

2-2023

Thriving Pastors Cohort: Expanding Capacity for Lifelong Ministry

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

PROJECT PORTFOLIO:

THRIVING PASTORS COHORT:

EXPANDING CAPACITY FOR LIFELONG MINISTRY



IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

PORTLAND SEMINARY

BY:

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PROJECT FACULTY:

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PORTLAND, OREGON

FEBRUARY 2023



CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

This certifies that the doctoral Project Portfolio of

Michael Spivey

has been approved by
the Evaluation Committee on March 16, 2023
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Leadership and Spiritual Formation.

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Dedication

To my bride, Jennifer. Your unfailing love, encouragement, and patience have sustained me on the journey to this moment. I will love you forever and ever.

Acknowledgments

An entire volume could not contain the list of people who have graciously contributed to our lives over the years. Our parents and children, former pastors, spiritual mentors, and faithful friends have certainly played a prominent role in that regard. I'd like to especially thank Dr. Jefferey Savage for his grace and patience throughout the project, as well as the "Little Savages" (David Brown, Wes Gallagher, Brad Pembleton, and Nathaniel Rhoades) for becoming the cheerleaders and lifelong friends that I didn't know I needed. The churches that we have served throughout our ministry also hold a very special place in our hearts. None more so than the precious saints at People's Church. Thank you #peeps for being so very generous, loving us well, and allowing us to walk this God journey with you.

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Research Method

This Doctoral Project utilized a blended research and design methodology called ‘Collaborative Design for Ministry and Nonprofit Contexts’. In Collaborative Design, practitioners work with stakeholder representatives to address a Need, Problem, or Opportunity (NPO) in their context. Using a combination of bibliographic resources, local knowledge derived from stakeholder Workshops, and an iterative process of continuous adjustment using ‘just enough’ feedback information at each juncture of development, practitioners produce an application-oriented Project that seeks to effect Christ-centered change.

Abstract

Assemblies of God pastors can expand their capacity for lifelong thriving by avoiding or recovering from ministry fatigue or burnout. The key insights that emerged from my research are as such: 1) Ministers are a vulnerable and largely self-isolating group who need a mechanism for spiritual growth and companionship. 2) There is already good work being accomplished in this arena, but pastoral thriving can be further nuanced and presented in a non-threatening and life-giving way. 3) There is not a singular way to accomplish the task of assisting ministers to engage in ongoing spiritual advancement. The cohort is but one avenue in pursuing pastoral flourishing. My current ministry context is as the Lead Pastor of People's Church, a 300+- Assemblies of God church located in Winter Haven, Florida.

The Thriving Pastors Cohort is a nine-session, in-person, group-based journey for pastors and ministry leaders who desire to avoid ministry burnout and expand their capacity for lifelong ministerial flourishing.

Introduction

The Thriving Pastors Cohort is a nine-session, in-person, group-based journey for pastors and ministry leaders who desire to avoid ministry burnout and expand their capacity for lifelong ministerial flourishing. What has been produced for the project is a leader guide and member manual which details each of the nine cohort sessions. The project also includes supplemental work including a functional website, social media platforms, and podcast sites that promote and supplement the cohort. Statistics show that many pastors are struggling with ministerial fatigue and have been for some time. The Thriving Pastors Cohort addresses the opportunity for Assemblies of God pastors to expand their capacity for lifelong ministry by avoiding or recovering from ministry fatigue or burnout.

Coming into the program, I had a strong sense that the final doctoral project would most likely lean towards something that would be a help to pastors who are struggling with isolation and the condition of their inner lives. The research and design journey that led to the final doctoral project took two distinct paths.

The first path was focused on looking to the scripture for biblical characters who seemed to go through seasons of loneliness and distress. One does not have to scour the Bible to find the first human dilemma. It occurs in Genesis 2 when God declares that it is “not good” for Adam to be alone. The design of the man demanded a friend, a mate, and helper to aid him in realizing his highest potential.

In 1 Kings chapters 18 and 19, we read the story of Elijah, the prophet. Having vanquished the prophets of Baal, Elijah fled to the mountains upon hearing the threats of Jezebel. Elijah completely cut himself off from any human who may have been a source of encouragement and strength to him. Mercifully, God met Elijah in his isolation and breathed life and hope back into him. God assured the prophet that he was not alone, and that God always has a people.

The other path of research relied heavily on two workshops designed to elicit honest and authentic answers from active ministers regarding issues that they face which led to ministerial fatigue and burnout. My vocational context is as the lead pastor in a medium sized (300) church in the geographically suburban south. I came to understand that my initial fixation on loneliness in the ministry was probably more of a personal need based on experience than a universal need which should be addressed. The workshops informed me that isolation was indeed a major concern of ministers but was only one of several factors that lead to ministry fatigue.

The stakeholders for the initial workshop included: 2 male lead pastors, 1 female lead pastor, 1 lay person from a sister congregation, a ministry student, and the wife of a deceased pastor. A subsequent workshop included a male lead pastor, a female co-lead pastor, and a university professor. After the workshops, follow up interviews were conducted with several leaders including the former leader of a charismatic denomination, a professor of religion, and the lead pastor of a church in our denomination. The key discoveries from these workshops and interviews were as

follows: 1) There is a perceived dilemma among our denominational peers in the areas of discouragement, frustration, and isolation. 2) There is a perceived lack of denominational leadership in this area. 3) Among our ministers, there is a systematic lack of vulnerability that stems from the inability to trust congregants, ministerial peers, or denominational leaders. 4) Many ministers are enslaved to unrealistic expectations by their church leadership structures. 5) There is a perceived lack of peer support among our ministerial ranks. 6) Several stakeholders expressed that they had received inadequate preparation for the mental and emotional toll that ministry exacts. 7) Most of the ministers disclosed a deficit in their personal lives around spiritual development and formation. Taking these findings into consideration, the NPO morphed from focusing directly on ministry isolation as *the* topic to addressing more topics that lead to isolation. Rather than focusing solely on the symptom, it was determined that the project should address causes leading to the symptom.

During the design phase of the project, I hosted an online "Zoom" workshop that included ministers from across the nation within the Assemblies of God tradition. The demographic make-up of the group included four male lead pastors, one female co-lead pastor, and two female staff pastors. The workshop yielded some predictable results as well as some surprising ones. Overwhelmingly, the group expressed the difficulty of pastoring during the Covid-19 interruption and subsequent stressors that came afterwards. The participants also expressed a profound desire to re-engage with their congregants and colleagues. "Fatigued", "stressed out", "overworked", and "disconnected" are words that most participants used.

Two prototypes were presented to the workshop attendees, and both were warmly received. The first prototype was a personal spiritual retreat designed for Assemblies of God ministers and their spouses. The second offering was a one-year pastoral cohort (6-8 pastors) which encourages pastors towards ongoing systematic spiritual transformation and spiritual friendships. The workshop attendees expressed that either one of the prototypes would be very helpful as long as they were presented in a face-to-face setting.

The subsequent one on one follow up interviews were conducted with an Anglican Priest, a Baptist Pastor, a Presbyterian Pastor, a Church of God Pastor, and an Episcopalian Priest. Each of the follow up interviewees expressed their interest in and approval of both proposals. The feedback that came from these seasoned ministry veterans was that an ongoing process may be more helpful than a one-time retreat. This rationale closely aligned with my personal convictions and the leading of the Holy Spirit throughout the process.

Several key insights emerged from the design phase.

1. Many ministers are in a dangerous place right now. Ministers need a mechanism for spiritual growth and companionship.
2. In designing the project, I will be tweaking the wheel, not reinventing it. These things have been and are being done well. My iteration of a project such as this would simply be another variation which may appeal to a different subset of ministers. This is God's work, and I am but a link in the long chain of helpers.

3. There is not a singular way to accomplish the task of assisting ministers to engage in ongoing spiritual advancement, but myriad “bite sized” approaches to contribute to those ends.

My Most Valuable Prototype was designing a one-year cohort-based *Journey Group*. As Dr. Mary Kate Morse states, “Christian leaders need safe environments in which they can unpack their inner worlds and their outward realities. They need to be able to pray and play and process together in community. They need to cultivate in community a maturing expression of Christ’s character and mission in their lives.”¹ This prototype lends itself to my brand of Authentic Servant Leadership and a strong desire to see others flourish. I am most encouraged that I feel a strong sense of direction in this process and believe that the Most Valuable Prototype has been a labor of love and passion.

Through the prototyping and beta cohort phases of development, the scope of the Thriving Pastors Cohort project has become clearer. The real-time feedback has indicated some things:

1. The optimal number of cohort participants is best capped at eight members.
2. An extended day or a retreat at the beginning of the cohort would help to solidify the group and assist in creating vulnerability.

Several of the original benchmarks were updated to gauge progress not only in the development stage but also during the official cohort. The updated benchmarks are as follows:

- A minimum of 2 groups of 6-8 pastors or ministry leaders will participate in each Thriving Pastors Cohort
- Achieving a greater level of consistency of visitors to the Thriving Pastors website via the social media platforms
- In lieu of a fee to join the cohort, participants who find the cohort valuable will “pay forward” a monetary amount to underwrite the cost of subsequent cohorts
- When nearing completion of the cohort, members will rate the quality, content, and effectiveness of the cohort as stand-alone metrics at an average of 80% or higher
- Cohort participants will be willing to recommend and share about their cohort experience.

The process for gathering long-term feedback will take place within each cohort. After the third, sixth, and ninth session, each cohort participant will be asked to complete a feedback form regarding the quality, content, and effectiveness of the cohort and to offer any additional comments regarding the cohort.

I am a pastor and I love pastors. I understand their struggles and fears. I understand the shame that comes along with not feeling like you are measuring up or living into the expectations of others or

¹ MaryKate Morse, *Lifelong Leadership Woven Together through Mentoring Communities* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2020).

even yourself. The long-term objective for the Thriving Pastors Cohort is that it would become a well-known avenue for pastors to receive and impart encouragement, strength, and tools for their lifelong journey. The dream of my life is to lead multiple cohorts per year and for this to become what I do vocationally. I would love to spend the rest of my days being a resource for God's ministers.

I have discovered on this journey that of all the pastors that need the healing touch of Jesus, I am foremost among them. At every turn, I have been reminded that it is in and through my own weaknesses that the Lord is working. One of the major obstacles that I have had to overcome is the tendency to insert my own experiences and solutions into the problem-solving equation. Since I am relatively new to the arena of formational spiritual practices, another area that I found to be challenging was the discovery that there were already many resources available concerning the NPO. Remaining open to the discovery process, outside voices, and consistent feedback have all served to enhance the project in ways that would not have happened otherwise.

During the discovery and development phases of the project, several shortcomings and risks of failure were discovered. Through the cohort's feedback loop, members suggested that one of the gaps in the project is that there is a learning curve for those who aren't familiar with formational ideas or terminology. *Lectio Divina* is not in the everyday lexicon of many Pentecostals! Language which is familiar to our "tribe" must be utilized when presenting new or different concepts. Failure of the cohort altogether is also possible because the topics could miss the felt needs of its members. Consistent feedback is helping to ensure that the topics which are being developed are relevant for their intended audience.

During the research journey I presented an alternative approach to dealing with the NPO in the form of a retreat for ministers which would touch on many of the same topics presented in the cohort. Other viable approaches to addressing the NPO may include a book which speaks to some of the same issues as the cohort or a training for lay leaders which informs them regarding some of the issues which their pastor's may be facing and how as leaders they can help. Each of the alternative approaches hold significant value and is worthy of further research and possible development.

Many pastors feel overwhelmed. In some church cultures, the pastor is expected to be proficient - if not an expert in many fields including: preaching, teaching, finances, visionary leadership, pastoral care, counseling, staff development and management, landscape design and upkeep, building maintenance, community relations, social media, and the list goes on. Most pastors silently plod through their struggles without the benefit of a friend or cadre of people with whom they can be honest and forthright. While evaluating the research, the overwhelming key discovery that emerged was the sense that ministers are craving relationship. The global pandemic ushered in a time of isolation and discouragement and ministers are desperate to re-engage with their peers. When asked about meeting face to face, one stakeholder stated, "Oh, heck yeah! I'm so far past protocols for safe meetings that I must look for a mask to go into a medical building. Meet. Meet. Meet. Meet. Meet. Meet face to face." My sense was that regardless of the venue, content, or structure,

the issue that concerned all stakeholders was that of engaging in authentic community. The material point is that people would like others to join them on their journey. With the average size of churches in America being 75 members,² there may not be much synergy or encouragement happening in their local church context. It is my suspicion that many ministers may echo the thoughts of one workshop participant, "I can see where being part of an honest, totally confidential cohort would indeed benefit my walk with the Lord and help me stay fresher in leadership."

Because I endeavor to expand the cohort beyond my own denominational boundaries, some areas requiring further research came to the surface. How similar are the needs of Assemblies of God ministers compared to those of other denominations? Do some current cohort topics need to be further nuanced? Do women in ministry face unique challenges that are not addressed in this iteration of the cohort? Would it be more effective to group cohorts by demographic information (men, women, lead pastors, staff pastors, denominational affiliation, age)?

My plans for the cohort post-graduation are both immediate and significant.

May 2023	Completion of the current Thriving Pastors Beta Cohort.
June 2023	Completion of the first iteration of all Thriving Pastors Cohort materials.
June 2023	Begin the push for the Fall 2023 Thriving Pastors Cohort.
August 2023	Initiate the first official Thriving Pastors Cohort(s).
October 2023	Collect quality, content, and effectiveness assessment from cohort members.
January 2024	Collect quality, content, and effectiveness assessment from cohort members.
April 2024	Collect quality, content, and effectiveness assessment from cohort members.

The highs and lows along the research journey have been profound. The disappointments have been very few. Oddly enough, one disappointment was discovering that so much had already been researched, written about, and developed prior to my journey. The naivete with which I approached the process is stupefying. "I will produce a solution to fix all pastors, everywhere," I thought. On this

² "Hartford Institute For Religion Research" 2005, April 1, 2022, http://hrr.hartsem.edu/research/fastfacts/fast_facts.html.

side of the process, I have a thankful humility that my input on this subject is but a link in the long chain of those who desire to encourage and equip God's servants.

The joys along the research and development journey are nearly too great to number. With every workshop or feedback form, validation came that I was indeed pursuing something noble and worthwhile. People who were asked to participate in the project in any way were willing to say "yes" at every turn. The members of my peer group have become some of my dearest friends. The Lord has healed some deep places in my heart and has continually encouraged my pursuits throughout the journey.

The biggest surprise is that I will soon complete the race. Admittedly, I am a late bloomer. I never dreamed that completing a doctorate would be possible for me. Thanks be to God for the sustaining grace to finish well!

One impact that the development of the cohort has produced is a greater desire to steward the staff that God has entrusted to our church. Hiring and leading our staff has frequently been a "thorn in my flesh" up to this point. I valued staff only for their production and the tangible benefits that they could bring to the church. I considered their personal spiritual journey as I did my own, something that they should work out on their own time and in their own way. The research phase of the project opened a tender spot for those with whom I co-labor and we have now implemented some needed reform in the way that I lead. As our staff gets healthier, our entire church benefits. As we are modeling a better way to interact with one another, God is expanding our vision of how we can do the same in a systemic way.

My future plans include further developing cohorts to meet the needs of ministers in various contexts and locations. The dream of my life is to lead multiple cohorts per year and for this to become what I do vocationally. I would love to spend the rest of my days being a resource for God's ministers.

Doctoral Project

Thriving Pastors Cohort



Thriving Pastors Cohort Leaders Guide

A nine-session, in-person, group-based journey for pastors and leaders who desire to avoid ministry burnout and expand their capacity for lifelong thriving.

Thriving Pastors Cohort Session 1 - Introduction Leader Guide



- Thriving Pastors Cohort | Session 1 - "Introduction"
- Table of Contents
- Prayer
- Introduction to the Cohort
- Personal Introductions / Why are you here?
- Guidelines
- How the cohort came to be
- Bible reflection and group prayer



Prayer

From Ted Loder

"Oh God, gather me now
 to be with you
 as you are with me.
 Soothe My tiredness;
 quiet my fretfulness;
 curb my aimlessness;
 relieve my compulsiveness;
 let me be easy for a moment.
 Oh Lord, release me
 from the fears and guilts
 which grip me so tightly;
 from the expectations and opinions
 which I so tightly grip,
 that I may be open
 to receiving what you give,
 to risking something genuinely new,
 to learning something refreshingly different.
 Oh God, gather me
 to be with you
 as you are with me.
 Amen."³

³ Ted Loder, *Guerrillas of Grace: Prayers for the Battle*, 20th anniversary ed (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Books, 2005), 58.



Personal Introductions

- Who are you?
- Tells us about your family.
- What is the context of your ministry?
- How long have you served there?
- What prompted you to attend the cohort?
- What do you hope to receive from the cohort?

Guidelines

- Guiding principles
- Participant pledge
- Dates and reading schedule
- Contact list
- Pattern of cohort meetings



Guiding Principles

As a community intentionally following Jesus, we will...

- Focus on what unites us.
- Love always.
- Not judge.
- Share mutually.
- Extend grace & mercy.
- Accept vulnerability.
- Will be fully present with/to one another.
- Not attempt to fix one another.
- Listen.
- Follow through.
- Expect & Extend confidentiality.
- Hold sacred/holy space.
- Celebrate and lament together.
- Be open to understanding and growth.
- Commit to hope and resilience.
- Live and speak courageous truth.
- Assume one another's best intentions.
- Embrace one another as a gift.

Thriving Pastors Cohort Participant Covenant

As I rely on God's grace, I _____ pledge my intent to do the following:

Attend all meetings unless providentially hindered. I will contact my cohort facilitator if I am unable to attend and take responsibility to find out what was missed in my absence.

Visit my cohort's online discussion forum (FB group) at least once a week and post at least once a month.

Arrange for my absence from regular duties during cohort meetings, including those related to family, Church, work, and friends.

Fully participate in cohort discussions and activities. I will give an accurate account of my experience, reflections, and spiritual progress during cohort meetings and online discussions. I will seek to be appropriately transparent and willing to share victories, weaknesses, struggles, and failures as the cohort grows together.

Unplug from electronic devices and work responsibilities unless absolutely necessary. I will turn my cell phone off and will not email or surf the internet during cohort meetings. I will do my best to bring no work with me and will refrain from working during breaks at the gatherings.

Care for the members of my cohort as individuals, family members, and church leaders.

Protect the confidentiality of my cohort by keeping whatever is shared confidential to encourage openness and honesty.

Complete all reading/assignments before and after cohort meetings to the best of my ability.

I understand that the Thriving Pastors Cohort will last for nine months (September 2022 - May 2023)

Signature

Date



Thriving Pastors Cohort #1

Significant Dates & Reading Schedule

* Denotes commenting in Facebook Group

- 08/15 - 2 Weeks prior to first cohort meeting
 - Pre-reading - Read God In My Everything Chapters 1-2*
- 09/02 (9 am - 12 pm) - Cohort Meeting #1 - Introduction
 - 09/05 through 10/14 - Read God In My Everything Chapters 3-4*
- 10/14 (9am - 12 pm) - Cohort Meeting #2 - "Inconsistency"
 - 10/17 through 11/03 - Read God In My Everything Chapters 5-6*
- 11/04 (9 am - 12 pm) - Cohort Meeting #3 - "Exhaustion"
 - 11/07 through 12/01 - Read God In My Everything Chapters 7-8*
- 12/02 (9 am - 12 pm) - Cohort Meeting #4 - "Distraction"
 - 12/03 through 01/05 - Read God In My Everything Chapters 9-10*
- 01/06 (9 am - 12 pm) - Cohort Meeting #5 - "Loneliness"
 - 01/09 through 02/02 - Read God In My Everything Chapters 11-12*



Pattern of Typical Cohort Meetings

Each regular meeting will have 7 movements

- Prayer
- Check-in with one another
- Introduce the topic to be addressed
- Sharing our personal experience related to the topic
- Scripture speaks to the topic
- Spiritual Practice related to the topic
- Prayer (Group Listening Prayer)



Why and how did the Thriving Pastors Cohort come about?

Jennifer and I have been in vocational church ministry since 1996. God has been so faithful through the years and in the various capacities in which we have served Christ's Church. We have served as staff pastors, church planters, and church revitalizers in varying sized congregations. Through the years, we have experienced the highest of highs and the lowest of lows. There have been seasons that were full of richness and joy and others that were so hurtful and sad that we wanted to walk away from the ministry altogether.

During the cohort, you will read and hear some of these stories from our lives - and hopefully learn from them. This cohort has been designed to help ministers to either avoid or recover from ministry fatigue and/or burnout and the topics reflect the concerns of ministry professionals across time and denominational lines. This cohort will offer some potential solutions to issues that every minister faces at one point or another and it is my prayer that lifelong ministerial flourishing will be the result of this journey. Thanks for walking with me for a little while.

An Incomplete but Very Real Snapshot⁴

Authors and pastoral advocates H.B. London Jr. and Neil B. Weisman cite some very alarming statistics about active clergymen: "Of the 500,000 full-time, vocational pastors in the United States today, approximately one out of every four (125,000) are experiencing 'burnout'."⁵

- 60% work more than 60 hours per week.
- 80% believe that ministry has adversely affected their families.

⁴ H. B. London, *Pastors at Greater Risk* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2014), 25.

⁵ London, *Pastors at Greater Risk*, 25.

- 90% feel they are inadequately trained to cope with ministry demands.
- 40% report a serious conflict with a parishioner at least once a month.
- 37% confess to inappropriate sexual behavior with someone in their church (which is about the same percentage as the general population).
- 70% do not have someone they consider a close friend.
- 70% have a lower self-image than when they entered ministry.
- 70% say they get less than seven hours of sleep each night.
- 75% do not take a regular day off for Sabbath rest.
- 76% are overweight or obese (compared with 61% of the general population).
- 40% reported being depressed or worn out "some or most of the time".

Not surprisingly, 40% of these pastors have considered leaving their ministries in the last three months alone."⁶

- The Coup de grâce to all these statistics for the minister are the events of the last few years.
- Pastors have personally endured and tried to lead congregations through the uncharted waters of a global pandemic.

*"Pastors describe their COVID-19 experience 'as an overwhelming sensation of busyness' and having 'new levels of irritation and stress.'"*⁷

- Compounding the Covid-19 crisis, the last few years have also presented:
- The most poisonous political climate in recent memory.
- Racial injustice resulting in rioting, looting, the burning of many of our cities, and a hostile takeover of our nation's capital building.
- A national housing and food crisis.
- Economic turmoil.
- An increase in anxiety disorders and mental health issues.

What Are We Trying to Get Back To?

- Since the pandemic, there has been much discussion of trying to get back to where we were.
- Churches are trying to get back to a pre-pandemic number of people.
- Families are trying to get back to a sense of normalcy.
- Businesses are trying to get back to having a full staff.

⁶ London, Pastors at Greater Risk, 25.

⁷ Marlon C. Robinson, *The Pastor's Mental Health and The Covid-19 Pandemic*. Ministry Magazine, March 2021, <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2021/03/The-pastors-mental-health-and-the-covid-19-pandemic>

- Perhaps we need to ask the question of whether getting back to once was, is the right thing to do.
- Maybe we have a romanticized view of how things used to be.
- It's possible that our new normal doesn't need to look like what once was and that God is opening a new path forward.
- God is not just God of what once was, he is the God of the right here and right now. Right now, might be the beginning of the good old days.
- I've been serving Jesus to one degree or another since 1982, but I'm more excited about what God is doing in my life right now than I ever have been. I can sense and see and feel God shaping me and molding me to a greater degree right now than ever before. I'm thankful for my spiritual past. I'm thankful for the moments that helped get me to where I am, but I am not satisfied to feed on a 40-year-old meal. I am not looking in the rear-view mirror and I'm not trying to figure out why this or that changed or dwell on what isn't anymore.
- Abandon all hope of getting back to what used to be. God has a path forward starting where you are right now. God has a new future and a new dream. God has an exciting direction and fresh vision for you. God has new experiences and wonderful people for you to enjoy. He has new ways of helping you to grow and flourish and be renewed in Him.
- Some of the questions to be answered are:
 - What do you want from God?
 - What do you want your experience with Him to look like?
 - Are you satisfied with what you have right now?
- The way forward is not going backwards. Change what you're doing. Adopt a new way of doing things. Establish some new patterns in your life. Stop doing things just because you've always done those things. Hear the voice of the Spirit and pursue the opportunity to shape your life in the way that you want it to be, spiritually speaking.
- You don't have to live tired and hurried and unsatisfied. You don't have to be burned out but if you don't do something to change the outcome, you're going to keep getting the results you're getting right now.
- You don't have to lead this way and your church doesn't have to live this way. You can establish some new patterns that will produce better outcomes. You can identify some key troublesome issues and initiate some spiritual disciplines to help overcome them.

"Disciplines are, in essence, activities in our power that enable us, by grace, to do what we cannot do by direct effort—by just trying."⁸

⁸ Dallas Willard, "How Does The Disciple Live?" Dallas Willard, 2009, <https://dwillard.org/articles/how-does-the-disciple-live>.

Eugene Peterson argues that pastors too often neglect their spiritual lives, *"They succumb to career idolatry and focus on job efficiency and management. They accept 'an offer by the devil for work that can be measured and manipulated at the convenience of the worker.'"*⁹

- The purpose of the cohort is threefold:
 1. Recognizing some of the deficits we work from
 - a. Exhaustion, Distraction, Loneliness, Confusion, Disappointment, Frustration, Unpreparedness, etc.
 2. Refocusing and reorienting our lives back on Jesus instead of ministry.
 3. Working towards creating balance
- Life with Jesus instead of for Jesus.
- Understanding that busyness does not always equal effectiveness.
- Establishing/Maintaining God centered relationships
- We were created from love, by love, and to love.

The end goal of the cohort is to help prevent or recover from ministry fatigue and burnout and promote ministerial thriving for the long haul of ministry.

*We have heard the word "burnout" a million times. The strange thing is millions of people every year are in the middle of burnout—and don't even realize it. Burnout is a prolonged season of exhaustion and disinterest that results in a decline in performance. It's when the demands being placed on you are greater than the resources you must deal with them. It's chronic stress, and that's not good.*¹⁰

Writer Tommy Bond produced a short "Burnout Test":

- "Are you exhausted?" This isn't just tired at the end of a long day. This is nearly perpetual zero-energy status.
- "Are you increasingly negative?" You can find something wrong with just about everything—especially your job. Your constant state is frustration, and your temper is shorter than ever.
- "Are your passionate interests fading?" "Nothing matters, so why try" is your motto. Your job performance is slipping, and even giving the bare minimum seems to be asking a lot.
- "Is your health declining?" You've got a headache or a cold you just can't shake. You can't concentrate on anything. Your streak at the gym has come to a screeching halt, and

⁹ John P. Burgess, *A Pastoral Rule for Today: Reviving an Ancient Practice* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, an imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2019).

¹⁰ Tommy Bond, "Simple Burnout Test: Take It, and Start Finding Relief," Life Church, Accessed September 2022, <https://finds.life.church/simple-burnout-test-take-it-and-start-finding-relief/>.

cooking healthy food is too much of a bother. You may even be abusing a substance of some kind to numb yourself.

- Are you withdrawing? You want to be around people less and less, even those you care about most deeply. Social activities sound scary. Even your personal values and beliefs start to lose their importance to you.

If you answered “yes” to three or more of the questions on the burnout test, chances are you’re experiencing burnout—and you shouldn’t wait to take action.”¹¹

Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly. - Matthew 11:28-30 ESV

This is the invitation of the Lord to each of us. Come, get away, walk, work, watch, learn, keep - this is where life is found. This is how we can sustain ourselves and lay aside spiritual treasure to pass on to those we minister to. Lay down your pride and accomplishments for a season, there is no one here you need to impress. In these meetings you will not be pastor, bishop, doctor, or reverend. You will only be you and you’ll discover that is enough.

¹¹ Bond, *Simple Burnout Test*.

Prayer (Group Listening Prayer)

From the book, "Lifelong Leadership: Woven Together through Mentoring Communities".

Step 1 - Silence

"The silence gives everyone time to still the inner chatter in their minds and turn their loving attention to God by gazing on him and receiving his loving gaze. In that inner place of love, group members also have time to listen to their own souls to discern what the spirit might be stirring that they want the group to consider in prayer".

Step 2 - First Sharing

After the silence, the cohort member who will be sharing that day will proceed to share what they'd like the other members to consider.

"Sharing in Listening Prayer does not require a lot of details. Whatever helps to convey the essence of the sharer's heart concern is needed, but not all the details surrounding it".

Step 3 - Listening Silence on Behalf of The Member Who Shared

All members will return to a period of silence, prayer, and listening on behalf of the member who shared.

In silence, the person who shared is lifted into God's light. Listening starts from the assumption that God knows and loves this person completely, so we do not need to tell God what he already knows. Listening also starts with the assumption that Jesus is at the right hand of God, interceding for the one who shared. The group seeks to join in the prayer of Jesus for this person. In the silence, listeners are not telling God what they think the one who shared needs; rather, they are attentively listening for a sense of what God's prayer might be for this person. Just having a few friends lovingly hold an individual before God is gift enough.

The length of this time will be determined by the cohort facilitator.

Step 4 - Response to The Member Who Shared

"After silence for listening, those who have been listening are invited to share anything that they experienced. Sometimes in the listening, a scripture, image, or song might arise".

"It is very helpful when someone offers to take notes on what is shared on behalf of the one who shared. This allows the sharer to listen fully to the one speaking but also preserves what was spoken".

"Also, offer what comes without a sense of a strong prophetic voice but rather as a humble, gentle offering. Allow the sharer to discern what resonates with the spirit for them".

Step 5 - Prayer for The Member Who Shared

"After hearing the responses, the person who shared can offer any final comments, if they wish. Then the mentor or peer facilitator asks who would like to pray for the one who shared. Someone volunteers to pray. It is helpful to lay hands on the one who shared while praying aloud as a way of expressing the group's love and involvement in the prayer. The brief spoken prayer places the needs and responses in God's care".¹²

¹² MaryKate Morse, *Making Room for Leadership: Power, Space and Influence* (Downers Grove, IL.: IVP Books, 2008), 148-149.

Thriving Pastors Cohort Session 2 - Inconsistency Leader Guide



Thriving Pastors Cohort - Session 2 - "Inconsistency"

This life, therefore, is not godliness but the process of becoming godly, not health but getting well, not being but becoming, not rest but exercise. We are not now what we shall be, but we are on the way. The process is not finished, but it is actively going on. This is not the goal, but it is the right road. At present, everything does not gleam and sparkle, but everything is being cleansed.- Martin Luther

Pattern of Cohort Meeting

- Prayer
- Check-in with one another
- Introduce the topic to be addressed.
- Sharing our personal experience related to the topic.
- Scripture speaks to the topic.
- Spiritual Practice related to the topic.
- Prayer (Group Listening Prayer)

Prayer

O God, so many times my actions have been at odds with my convictions.

I have not consistently done what I ought to have done.

My behavior, thoughts, affections, and devotion have been erratic.

I have labored without praying consistently.

I have preached without preparing consistently.

I have counseled without seeking you consistently.

I have ministered without loving you consistently.

I have made decisions without consulting you consistently.

This has left me with regret and shame.

I am tired and unsure and questioning.

Forgive me Lord for depending on my own strength too much.

Forgive me for trusting in myself too often.

Forgive me for being lazy too many times.

Forgive me for happily abiding in the rut of the everyday,

not perceiving that it wasn't a rut at all but a tomb.

Increase my desire for consistency, I know that habits create lifestyles.

Make my time with you the first thought and not an afterthought.

Help me to understand that being faithful in Spirit-led practices is the battle,

not preparation for the battle.

I want to be confident that since I have been with you,

I can work alongside you - for the sake of others.

I love you Lord and my heart's desire is to make you proud.

Please help me to do that every single day

for the rest of my life.

In Christ's name, Amen

M.S.



Check-In with one another

- Each cohort participant will give a brief (2-3 minute) synopsis of how their month has been and where they are experiencing in the words of Vinita Hampton Wright, “Consolation and Desolation.”
- Consolation
 - Directs our focus outside and beyond ourselves.
 - Lifts our hearts so that we can see the joys and sorrows of other people.
 - Bonds us more closely to our human community.
 - Generates new inspiration and ideas.
 - Restores balance and refreshes our inner vision.
 - Shows us where God is active in our lives and where God is leading us.
 - Releases new energy in us.
- Desolation
 - Turns us in on ourselves.
 - Drives us down the spiral ever deeper into our own negative feelings.
 - Cuts us off from community.
 - Makes us want to give up on the things that used to be important to us.
 - Takes over our whole consciousness and crowds out our distant vision.
 - Covers up all our landmarks [the signs of our journey with God so far].
 - Drains us of energy.¹³

¹³ Vinita Hampton Wright, Consolation and Desolation, October 10, 2022, <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/consolation-and-desolation-2/>.

Topic to be addressed - "Inconsistency"

*"Look, I may be a pastor, but I'm an inch deep. My life is filled with incessant activity and little prayer. 'Contemplation' is foreign in my vocabulary and nonexistent in my life."*¹⁴

- Maturity is an ongoing process. Many times, the maturation process in the life of the minister looks like this:
 - We get a degree or attain the educational requirements necessary for credentialing purposes.
 - We become credentialed.
 - We assume a leadership role.
 - We stop learning and growing in any significant way (other than the experience we acquire by dealing with the day-to-day issues of church life).

Typically, we don't have anyone who asks us about our spiritual life or what kind of spiritual consistency we have in our lives. "70% of pastors do not have someone they consider a close friend"¹⁵, much less a friend that will be completely transparent with us. The following example is not uncommon:

*Bob struggled over self-disclosure while serving in a pastorate. One Sunday afternoon he was helping a deacon set up for an evening activity. As they put up tables and chairs, the deacon suddenly asked the simple question, 'how are you doing?' When asked this question, Bob faced an ethical dilemma. He wasn't doing well at all. He was frustrated with the people in the church and was frustrated with his frustration. He was questioning his capacity as a leader and his own spiritual maturity. In a split-second, he pondered the options: 'If I answer honestly, how would this man handle my response?' Or would he throw up his hands and say, "You are no spiritual leader! I'm out of here!" Do I tell him the truth, or do I give him a superficial answer? Bob decided to go superficial and lied. He said he was fine and then diverted the conversation.*¹⁶

¹⁴ Bob Burns, Tasha Chapman, and Donald Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us about Surviving and Thriving* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2013), 19.

¹⁵ London, *Pastors at Greater Risk*, 264.

¹⁶, Burns, Chapman, and, Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 120.

SPIRITUAL INCONSISTENCY

- So much emphasis (especially in our denominational camp) is placed on numerical growth. Certainly, that is a clear mandate from Matthew 28, but not to the detriment of our own spiritual lives as leaders.
- There is no shortage of seminars, consulting firms, or conferences that help us numerically grow our ministries or churches.
- Unfortunately, many times there is not much emphasis placed on helping the minister maintain a healthy spiritual life while endeavoring to win the world for Jesus.

"While many ministry frustrations are external and environmental - even out of our own control - our only sure way to revitalize the Church is to renew our own inner world in fresh old ways."¹⁷

- "Successful" pastors create a conundrum for themselves. Their effectiveness or success requires them to do more to keep up with the expanding ministry or church. Doing more external things creates less time for internal work and this creates a "catch 22" proposition.
- Loving the Lord with all our heart, soul, and mind and loving others as we love ourselves necessitates setting aside time and energy.
- Healthy ministry in which we cultivate "fruit that remains" can only be sustained by the inner work of the Holy Spirit, which requires time and energy. Our relationship with God is a prerequisite for our work for God.
- When we start trying to do the external work of the ministry without maintaining the consistent internal work of the Spirit in our lives, we become hypocrites - very tired hypocrites.
- Ministry fatigue or burnout is typically thought of in terms of giving out too much or working too hard. However, I have observed in my own life and in the lives of colleagues that burnout is not so much a matter of giving out too much but attempting to distribute that which I do not possess at all.

"When I give something, I do not possess, I give a false and dangerous gift, a gift that looks like love, but is, in reality, loveless - a gift more from my need to prove myself, then from the others need to be cared for."¹⁸

- It is in burnout that I become a false version of myself. I present something to the world that is not true. I portray strength when I am weak. I present confidence when I am internally divided and confused.

¹⁷ London, Pastors at Greater Risk, 264.

¹⁸ Parker J Palmer, Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000. Quoted in Peter Scazzero, Emotionally Healthy Spirituality Day by Day: A 40-Day Journey with the Daily Office (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 49.

When I lack consistency in my private spiritual life, I hasten the process of entropy and invite all manner of distraction and sin.

- The great news is that we can avoid or recover from burnout. By reminding ourselves that the invitation to be one of God's sheep was not rescinded when the call to be a shepherd was issued, we put on the garment of humility and acknowledge our dependence upon the grace of the only, truly Good Shepherd.
- God's sheep still know God's voice and obedience to that voice is where consistent spiritual practices come in.
- As our faithfulness to God through the practices increase, so do our odds of making it for the long haul. The presence of consistent spiritual practices helps to put layers of insulation between us and the alluring influence of compromise.

Personal Experience Related to The Topic

I was born to teenage parents who married when they were sixteen and eighteen and had me 2 years later. I can't imagine the stress of having a child at that young age and trying to figure out what life was supposed to look like. The strain led to a divorce when I was only six months old and I grew up in a co-parenting situation, living with my mother and seeing my dad every other weekend. From my earliest days there were some inconsistencies that I had to learn to deal with.

My mom would remarry several times, so my early life felt unpredictable and unstable at times. Through those unsettled years there were enough episodes of dysfunction to fill a book with. It was the era (early 1970s) of drugs, sex, and rock and roll and there were lots of all three going on around me. As a child, I also sustained abuse at the hands of a family "friend". God is good and has brought much healing into my life, but as I look back, I can clearly see where my desire for stability and routine come from.

It is out of this need for schedules, calendars, and itineraries that I have found a home in the spiritual practices. The practices, also sometimes referred to as disciplines have enabled me to couple spiritual desires and goals with my natural propensity towards routine. Through the spiritual practices in the "behind the scenes" routines of my life, God has shaped and molded my character and enabled me to pursue ministry life for 25 plus years.

In the "stream" of Christianity where I have roots, a high premium is placed on the spontaneous and experiential aspects of our faith experience. As a point of clarification, the practices do not serve to replace those experiences, but to anchor and augment them. If you are seeking a greater level of consistency and proven methods to grow in your life with Jesus, the practices may become of great value to you as they have for me.

"Discipline, strictly speaking, is activity carried on to prepare us indirectly for some activity other than itself. We do not practice the piano to practice the piano well, but to play it well."

- Dallas Willard, The Spirit of the Disciplines

Scripture Speaks to The Topic

- Inconsistency among Jesus' disciples is not a modern construct. We see in the lives of several of Jesus' followers the intent and even the attempt to destroy people in Jesus' name!
- In this first incident, James, and John (the one whom Jesus loved) offered to call down a strategic lightning strike on the Samaritans.

When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. And he sent messengers ahead of him, who went and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make preparations for him. But the people did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them (as Elijah did)?" But he turned and rebuked them. And he said, ("You do not know what manner of spirit you are of; for the Son of Man came not to destroy people's lives but to save them") And they went on to another village.

- Luke 9:51-56 ESV

- There can be no doubt that bitter feelings existed between the Samaritans and the Jews and on this occasion those feelings boiled to the surface.

"Their feud with the Jews was so bitter that they (Samaritans) would not help anyone travel to Jerusalem, though apparently, they did not mind receiving Galileans as such. Josephus tells us that Samaritans were not averse to ill-treating pilgrims going up to Jerusalem, even to the extent of murdering them on occasion."¹⁹

- Jesus' clear rebuke of the attitudes of their hearts and further instruction that he had come to save men's lives, not destroy them played a role in the kind of men they would become.
- The Lord's correction apparently humbled James and John enough to recognize their need for repentance. And ultimately it led to their transformation.
- Clearly, James and John had not been with Jesus long enough at this point to understand how to deal with this situation.
- They had not marinated in the secret sauce of the Savior long enough to absorb his essence. But absorb it they did!
- It was this same John that when writing his gospel refused to even insert his own name, instead opting for the title, "the disciple that Jesus loved".
- John was in Jesus' inner circle of close friends.

¹⁹ Leon Morris, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 3, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 198.

- John was with Jesus at the transfiguration and was a watchman in the Garden of Gethsemane.
- It was this same John that Jesus would call to from the cross, imploring John to take Mary (Jesus' mother) into his home and care for her until her death.
- Tertullian tells of the Roman attempt to boil John alive in oil.
- Though inconsistent early on in his journeys with Jesus, John became a vital piece of the puzzle in the early church.

When Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, for Jesus often met there with his disciples. So, Judas, having procured a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons. Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, "Whom do you seek?" They answered him, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus said to them, "I am he." Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground. So, he asked them again, "Whom do you seek?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. So, if you seek me, let these men go." This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken: "Of those whom you gave me I have lost not one." Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.) So, Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?"

- John 18:1-11 ESV

- What more can be said of Cephas - aka Peter - aka Satan - aka "The Rock"?
- Peter was the poster child for inconsistency throughout the gospels. Some might even describe him as spiritually bi-polar!
- In the incident referenced above, Peter's good intentions morphed into murderous rage (I find it hard to believe that he was aiming for Malchus' ear).
- Through a series of events including denial, deep shame, repentance, and restoration, Peter came to know the grace and kindness like few before or since have.
- Peter would go on to lead the early church and walked in such an uncommon anointing that strangers took notice.

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.

- Acts 4:13 ESV

- "They had been with Jesus." That phrase is both challenging and hopeful.
- It is hopeful for those of us who are modern day followers of Jesus aspiring to know that the source of the disciples' boldness and confidence was a direct result of simply being with Jesus.
- By following, watching, and emulating Jesus, they became like Jesus.

- It is challenging because we know that our lives speak - either for Christ or against him.
- It could be conversely said of others, "They had the theological pedigree and proper training, but they had not been with Jesus."
- It is the private intimacy of being with Jesus that makes the difference in public, practical ministry.

What happens when I skirt my spiritual growth? I replace it with the "spiritual" taboo of pastoral life. So, for example, it is not unusual to find me substituting sermon preparation for personal worship and bible study." After all," I rationalize, "I will be meditating on the Bible." however, the sustained exchange of ministry duties for spiritual growth results in my becoming an "inch deep." the outcome is a spiritually dry, worn-out pastor with very little" left in the tank" for others. The "spring of water welling up to eternal life" has slowed down to a trickle.²⁰ - Anonymous pastor

²⁰ London, *Pastors at Greater Risk*, 33.

Spiritual Practice Related to The Topic - Rule of Life

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. - Acts 2:42 ESV

- Though the early church would not have known to describe the practices they participated in as a "rule of life", in essence their life rhythm or cadence is clearly stated.
- A Rule is simply a plan that we develop and document to establish regular rhythms which help us to love Christ deeply and consistently.
- A Rule is a mechanism to help us hold ourselves accountable to the Spirit and to assist us in becoming Christlike.
- Through the reading of "God in My Everything", we will look at, develop, refine, and implement a Rule for our own lives.
- Shigematsu emphasizes several things that are important when cultivating an effective Rule of Life.

Start Simply

- There are many "ought to's" when we begin to think about our spiritual lives.
- Jesus and our growing relationship with him is the chief objective of a rule, not the practice itself.
- Small and simple practices, sustained over time produce tremendous results.

"Whatever we do repeatedly - even if it's simple - has the power to shape us. The daily habit of spending time with God shapes us. even if it is brief and not marked with groundbreaking insight or deep emotion - even when it feels perfunctory - it shapes us."²¹

Build Slowly

- Trying to add too much, too fast to your Rule may result in discouragement and ultimately laying it aside.
- Perhaps start with 1 or 2 core values that you sense the Spirit desires for you to cultivate and develop your rule around those.

Prune Regularly

- Shigematsu uses the image of a trellis to demonstrate the Rule. Unpruned grapevines don't ever reach their full potential.
- Through the Spirit's guidance, we can lay aside a good practice to embrace the best practice for this stage of our lives.

²¹ Ken Shigematsu, *God in My Everything: How an Ancient Rhythm Helps Busy People Enjoy God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 34.

- Worldly maturity says that if we're being successful, we should just continue to add things to our lives. "Bigger is always better" is the mantra.
- Whenever we say "yes" to one thing, we'll probably have to say "no" to something else.

Be Energy Conscious

- We are all uniquely created with differing internal clocks.
- My most alert, attentive, and productive times are in the early morning. You may be different and will need to adjust your Rule accordingly.

"A rule shouldn't make our lives feel busier, even if it leads to new practices."²²

Consider Your Life Stage

- Things are different for me now than they once were. The stress of raising small children and participating in all the activities that this requires can be draining.
- There is no extra credit for trying to be a superstar. Please consider your life stage and even the times of the year when developing your Rule.

Stay Flexible

- A Rule is somewhat in the same category as the Sabbath - The Rule is made for us, not us for the Rule.
- Life is malleable and unexpected things happen. Don't let your rule pigeonhole you into something that is ill-fitting.

"A Rule of Life should feel like a slightly corrective pair of shoes. It needs to be comfortable enough that you can wear it and walk around in it for days and weeks on end. At the same time, it needs to apply just enough pressure to correct those places that are out of line. If your Rule of Life is too corrective, you will fatigue and set it aside. If it is too comfortable, it won't bring the needed correction to your life. Be sure to give yourself the time and grace to find that balance."²³

Make Time for Fun

- Joy is a part of life and should be included when cultivating your Rule.
- Fun has a refreshing quality to it, so make room for it in your Rule.

Include Community

- Community is vitally important.

²² Shigematsu, God in My Everything, 26.

²³ Ken Van Vliet, DLGP851: *Experimenting With Prototypes* (Summary Post, George Fox University, Newberg, OR., September 10, 2021).

*"Without some kind of community or relationship, we will have no inspiration and support to experience sustained change."*²⁴

*"When they experience burnout, leaders emotionally decompress, distance themselves from others, and have difficulty functioning normally."*²⁵

- It is in relationship that our spiritual lives are refined and formed to the image of Christ.

Questions to ask ourselves in regard to cultivating a Rule of Life:

- "How and where do I thrive?"
- "How and where do I struggle or get stuck?"
- What is my purpose / mission?
- What are my Core Values?
- What are my Vital Behaviors?

²⁴ Shigematsu, *God in My Everything*, 38.

²⁵ DJ Chandler, "The Impact of Pastors' Spiritual Practices on Burnout." *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling*, 64, no. 2, 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1177/154230501006400206>.

Rule of Life: Example

This should be your ambition: to live a quiet life, minding your own business and doing your own work, just as we told you before. - 1 Thessalonians 4:11 TLB

Spiritually I will:

- Practice the daily offices.
- Set aside at least one hour in the morning to be quiet and spend time with Jesus.
- Be more aware of nature by writing a weekly Haiku.

Relationally I will:

- Take my wife on a weekly date.
- Meet with my children at least weekly, either in person or by phone.
- Invest weekly in at least one relationship with a ministry colleague.
- Mentor a small group of young men every week.

Physically I will:

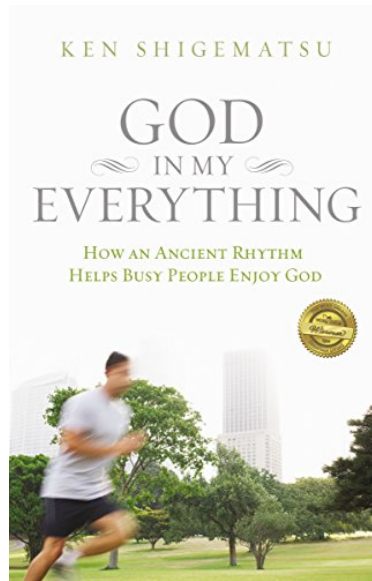
- Walk for a minimum of thirty minutes, four days per week.
- Adjust my diet to lose at least an additional forty pounds.
- Drink at least a gallon of water daily.

Vocationally I will:

- Make some hard decisions which have needed attention for some time.
- Be more intentional in helping staff members to cultivate their spiritual lives.
- Be obedient to the specific direction that God is giving.
- Give this Rule of Life to my journey partner and we will discuss it weekly.

Recommended Resource(s):

- God In My Everything | Ken Shigematsu



Prayer (Group Listening Prayer)

From the book, "Lifelong Leadership: Woven Together through Mentoring Communities".

Step 1 - Silence

"The silence gives everyone time to still the inner chatter in their minds and turn their loving attention to God by gazing on him and receiving his loving gaze. In that inner place of love, group members also have time to listen to their own souls to discern what the spirit might be stirring that they want the group to consider in prayer".

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²⁶ Morse, *Lifelong Leadership*, 148-149.

Thriving Pastors Cohort Session 3 - Exhaustion Leader Guide



Thriving Pastors Cohort - Session 3 - "Exhaustion"

"Because we do not rest, we lose our way . . . poisoned by the hypnotic belief that good things come only through unceasing determination and tireless effort, we can never truly rest. And for want of rest our lives are in danger."²⁷ - Wayne Muller

Pattern of Cohort Meeting

- Prayer.
- Check-in with one another.
- Introduce the topic to be addressed.
- Sharing our personal experience related to the topic.
- Scripture speaks to the topic.
- Spiritual Practice related to the topic.
- Prayer (Group Listening Prayer).

²⁷ R. Ruth Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence: Experiencing God's Transforming Presence*, Expanded ed (Downers Grove, IL IVP Books, 2010), 55.



Prayer

Lord, I have known what it is to allow myself to
 be swept away in an undertow of busyness.
 Sometimes unaware, I have swum in the wrong direction -
 away from the safety of your rest.
 Because of pressure and expectations, I have said "yes" to too many things.
 I have not ordered my days well
 and my soul is always the victim of that.
 The truth is that there is so much to do, too much to do.
 There is much more than I can handle.
 My body is tired.
 My mind is unclear.
 My emotions are raw.
 My spirit is in distress
 So, I come to you for rescue, great creator, and sustainer of rest.
 Make me to lie in green pastures, lead me by still waters, restore my soul.
 Let me settle under the easy yoke of Jesus and fully realize your words,
 "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."

For Christ's glory, Amen.
 M.S.



Check-In with one another

Each cohort participant will give a brief (2-3 minute) synopsis of how their month has been and where they are experiencing in the words of Vinita Hampton Wright, "Consolation and Desolation."

- Consolation
 - Directs our focus outside and beyond ourselves.
 - Lifts our hearts so that we can see the joys and sorrows of other people.
 - Bonds us more closely to our human community.
 - Generates new inspiration and ideas.
 - Restores balance and refreshes our inner vision.
 - Shows us where God is active in our lives and where God is leading us.
 - Releases new energy in us.
- Desolation
 - Turns us in on ourselves.
 - Drives us down the spiral ever deeper into our own negative feelings.
 - Cuts us off from community.
 - Makes us want to give up on the things that used to be important to us.
 - Takes over our whole consciousness and crowds out our distant vision.
 - Covers up all our landmarks [the signs of our journey with God so far].
 - Drains us of energy²⁸.

²⁸ Wright, *Consolation and Desolation*.

Topic to be addressed - "Exhaustion"

Perhaps you've heard the quote from Christmas Evans, a famous Welsh preacher from the early 19th century, who supposedly said, *'I'd rather burn out than rust out in the service of the Lord.'* One of Evans's contemporaries, James Berkeley, is said to have retorted, *"I admire the bravado. It sounds dedicated, bold, and stirring. However, when I view the burn-outs and the almost burn-outs who lie by the ecclesiastical road, the glory fails to reach me. Is there not a third alternative?"*²⁹

- One of the great problems in current church culture is that we wear "busy" as a badge of honor.
- There are many pitfalls in ministry life to be certain, but perhaps none we are prouder of than busy.
- In every ministerial meeting you attend, what is the dominant theme? "I'm so busy." "I don't have any time." "I'd love to get together when we have time."
- The idea that we must be constantly productive (or at least have the appearance of productivity) has permeated society and no industry is immune... not even the ministry.
- Many of us don't just tolerate busyness, we relish it - celebrate it. We work as if someone (namely God) is keeping some celestial score. There are myriad reasons for this.

"6 Signs You're a Productivity Addict"

According to Melody Wilding

1. Are you acutely aware of when you are "wasting" time? Do you beat yourself up for it?
2. Are you reliant on technology to optimize your time management?
3. Is your #1 topic of conversation how "crazy busy" you are? Do you think "hustling" sounds impressive, while "doing less" sounds lazy?
4. Are you a slave to your email inbox? Compulsively checking it or feeling like your phone is an extension of your arm?
5. Do you feel guilty when you only cross one item off your to-do list or find you're kept awake at night by work stress?
6. Have you ever rolled your eyes when your friend says she'll finally get started on that side project she's been talking about for months, yet you do the same and rationalize it by thinking you're too swamped?³⁰

²⁹ Burns, Chapman, and, Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 67.

³⁰ Melody Wilding, *6 Signs Your Obsession With Productivity Is Hurting You*, October 2, 2022, <https://melodywilding.com/6-signs-obsession-productivity-hurting>.

Possible Reasons For “Busy Sickness”

BAD THEOLOGY

- Many Christians have wrongly interpreted the call to take up the cross and deny oneself as a mandate to ignore the inner life that beckons us to slow down.

“Somewhere along the line we got the message that serving wholeheartedly means neglecting the needs God has created our bodies with as well as the command to regularly practice sabbath rest.”³¹

- I’ve often heard and read things like, “Pray as if everything is up to God and work as if everything is up to you.” I get the sentiment, truly, I do. But this theology inevitably leads to a works-based approach to ministry. Perhaps a better approach would be, “Pray as if everything is up to God, rest in that, and work in the arena where God directs and places you.”
- This is not lazy, it is faith. We all know that there are seasons of giving a little extra towards the work of the Lord. Emergencies happen, congregants die, hurricanes cause damage, and the list goes on and on. However, we are not the “fixers” of every situation and living as if we are - is completely unsustainable.

WE WORK TOO HARD AT THE WRONG THINGS

“Busyness for most of us is a form of sloth because we haven't planned well enough in order to embrace rest.”³² - C.S. Lewis

“Hard work doesn’t produce burnout. Unrealistic expectations do. It’s important for us as people in the ministry to understand that the Lord is in charge of outcomes.”³³

- You’re a servant and you work hard. But do all the things that you’re working on, line up with God’s calling for your life?
- What are THE priorities for you - the things that only you can do.
- Only you can maintain a healthy spiritual, physical, relational, emotional, and mental life.
- Only you can be the spouse and/or parent in your family.

³¹ Josh Spurlock. Burnout in Ministry | Symptoms, Causes, and Prevention, accessed October 18, 2022, <https://mycounselor.online/burnout-ministry-symptoms-causes-prevention/#causes-of-burnout>.

³² Ken Shigematsu, *Survival Guide for the Soul: How to Flourish Spiritually in a World That Pressures Us to Achieve* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 103.

³³ John MacArthur, 2 Traps That Lead To Ministry Failure, March 17, 2019, <https://www.crossway.org/articles/2-traps-that-lead-to-ministry-failure>.

- Only you can be the chief leader in your context.
- Are you doing things that someone else could (and maybe should) be doing?
- This may not only be extra work for you, but it may be depriving someone else of a ministry opportunity for their life.

Doing menial tasks or non-essential “busy” work is easier than doing the hard work of forming your spirit and leading your family and church well.

- You must manage your work/rest balance to succeed for the long-haul of ministry.
- The focus of our life is not singular. God has entrusted us with our spouses, children, extended family, ministry, as well as leading ourselves.

Personal Experience Related to The Topic

Context | This was 2005 and we were pastoring a church that we had planted 3 years earlier and had been in full time vocational ministry for 9 years total.

I had hardly slept for a couple of months. I was getting 2 maybe 3 hours of intermittent, fitful sleep (usually just before I had to get up). Panic attacks, newly developed claustrophobia, and heart palpitations had become the norm for me and unfortunately, Jennifer was along for the ride. I dreaded going to bed and would often plead for the morning to come. This incident occurred in the middle of the night, probably 2 or 3 am. I found myself on the floor on my wife’s side of the bed, weeping uncontrollably and begging her to pray for me because I didn’t have the strength to pray for myself. I was at a breaking point and didn’t know how to handle it. I was completely broken and exhausted in body, mind, and soul. She prayed that night and for many nights after that. This was the most dreadful season of life I had ever known, and I didn’t know where it came from or why. There were no obvious stressors or recent traumatic experiences to blame, it was simply as John of the Cross described - a dark night of the soul. Thankfully, seasons change, and we eventually came out of that spiritually dark place. But it was there that I learned that there is an exhaustion that no amount of physical rest or time off can remedy. It is an exhaustion of the body, mind, and soul and it is crippling. I never want to go there again.

Prompts

1. Tell of a time when you experienced fatigue or exhaustion and what you believe may have been the cause.
2. Can you remember a time when you were exhausted from doing something out of a misguided place or a theological error?
3. Do you spend time doing “busy” work to avoid the hard work of spiritual formation?
4. What other factors lead to exhaustion?
5. When you are exhausted (spiritually, mentally, physically, emotionally), what are your tendencies? Work harder, anxiety/depression, procrastination, relational hiding, etc.

Scripture Speaks to The Topic

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, “Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath.” He said to them, “Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him to eat nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? Or have you not read in the Law how on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless? I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. And if you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath. - Matthew 11:28 - 12:8 ESV

- There was lots of talk about Sabbath and Jesus wanted to clarify what that was to mean for them.
- Jesus addresses the exhausted crowd.

Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly. - Matthew 11:28, 29 - The Message

- Jesus describes himself as the true rest that we need and are looking for. But we must learn how to slow down and be fully present with him.
- When we observe the Sabbath, we hit the pause button on the counterfeit rhythm of busyness and striving to enjoy and honor God, the people around us, and the gifts we have received from God. We unplug from secular and worldly wisdom and receive from the Spirit.
- When we draw near to God, he draws near to us. Jesus is lord of the Sabbath.
- No longer are we necessarily bound to a specific 24-hour period to observe the Sabbath. Jesus, our Sabbath says to us, “Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.”

Spiritual Practice Related to The Topic – Sabbath

For I have also experienced the utter joy and relief when Sabbath does happen, when the house has been cleaned, special food has been bought, the computer has been turned off, the last obligation has been completed or set aside, the candles or the fireplace has been lit, and it is time to stop, whether everything has been finished or not. I know what it is like to rest for hours until I have energy to delight in something - good food, a good book, a leisurely walk, a long-awaited conversation with someone I love. I know what it is like to feel joy and hope and peace flow back into my body and soul though I had thought it might never come again. I know what it's like to see my home and my children through the Sabbath eyes of enjoyment. I know what it's like to have rest turn into delight, and delight turn into gratitude, and gratitude into worship. I know what it is like to recover myself so completely that I am able, by God's grace, to enter my work on Monday with a renewed sense of God's calling and God's presence.³⁴

Thus, the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation. - Genesis 2:1-3 ESV

- God "Blessed" and "Made Holy" the Seventh Day.
- Both Genesis 2:3 and Exodus 20:11 declare that God "blessed" and "made holy" the day of rest.

"What does it mean for God to bless a day? I think it means that he makes the day a time of blessing. When God blesses a man, the man becomes rich with blessings. When he blesses a land, the land becomes rich with blessings. So, when he blesses a day, that day becomes rich with blessings."³⁵

- And the Lord also makes the Sabbath day Holy (consecrated and set apart).
- When we "make God holy", set him apart, and focus our awareness on him, we receive God's blessing in greater measure and with greater frequency than if we continue to plow seven days a week.

God sets the Sabbath day apart for the express purposes of receiving abundant blessing and imparting abundant blessing to the people of God!

³⁴ R. Ruth Barton, *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 137.

³⁵ John Piper, *Remembering the Sabbath Day to Keep It Holy*, October 6, 1985, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/remember-the-sabbath-day-to-keep-it-holy?cv=1>

- It is as if the Lord is saying, "Let the one made in my image, my highest creation, stop once every seven days to rest and remember the fact that I, their creator, has done all of this for them. Let them cease from their labor and remember that I, not their hard work, am the source of all that they have. I am their fountain of blessing. Let my people look to me one day out of seven for the renewal and recharging that cannot be attained by any other means."
- Sabbath keeping is not a lesser command in the Commandments. It was written by God - in stone, no less! Most Christians treat it as more of a suggestion than a command.
- If Jesus came to fulfill the law and none of the other commandments have been done away with or even modified, how should you and I treat Sabbath keeping?
- We keep commandments one to three and five to ten, so why skip the command to keep the Sabbath as holy?

SABBATH HELPS TO ESTABLISH PRIORITIES.

- Sabbath keeping places God not only on the throne of the universe, but on the throne of our hearts.
- Sabbath makes room for our heart to receive the healing, reviving presence of God himself.
- Remember back in the day when Wednesday & Sunday were off limits? That's not the case anymore.
- We MUST arrange our schedules, or our work will dictate when they will be.

SABBATH ACKNOWLEDGES OUR LIMITATIONS

- Time, Energy, Finances, Patience, Wisdom, Creativity, Skills
- God is infinite, beyond limitations and we are not!
- Sabbath requires surrendering control.
- Sabbath seems like a nice idea for the strange, lazy, or those who have nothing better to do with their time.

SABBATH REQUIRES COURAGE AND TRUST.

- For ministry families, Sundays are anything but light and easy. We have responsibilities and meetings and pressure.
- Planning for and executing a regular Sabbath day should be a delight but our weeks must be well ordered for Sabbath keeping to take place.
- You must be intentional about this with your family, work, church, kid's sports, school, and community involvement.
- This is where the rule of life comes into play. You must try to order your week so that:
- You work 5 days (or 40 hours) at the job you're getting paid from.
- You have a day to do errands, shopping, chores, sports, etc.
- You have a Sabbath day.

- Think about what you would do with an entire 24 hours that God has given to you as a gift to rest and worship and eat and visit. The biggest struggle you'll probably have during Sabbath rest is the fight to not be productive.

"Ministry leaders need to consider self-care as a way of ensuring that we will remain effective in the great work God has given us to do."³⁶

Things to include in your Sabbath

REST AND REFRESHING FOR YOUR BODY

- What do you do that is especially enjoyable to you?
- Cooking, gardening, naps, baths, light exercise

REST AND REFRESHING FOR YOUR SPIRIT (HEART, SPIRIT)

- What do you do that stirs your spirit? What calls your heart higher?
- This is highly subjective.
- Reading the scripture, listening to podcasts/sermons, solitude/silence...
- Worshiping in community/family, communion.

REST AND REFRESHING YOUR SOUL (EMOTIONAL HEALTH, MENTAL HEALTH)

- What nourishes your inner person? What brings you emotional health?
- Talking, journaling, writing, reading, poetry, art, photography, outdoors...
- Sharing love in a way you receive it best.

Things to exclude from your Sabbath.

WORK

- No sermon planning/prep.
- No gearing up for staff meetings, hospital visits, etc.

WORRY

- Tomorrow has enough worries of its own.
- Remember that God continues to run the world while you rest.

³⁶ Burns, Chapman, and, Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 63.

OTHERS' EXPECTATIONS

- As you choose Sabbath and rest, you may have to get comfortable with others being uncomfortable.

*"As we embrace the gift of Sabbath, we remember that we are human beings, beloved Sons & Daughters, rather than human doings, slaves of a harsh Taskmaster"*³⁷

*"We just want very much to say that you need the rest one day a week, and you need to find a way to say to the Lord, "I love you, and I revere you, and I'll honor you in a special way on this day."*³⁸

Lord, I trust you to run the universe without my help for the next 24 hours.

QUESTIONS

- Do you feel a deep desire to keep the Sabbath?
- How can you adjust your schedule to practice Sabbath Keeping?
- Do you want to pass on your patterns to your family, staff, and ultimately your church?
- How do you counsel your staff regarding Sabbath keeping?
- What word would you use when you think about implementing a weekly Sabbath? Why?
- If you don't keep the Sabbath, is there a reason or have you simply overlooked it?
- What is your current pattern of rest?
- Is there anything that stood out to you from this week's reflection?
- Have you ever practiced a true Sabbath? Why not?

*"Unless one learns how to relish the taste of Sabbath ... one will be unable to enjoy the taste of eternity in the world to come."*³⁹ - Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath*

- Pete Scazzero videoclip - How Do We Take a Sabbath When Life Is So Busy?
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dTXfzi7Z53g>
- Sabbath Keeping Worksheet

³⁷ Shigematsu, *Survival Guide for the Soul*, 106.

³⁸ John Piper, *What Does it Mean Practically to Keep the Sabbath Holy?*, December 26, 2008, <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/what-does-it-mean-practically-to-keep-the-sabbath-holy?cv=1>

³⁹ Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005).

Matthew Sleeth offers the following Sabbath plan worksheet:

WRITING YOUR SABBATH PLAN

☐ My Sabbath day each week will be _____

☐ I will mark off this day each week on my calendar as Sabbath

☐ Activities to complete each week *to prepare for my Sabbath include:*

☐ Temptations to break my Sabbath commitment will most likely include:

☐ Who will be affected by my observation of Sabbath, and how will I inform them of my plans?

Activities I will engage in during my Sabbath (What renews my spirit?):

☐ _____

☐ _____

☐ _____

☐ _____

Activities I will *avoid* during my Sabbath (What drains my spirit?):

☐ _____

☐ _____

☐ _____

☐ _____

Encouragement I need to stay on track:

☐ Person(s) who can keep me accountable: _____ ☐ Person(s) with whom I will share my Sabbath journey: _____

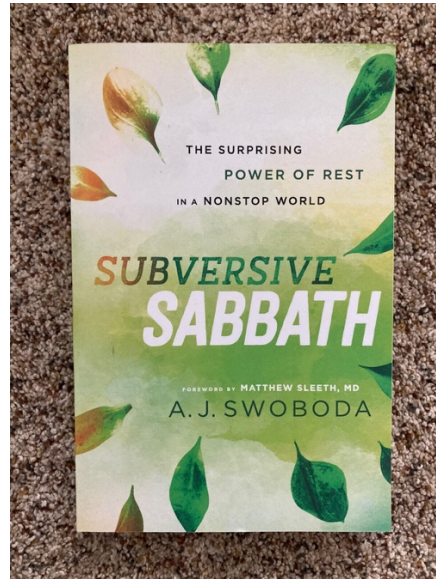
☐ Additional ways I will share/process my Sabbath journey (journaling, blog posts, testimony, etc.):

Adapted from 24/6: *A Prescription for a Healthier, Happier Life* by Matthew Sleeth, MD
For additional resources, visit www.sabbathliving.org
contact@blessedearth.org

⁴⁰ Matthew Sleeth, "Writing Your Sabbath Plan", PDF file, October, 2020, <http://sabbathliving.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Sabbath-Plan-Worksheet-General-Audience-updated.pdf>.

Recommended Resource(s):

- Subversive Sabbath | A.J. Swoboda



Prayer (Group Listening Prayer)

From the book, "Lifelong Leadership: Woven Together through Mentoring Communities".

Step 1 - Silence

"The silence gives everyone time to still the inner chatter in their minds and turn their loving attention to God by gazing on him and receiving his loving gaze. In that inner place of love, group members also have time to listen to their own souls to discern what the spirit might be stirring that they want the group to consider in prayer".

Step 2 - First Sharing

After the silence, the cohort member who will be sharing that day will proceed to share what they'd like the other members to consider.

"Sharing in Listening Prayer does not require lots of details. Whatever helps to convey the essence of the sharer's heart concern is needed, but not all the details surrounding it".

Step 3 - Listening Silence on Behalf of The Member Who Shared

All members will return to a period of silence, prayer, and listening on behalf of the member who shared.

"In silence, the person who shared is lifted into God's light. Listening starts from the assumption that God knows and loves this person completely, so we do not need to tell God what he already knows. Listening also starts with the assumption that Jesus is at the right hand of God, interceding for the one who shared. The group seeks to join in the prayer of Jesus for this person. In the silence, listeners are not telling God what they think the one who shared needs; rather, they are attentively listening for a sense of what God's prayer might be for this person. Just having a few friends lovingly hold an individual before God is gift enough".

The length of this time will be determined by the cohort facilitator.

Step 4 - Response to The Member Who Shared

"After silence for listening, those who have been listening are invited to share anything that they experienced. Sometimes in the listening, a scripture, image, or song might arise".

"It is very helpful when someone offers to take notes on what is shared on behalf of the one who shared. This allows the sharer to listen fully to the one speaking but also preserves what was spoken".

"Also, offer what comes without a sense of a strong prophetic voice but rather as a humble, gentle offering. Allow the sharer to discern what resonates with the spirit for them".

Step 5 - Prayer for The Member Who Shared

"After hearing the responses, the person who shared can offer any final comments, if they wish. Then the mentor or peer facilitator asks who would like to pray for the one who shared. Someone volunteers to pray. It is helpful to lay hands on the one who shared while praying aloud as a way of expressing the group's love and involvement in the prayer. The brief spoken prayer places the needs and responses in God's care".⁴¹

⁴¹ Morse, *Lifelong Leadership*, 148-149.

Thriving Pastors Cohort Session 4 - Distraction Leader Guide



Thriving Pastors Cohort - Session 4 - "Distraction"

"You will never reach your destination if you stop and throw stones at every dog that barks."

- Winston Churchill

Pattern of Cohort Meeting

- Prayer.
- Check-in with one another.
- Introduce the topic to be addressed.
- Sharing our personal experience related to the topic.
- Scripture speaks to the topic.
- Spiritual Practice related to the topic.
- Prayer (Group Listening Prayer).



Prayer

From Asherita Ciuciu

Oh Lord, you know my heart.

You know I sincerely want to grow closer to You and spend time with You, but I get so easily distracted. Like a silly sheep, my mind wanders, and I find my thoughts far from You.

Forgive me for my undisciplined thoughts. Forgive me for so often giving up instead of persevering despite my distraction. Forgive me for choosing the easy path instead of the more difficult, disciplined route. I really want to know you more. I want to spend time in Your presence, to learn to sit quietly at Your feet without a million thoughts distracting me.

Teach me, Lord, how to be still. Like a Good Shepherd, lead me beside still waters. Quiet my soul. Bring order and calm to the chaos in my mind, so that I can spend time in quiet and joyful meditation with You.

Thank You that you are willing and able to do these things, and that when I am weak, you are strong.

I love You. Amen.⁴²

⁴² Asherita Ciuciu, "A Prayer for Focused Quiet Time", accessed January 18, 2023, <https://onethingalone.com/prayer-focused-quiet-time/?cv=1>.



Check-In with one another

Each cohort participant will give a brief (2-3 minute) synopsis of how their month has been and where they are experiencing in the words of Vinita Hampton Wright, "Consolation and Desolation."

- Consolation
 - Directs our focus outside and beyond ourselves.
 - Lifts our hearts so that we can see the joys and sorrows of other people.
 - Bonds us more closely to our human community.
 - Generates new inspiration and ideas.
 - Restores balance and refreshes our inner vision.
 - Shows us where God is active in our lives and where God is leading us.
 - Releases new energy in us.
- Desolation
 - Turns us in on ourselves.
 - Drives us down the spiral ever deeper into our own negative feelings.
 - Cuts us off from community.
 - Makes us want to give up on the things that used to be important to us.
 - Takes over our whole consciousness and crowds out our distant vision.
 - Covers up all our landmarks [the signs of our journey with God so far].
 - Drains us of energy⁴³.

⁴³ Wright, *Consolation and Desolation*.

Topic to be addressed - "Distraction."

"Churchgoers expect their pastor to juggle an average of 16 major tasks."⁴⁴

- Many pastors fill more roles in this era of ministry than those of generations past. In some church cultures, the pastor is expected to be proficient - if not an expert in many fields including: preaching, teaching, finances, visionary leadership, pastoral care, counseling, staff development and management, landscape design and upkeep, building maintenance, community relations, social media director, and the list goes on.
- It is not only impractical for these expectations to be in place, it's impossible. Unrealistic expectations are one of the tripwires which often triggers feelings of inadequacy and failure leading to myriad harmful issues.
- It's impossible to give 100% of our attention to every person or problem that clamors for it.
- Ministry life is a life of giving. Being attentive to our own heart, God, our spouses, children, organizational overseers, ministry staff, church members, and cultural trends can be exhausting.
- Only God can nourish, encourage, and guide our hearts in truth, fidelity, and stability, yet God is often the first to be squeezed out of our busy schedule.

"There is seldom a period in which we do not know what to do, and we move through life in such a distracted way that we do not even take the time to rest to wonder if any of the things we think, say, or do are worth thinking, saying, or doing."⁴⁵

A LACK OF BOUNDARIES

- An area that can be exhausting for those of us in vocational ministry is a lack of boundaries.
- We do what we do because we love people and we love to help people, but some people cannot or will not recognize boundaries.
- Jesus established and lived within boundaries and ended up disappointing many people in his day.
 - Israel wanted a political and military leader - they were disappointed in Jesus.
 - Mary and Martha wanted healing for their brother - they were disappointed in Jesus.
 - Peter wanted Jesus to stay in Capernaum and minister - he was disappointed in Jesus.

⁴⁴ H. B. London, *Pastors at Greater Risk*, 62.

⁴⁵ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 1st Ballantine trade pbk. ed (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 2003).

- The rich young ruler wanted validation from Jesus - he was disappointed in Jesus.
- We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us, but God's primary empowerment resides in the areas wherein he has called us. We cannot do everything, and God is not calling us to do everything.
- Distraction is crippling.
- Sometimes, when we say "No", it may open the door for God's "Yes".
- What do you want your ministry to look like?
- What are your goals for your personal ministry?
- Try Eugene Peterson's vision for ministry on for size:

"I want to study God's word long and carefully so that when I stand before you and preach and teach, I will be accurate. I want to pray slowly and lovingly, so that my relationship with God will be inward and honest. And I want to be with you, often and leisurely so that we can recognize each other as close companions on the way of the cross and be available for counsel and encouragement to each other." ⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Eugene H. Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant: An Exploration in Vocational Holiness* (Grand Rapids, MI. : Leominster, England: W.B. Eerdmans ; Gracewing, 1992), 39.

Personal Experience Related to The Topic

Context | This was 1997 and we had only been in full time vocational ministry for 2 years. We were youth pastors at our first church and were as green as the grass.

August in Miami is HOT! Spreading tar on a flat roof in August in Miami is almost unbearable. The church had a small roof leak and I had volunteered to try and track it down and fix it. After working for several hours, I was drenched in sweat and covered in tar from my calves down. I came down from the roof to get lunch and cool off a bit when I was introduced to a pastor from another city. This man scanned me from head to toe and literally sneered and half snorted at me, "Well you really look like you're dressed for success." What I wanted to say was, "Jesus said the greatest among you will be a servant", or something super religious like that. What I actually said was, "I'm just trying to help." That was the truth, I genuinely was trying to be a help. I thought it would help my pastor with taking something off his plate and help my church to save some money. I have people pleasing tendencies and it made perfect sense to me. Unfortunately, doing less important things became a pattern in my life. I found myself constantly busy, but busy with the wrong things. In small to medium sized churches there is never a lack of things to do, the finances simply don't allow everything to be hired out. So, we do - and do - and do the things that seemingly need to be done, all the while neglecting the weightier matters of allowing the Spirit to form and shape us for the work to which he has called us. Distractions funnel us away from the things that will significantly shape our spirit for the work God has called us to.

Prompts

1. Are you an introvert/extrovert
2. What areas of your ministry energize/drain you?
3. Do you have a way to cope with distractions?
4. Has a lack of boundaries ever left you exhausted in body, mind, or soul?
5. Give an example of how a lack of boundaries may distract you from the primary ministry God has called you to.

Scripture Speaks to The Topic

"All of humanity's problems stem from man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone."

– Blaise Pascal

- Jesus and the disciples had just experienced a day which was unprecedented and was barely believable.
- Capernaum, Peter's hometown had been completely turned upside down. Peter's family, friends, and neighbors had surely been amazed by the authoritative, bold, and convincing teaching and miraculous signs of Jesus of Nazareth.
- These plain people had never seen demons obey a man before and stood amazed.
- Next, Jesus visited Peter's house and healed his mother-in-law of a fever.
- And to top the day off, Peter's home became the destination of the sick, afflicted, and demonized of Capernaum and beyond.
- The biblical text says "The whole city was gathered together at the door." It had to have been one of the greatest days of Peter's life, and one of the greatest in the history of the tiny fishing village.
- Instantly Jesus' flicker of popularity was fanned into full flame. Surely the disciples thought to themselves, "If today had been that fantastic, what might tomorrow look like?"

And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed. - Mark 1:35 ESV

- What do we typically do when we have a great expectation that the day will bring opportunities for the blessing and power of God? When we sense a spiritual opportunity is afoot, we rise early to meet the day.
- Like a child on Christmas morning, our hearts call our bodies to shake off slumber and greet the new day.
- Jesus, knowing full well what the expectation of the morning would be, rose before the sun to spend time with his Father to prepare for the challenges of the day.
- Humanity would demand Jesus' attention and abilities and he could not live without fellowship with God. If he was to pour his power, healing, love, and divine influence into the world, he would need to tap into the fountain of those things which flow only from God's presence.
- Time alone with God, speaking to God, and receiving from God was non-negotiable in Jesus' life.

It is as William Barclay said, *"Prayer will never do our work for us; what it will do is to strengthen us for work which must be done."*⁴⁷

- We see in scripture again and again that the people of God, Abraham (Genesis 19 & 21), Moses (Exodus 8 & 9), Joshua (Joshua 3,6,7,8), Gideon (Judges 7) all rose early to meet with God.
- Like Jesus, they prioritized their days to receive perfect wisdom, love, authority, vision, anointing, and encouragement in the presence of the Lord.

*"And the picture we have of Christ's habits is not one that is foreign to our world and lives and experience. Rather, we find timeless and transcultural postures that can be replicated, and easily applied, by any follower of Jesus, anywhere in the world, at any time in history."*⁴⁸

- Peter rose early the next morning, probably awakened by those already looking for Jesus. The expectation was most likely that Capernaum would experience another day of preaching, healing, and deliverance.

And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, and they found him and said to him, "Everyone is looking for you." - Mark 1:36-37 ESV

- Don't lose sight of when it was that Jesus sought his Father.
- It was early, before the demands of the day clamored for his attention.
- Before hands and hearts were grasping for what he could do for them.
- Life offers endless ways to move our time with God down the list of priorities for the day.
- For many people, our best moments of each day are our first moments.
- Our minds are usually clearer, and our hearts haven't had the chance to absorb anything negative.

Peter was ready to set the agenda and control Jesus' day.

- Who or what desires to control you?
- Practically speaking, early mornings afford us time before the other people in our lives attempt to shackle us with their agendas.
- Let's be honest, spouses, jobs, friends, staff members, church members, and even children can commandeer our schedules before we know it.
- Life will dominate and consume your time if proper boundaries are not established.

⁴⁷ William Barclay, *Barclay on the Lectionary: Mark: Year B*, ed. Linda Foster (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 2014), 58.

⁴⁸ David Mathis, *Time Alone for God: The Ageless Habits of Jesus Christ*, October 18, 2021, <https://didiyouprayfirst.org/2021/10/18/time-alone-for-god-the-ageless-habits-of-jesus-christ-by-david-mathis/>

And he said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out." - Mark 1:38 ESV

- As Peter approached Jesus, there seems to be no regard for what Jesus is doing or who he is talking to.
- Jesus' reply was not short, and he did not get angry with Peter. He simply responded by telling Peter what the plan for the day was and moved on.
- Jesus knew his mission:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. - Luke 4:18-19 ESV

- Time in God's presence confirms God's direction in our lives as well as producing the fruit of the Holy Spirit.
- Peace, patience, kindness, and self-control were on full display on this particular morning in Jesus' life.
- Jesus found it necessary to balance ministry activity with solitude and time with his Father.
- We're not after "aloneness" and we don't retreat from life's busyness as an end.

"We don't retreat from life's busyness and bustle as an end in itself. "To sit quietly in a room alone," in Pascal's words, is not an achievement but an instrument - an opportunity to open up our lives and souls to him for whom we were made. To know him and enjoy him."⁴⁹

- If rising early is a priority, what are the steps we need to take to follow Jesus' example?
- What can we see from Jesus' response to Peter?
- How can you balance life, family, work, and ministry activity with solitude and silence?
- How often do you now practice solitude and silence?

⁴⁹ David Mathis, *Time Alone for God: The Ageless Habits of Jesus Christ*, October 18, 2021, September 30, 2022, <https://difyouprayfirst.org/2021/10/18/time-alone-for-god-the-ageless-habits-of-jesus-christ-by-david-mathis/>.

Spiritual Practice Related to The Topic Silence and Solitude

"To enter into solitude and silence is to take the spiritual life seriously. It is to take seriously our need to quiet the noise of our lives, to cease the constant striving of human effort, to pull away from our absorption in human relationships or a time in order to give God our undivided attention."⁵⁰

We need to tune our ears to hear the one voice out of the many.

- Solitude has been mistaught, misunderstood, and even hijacked by some in the church.
- In many of our theological tribes, solitude and silence isn't even discussed much less yearned for or seen as something to be pursued.
- On the rare occasion that we recognize that solitude is needed, what we usually mean is that we need some "ME" time and space.
- We need a space in time to not be bothered by others and escape from the world to think what we want to think and do what we want to do.
- Our brand of solitude may look like going to a movie by oneself or a day out shopping alone.
- We often think, "If I just had more time."

"It is a fallacy to think that one just needs more time. Unless a deeper solution is found, 'more time' will just fill up in the same way as the time we already have. The way to liberation and rest lies through a decision and a practice."⁵¹

- In solitude, there is God and there is me.
- There are no friends to receive counsel from, no dopamine hits from social media affirmation, no music to distract, no staff to direct, and no meetings to rush to.
- With its roots planted in the sand where the desert fathers sojourned, solitude is an experience in which I voluntarily agree to meet with God without any crutches to lean on.

⁵⁰ Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 63.

⁵¹ Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 134.

"Society... was regarded (by the Desert Fathers) as a shipwreck from which each single individual man had to swim for his life... These were men who believed that to let oneself drift along, passively accepting the tenets and values of what they knew as society, was purely and simply a disaster."⁵² - Thomas Merton

"The normal way to practice solitude and silence is to get alone with God to be quiet in a quiet place for some uninterrupted time. Perhaps you take a walk on a nature trail or sit beside a lake or a creek or sit in a quiet spot in a park or in your backyard swing may work well. Even a secluded chair inside your house may work – as long as all your communication and media devices are turned off!"⁵³

- The point of your time in solitude and silence is to do nothing and don't try to make anything happen.
- Allow God's Spirit to bring up to you what needs to be brought up.
- Often, people practice solitude in the morning before the sun rises or in the evening when the house has settled.
- Receive words of life from God himself to encourage, strengthen, and challenge you.

"We are silent at the beginning of the day because God should have the first word, and we are silent before going to sleep because the last word also belongs to God... Silence is nothing else but waiting for God's Word and coming from God's Word with a blessing."⁵⁴
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer

A congregant recently wrote:

Good morning,

Your recent sermon about sitting silent with God, being still and alone with him is truly getting me through this difficult season. Each morning even before I pray, I just sit. The last few days Jesus keeps giving me these words - "Loved", "Called", "Chosen". Yesterday was a BAD day. Taking the high road through this divorce is difficult. So many lies are being said about me, but I will not retaliate or let myself stoop to his level. My time alone with God is healing and calming me."

⁵² Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 11.

⁵³ Bill Gailtiere, *Solitude and Silence*, November 21, 2022,
<https://www.soulshpherd.org/solitude-and-silence/?cv=1>

⁵⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Jana Riess, *God Is in the Manger: Reflections on Advent and Christmas*, 1st ed (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 12.

Shigematsu shares, *"We all long for something more than the rat race, rushing through life without ever living. We crave depth, and experience of beauty, truth, and meaning. We can each learn to enjoy God's presence in our rhythms of work and rest, study and play, community, and solitude."*⁵⁵

- Huge blocks of time aren't necessary to practice silence and solitude. As a matter of fact, you'll probably want to start with a short amount of time - maybe just a few minutes to start. Adele Calhoun recommends the following ways of practicing solitude:

*"In a place where you can't be interrupted, intentionally place yourself in the presence of God. Recognize that the Lord is as near as your own breathing. Inhale God's breath of life; exhale all that weighs on you. Simply be with God. When it is time to return to others, leave the presence of God gently. Carry the sense of being alone with God with you into the next thing."*⁵⁶

*"Set aside half a day for time alone with God. Go to a retreat center, quiet chapel, or park. Don't stay in your home. Take only your Bible."*⁵⁷

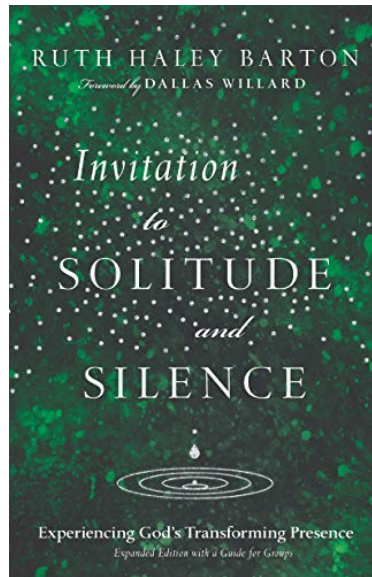
⁵⁵ Shigematsu, *God in My Everything*, 155.

⁵⁶ Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 113.

⁵⁷ Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 114.

Recommended Resource(s):

- Invitation To Silence and Solitude | Ruth Haley Barton



Prayer (Group Listening Prayer)

From the book, "Lifelong Leadership: Woven Together through Mentoring Communities".

Step 1 - Silence

"The silence gives everyone time to still the inner chatter in their minds and turn their loving attention to God by gazing on him and receiving his loving gaze. In that inner place of love, group members also have time to listen to their own souls to discern what the spirit might be stirring that they want the group to consider in prayer".

Step 2 - First Sharing

After the silence, the cohort member who will be sharing that day will proceed to share what they'd like the other members to consider.

"Sharing in Listening Prayer does not require lots of details. Whatever helps to convey the essence of the sharer's heart concern is needed, but not all the details surrounding it".

Step 3 - Listening Silence on Behalf of The Member Who Shared

All members will return to a period of silence, prayer, and listening on behalf of the member who shared.

"In silence, the person who shared is lifted into God's light. Listening starts from the assumption that God knows and loves this person completely, so we do not need to tell God what he already knows. Listening also starts with the assumption that Jesus is at the right hand of God, interceding for the one who shared. The group seeks to join in the prayer of Jesus for this person. In the silence, listeners are not telling God what they think the one who shared needs; rather, they are attentively listening for a sense of what God's prayer might be for this person. Just having a few friends lovingly hold an individual before God is gift enough".

The length of this time will be determined by the cohort facilitator.

Step 4 - Response to The Member Who Shared

"After silence for listening, those who have been listening are invited to share anything that they experienced. Sometimes in the listening, a scripture, image, or song might arise".

"It is very helpful when someone offers to take notes on what is shared on behalf of the one who shared. This allows the sharer to listen fully to the one speaking but also preserves what was spoken".

"Also, offer what comes without a sense of a strong prophetic voice but rather as a humble, gentle offering. Allow the sharer to discern what resonates with the spirit for them".

Step 5 - Prayer for The Member Who Shared

"After hearing the responses, the person who shared can offer any final comments, if they wish. Then the mentor or peer facilitator asks who would like to pray for the one who shared. Someone volunteers to pray. It is helpful to lay hands on the one who shared while praying aloud as a way of expressing the group's love and involvement in the prayer. The brief spoken prayer places the needs and responses in God's care".⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Morse, *Lifelong Leadership*, 148-149.

Thriving Pastors Cohort Session 5 - Loneliness Leader Guide



Thriving Pastors Cohort - Session 5 - "Loneliness"

"In a profession with so many inherent challenges that are often faced without the support and nurturance of a well-established social network of trusted people, it is not surprising that clergy often find themselves exhausted, depleted, and languishing in the throes of burnout."⁵⁹

Pattern of Cohort Meeting

- Prayer.
- Check-in with one another.
- Introduce the topic to be addressed.
- Sharing our personal experience related to the topic.
- Scripture speaks to the topic.
- Spiritual Practice related to the topic.
- Prayer (Group Listening Prayer).

⁵⁹ Ryan C. Staley, Mark R. McMinn, Kathleen Gathercoal, and Kurt Free. "Strategies Employed by Clergy to Prevent and Cope with Interpersonal Isolation." *Pastoral Psychology* 62, no. 6 (December 2013): 843-57. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-012-0473-9>.



Prayer

"Lord of the wilderness, I know you often sought time alone,

but in this season of my life,

I'm just feeling really isolated and lonely.

Friend, Jesus, I know that you are here with me,

but it doesn't always seem like it.

Help me to use this time to seek you more intimately.

But also, help me to find a community and companions

to share my life with -

my joys and my sufferings.

While I wait, Lord, help me to not fear being alone,

but to embrace a time to sit with you

in quiet togetherness and learn to draw comfort from your presence.

Amen."

- Reclaim Today



Check-In with one another

Each cohort participant will give a brief (2-3 minute) synopsis of how their month has been and where they are experiencing in the words of Vinita Hampton Wright, "Consolation and Desolation."

- Consolation
 - Directs our focus outside and beyond ourselves.
 - Lifts our hearts so that we can see the joys and sorrows of other people.
 - Bonds us more closely to our human community.
 - Generates new inspiration and ideas.
 - Restores balance and refreshes our inner vision.
 - Shows us where God is active in our lives and where God is leading us.
 - Releases new energy in us.
- Desolation
 - Turns us in on ourselves.
 - Drives us down the spiral ever deeper into our own negative feelings.
 - Cuts us off from community.
 - Makes us want to give up on the things that used to be important to us.
 - Takes over our whole consciousness and crowds out our distant vision.
 - Covers up all our landmarks [the signs of our journey with God so far].
 - Drains us of energy⁶⁰.

⁶⁰ Wright, Consolation and Desolation.

Topic To Be Addresses - "Loneliness"

"Leaders from ages 25 to 45 (and sometimes older) often feel alone. They have been in ministry for five years or longer. Idealism has passed. They have few or no safe places or safe people with whom to process their spiritual and life stage journeys. They are hungry for conversations with mature leaders. They long for experienced leaders to listen to them and pray for them. They lack a safe community of peers who know their stories and are cheering for their spiritual success.

These lacks often result in burnout and emotional fatigue, cynicism, spiritual dryness, or unfortunately, loss of integrity and a shift to self-promotional leadership habits."⁶¹

- Interpersonal isolation leading to ministerial burnout is a serious issue among many ministers. In a survey of Assemblies of God ministers,

*"Approximately 65 % of those surveyed were either suffering from burnout or on the verge of burnout."*⁶²

*"Loneliness is loosed upon the landscape. It haunts the penthouse and the rectory, the executive suite and the millionaire's mansion, as well as the barren apartment, the assembly line, the cocktail bar and the city streets. It is, as Mother Teresa of Calcutta once said, the leprosy of the modern world."*⁶³

- In the absence of life giving, loving human relationships, a void forms - even among members of the clergy. Perhaps especially among members of the clergy.
- There must be a people with whom we can love and share the most personal of spaces with. There must be space and a place in which we can drink from the deep well of Christ together with the ones we call brother and sister.
- It is a fascinating point that the very first human dilemma did not involve the introduction of forbidden fruit, temptation, sin, or even Satan. Isolation holds that dubious distinction:

"Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.'" - Gen. 2:18 ESV

⁶¹ Morse, *Lifelong Leadership*, 82.

⁶² Joseph D Visker, Taylor Rider, and Anastasia Humphers-Ginther. "Ministry-Related Burnout and Stress Coping Mechanisms Among Assemblies of God-Ordained Clergy in Minnesota." *Journal of Religion and Health* 56, no. 3 (June 2017): 951-61. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-016-0295-7>.

⁶³ Willard and Johnson, *Hearing God: Developing a Conversational Relationship with God*, Updated and expanded (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2012), 61.

- According to scripture, the heavens, oceans, light, land, vegetation, animals, man, and all other created matter was called “good” by God himself. Only one thing in the whole of creation was called “not good” and that is the isolation of man.

“Interestingly, it is God who determines that it is not good for man to be alone. There is no indication that Adam himself was dissatisfied with his circumstances.”⁶⁴

- That is to say that Adam did not even know what he needed. Adam could have existed without a mate; he would not have known to be lonely. How incredible it is that before Adam even knew of or felt loneliness or isolation, God had provided a solution. Just as each member of the Trinity is dependent on the other, the design of the man demanded a friend, a mate, and helper to aid him in realizing his highest potential.

Personal Experience Related to The Topic

Context | It was 2001 and we were happily serving as youth pastors in a large church. At this point, we had been in full time vocational ministry for 5 years.

Mega churches are peculiar animals. There are so many positive things to say about the efficiency with which they can function and the amount of ministry they can offer. The mega-church we served at was an incredible church. We learned so much and grew in our leadership potential while enjoying lots of camaraderie among the other pastors and staff. One of the one things that is difficult in any church (much less a large church) is trying to make sure to connect with the congregation on a personal level. It was never in my pastoral portfolio but during our time at the church, I made it a point to try and mingle with folks in the pews before our weekend services. One particular Sunday I greeted a lady that I did not recognize and asked her if this was her first time being in church. She seemed surprised and said, “No, Pastor Spivey, I’ve been attending here for years but you are the first person to actually talk to me.” I was gutted.

How is it that someone can attend a church of thousands for years and never have someone introduce themselves or start a conversation? Alone amid a crowd.... it was too familiar, and I understood her perfectly. Sure, I had people around to yuck it up with but no one to bear my soul to. Early on in our ministry, one leader told my wife and I not to ever have close friendships with people in the church. “They’ll just use you to get information and then use that information against you” was his rationale. So, we didn’t have spiritual friendships inside the church and didn’t really know people from outside the church. Languishing in loneliness is the best way to describe how we spent many years doing God’s work.

⁶⁴ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis. ... Chapters 1 - 17*, Nachdr., The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 2006.

Prompts

1. Under what circumstances have you or do you find yourself to be most vulnerable to loneliness?
2. Are there patterns to when you feel lonely?
3. What are your tendencies when you feel lonely?

Scripture Speaks to The Topic

- Think of the fullness of Heaven; eternal fellowship with God, the angelic host, saints, and family members who have gone on before us. Heaven is perfection in every sense. Imagine Jesus, having been in trinitarian relationship from eternity past - choosing to leave the close union that he had enjoyed with the Father and Spirit. Choosing to obey the plan of Heaven and come to earth would have been a separation and loneliness in and of itself. But Jesus, the man of sorrows would come to know a level of loneliness that none of us can even fathom.
- Imagine Jesus as a child. He was 100% divine, needing nothing yet 100% human and would no doubt have desired human friendship. I can imagine that Jesus would have been a very odd little boy. He was holiness incarnate and most likely would have made his sin-stained classmates uncomfortable. While his friends played in the streets, Jesus was in the temple "about his father's business." We know from scripture that he was frequently misunderstood, despised, and rejected - even among his own.
- The last hours of Jesus' life had to be the loneliest ever known to man. In the garden, Jesus beckoned to his friends,

"My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me." - Matthew 26:38 ESV

- "Just be with me, just stay awake with me." We have all known the sting of loneliness and the desire to have the company of another while in the throes of pain or despair.
- Jesus was no different and those hours in the garden alone must have been agonizing. His friends could offer no comfort or solace to Christ in that moment.
- Later, in the early hours of the next morning, it was Peter (who fell asleep in the garden) that blatantly denied knowing, much less being a friend to Jesus.
- The other disciples had scattered in light of Jesus' arrest and Jesus found himself completely alone in the house of the High Priest.
- There was no one to testify on Jesus' behalf, only "many false witnesses" to give testimony against him.
- The path leading to the redemption of mankind started in the garden and culminated on a Roman cross. It was from the cross that the loneliest moment Jesus ever knew occurred,

Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. 46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" - Matthew 27:45-46 ESV

Spiritual Practice Related to The Topic Join or Create a Peer Group

"Most clergy are relatively isolated, emotionally, and spiritually, without enough peer support. They stand alone, as helpers to others, but are not appreciated or affirmed as equals... participating in a genuine spiritual community as an equal is very important for a cleric's health and well-being... clergy who recognize that they are relatively isolated need to take the initiative to find or create the kind of peer spiritual community in which they can live and grow."⁶⁵

- From God's perspective, close relationships are and always have been a given. Intimate fellowship between Father, Son, and Spirit has never been broken and it is out of that great love that humanity was created.

"Love is such a powerful dimension of God's nature that it binds three persons so closely that they are actually one."⁶⁶

- We were made from love, by love, to love. And love, the God kind of love cries out to be shared in the context of human relationship.

Feedback from pastors who joined a peer group reported the following:

- "Learning and positive change occur most deeply in the context of relationships."
- "It was a treat having freedom from being 'on' all the time and to be able to share with mutual understanding about our lives and work."
- "The Pastor's Summit was about our health, not the health of our church."
- "My Summit Group is the only place I can be myself and laugh from my gut."

⁶⁵ Donald R. Hands and Wayne L. Fehr, *Spiritual Wholeness for Clergy: A New Psychology of Intimacy with God, Self, and Others* (Washington, DC: Alban Institute, 1993), 67.

⁶⁶ Millard J. Erickson, *Making Sense of the Trinity: 3 Crucial Questions*, 3 Crucial Questions (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 2000.

- "I don't want to lose this because I don't have this anyplace else. I hope that if I veer off, you all will come and get me. Because I don't know who in the world, literally, will come and get me if you don't."⁶⁷
- It is possible to be consistently surrounded by dozens or hundreds of people and feel completely isolated. You need a life giving, honest, transforming community to flourish for the long haul in ministry. Your church small group, governing board, or denominational hierarchy typically should not fill this role.
- But we do desperately need community.

"We were designed to connect with others. Connecting is life. Loneliness is the ultimate horror. In connecting with others, we nourish and experience that life as we freely share it. Rugged individualism, proud independence, and chosen isolation violate the nature of our existence as much as trying to breathe underwater."⁶⁸

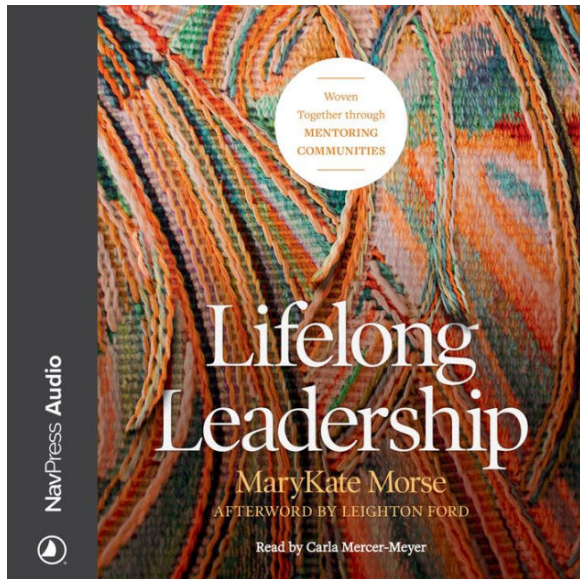
- Are you now involved in a peer group? Why or why not?
- What would it take for you to join or form a peer group?
- Do you know others who are dealing with loneliness?

⁶⁷ Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 88.

⁶⁸ Larry Crabb, *Connecting: Healing for Ourselves and Our Relationships: A Radical New Vision* (Nashville, TN: Word Pub, 1997).

Recommended Resource(s):

- Lifelong Leadership | Mary Kate Morse
- Connecting | Larry Crabb



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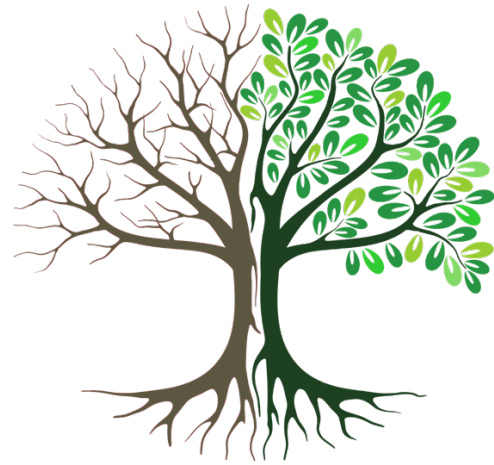
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⁶⁹ Morse, *Lifelong Leadership*, 148-149.

Thriving Pastors Cohort



Thriving Pastors Cohort Member Guide

A nine-session, in-person, group-based journey for pastors and leaders who desire to avoid ministry burnout and expand their capacity for lifelong thriving.

Thriving Pastors Cohort Session 1 - Introduction

Member Guide



Thriving Pastors Cohort | Session 1 - "Introduction"

Table of Contents

- Prayer
- Introduction to the cohort
- Personal Introductions / Why Are You Here?
- Guidelines
- How the cohort came to be
- Bible reflection and group prayer



Prayer

From Ted Loder

Oh God, gather me now
to be with you
as you are with me.
Soothe My tiredness;
quiet my fretfulness;
curb my aimlessness;
relieve my compulsiveness;
let me be easy for a moment.
Oh Lord, release me
from the fears and guilts
which grip me so tightly;
from the expectations and opinions
which I so tightly grip,
that I may be open
to receiving what you give,
to risking something genuinely new,
to learning something refreshingly different.
Oh God, gather me
to be with you
as you are with me.
Amen.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Ted Loder, *Guerrillas of Grace: Prayers for the Battle*, 20th anniversary ed (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Books, 2005), 58 .



Personal Introductions

- Who are you?
- Tells us about your family.
- What is the context of your ministry?
- How long have you served there?
- What prompted you to attend the cohort?
- What do you hope to receive from the cohort?

Guidelines

- Guiding principles
- Participant pledge
- Dates and reading schedule
- Contact list
- Pattern of cohort meetings



Guiding Principles:

as a community intentionally following Jesus, we will...

- Focus on what unites us.
- Love always.
- Not judge.
- Share mutually.
- Extend grace & mercy.
- Accept vulnerability.
- Will be fully present with/to one another.
- Not attempt to fix.
- Listen.
- Follow through.
- Expect & Extend confidentiality.
- Hold sacred/holy space.
- Celebrate and lament together.
- Be open to understanding and growth.
- Commit to hope and resilience.
- Live and speak courageous truth.
- Assume one another's best intentions,
- Embrace one another as a gift.

Thriving Pastors Cohort Participant Pledge

Relying on God's grace, I _____ pledge my intent to do the following:

- Attend all meetings unless providentially hindered. I will contact my cohort facilitator if I am unable to attend and take responsibility to find out what was missed in my absence.
- Visit my cohort's online discussion forum (FB group) at least once a week and post at least once a month.
- Arrange for my absence from regular duties during cohort meetings, including those related to family, Church, work, and friends.
- Fully participate in cohort discussions and activities. I will give an accurate account of my experience, reflections, and spiritual progress during cohort meetings and online discussions. I will seek to be appropriately transparent and willing to share victories, weaknesses, struggles, and failures as the cohort grows together.
- Unplug from electronic devices and work responsibilities unless absolutely necessary. I will turn my cell phone off and will not email or surf the internet during cohort meetings. I will do my best to bring no work with me and will refrain from working during breaks at the gatherings.
- Care for the members of my cohort as individuals, family members, and church leaders.
- Protect the confidentiality of my cohort by keeping whatever is shared confidential to encourage openness and honesty.
- Complete all reading/assignments before and after cohort meetings to the best of my ability.

I understand that the Thriving Pastors Cohort will last for nine months (September 2022 - May 2023)

Signature

Date



Thriving Pastors Cohort #1

Significant Dates & Reading Schedule

* Denotes commenting in Facebook Group

- 08/15 - 2 Weeks prior to first cohort meeting
 - Pre-reading - Read God In My Everything Chapters 1-2*
- 09/02 (9 am - 12 pm) - Cohort Meeting #1 - Introduction
 - 09/05 through 10/14 - Read God In My Everything Chapters 3-4*
- 10/14 (9am - 12 pm) - Cohort Meeting #2 - "Inconsistency"
 - 10/17 through 11/03 - Read God In My Everything Chapters 5-6*
- 11/04 (9 am - 12 pm) - Cohort Meeting #3 - "Exhaustion"
 - 11/07 through 12/01 - Read God In My Everything Chapters 7-8*
- 12/02 (9 am - 12 pm) - Cohort Meeting #4 - "Distraction"
 - 12/03 through 01/05 - Read God In My Everything Chapters 9-10*
- 01/06 (9 am - 12 pm) - Cohort Meeting #5 - "Loneliness"
 - 01/09 through 02/02 - Read God In My Everything Chapters 11-12*



Pattern of Typical Cohort Meetings / Each regular meeting will have 7 movements

- Prayer.
- Check-in with one another.
- Introduce the topic to be addressed.
- Sharing our personal experience related to the topic.
- Jesus speaks to the topic.
- Spiritual Practice related to the topic.
- Prayer (Group Listening Prayer).

An Incomplete but Very Real Snapshot

- Authors and pastoral advocates H.B. London Jr. and Neil B. Weisman cite some very alarming statistics about active clergymen: “Of the 500,000 full-time, vocational pastors in the United States today, approximately one out of every four (125,000) are experiencing ‘burnout’.
- 60% work more than 60 hours per week.
- 80% believe that ministry has adversely affected their families.
- 90% feel they are inadequately trained to cope with ministry demands.
- 40% report a serious conflict with a parishioner at least once a month.
- 37% confess to inappropriate sexual behavior with someone in their church (which is about the same percentage as the general population).
- 70% do not have someone they consider a close friend.
- 70% have a lower self-image than when they entered ministry.
- 70% say they get less than seven hours of sleep each night.
- 75% do not take a regular day off for Sabbath rest.
- 76% are overweight or obese (compared with 61% of the general population).
- 40% reported being depressed or worn out “some or most of the time”.
- Not surprisingly, 40% of these pastors have considered leaving their ministries in the last three months alone.”⁷¹

“Pastors describe their COVID-19 experience ‘as an overwhelming sensation of busyness’ and having ‘new levels of irritation and stress.’”⁷²

- Some of the questions to be answered are:
 - What do you want from God?
 - What do you want your experience with Him to look like?
 - Are you satisfied with what you have right now?

“Disciplines are, in essence, activities in our power that enable us, by grace, to do what we cannot do by direct effort—by ‘just trying.’”⁷³

⁷¹ H. B. London, *Pastors at Greater Risk* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2014), 25.

⁷² Marlon C. Robinson, *The Pastor’s Mental Health and The Covid-19 Pandemic*. Ministry Magazine, March 2021, September 2022, <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2021/03/The-pastors-mental-health-and-the-covid-19-pandemic>.

⁷³ Dallas Willard, *How Does The Disciple Live?*, Dallas Willard, 2009, September, 2022. <https://dwillard.org/articles/how-does-the-disciple-live>.

Eugene Peterson argues that pastors too often neglect their spiritual lives, “They succumb to career idolatry and focus on job efficiency and management. They accept ‘an offer by the devil for work that can be measured and manipulated at the convenience of the worker.’”⁷⁴

- The purpose of the cohort is threefold:
 1. Identifying some of the deficits we work from.
 2. Working towards creating balance.
 3. Establishing/Maintaining God centered relationships.

The end goal of the cohort is to help prevent or recover from ministry fatigue and burnout and promote ministerial thriving for the long haul of ministry.

Are you exhausted? This isn’t just tired at the end of a long day. This is nearly perpetual zero-energy status.

Are you increasingly negative? You can find something wrong with just about everything—especially your job. Your constant state is frustration, and your temper is shorter than ever.

Are your passionate interests fading? “Nothing matters, so why try” is your motto. Your job performance is slipping, and even giving the bare minimum seems to be asking a lot.

Is your health declining? You’ve got a headache or a cold you just can’t shake. You can’t concentrate on anything. Your streak at the gym has come to a screeching halt, and cooking healthy food is too much of a bother. You may even be abusing a substance of some kind to numb yourself.

Are you withdrawing? You want to be around people less and less, even those you care about most deeply. Social activities sound scary. Even your personal values and beliefs start to lose their importance to you.

- If you answered “yes” to three or more of the questions on the burnout test, chances are you’re experiencing burnout—and you shouldn’t wait to take action.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ John P. Burgess, *A Pastoral Rule for Today: Reviving an Ancient Practice* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, an imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2019), 187.

⁷⁵ Tommy Bond, *Simple Burnout Test: Take It, and Start Finding Relief*, Life Church, September 2022, <https://finds.life.church/simple-burnout-test-take-it-and-start-finding-relief/>.

Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly. - Matthew 11:28-30 ESV

Thriving Pastors Cohort Session 2 – Inconsistency Member Guide



Thriving Pastors Cohort - Session 2 - "Inconsistency"

"This life, therefore, is not godliness but the process of becoming godly, not health but getting well, not being but becoming, not rest but exercise. We are not now what we shall be, but we are on the way. The process is not finished, but it is actively going on. This is not the goal, but it is the right road. At present, everything does not gleam and sparkle, but everything is being cleansed." -

Martin Luther

Pattern of Cohort Meeting

- Prayer.
- Check-in with one another.
- Introduce the topic to be addressed.
- Sharing our personal experience related to the topic.
- Jesus speaks to the topic.
- Spiritual Practice related to the topic.
- Prayer (Group Listening Prayer).



Prayer

O God, so many times my actions have been at odds with my convictions.

I have not consistently done what I ought to have done.

My behavior, thoughts, affections, and devotion have been erratic.

I have labored without praying consistently.

I have preached without preparing consistently.

I have counseled without seeking you consistently.

I have ministered without loving you consistently.

I have made decisions without consulting you consistently.

This has left me with regret and shame.

I am tired and unsure and questioning.

Forgive me Lord for depending on my own strength too much.

Forgive me for trusting in myself too often.

Forgive me for being lazy too many times.

Forgive me for happily abiding in the rut of the everyday,
not perceiving that it wasn't a rut at all but a tomb.

Increase my desire for consistency, I know that habits create lifestyles.

Make my time with you the first thought and not an afterthought.

Help me to understand that being faithful in Spirit-led practices is the battle,
not preparation for the battle.

I want to be confident that since I have been with you,

I can work alongside you - for the sake of others.

I love you Lord and my heart's desire is to make you proud.

Please help me to do that every single day
for the rest of my life.

In Christ's name, Amen

M.S.



Check-In with one another

Each cohort participant will give a brief (2-3 minute) synopsis of how their month has been and where they are experiencing in the words of Vinita Hampton Wright, "Consolation and Desolation."

- Consolation
 - Directs our focus outside and beyond ourselves.
 - Lifts our hearts so that we can see the joys and sorrows of other people.
 - Bonds us more closely to our human community.
 - Generates new inspiration and ideas.
 - Restores balance and refreshes our inner vision.
 - Shows us where God is active in our lives and where God is leading us.
 - Releases new energy in us.
- Desolation
 - Turns us in on ourselves.
 - Drives us down the spiral ever deeper into our own negative feelings.
 - Cuts us off from community.
 - Makes us want to give up on the things that used to be important to us.
 - Takes over our whole consciousness and crowds out our distant vision.
 - Covers up all our landmarks [the signs of our journey with God so far].
 - Drains us of energy.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Vinita Hampton Wright , Consolation and Desolation.

Topic to be addressed - "Inconsistency"

"Look, I may be a pastor, but I'm an inch deep. My life is filled with incessant activity and little prayer. 'Contemplation' is foreign in my vocabulary and nonexistent in my life."⁷⁷

"Bob struggled over self-disclosure while serving in a pastorate. One Sunday afternoon he was helping a deacon set up for an evening activity. As they put up tables and chairs, the deacon suddenly asked the simple question, 'how are you doing?' When asked this question, Bob faced an ethical dilemma. He wasn't doing well at all. He was frustrated with the people in the church and was frustrated with his frustration. He was questioning his capacity as a leader and his own spiritual maturity. In a split-second, he pondered the options: 'If I answer honestly, how would this man handle my response?' Or would he throw up his hands and say, 'You are no spiritual leader! I'm out of here!' Do I tell him the truth or do I give him a superficial answer? Bob decided to go superficial and lied. He said he was fine and then diverted the conversation."⁷⁸

Spiritual Inconsistency

"While many ministry frustrations are external and environmental - even out of our own control - our only sure way to revitalize the Church is to renew our own inner world in fresh old ways."⁷⁹

"When I give something, I do not possess, I give a false and dangerous gift, a gift that looks like love, but is, in reality, loveless - a gift more from my need to prove myself, then from the others need to be cared for."⁸⁰

It is in burnout that I become a false version of myself. I present something to the world that is not true. I portray strength when I am weak. I present confidence when I am internally divided and confused.

⁷⁷ Bob Burns, Tasha Chapman, and Donald Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us about Surviving and Thriving* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2013), 19.

⁷⁸ Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 120.

⁷⁹ London, *Pastors at Greater Risk*, 266.

⁸⁰ Parker J. Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000. Quoted in Scazzero, Peter. *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality Day by Day: A 40-Day Journey with the Daily Office*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014, 49.

When I lack consistency in my private spiritual life, I hasten the process of entropy and invite all manner of distraction and sin.

Scripture Speaks to The Topic

When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. And he sent messengers ahead of him, who went and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make preparations for him. But the people did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them (as Elijah did)?" But he turned and rebuked them. And he said, ("You do not know what manner of spirit you are of; for the Son of Man came not to destroy people's lives but to save them") And they went on to another village.

- Luke 9:51-56 ESV

"Their feud with the Jews was so bitter that they (Samaritans) would not help anyone travel to Jerusalem, though apparently, they did not mind receiving Galileans as such. Josephus tells us that Samaritans were not averse to ill-treating pilgrims going up to Jerusalem, even to the extent of murdering them on occasion."⁸¹

When Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, for Jesus often met there with his disciples. So, Judas, having procured a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons. Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, "Whom do you seek?" They answered him, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus said to them, "I am he." Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground. So, he asked them again, "Whom do you seek?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. So, if you seek me, let these men go." This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken: "Of those whom you gave me I have lost not one." Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.) So Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?"

- John 18:1-11 ESV

⁸¹ Leon Morris, *Luke*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, v. 3 (Nottingham, England ; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press ; Intersity Press, 2008), 198.

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.

- Acts 4:13 ESV

"What happens when I skirt my spiritual growth? I replace it with the "spiritual" taboo of pastoral life. So, for example, it is not unusual to find me substituting sermon preparation for personal worship and bible study." After all, "I rationalize, "I will be meditating on the Bible." however, the sustained exchange of ministry duties for spiritual growth results in my becoming an "inch deep." the outcome is a spiritually dry, worn-out pastor with very little" left in the tank" for others.

The "spring of water welling up to eternal life" has slowed down to a trickle." ⁸²

- Anonymous pastor

⁸² Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 33.

Spiritual Practice Related to The Topic - Rule of Life

"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." - Acts 2:42 ESV

START SIMPLY

- There are many "ought to's" when we begin to think about our spiritual lives.
- Jesus and our growing relationship with him are the chief objectives of a rule, not the practice itself.
- Small and simple practices, sustained over time produce tremendous results.

"Whatever we do repeatedly - even if it's simple - has the power to shape us. The daily habit of spending time with God shapes us. even if it is brief and not marked with groundbreaking insight or deep emotion - even when it feels perfunctory - it shapes us."⁸³

BUILD SLOWLY

- Trying to add too much, too fast to your Rule may result in discouragement and ultimately laying it aside.
- Perhaps start with 1 or 2 core values that you sense the Spirit desires for you to cultivate and develop your rule around those.

PRUNE REGULARLY

- Shigematsu uses the image of a trellis to demonstrate the Rule. Unpruned grapevines don't ever reach their full potential.
- Through the Spirit's guidance, we can lay aside a good practice to embrace the best practice for this stage of our lives.
- Worldly maturity says that if we're being successful, we should just continue to add things to our lives. "Bigger is always better" is the mantra.
- Whenever we say "yes" to one thing, we'll probably have to say "no" to something else.

BE ENERGY CONSCIOUS

- We are all uniquely created with differing internal clocks.
 - My most alert, attentive, and productive times are in the early morning. You may be different and will need to adjust your Rule accordingly.
-

⁸³ Ken Shigematsu, *God in My Everything: How an Ancient Rhythm Helps Busy People Enjoy God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 34.

"A rule shouldn't make our lives feel busier, even if it leads to new practices."⁸⁴

CONSIDER YOUR LIFE STAGE

- Things are different for me now than they once were. The stress of raising small children and participating in all the activities that requires can be draining.
- There is no extra credit for trying to be a superstar. Please consider your life stage and even the times of the year when developing your Rule.

STAY FLEXIBLE

- A Rule is somewhat in the same category as the Sabbath - The Rule is made for us, not us for the Rule.
- Life is malleable and unexpected things happen. Don't let your rule pigeonhole you into something that is ill-fitting.

"A Rule of Life should feel like a slightly corrective pair of shoes. It needs to be comfortable enough that you can wear it and walk around in it for days and weeks on end. At the same time, it needs to apply just enough pressure to correct those places that are out of line. If your Rule of Life is too corrective, you will fatigue and set it aside. If it is too comfortable, it won't bring the needed correction to your life. Be sure to give yourself the time and grace to find that balance."⁸⁵

MAKE TIME FOR FUN

- Joy is a part of life and should be included when cultivating your Rule.
- Fun has a refreshing quality to it, so make room for it in your Rule.

INCLUDE COMMUNITY

- Community is vitally important.

⁸⁴ Shigematsu, God in My Everything, 26.

⁸⁵ Ken Van Vliet, DLGP851: *Experimenting With Prototypes* (Summary Post, George Fox University, Newburg, OR., September 10, 2021).

"Without some kind of community or relationship, we will have no inspiration and support to experience sustained change."⁸⁶

"When they experience burnout, leaders emotionally decompress, distance themselves from others, and have difficulty functioning normally."⁸⁷

- It is in relationship that our spiritual lives are refined and formed to the image of Christ.
- Questions to ask ourselves regarding cultivating a Rule of Life:
 1. "How and where do I thrive?"
 2. "How and where do I struggle or get stuck?"
 3. What is my purpose / mission?
 4. What are my Core Values?
 5. What are my Vital Behaviors?

⁸⁶ Shigematsu, *God in My Everything*, 38.

⁸⁷ Diane J. Chandler, "The Impact of Pastors' Spiritual Practices on Burnout", *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling*, 64 (2), 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1177/154230501006400206>.

Rule of Life: Example

"This should be your ambition: to live a quiet life, minding your own business and doing your own work, just as we told you before." - 1 Thess. 4:11 TL

Spiritually I will:

- Practice the daily offices.
- Set aside at least one hour in the morning to be quiet and spend time with Jesus.
- Be more aware of nature by writing a weekly Haiku.

Relationally I will:

- Take my wife on a weekly date.
- Meet with my children at least weekly, either in person or by phone.
- Invest weekly in at least one relationship with a ministry colleague.
- Mentor a small group of young men every week.

Physically I will:

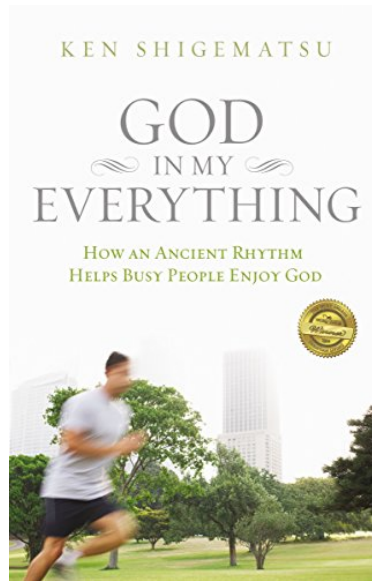
- Walk for a minimum of thirty minutes, four days per week.
- Adjust my diet to lose at least an additional forty pounds.
- Drink at least a gallon of water daily.

Vocationally I will:

- Make some hard decisions which have needed attention for some time.
- Be more intentional in helping staff members to cultivate their spiritual lives.
- Be obedient to the specific direction that God is giving.
- Give this Rule of Life to my journey partner and we will discuss it weekly.

Recommended Resource(s):

- God In My Everything | Ken Shigematsu



Thriving Pastors Cohort Session 3 - Exhaustion Member Guide



Thriving Pastors Cohort - Session 3 - "Exhaustion"

"Because we do not rest, we lose our way . . . poisoned by the hypnotic belief that good things come only through unceasing determination and tireless effort, we can never truly rest. And for want of rest our lives are in danger."⁸⁸ - Wayne Muller

Pattern of Cohort Meeting

- Prayer.
- Check-in with one another.
- Introduce the topic to be addressed.
- Sharing our personal experience related to the topic.
- Jesus speaks to the topic.
- Spiritual Practice related to the topic.
- Prayer (Group Listening Prayer).

⁸⁸ R. Ruth Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence: Experiencing God's Transforming Presence*, Expanded ed (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2010), 55.



Prayer

Lord, I have known what it is to allow myself to
 be swept away in an undertow of busyness.
 Sometimes unaware, I have swum in the wrong direction -
 away from the safety of your rest.
 Because of pressure and expectations, I have said "yes" to too many things.
 I have not ordered my days well
 and my soul is always the victim of that.
 The truth is that there is so much to do, too much to do.
 There is much more than I can handle.
 My body is tired.
 My mind is unclear.
 My emotions are raw.
 My spirit is in distress
 So, I come to you for rescue, great creator, and sustainer of rest.
 Make me to lie in green pastures, lead me by still waters, restore my soul.
 Let me settle under the easy yoke of Jesus and fully realize your words,
 "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."

For Christ's glory, Amen.

M.S.



Check-In with one another

Each cohort participant will give a brief (2-3 minute) synopsis of how their month has been and where they are experiencing in the words of Vinita Hampton Wright, "Consolation and Desolation."

- Consolation
 - Directs our focus outside and beyond ourselves.
 - Lifts our hearts so that we can see the joys and sorrows of other people.
 - Bonds us more closely to our human community.
 - Generates new inspiration and ideas.
 - Restores balance and refreshes our inner vision.
 - Shows us where God is active in our lives and where God is leading us.
 - Releases new energy in us.
- Desolation
 - Turns us in on ourselves.
 - Drives us down the spiral ever deeper into our own negative feelings.
 - Cuts us off from community.
 - Makes us want to give up on the things that used to be important to us.
 - Takes over our whole consciousness and crowds out our distant vision.
 - Covers up all our landmarks [the signs of our journey with God so far].
 - Drains us of energy.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Vinita Hampton Wright, *Consolation and Desolation*.

Topic to be addressed - Exhaustion

Perhaps you've heard the quote from Christmas Evans, a famous Welsh preacher from the early 19th century, who supposedly said, *"I'd rather burn out than rust out in the service of the Lord."* One of Evans's contemporaries, James Berkeley, is said to have retorted, *"I admire the bravado. It sounds dedicated, bold, and stirring. However, when I view the burn-outs and the almost burn-outs who lie by the ecclesiastical road, the glory fails to reach me. Is there not a third alternative?"*⁹⁰

6 Signs You're a Productivity Addict

1. Are you acutely aware of when you are "wasting" time? Do you beat yourself up for it?
2. Are you reliant on technology to optimize your time management?
3. Is your #1 topic of conversation how "crazy busy" you are? Do you think "hustling" sounds impressive, while "doing less" sounds lazy?
4. Are you a slave to your email inbox? Compulsively checking it or feeling like your phone is an extension of your arm?
5. Do you feel guilty when you only cross one item off your to-do list or find you're kept awake at night by work stress?
6. Have you ever rolled your eyes when your friend says she'll finally get started on that side project she's been talking about for months, yet you do the same and rationalize it by thinking you're too swamped?⁹¹

Possible Reasons For "Busy Sickness"

BAD THEOLOGY

*"Somewhere along the line we got the message that serving wholeheartedly means neglecting the needs God has created our bodies with as well as the command to regularly practice sabbath rest."*⁹²

⁹⁰ Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 67.

⁹¹ Melody Wilding, *6 Signs Your Obsession With Productivity Is Hurting You*, October 2, 2022, <https://melodywilding.com/6-signs-obsession-productivity-hurting>.

⁹² Josh Spurlock, *Burnout in Ministry | Symptoms, Causes, and Prevention*, October 18, 2022, <https://mycounselor.online/burnout-ministry-symptoms-causes-prevention/#causes-of-burnout>.

WE WORK TOO HARD AT THE WRONG THINGS

"Busyness for most of us is a form of sloth because we haven't planned well enough in order to embrace rest."⁹³ - C.S. Lewis

"Hard work doesn't produce burnout. Unrealistic expectations do. It's important for us as people in the ministry to understand that the Lord is in charge of outcomes."⁹⁴

Doing menial tasks or non-essential "busy" work is easier than doing the hard work of forming your spirit and leading your family and church well.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE PROMPTS

1. Tell of a time when you experienced fatigue or exhaustion and what you believe may have been the cause.
2. Can you remember a time when you were exhausted from doing something out of a misguided place or a theological error?
3. Do you spend time doing "busy" work to avoid the hard work of spiritual formation?
4. What other factors lead to exhaustion?
5. When you are exhausted (spiritually, mentally, physically, emotionally), what are your tendencies? Work harder, anxiety/depression, procrastination, relational hiding, etc.

⁹³ Ken Shigematsu, *Survival Guide for the Soul: How to Flourish Spiritually in a World That Pressures Us to Achieve* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 103.

⁹⁴ John MacArthur, *2 Traps That Lead To Ministry Failure*, March 17, 2019, <https://www.crossway.org/articles/2-traps-that-lead-to-ministry-failure>.

Jesus Speaks to The Topic

"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, "Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath." He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him to eat nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? Or have you not read in the Law how on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless? I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. And if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath."

- Matthew 11:28 - 12:8 ESV

Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.

- Matthew 11:28, 29 | The Message

Spiritual Practice Related to The Topic – Sabbath

"For I have also experienced the utter joy and relief when Sabbath does happen, when the house has been cleaned, special food has been bought, the computer has been turned off, the last obligation has been completed or set aside, the candles or the fireplace has been lit, and it is time to stop, whether everything has been finished or not. I know what it is like to rest for hours until I have energy to delight in something - good food, a good book, a leisurely walk, a long-awaited conversation with someone I love. I know what it is like to feel joy and hope and peace flow back into my body and soul though I had thought it might never come again. I know what it's like to see my home and my children through the Sabbath eyes of enjoyment. I know what it's like to have rest turn into delight, and delight turn into gratitude, and gratitude into worship. I know what it is like to recover myself so completely that I am able, by God's grace, to enter into my work on Monday with a renewed sense of God's calling and God's presence."⁹⁵

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So, God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation. - Genesis 2:1-3 ESV

- God "Blessed" and "Made Holy" the Seventh Day.
- When we "make God holy", set him apart, and focus our awareness on him, we receive God's blessing in greater measure and with greater frequency than if we continue to plow seven days a week.

God sets the Sabbath day apart for the express purposes of receiving abundant blessing and imparting abundant blessing to the people of God!

SABBATH HELPS TO ESTABLISH PRIORITIES.

- Sabbath keeping places God not only on the throne of the universe, but on the throne of our hearts.
 - Sabbath makes room for our heart to receive the healing, reviving presence of God himself.
 - Remember back in the day when Wednesday & Sunday were off limits? That's not the case anymore.
-

⁹⁵ R. Ruth Barton, *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation* (Downers Grove, IL InterVarsity Press, 2006), 137.

- We MUST arrange our schedules, or our work will dictate when they will be.

SABBATH ACKNOWLEDGES OUR LIMITATIONS

- Time, Energy, Finances, Patience, Wisdom, Creativity, Skills
- God is infinite, beyond limitations and we are not!
- Sabbath requires surrendering control.
- Sabbath seems like a nice idea for the strange, lazy, or those who have nothing better to do with their time.

SABBATH REQUIRES COURAGE AND TRUST.

- For ministry families, Sundays are anything but light and easy. We have responsibilities and meetings and pressure.
- Planning for and executing a regular Sabbath day should be a delight but our weeks must be well ordered for Sabbath keeping to take place.
- You must be intentional about this with your family, work, church, kid's sports, school, and community involvement.
- This is where the rule of life comes into play. You must try to order your week so that:
 - You work 5 days (or 40 hours) at the job you're getting paid from.
 - You have a day to do errands, shopping, chores, sports, etc.
 - You have a Sabbath day.

Think about what you would do with an entire 24 hours that God has given to you as a gift to rest and worship and eat and visit. The biggest struggle you'll probably have during Sabbath rest is the fight to not be productive.

"Ministry leaders need to consider self-care as a way of ensuring that we will remain effective in the great work God has given us to do."⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 63.

Things to include in your Sabbath

REST AND REFRESHING FOR YOUR BODY

- What do you do that is especially enjoyable to you?
- Cooking, gardening, naps, baths, light exercise

REST AND REFRESHING FOR YOUR SPIRIT (HEART, SPIRIT)

- What do you do that stirs your spirit? What calls your heart higher?
- This is highly subjective.
- Reading the scripture, listening to podcasts/sermons, solitude/silence...
- Worshiping in community/family, communion

REST AND REFRESHING YOUR SOUL (EMOTIONAL HEALTH, MENTAL HEALTH)

- What nourishes your inner person? What brings you emotional health?
- Talking, journaling, writing, reading, poetry, art, photography, outdoors...
- Sharing love in a way you receive it best.

Things to exclude from your Sabbath.

WORK

- No sermon planning/prep.
- No gearing up for staff meetings, hospital visits, etc.

WORRY

- Tomorrow has enough worries of its own.
- Remember that God continues to run the world while you rest.

OTHERS' EXPECTATIONS

- As you choose Sabbath and rest, you may have to get comfortable with others being uncomfortable.

"As we embrace the gift of Sabbath, we remember that we are human beings, beloved Sons & Daughters, rather than human doings, slaves of a harsh Taskmaster"⁹⁷

Questions

⁹⁷ Shigematsu, *Survival Guide for the Soul*, 106.

- Do you feel a deep desire to keep the Sabbath?
- How can you adjust your schedule to practice Sabbath Keeping?
- Do you want to pass on your patterns to your family, staff, and ultimately your church?
- How do you counsel your staff in regard to Sabbath keeping?
- What word would you use when you think about implementing a weekly Sabbath? Why?
- If you don't keep the Sabbath, is there a reason or have you simply overlooked it?
- What is your current pattern of rest?
- Is there anything that stood out to you from this week's reflection?
- Have you ever practiced a true Sabbath? Why not?

"Unless one learns how to relish the taste of Sabbath ... one will be unable to enjoy the taste of eternity in the world to come." ⁹⁸ - Abraham Joshua Heschel, The Sabbath

Matthew Sleeth offers the following Sabbath plan worksheet:

WRITING YOUR SABBATH PLAN

☐ My Sabbath day each week will be _____

☐ I will mark off this day each week on my calendar as Sabbath

☐ Activities to complete each week *to prepare for my Sabbath include:*

☐ Temptations to break my Sabbath commitment will most likely include:

☐ Who will be affected by my observation of Sabbath, and how will I inform them of my plans?

Activities I will engage in during my Sabbath (What renews my spirit?):

☐ _____

☐ _____

☐ _____

☐ _____

Activities I will *avoid* during my Sabbath (What drains my spirit?):

☐ _____

☐ _____

☐ _____

☐ _____

Encouragement I need to stay on track:

☐ Person(s) who can keep me accountable: _____ ☐ Person(s) with whom I will share my Sabbath journey: _____

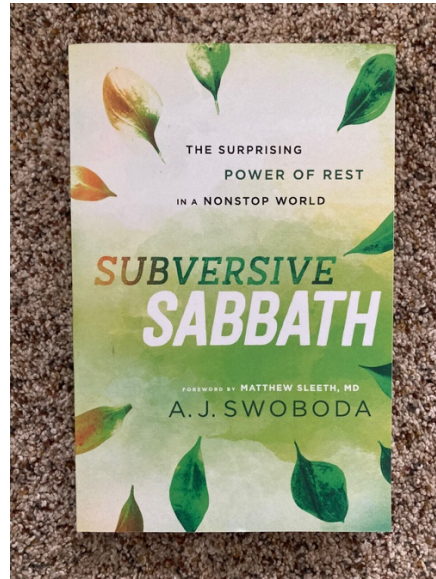
☐ Additional ways I will share/process my Sabbath journey (journaling, blog posts, testimony, etc.):

Adapted from 24/6: *A Prescription for a Healthier, Happier Life* by Matthew Sleeth, MD
For additional resources, visit www.sabbathliving.org
contact@blessedearth.org

⁹⁹ Matthew Sleeth, "Writing Your Sabbath Plan", PDF file, October, 2020, <http://sabbathliving.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Sabbath-Plan-Worksheet-General-Audience-updated.pdf>.

Recommended Resource(s):

- Subversive Sabbath | A.J. Swoboda



Thriving Pastors Cohort Session 4 - Distraction Member Guide



Thriving Pastors Cohort - Session 4 - "Distraction"

"You will never reach your destination if you stop and throw stones at every dog that barks."

- Winston Churchill

Pattern of Cohort Meeting

- Prayer.
- Check-in with one another.
- Introduce the topic to be addressed.
- Sharing our personal experience related to the topic.
- Jesus speaks to the topic.
- Spiritual Practice related to the topic.
- Prayer (Group Listening Prayer).



Prayer

From Asherita Ciuciu

Oh Lord, you know my heart.

You know I sincerely want to grow closer to You and spend time with You, but I get so easily distracted. Like a silly sheep, my mind wanders, and I find my thoughts far from You.

Forgive me for my undisciplined thoughts. Forgive me for so often giving up instead of persevering despite my distraction. Forgive me for choosing the easy path instead of the more difficult, disciplined route. I really want to know you more. I want to spend time in Your presence, to learn to sit quietly at Your feet without a million thoughts distracting me.

Teach me, Lord, how to be still. Like a Good Shepherd, lead me beside still waters. Quiet my soul. Bring order and calm to the chaos in my mind, so that I can spend time in quiet and joyful meditation with You.

Thank You that you are willing and able to do these things, and that when I am weak, you are strong.

I love You. Amen.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ Asherita Ciuciu, "A Prayer for Focused Quiet Time", January 18, 2023, <https://onethingalone.com/prayer-focused-quiet-time/?cv=1>.



Check-In with one another

Each cohort participant will give a brief (2-3 minute) synopsis of how their month has been and where they are experiencing in the words of Vinita Hampton Wright, "Consolation and Desolation."

- Consolation
 - Directs our focus outside and beyond ourselves.
 - Lifts our hearts so that we can see the joys and sorrows of other people.
 - Bonds us more closely to our human community.
 - Generates new inspiration and ideas.
 - Restores balance and refreshes our inner vision.
 - Shows us where God is active in our lives and where God is leading us.
 - Releases new energy in us.
- Desolation
 - Turns us in on ourselves.
 - Drives us down the spiral ever deeper into our own negative feelings.
 - Cuts us off from community.
 - Makes us want to give up on the things that used to be important to us.
 - Takes over our whole consciousness and crowds out our distant vision.
 - Covers up all our landmarks [the signs of our journey with God so far].
 - Drains us of energy¹⁰¹.

¹⁰¹ Vinita Hampton Wright, *Consolation and Desolation*.

Topic to be addressed - "Distraction"

"Churchgoers expect their pastor to juggle an average of 16 major tasks."¹⁰²

"There is seldom a period in which we do not know what to do, and we move through life in such a distracted way that we do not even take the time to rest to wonder if any of the things we think, say, or do are worth thinking, saying, or doing."¹⁰³

A Lack of Boundaries

"I want to study God's word long and carefully so that when I stand before you and preach and teach, I will be accurate. I want to pray slowly and lovingly, so that my relationship with God will be inward and honest. And I want to be with you, often and leisurely so that we can recognize each other as close companions on the way of the cross and be available for counsel and encouragement to each other."¹⁰⁴

Personal Experience Prompts

1. Are you an introvert/extrovert?
2. What areas of your ministry energize/drain you?
3. Do you have a way to cope with distractions?
4. Has a lack of boundaries ever left you exhausted in body, mind, or soul?
5. Give an example of how a lack of boundaries may distract you from the primary ministry God has called you to.

¹⁰² London, *Pastors at Greater Risk*, 62.

¹⁰³ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 1st Ballantine trade pbk. ed (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 2003), 2003.

¹⁰⁴ Eugene H. Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant: An Exploration in Vocational Holiness* (Grand Rapids, MI. : Leominster, England: W.B. Eerdmans ; Gracewing, 1992), 39.

Scripture Speaks to The Topic

"All of humanity's problems stem from man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone."

—Blaise Pascal

And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed. - Mark 1:35 ESV

"Prayer will never do our work for us; what it will do is to strengthen us for work which must be done."¹⁰⁵

- Peter rose early the next morning, probably awakened by those already looking for Jesus. The expectation was most likely that Capernaum would experience another day of preaching, healing, and deliverance.

And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, and they found him and said to him, "Everyone is looking for you." - Mark 1:36-37 ESV

- Peter was ready to set the agenda and control Jesus' day.

And he said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out." - Mark 1:38 ESV

- Jesus knew his mission:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

- Luke 4:18-19 ESV

¹⁰⁵ William Barclay, *Barclay on the Lectionary: Mark : Year B*, ed. Linda Foster (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 2014), 58.

*"We don't retreat from life's busyness and bustle as an end in itself. "To sit quietly in a room alone," in Pascal's words, is not an achievement but an instrument - an opportunity to open up our lives and souls to him for whom we were made. To know him and enjoy him."*¹⁰⁶

- If rising early is a priority, what are the steps we need to take to follow Jesus' example?
- What can we see from Jesus' response to Peter?
- How can you balance life, family, work, and ministry activity with solitude and silence?
- How often do you now practice solitude and silence?

Spiritual Practice Related to The Topic - Silence and Solitude

*"To enter into solitude and silence is to take the spiritual life seriously. It is to take seriously our need to quiet the noise of our lives, to cease the constant striving of human effort, to pull away from our absorption in human relationships or a time in order to give God our undivided attention."*¹⁰⁷

We need to tune our ears to hear the one voice out of the many.

We often think, "If I just had more time." *"It is a fallacy to think that one just needs more time. Unless a deeper solution is found, 'more time' will just fill up in the same way as the time we already have. The way to liberation and rest lies through a decision and a practice."*¹⁰⁸

- With its roots planted in the sand where the desert fathers sojourned, solitude is an experience in which I voluntarily agree to meet with God without any crutches to lean on.

¹⁰⁶ David Mathis, *Time Alone for God: The Ageless Habits of Jesus Christ*, October 18, 2021, <https://difyouprayfirst.org/2021/10/18/time-alone-for-god-the-ageless-habits-of-jesus-christ-by-david-mathis/>

¹⁰⁷ Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence*, 34.

¹⁰⁸ Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence*, 134.

*"Society... was regarded (by the Desert Fathers) as a shipwreck from which each single individual man had to swim for his life... These were men who believed that to let oneself drift along, passively accepting the tenets and values of what they knew as society, was purely and simply a disaster."*¹⁰⁹ - Thomas Merton

*"We are silent at the beginning of the day because God should have the first word, and we are silent before going to sleep because the last word also belongs to God... Silence is nothing else but waiting for God's Word and coming from God's Word with a blessing."*¹¹⁰
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Shigematsu shares, *"We all long for something more than the rat race, rushing through life without ever living. We crave depth, and experience of beauty, truth, and meaning. We can each learn to enjoy God's presence in our rhythms of work and rest, study and play, community, and solitude."*¹¹¹

- Huge blocks of time aren't necessary to practice silence and solitude. As a matter of fact, you'll probably want to start with a short amount of time - maybe just a few minutes to start. Adele Calhoun recommends the following ways of practicing solitude:

*"In a place where you can't be interrupted, intentionally place yourself in the presence of God. Recognize that the Lord is as near as your own breathing. Inhale God's breath of life; exhale all that weighs on you. Simply be with God. When it is time to return to others, leave the presence of God gently. Carry the sense of being alone with God with you into the next thing."*¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 11.

¹¹⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Jana Riess, *God Is in the Manger: Reflections on Advent and Christmas*, 1st ed (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 12.

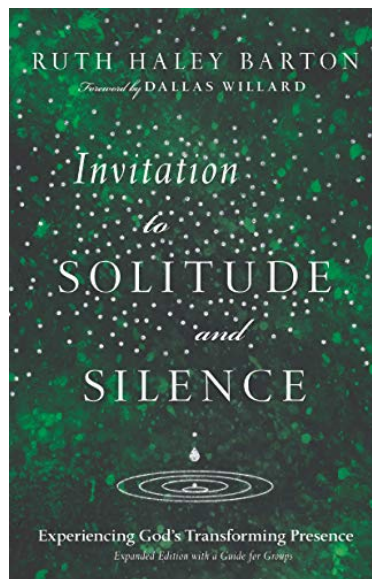
¹¹¹ Ken Shigematsu, *God in My Everything*.

¹¹² Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 113.

*"Set aside half a day for time alone with God. Go to a retreat center, quiet chapel or park. Don't stay in your home. Take only your Bible."*¹¹³

Recommended Resource(s):

- Invitation To Silence and Solitude | Ruth Haley Barton



¹¹³ Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 114.

Thriving Pastors Cohort Session 5 - Loneliness Member Guide



Thriving Pastors Cohort - Session 5 - "Loneliness"

"In a profession with so many inherent challenges that are often faced without the support and nurturance of a well-established social network of trusted people, it is not surprising that clergy often find themselves exhausted, depleted, and languishing in the throes of burnout."¹¹⁴

Pattern of Cohort Meeting

- Prayer.
- Check-in with one another.
- Introduce the topic to be addressed.
- Sharing our personal experience related to the topic.
- Jesus speaks to the topic.
- Spiritual Practice related to the topic.
- Prayer (Group Listening Prayer).

¹¹⁴ Ryan C. Staley, Mark R. McMinn, Kathleen Gathercoal, and Kurt Free. "Strategies Employed by Clergy to Prevent and Cope with Interpersonal Isolation." *Pastoral Psychology* 62, no. 6 (December 2013): 843-57. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-012-0473-9>.



Prayer

Lord of the wilderness, I know you often sought time alone,
but in this season of my life,
I'm just feeling really isolated and lonely.

Friend, Jesus, I know that you are here with me,
but it doesn't always seem like it.

Help me to use this time to seek you more intimately.

But also, help me to find a community and companions
to share my life with -
my joys and my sufferings.

While I wait, Lord, help me to not fear being alone,
but to embrace a time to sit with you
in quiet togetherness and learn to draw comfort from your presence.

Amen.

- Reclaim Today



Check-In with one another

Each cohort participant will give a brief (2-3 minute) synopsis of how their month has been and where they are experiencing in the words of Vinita Hampton Wright, "Consolation and Desolation."

- Consolation
 - Directs our focus outside and beyond ourselves.
 - Lifts our hearts so that we can see the joys and sorrows of other people.
 - Bonds us more closely to our human community.
 - Generates new inspiration and ideas.
 - Restores balance and refreshes our inner vision.
 - Shows us where God is active in our lives and where God is leading us.
 - Releases new energy in us.
- Desolation
 - Turns us in on ourselves.
 - Drives us down the spiral ever deeper into our own negative feelings.
 - Cuts us off from community.
 - Makes us want to give up on the things that used to be important to us.
 - Takes over our whole consciousness and crowds out our distant vision.
 - Covers up all our landmarks [the signs of our journey with God so far].
 - Drains us of energy.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ Vinita Hampton Wright, *Consolation and Desolation*.

Topic To Be Addresses - "Loneliness"

*"Leaders from ages 25 to 45 (and sometimes older) often feel alone. They have been in ministry for five years or longer. Idealism has passed. They have few or no safe places or safe people with whom to process their spiritual and life stage journeys. They are hungry for conversations with mature leaders. They long for experienced leaders to listen to them and pray for them. They lack a safe community of peers who know their stories and are cheering for their spiritual success. These lacks often result in burnout and emotional fatigue, cynicism, spiritual dryness, or unfortunately, loss of integrity and a shift to self-promotional leadership habits."*¹¹⁶

- Interpersonal isolation leading to ministerial burnout is a serious issue among many ministers. In a survey of Assemblies of God ministers,

*"Approximately 65 % of those surveyed were either suffering from burnout or on the verge of burnout."*¹¹⁷

*"Loneliness is loosed upon the landscape. It haunts the penthouse and the rectory, the executive suite and the millionaire's mansion, as well as the barren apartment, the assembly line, the cocktail bar and the city streets. It is, as Mother Teresa of Calcutta once said, the leprosy of the modern world."*¹¹⁸

- It is a fascinating point that the very first human dilemma did not involve the introduction of forbidden fruit, temptation, sin, or even Satan. Isolation holds that dubious distinction:

"Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.'" - Gen. 2:18 ESV

¹¹⁶ Morse, *Lifelong Leadership*,

¹¹⁷ Joseph D. Visker, Taylor Rider, and Anastasia Humphers-Ginther. "Ministry-Related Burnout and Stress Coping Mechanisms Among Assemblies of God-Ordained Clergy in Minnesota." *Journal of Religion and Health* 56, no. 3 (June 2017): 951-61. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-016-0295-7>.

¹¹⁸ Dallas Willard and Jan Johnson, *Hearing God: Developing a Conversational Relationship with God*, Updated and expanded (Downers Grove, IL. IVP Books, 2012), 61.

"Interestingly, it is God who determines that it is not good for man to be alone. There is no indication that Adam himself was dissatisfied with his circumstances."¹¹⁹

Personal Experience Prompts

1. Under what circumstances have you or do you find yourself to be most vulnerable to loneliness?
2. Are there patterns to when you feel lonely?
3. What are your tendencies when you feel lonely?

Scripture Speaks to The Topic

"My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me." - Matthew 26:38 ESV

Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. 46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" - Matthew 27:45-46 ESV

Spiritual Practice Related to The Topic - Join or create a peer group

"Most clergy are relatively isolated, emotionally, and spiritually, without enough peer support. They stand alone, as helpers to others, but are not appreciated or affirmed as equals... participating in a genuine spiritual community as an equal is very important for a cleric's health and well-being... clergy who recognize that they are relatively isolated need to take the initiative to find or create the kind of peer spiritual community in which they can live and grow."¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis. ... Chapters 1 - 17*, Nachdr., The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 2006.

¹²⁰ Donald R. Hands and Wayne L. Fehr, *Spiritual Wholeness for Clergy: A New Psychology of Intimacy with God, Self, and Others* (Washington, DC: Alban Institute, 1993), 67.

"Love is such a powerful dimension of God's nature that it binds three persons so closely that they are actually one."¹²¹

- We were made from love, by love, to love. And love, the God kind of love cries out to be shared in the context of human relationship.

Feedback from pastors who joined a peer group reported the following:

- "Learning and positive change occur most deeply in the context of relationships."
- "It was a treat having freedom from being 'on' all the time and to be able to share with mutual understanding about our lives and work."
- "The Pastor's Summit was about our health, not the health of our church."

"My Summit Group is the only place I can be myself and laugh from my gut."

"I don't want to lose this because I don't have this anyplace else. I hope that if I veer off, you all will come and get me. Because I don't know who in the world, literally, will come and get me if you don't."¹²²

"We were designed to connect with others. Connecting is life. Loneliness is the ultimate horror. In connecting with others, we nourish and experience that life as we freely share it. Rugged individualism, proud independence, and chosen isolation violate the nature of our existence as much as trying to breathe underwater."¹²³

1. Are you now involved in a peer group? Why or why not?
2. What would it take for you to join or form a peer group?
3. Do you know others who are dealing with loneliness?

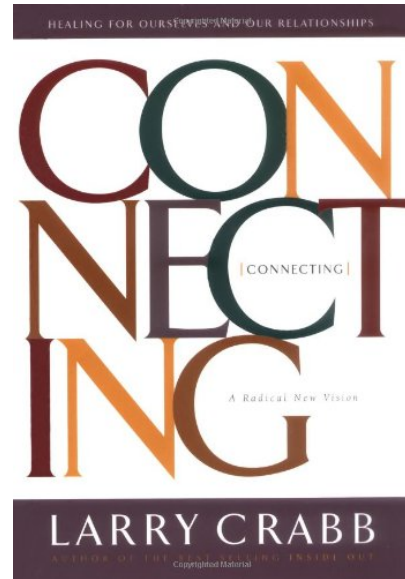
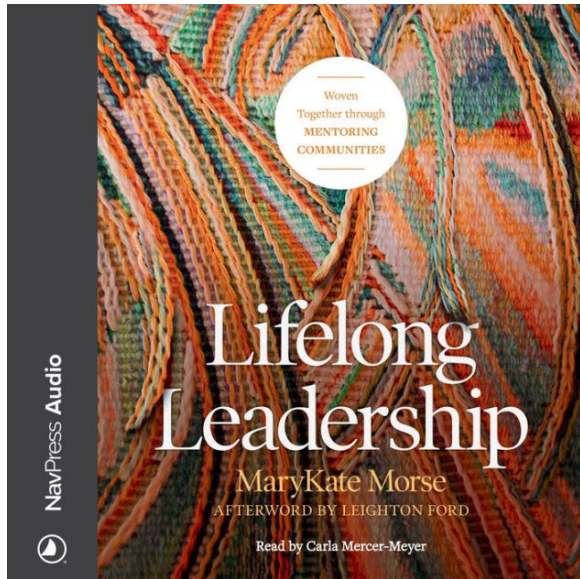
¹²¹ Millard J. Erickson, *Making Sense of the Trinity: 3 Crucial Questions*, 3 Crucial Questions (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000).

¹²² Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 88.

¹²³ Larry Crabb, *Connecting: Healing for Ourselves and Our Relationships: A Radical New Vision* (Nashville, TN: Word Pub, 1997).

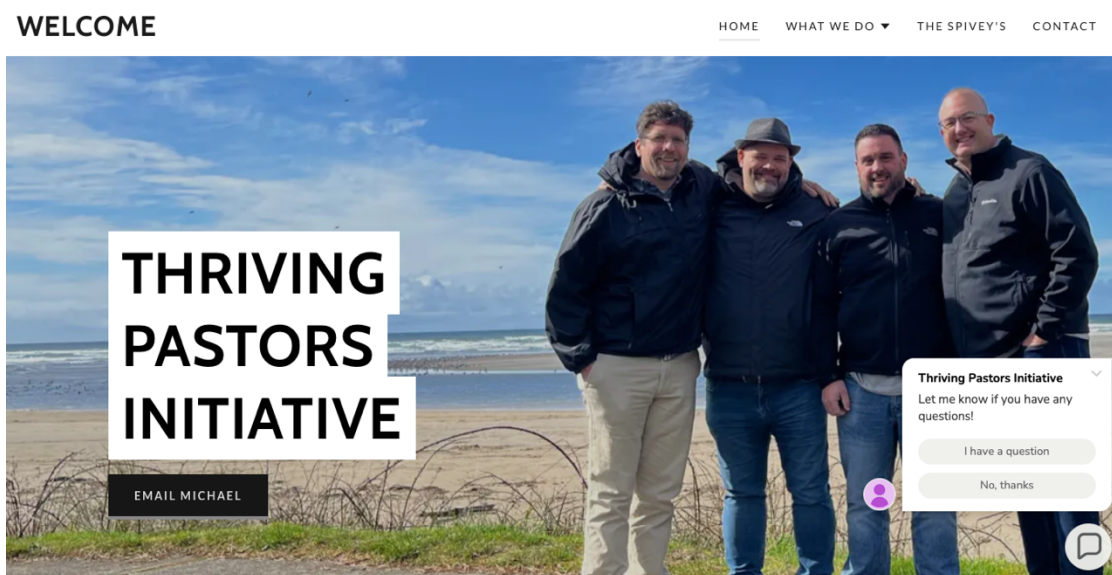
Recommended Resource(s):

- Lifelong Leadership | Mary Kate Morse
- Connecting | Larry Crabb

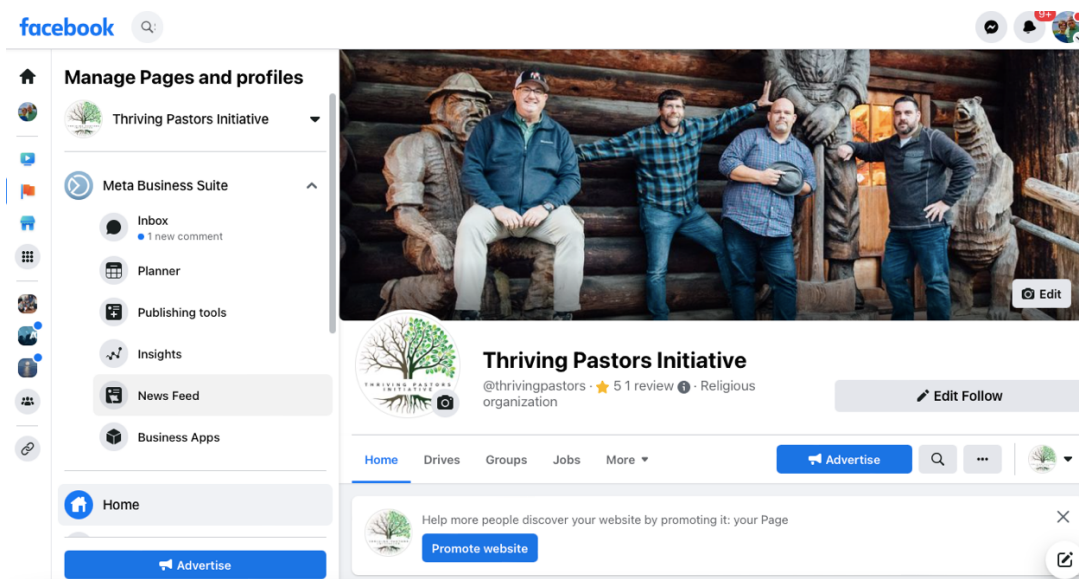


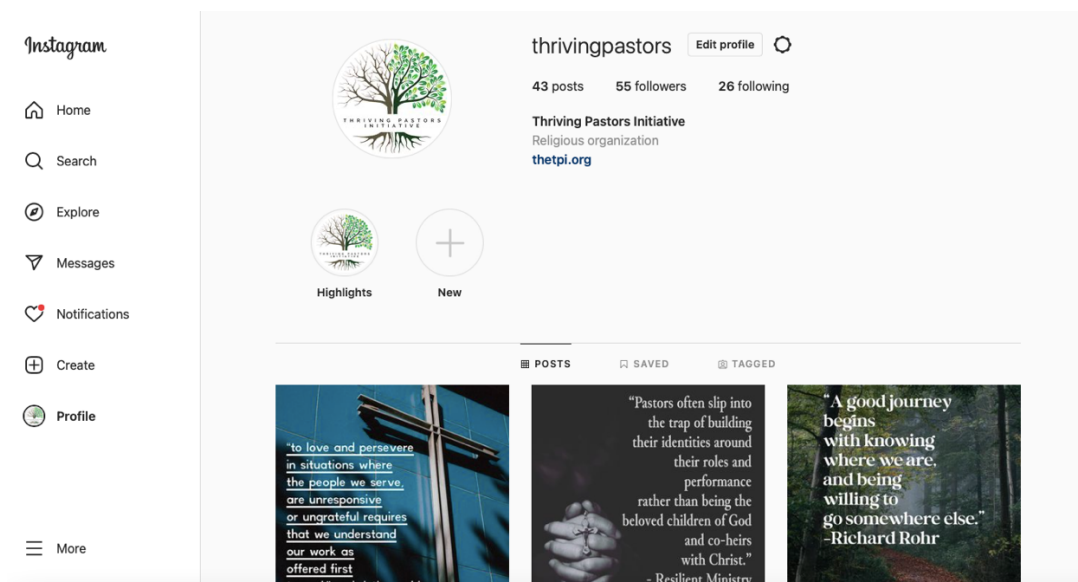
Presentation of Project (continued)

Thriving Pastors Cohort [Website](#) Homepage

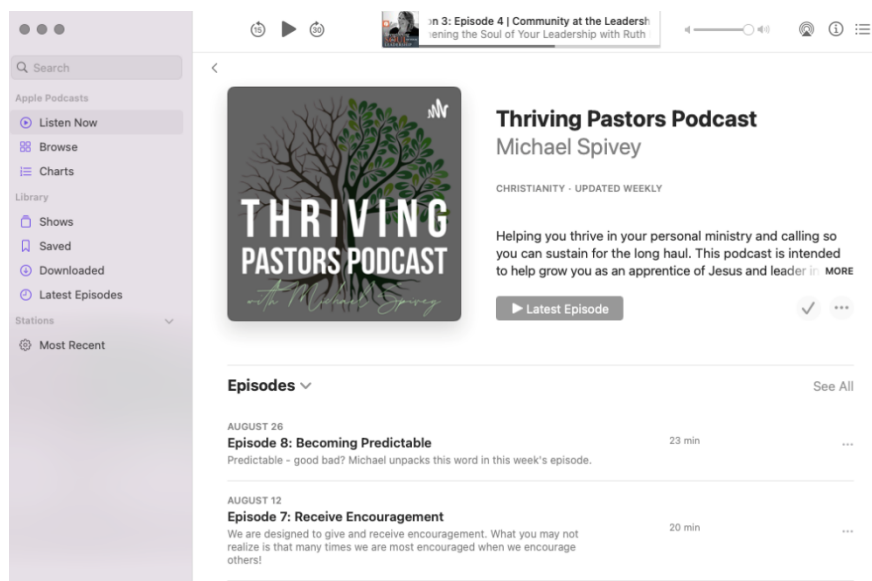


Thriving Pastors Social Media Home Pages ([Facebook](#), [Instagram](#))





Thriving Pastors Podcast Homepage



Sample Cohort Feedback Form

Is there anything you would like to concentrate more on (conversation, prayer, teaching, spiritual practices, etc.)?

8 responses

I would like to see more intentional conversation from all members rather than just a few of the most outgoing members. Everyone has a wealth of knowledge to add to the group and I'd like to hear from them.

Spiritual formations

Teaching from experience, practical suggestions for implementing practices

Not really

no

Conversation

I would enjoy a time of teaching.

Conversation/Interaction seems to be lacking

Assessment

The original benchmarks that were established were based on a *beta* cohort which is currently underway. Because many of the benchmarks for the *beta* cohort have been achieved, some new milestones have been established for the project moving forward.

ORIGINAL MILESTONE 1 - At least 8 pastors or ministry leaders join the Thriving Pastors Cohort.

REVISED MILESTONE 1 - A minimum of 2 groups of 6-8 pastors or ministry leaders will participate in each Thriving Pastors Cohort.

With multiple cohorts operating concurrently, success will mean that 6-8 pastors will participate in each cohort and waiting lists will be established for each cohort that fills up. The current beta cohort accomplished its benchmark of at least 8 members, as 12 pastors or ministry leaders enrolled in the cohort. As the beta cohort progressed and real time feedback was collected, one of the observations is that 12 participants is too many to maintain an intimate enough atmosphere for sharing. Open and honest sharing is a key component of the cohort and with more than 8 participants, time does not allow everyone time enough to share at the depth that is desired. Creating additional smaller cohorts will create more opportunities for participation as well as limit the number of participants in each cohort.

ORIGINAL MILESTONE 2 - A minimum of 500 visits to the Thriving Pastors Cohort website and 250 subscribers to social media platforms.

REVISED MILESTONE 2 - Achieve a greater level of consistency of visitors to the Thriving Pastors website via the social media platforms.

Having launched the Thriving Pastors website, podcast sites, and social media platforms, real time results have been observable. The former milestones were eclipsed in a reasonably short amount of time, but there were large spikes of activity during some months while activity nearly flat lined in others. These spikes and valleys directly corresponded to the number of social media items that were posted. To keep the Thriving Pastors message before its intended audience, a greater level of consistency must be achieved. Driving traffic to the Thriving Pastors website can be achieved through consistent promotion of the website on the various social media platforms. Success would mean increasing the number of followers on the social media platforms to 500 subscribers. "87% of marketers say a benefit of social media is increasing web traffic."¹²⁴ Once the level of subscribers increases, a more consistent flow of traffic to the website should follow.

¹²⁴ Madison Tierney, "9 Tips to Drive More Web Traffic from Social Media," July 13, 2021, <https://contentmarketinginstitute.com/articles/drive-web-traffic-social-media/>.

MILESTONE 3 - In lieu of a fee to join the cohort, participants who find the cohort valuable will “pay forward” a monetary amount to underwrite the cost of subsequent cohorts.

Though the Thriving Pastors Cohort does not target a specific pastoral or church demographic, the greatest appeal to this point has been for pastors and ministry leaders who lead in smaller church or ministry contexts. In small to medium-sized churches and ministries, personal and church resources are often limited and an endeavor towards self-care such as this cohort may not fit in the budget. Though there are costs associated with facilitating a Thriving Pastors Cohort, it is my desire to host each one at little to no cost to each participant. If, after attending a cohort a participant feels the experience has offered significant benefit, they may consider investing monetarily to reduce or completely underwrite the costs for those who follow. Success would mean that costs would be covered for each participant of a cohort before the cohort even starts.

ORIGINAL MILESTONE 4 - Cohort members will rate the quality, content, and effectiveness of the cohort at an average of 80% or high higher on a follow up survey after completion of the cohort.

REVISED MILESTONE 4 - When nearing completion of the cohort, members will rate the quality, content, and effectiveness of the cohort as stand-alone metrics at an average of 80% or higher.

After the third session, beta cohort participants were asked to rate the quality, content, and effectiveness of the cohort as a whole. All participants rated the cohort at or above the 80% but expressed that rating individual factors (quality, content, effectiveness) may be helpful to obtain a more accurate picture of what areas need to be improved upon. The quality of the cohort material speaks to the physical characteristics of the meeting space and materials provided by the cohort. Rating the content of the material will mean that the spiritual and educational components of the cohort have been met. The effectiveness of the cohort cannot be fully known until some time has passed, but each participant will be able to discern whether their spiritual lives have been enhanced during the process of the cohort. Success will mean that the metrics of quality, content, and effectiveness will each be rated at 80% or higher.

MILESTONE 5 - Cohort participants will be willing to recommend and share about their cohort experience.

Success for the cohort participants will mean that he or she will have received encouragement, friendship, instruction, and tools that will enable them to form a plan for lifelong thriving. Success for the cohort will mean that participants will be willing and eager to share about their experience and will gladly promote the cohort by whatever means available to them. Beta cohort participants may be asked to write testimonials which will be disseminated on the Thriving Pastors webpage or

social media outlets. Participants may also be asked to re-post social media posts from the Thriving Pastors social media platforms.

Project Launch Plan

Doctoral Project Description

Assemblies of God pastors can expand their capacity for lifelong thriving by avoiding or recovering from burnout.

The Doctoral Project that is being developed is a nine-session, in-person, group-based cohort for pastors and ministry leaders who desire to avoid ministry burnout and expand their capacity for lifelong thriving.

Audience

The intended end-user of the Thriving Pastors Cohort will include pastors and ministry leaders from the several districts of the Assemblies of God, who desire to minimize or overcome the effects of ministry fatigue or burnout. Exposure to the cohort will initially happen through a vast personal network of ministry colleagues and friends. A functional Thriving Pastors [website](#) has been developed to inform visitors about the cohort(s) and various other helpful offerings. As a gateway to promote and attract ministry leaders, Thriving Pastors [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) social media platforms have been developed. Additionally, a Thriving Pastors Podcast channel has been created and is being distributed on [iTunes](#), [Spotify](#), [Anchor](#). This podcast provides supplemental material for those who may be interested in contents of the cohort.

Development Plan

Key Milestones

- | | |
|--------------|---|
| April / 2023 | <p>Completion of the first iteration of all Thriving Pastors Cohort materials.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key Deliverable and Assessment Metrics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Cohort material to be completed and evaluated by Portland Seminary and the Thriving Pastors <i>Beta</i> Cohort members. ○ A “pass” from Portland Seminary and an 80% or higher members rating regarding the content of the cohort. |
| May / 2023 | <p>Completion of the current Thriving Pastors <i>Beta</i> Cohort.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key Deliverable and Assessment Metrics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The cohort began with ten participants and will end with nine. By its completion, the cohort content, presentation, execution, and effectiveness will be evaluated and critiqued by each member no less than three times. ○ Success will mean an 80% or higher members rating regarding the presentation, execution, and effectiveness of the cohort. ○ Each participant will be willing to offer their endorsement of the cohort to other ministry colleagues. |

- No fee was imposed to join the cohort. However, participants who judged the cohort as valuable will be given an opportunity to “pay forward” a monetary amount to fund subsequent cohorts. If the cohort holds enough value for a member, they may see the importance in making an investment for those who will follow.

June / 2023

Begin the push for the Fall 2023 Thriving Pastors Cohort

- Key Deliverable and Assessment Metrics
 - A video shoot is scheduled to film some promotional videos involving members of the beta cohort.
 - Those who are on the waiting list from the beta cohort will be informed about the dates and times of the Fall 2023 cohort.
 - A social media campaign will be aimed at those who are already subscribers to our social media platforms.
 - The Thriving Pastors website will be updated to indicate the Fall 2023 cohort dates and times.

August / 2023

Initiate the first actual Thriving Pastors Cohort.

- Key Deliverable and Assessment Metrics
 - 6-8 participants in the cohort.
 - Having costs covered for the cohort.

October / 2023

Collect quality, content, and effectiveness assessment from cohort members.

- Key Deliverable and Assessment Metrics
 - After reviewing the assessments, adjustments and/or improvements can be made.

January / 2024

Collect quality, content, and effectiveness assessment from cohort members.

- Key Deliverable and Assessment Metrics
 - After reviewing the assessments, adjustments and/or improvements can be made.

April / 2024

Collect quality, content, and effectiveness assessment from cohort members.

- Key Deliverable and Assessment Metrics
 - After reviewing the assessments, adjustments and/or improvements can be made.

Ongoing

Promotion of the Thriving Pastors Cohorts through social media, web presence, and podcasting.

- Key Deliverable and Assessment Metrics
- 1000 visitors to the Thriving Pastors Initiative website.
- 500 subscribers to the Thriving Pastors Facebook and Instagram pages.
- 200 listens/subscriptions to the Thriving Pastors Podcast

Development Process

After the third, sixth, and final cohort sessions, each cohort member is invited to complete a questionnaire regarding the content, presentation, execution, and effectiveness of the cohort. As feedback is returned, adjustments are considered and implemented when deemed appropriate. A Thriving Pastors *Beta* Cohort has been in session for five months and has been providing consistent feedback as the cohort has progressed. As a result of having real time feedback, the cohort has been able to make mid-stream adjustments which have been very helpful.

Appendix A— Milestone 1 The NPO Charter

Personal Research Manifesto

My blueprint to researching the NPO involves gathering information and listening intently, exploring the need deeply, recognizing my own errors and biases, and allowing room for solutions to present themselves.

NPO Statement

Among Assemblies of God ministerial peers, recurring seasons of discouragement and frustration often lead to spiritual, relational, and emotional isolation.

NPO Scope and Constraints

Upon completion of this doctoral program and final project, a cohort style peer group manual or guide will exist for those ministers who have a desire to assist their colleagues who may be struggling with spiritual, relational, and emotional isolation. The goal of this guide is to enable the facilitator to lead participants on a systematic journey to a flourishing life with God and others. Permission has previously been obtained to submit this manual/guide to my denominational leadership for review, discussion, and possible implementation. As the project develops, the final parameters and scope of the project will be established.

NPO Context

My NPO ministry context primarily addresses the Assemblies of God ministerial fellowship in the Peninsular Florida District of the Assemblies of God. This particular district consists of over 300 churches and 1200 credentialed ministers. Because of the demographic makeup of our ministerial fellowship, the initial cohorts will predominantly consist of white, middle to upper class church leaders, ranging in age from their late 20's to mid 70's. The cohort community size may vary with the optimal group size of each group being 6-8 individuals to maintain an intimate setting for confidential conversations.

Underlying Causes

There are multiple root causes for my NPO, but the primary cause is a lack of trust among ministers stemming from a series of unmet expectations and perceived abandonment throughout the cycle of ministry. Because ministry is people driven, and there are limited resources that teach about forgiveness as a spiritual discipline, colleagues who betray confidentiality, or how to deal with people who leave the churches that they serve, there can be a downward spiraling cycle which leads ministers through spiritual, emotional, and relational isolation. An inability to fully trust is also the root cause of several other symptoms such as: a lack of vulnerability in teaching and leadership, insecurity in decision making, a lack of ministry colleagues who could offer peer support, and a lack of faith in denominational leadership.

Discovery Workshop Stakeholders

The stakeholders included: 2 male lead pastors, 1 female lead pastor, 1 lay person from a sister congregation, a ministry student, and a deceased pastor's wife.

One-On-One Interviews

My one-on-one interviewees included: the former leader of a charismatic denomination, a professor of religion, and the lead pastor of a church in our denomination.

3-5 Key Biblical Texts

The themes of loneliness and aloneness in the life of godly servants will be explored in depth. Both loneliness and aloneness are woven through the tapestry of the scripture from start to finish. Loneliness will be examined in the very first Biblical dilemma which occurs in Genesis 2. Elijah's loneliness was palpable in 1 Kings 19. Yet, we also see examples of the servants of the Lord and the Lord himself choosing aloneness as a way of life as in Luke 4 and Matthew 14.

Academic Resources

There are several primary voices which can speak to the subject of my NPO including Eugene Peterson, minister, scholar, theologian, author, and poet; Greg Scott, Sociology and Director of the Social Science Research Center, DePaul University; James K.A. Smith (PhD), author, theologian; and Henri Nouwen, theologian, and priest. Other areas of research will include the importance of testimony, the spiritual discipline of forgiveness, and consistency in our appointments with God as well as practical resources to assist ministers to engage in a flourishing life with God for the long haul of pastoral ministry.

Appendix A

Discovery Workshop Description

The Discovery Workshop to discuss my N.P.O. was held on Monday, October 19th, 2020, from 9 am until 12 pm at People's church in Winter Haven, Florida. There were six stakeholders who agreed to attend, and all did attend the workshop. Out of the six stakeholders, three were lead pastors (one of them was a female pastor), one stakeholder was a graduate student who is preparing for the ministry, one stakeholder was a lay person but who has very close ties to his pastor, and the last stakeholder was the wife of a retired (now deceased) minister.

A light breakfast was made available to the stakeholders from 8:30 - 9:00 am and the workshop began promptly at 9 am. The first activity was a brief meet and greet to introduce all of the stakeholders to one another. We then went over the ground rules regarding the workshop.

At about 9:25 am the group launched into the first workshop activity which was called, "The 5 Why's". The 5 Whys game attempts to move beyond the surface of a problem and discover the root cause. The second activity that was conducted was named, "The Blind Side". The purpose of this activity was to disclose and discover unknown information that can impact organizational and group success in any area of the company—management, planning, team performance, and so forth. The last activity was titled, "The \$100 Test" and it was used to uncover how stakeholders would allot time and energy towards a solution for the N.P.O. and why. After closing the last activity, the group had lunch together to debrief and to formulate the Discovery Statement.

Discovery Statement

Considering Assemblies of God Ministers, we've discovered that among Assemblies of God ministerial peers, recurring seasons of discouragement and frustration often lead to spiritual, relational, and emotional isolation. which is caused by the absence of true, life-giving relationships due to the inability to fully trust others. If solved, it would mean increased emotional and spiritual health for pastors and congregations and the ability to thrive in pastoral ministry for the long haul.

Critical Insights from Discovery Workshop

Discovery Statement did hit home for the stakeholders. There is a perceived dilemma among our denominational peers in the areas of discouragement, frustration, and isolation. 2) There is a perceived lack of denominational leadership in this area. 3) Among our ministers, there is a systematic lack of vulnerability that stems from the inability to trust congregants, ministerial peers, or denominational leaders. 4) Many ministers are enslaved to unrealistic expectations by their church leadership structures. 5) There is a perceived lack of peer support among our ministerial ranks. 6) Several stakeholders expressed that there had been a lack of preparation for the mental and emotional toll of ministry. 7) Most of the ministers disclosed a deficit in their personal lives in the area of spiritual development and formation. 8) This dilemma is not exclusive to ministers or church work.

One-On-One Interview Discoveries

While some of the insights from the one-on-one interviews were consistent with the Discovery Workshop findings, there was some deviation of thought that I felt will help clarify the project: 1) The N.P.O. needs further clarification. Discouragement, frustration, and isolation are really three different topics and I need to deal with a singular issue. 2) Ministers need to reevaluate their situation to remember that we have the opportunity to be “professional” Christians and appreciate the privilege of serving. 3) In regard to the inability to trust, ministers should make forgiveness a daily spiritual discipline in their lives. 4) Trust (in God and his people) is foundational to ministerial health and longevity. 5) Life was meant to be lived in groups and ministry meant to be done in teams. Loneliness was the first major dilemma recorded in the scripture (Genesis 2:18). 6) The reestablishment of a theology of relationship over productivity is paramount.

Synthesis

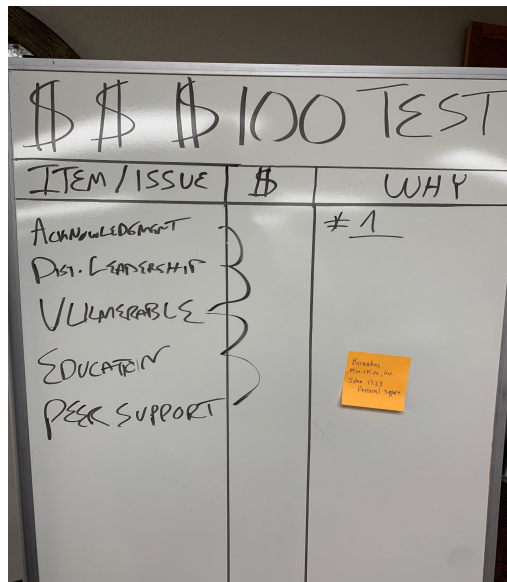
The findings from the Discovery Workshop were significant and did help me in the sense that there were others who sensed the need to address this particular N.P.O. Most participants felt the same frustrations that I have felt through the years. As we worked through the exercises, a sense of camaraderie developed and most of the people in the room agreed with most of what was said and the outcomes of the exercises. The problem was that the discussion felt more fraternity banter and muddled the waters as far as the next step goes.

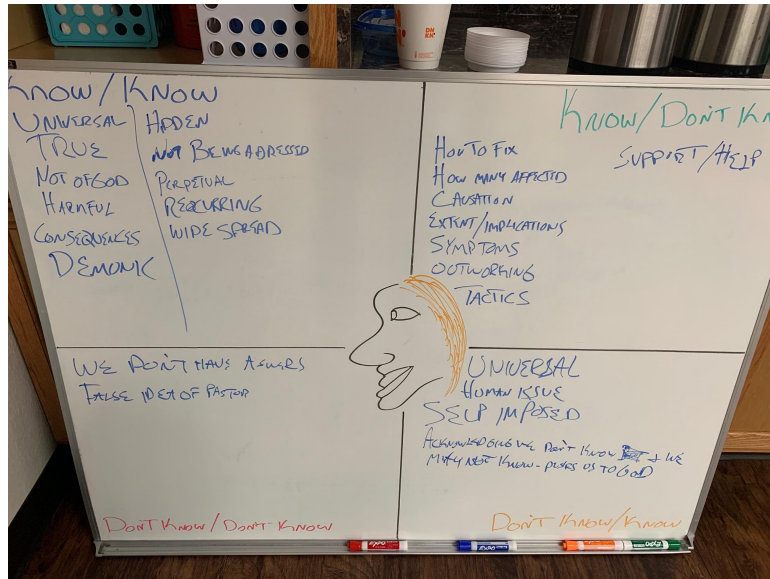
The one-on-one interviews helped to point me in a more specific direction and encouraged me to be more singular in my approach to actual research. Each one of the interviewees encouraged me to dig deep and not wide. Without disclosing the contents of the other conversations to each participant, all three interviewees gravitated to the idea of exploring the problem of isolation in the life of the minister since isolation seems to be the end of the line for ministerial frustration and discouragement.

The workshop left me a little confused and unclear about the direction to take in research, but the one-on-one interviews both helped to clarify the core need to address and provided further sources to investigate.

Next Steps

The areas that I know that I will need to further explore are as follows: 1) I need to continue to further define and clarify the issue of pastoral isolation and what research should entail in regard to the subject. 2) Study the Biblical texts which deal with the themes of loneliness, aloneness, betrayal, forgiveness, and community. 2) I also want to explore the psychological and spiritual differences between being lonely (Adam and Elijah) and choosing aloneness for spiritual purposes (Jesus, the discipline of silence and solitude). 3) Discovering the key voices which have written about pastoral isolation and how to maintain ministry effectiveness for a lifetime. 4) Researching a wide variety of sources including: peer reviewed articles, current scholarly books, dissertations, and professional level literature. 5) Further sampling of ministers and denominational leadership also needs to be done to further clarify the subject and how to address it.





One-Page Post-Workshop Message to Stakeholders

I want to sincerely thank you from the bottom of my heart for your time, energy, and input into the workshop that you attended last week. It is clear to me that I made the right choice in asking you to be a part of this project. I believe that we were able to start the process of discovering some of the key insights into why ministers in our fellowship are having a difficult time. As we discussed the problem, which was stated, several main themes came to the forefront:

1. There was a consensus that these problems are a legitimate issue and that they are worthy to be further explored.
2. There was a perceived lack of denominational leadership in this area.
3. Among our minister colleagues, there is a systematic lack of vulnerability that stems from the inability to trust congregants, ministerial peers, or denominational leaders.
4. Many ministers are enslaved to unrealistic expectations by their church leadership structures.
5. There is a perceived lack of peer support among our ministerial ranks.
6. Several stakeholders expressed that there had been a lack of preparation for the mental and emotional toll of ministry.

The Discovery Statement that emerged from our time together is as follows: *Considering Assemblies of God Ministers, we've discovered that among Assemblies of God ministerial peers, recurring seasons of discouragement and frustration often lead to spiritual, relational, and emotional isolation. which is caused by the absence of true-life giving relationships due to the inability to fully trust others. If solved, it would mean*

increased emotional and spiritual health for pastors and congregations and the ability to thrive in pastoral ministry for the long haul.

I am keenly interested in any further thoughts or ideas you may have concerning our discussion and welcome any additional feedback you may have. Many blessings to you!

Grace & Peace,

Michael Spivey

One-On-One Interview Documentation

<p>UNPREPARED, LACK OF SUPPORT, LACK OF VULNERABILITY UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS NPO. MINDSET OR THOUGHT IN VARIOUS CAPES - NOT INTENDING TO ALSO Among my denominational ministerial peers, feelings of discouragement, frustration, and isolation are common.</p> <p>Discovery Summary Considering Assemblies of God Ministers, we've discovered that among my denominational ministerial peers, feelings of discouragement, frustration, and isolation are common, which is caused by unrealistic expectations, lack of peer and leadership support, being unprepared for the spiritual/emotional challenge of ministry. If solved, it would mean increased emotional and spiritual health for pastors and congregations.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. With what do you agree? Why? 2. What do you disagree with? Why? 3. What is missing? 4. What resources are available? 5. How would you redefine the NPO? - CLARIFY 6. Is this a problem that should be solved by the individual or can denominational leadership be involved? <p>- NPO MAY NEED FURTHER DEFINITION - NEED TO CLARIFY - SABBATH/SABOTAGE ISSUES - SELF CARE/LEADERSHIP - GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES</p> <p>DISAGREEMENTS I NOT UNIQUE TO MY WISDOM LOWKEY CONFRONT ONE ANOTHER - WE HAVE IT BETTER THAN MOST - APPRECIATION FOR PRIVILEGE TO SERVE - LACK OF BEING ABLE TO TRUST - STEP OF REBUILDING TRUST! - INTERNALLY - FORGIVENESS AS A DISCIPLINE</p> <p>* R.T. KENDALL - TOTAL FORGIVENESS - ONE WHO WE TRUST MOST TURNS AWAY - JESUS, WILL YOU LOVE ME TOO - PHIL, DEMAS, JOHN MARK</p> <p>ORILL DOWN TO A COMMON DENOMINATION</p> <p>* JOHN WOOLEN - OHIO - LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT</p>	<p>JOSH WILLIFORD - OHIO DIST. ROBERT CROSBY - EMERGE</p> <p>TRUST AS FOUNDATIONAL IN MINISTERIAL HEALTH FORGIVENESS BRIDGING THE KNOWING FROM HEAD TO HANDS/HEART THROUGH EDUCATION.</p> <p>* JOSE LUIS NAVARRO - MENDOCINO WITH OUR PASTOR * A.J. SWABORTA - SUBVERSIVE SABBATH</p>
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N.P.O.

Among my denominational ministerial peers, feelings of discouragement, frustration, and isolation are common.

Discovery Summary

Considering Assemblies of God Ministers, we've discovered that among my denominational ministerial peers, feelings of discouragement, frustration, and isolation are common, which is caused by unrealistic expectations, lack of peer and leadership support, being unprepared for the spiritual/emotional challenge of ministry. If solved, it would mean increased emotional and spiritual health for pastors and congregations.

1. With what do you agree? Why?
2. What do you disagree with? Why?
3. What is missing?
4. What resources are available?
5. How would you redefine the NPO?
6. Is this a problem that should be solved by the individual or can denominational leadership be involved?

S** H**** 10/27/20 9:30 A.M. KiKi's Cafe, Lakeland, FL.

- NPO may need to be further clarified
- Sabbath/Sabbatical Issues
- Self Leadership/Care
- Generational Differences
- This is not unique to ministry
- Need to lovingly confront one another
- Ministers (especially lead pastors) have it better than most
- Appreciation for the ability to serve
- Lack of being able to trust
- Steps to rebuilding trust
 - Forgiveness as a discipline
- One who we pour into most turns their back
 - Jesus - Will you leave me too?
 - Paul - Demas, John Mark
- Drill down to the common denominator which is lack of trust
- Trust as foundational to ministerial health & longevity
- Bridging the gap from head knowing & heart and hand knowing as far as trust - through education
- R.T. Kendall - Total Forgiveness
- John Wooten, Ohio District Leadership - Leadership Development
- Josh Williford, Ohio District

- Robert Crosby, Emerge
- Jose Luis Navarro - Monday's with my old pastor
- A.J. Swoboda - Subversive Sabbath

A**** G***** 10/27/20 3:00 PM Phone Interview

ACEN -

TRANSPARENCY - NEVER TAUGHT
NEVER HAVE FRIENDS
DON'T GET CLOSE TO ANYONE
LEADS TO ISOLATION

RESOURCES

ACTS 2

LIFE IN CHURCH

MINISTRY IN TEAMS

INTIMACY COUNSELING CENTERS - TX

- 3rd PURPOSE OF TRUTH
- RATIONAL THEOLOGY 2 TH 3:15, DOCTRINAL THEOLOGY
- REPROOF, CORRECTION
- BEHAVIORAL THEOLOGY, PUFFED UP
- BELIEVING, BEHAVING, BECOMING - RELATIONAL CONTEXT

CHP. 13 - ACTS 2 BOOK

SOUL TSONAMI, L.W. SWEET

EPIC CHURCH

IMMELVY CONNECTION

WE HAVE STRAYED AWAY FROM EXPERIENCE
1st HUMAN CONFLICT WAS LONGEVITY GEN 2:18
ALONENESS WAS BEFORE SIN CONCEPT

TRUE
WHY? - NO OPPORTUNITY FOR FELLOWSHIP / COMMUNICATION
LACK OF CONNECTION
- OUR STRUCTURE IS NOT DESIGNED FOR IT ON A DISTRICT LEVEL
- SELF ISOLATION
- POST RECREATIONAL TRUST
- LACK OF TRUST
- LACK OF VULNERABILITY
- LACK OF LEADERSHIP
- LOSS OF RESPECT FOR LEADERSHIP
- ISOLATION AGAINST NEGATIVE EMOTION

Appendix B– Milestone 2 NPO Topic Expertise Essay

Introduction

"Indeed, the most important thing in life are human relationships; even the modern "high achiever" cannot change that; but neither can the "demigods" or the lunatics who know nothing about human relationships."¹²⁵ From the perspective of our omniscient God, close relationships are and always have been a given. Intimate fellowship between Father, Son, and Spirit has never been broken and it is out of that great love that humanity was created. "Love is such a powerful dimension of God's nature that it binds three persons so closely that they are actually one."¹²⁶ We were made from love, by love, to love. And love, the God kind of love cries out to be shared in the context of human relationship.

In the absence of life giving, loving human relationships, a void forms - even among members of the clergy. Perhaps especially among members of the clergy. "In a profession with so many inherent challenges that are often faced without the support and nurturance of a well-established social network of trusted people, it is not surprising that clergy often find themselves exhausted, depleted, and languishing in the throes of burnout."¹²⁷ Interpersonal isolation leading to ministerial burnout is a serious issue among many ministers. In a survey of Assemblies of God ministers, "Approximately 65 % of those surveyed were either suffering from burnout or on the verge of burnout."¹²⁸

In the first man, Adam, we see that isolation is present from the very inception of man's existence. Isolation was Elijah's undesirable companion as he hid from Jezebel's taunts in the dark recesses of Mount Horeb. It was spiritual and emotional isolation that prompted Jesus Christ to proclaim, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me" (Matt 27:46, ESV)? It was the Spirit which compelled and called Christ into the solitude of the wilderness. This paper will seek out the root causes of the spiritual, relational, and emotional deficits which lead to burnout and isolation that many ministers face and will attempt to help develop a systematic approach which leads to health in those areas.

¹²⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer et al., *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 1st English ed, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, v. 8 (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010).

¹²⁶ Millard J. Erickson, *Making Sense of the Trinity: 3 Crucial Questions*, 3 Crucial Questions (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000).

¹²⁷ Ryan C. Staley, Mark R. McMinn, Kathleen Gathercoal, and Kurt Free. "Strategies Employed by Clergy to Prevent and Cope with Interpersonal Isolation." *Pastoral Psychology* 62, no. 6 (December 2013): 843-57. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-012-0473-9>.

¹²⁸ Joseph D. Visker, Taylor Rider, and Anastasia Humphers-Ginther. "Ministry-Related Burnout and Stress Coping Mechanisms Among Assemblies of God-Ordained Clergy in Minnesota." *Journal of Religion and Health* 56, no. 3 (June 2017): 951-61. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-016-0295-7>.

Section 1: Biblical and Theological Foundations

Isolation in the Biblical World

It is a fascinating point that the very first human dilemma did not involve the introduction of temptation, sin, or even Satan. Isolation holds that dubious distinction; "Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him"" (Gen. 2:18, ESV). According to scripture, the heavens, oceans, light, land, vegetation, animals, man, and all other created matter was called "good" by God himself. Only one thing in the whole of creation was called "not good" and that is the isolation of man.

"Interestingly, it is God who determines that it is not good for man to be alone (Gen. 2:18-25, ESV). There is no indication that Adam himself was dissatisfied with his circumstances. After making his evaluation (v. 18a), God proposes a solution (v. 18b). God will provide a helper for Adam. God already is Adam's helper (but a superior helper). The animals are also Adam's helpers (but inferior helpers). This helper, then, must be one that will be equal to him. Furthermore, she is to be suitable for him. The Hebrew word for "suitable" suggests something that completes a polarity, as the north pole is "suitable" to the south pole. One without the other is incomplete."¹²⁹

Just as each member of the Trinity is dependent on the other, the design of the man demanded a friend, a mate, and helper to aid him in realizing his highest potential. "Being alone prevents the man from fulfilling the design of creation and therefore is not good."¹³⁰ Of Adam it is said, "With a soul full of affections, and capable of finding its sweetest enjoyment in the interchange of sentiments and the endearments of friendship, he had as yet no suitable object with which those natural feelings could ally themselves. Though formed with strong desires to love and to be loved, he possessed no means of exercising his emotions, no ear to which he could impart his thoughts, no bosom ready to reciprocate his feelings."¹³¹ Adam could have existed without a mate, he would not have known to be lonely. The experience of a loving union that God had forever been a part of was the very impetus for providing an escape from interpersonal isolation for the first man. Before Adam knew of isolation, God provided a solution.

¹²⁹ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis. ... Chapters 1 - 17*, Nachdr., The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006).

¹³⁰ Biblical Studies Press. (2006). *The NET Bible First Edition Notes* (Ge 2:18). Biblical Studies Press.

¹³¹ Robert Jamieson, A. R Fausset, and David Brown, *A Commentary on the Old and New Testaments* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997).

Textual Discussions

Isolation, a response to fear: 1 Kings 18:20 - 19:18

Answered prayer, glory, terror, wonder, and fire all accompanied Elijah's showdown with Baal's prophets atop Carmel. Upon the consumption of the burnt offering to God, the false prophets were exposed and subsequently slaughtered, God was glorified, and the Lord's people were left standing in amazement. The celebration was short-lived once word of the massacre reached Queen Jezebel. Her words were not ambiguous, "So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow" (1 Kings 19:2b, ESV). "Victory seems to be transformed into defeat, the brave prophet into a cowering refugee, and the victory over death and Baal into an opportunity for death to reassert itself through Jezebel's oath to take Elijah's life."¹³²

Elijah, the *summoner of fire* made the fear-based decision to flee from Jezebel into a season of self-imposed isolation from God and man. "The Bible typically exposes the weakness of a man of God, for Elijah exhibited symptoms of manic depression, wishing for death, together with loss of appetite, an inability to manage and with excessive self-pity. He was unmoved by visitors, even by a visit from God and visions."¹³³

Even though fear compelled Elijah into a season of isolation, he found as Adam did before him that "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Ps. 46:1, ESV). Elijah discovered a God who was present, who provided, and protected. "His gracious God did not lose sight of His fugitive servant, but watched over him, and, miraculously ministering to his wants, enabled him, in a better but not wholly right frame of mind, by virtue of that supernatural supply, to complete his contemplated journey."¹³⁴ It must have been a strange and wonderful discovery for Elijah to realize the words of the Psalmist, "Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!" (Ps. 139:7-8, ESV). Elijah's emotional, spiritual, and relational deficits were filled in by God's unexpected presence.

Isolation, man's wrath, and the Spirit's call: Matthew 27:46, 14:23

Adam was afforded providential grace in the form of a mate. Elijah found God's goodness in supernatural provision and an encouraging word from the Lord. In the life of Jesus, we read that

¹³² Alan J. Hauser and Russell I. Gregory, eds., *From Carmel to Horeb: Elijah in Crisis*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 85 (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1990).

¹³³ D. J. Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, v. 9 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008).

¹³⁴ Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Vol. 1, p. 227). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

the cold hand of isolation was forced upon him at the cross (Matt. 27:46). The humanity of Christ had separated him physically from his father and the curse of sin forced a brief yet heavy veil of isolation upon the Savior. Of the estrangement of Jesus from the Father it is said, "This is no dispassionate theological statement, but an agonized expression of a real sense of alienation, reflecting the full meaning of Jesus' death as a 'ransom for many.'"¹³⁵ The God who never leaves or forsakes his children seemed, albeit momentarily, to be absent at the most critical time in history. Of course, we can be sure that God was not absent, only briefly hidden from sight while he received the spirit of his only begotten (Luke 23:46).

We can also witness how being alone was not always a curse in Jesus' life, but oftentimes a great blessing. Intentional solitude seemed to be a part of Jesus' walking around, everyday life. Jesus submitted himself to solitude on a regular basis and heeded the call of the Spirit into times of separation from his followers. Most certainly there was never a life which had more demand placed on it than that of Jesus of Nazareth and yet times of isolation were a part of his practice. Scripture records, "And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone" (Matt. 14:23, ESV). In Jesus we see solitude as a means of grace from within as opposed to a reaction to life from without. The lesson is not lost, "Nothing is better to keep the mind humble and unambitious than to seek some lonely place; to shut out the world with all its honors; to realize that the great God, before whom all creatures and all honors sink to nothing, is round about us; and to ask him to keep us from pride and vain-glory."¹³⁶ We can surmise from Jesus' time alone with the Father that he received all that was needed to accomplish the plan of God for his life and the world.

Synthesis of Themes, Values, and Commitments

We can be certain that from its origins, the human experience simply involves human isolation. Neither the most pious nor the vilest among us is immune from its reach. Scripture declares, "For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt. 5:45b, ESV). Some things just are. Biblical characters throughout the Old and New Testaments show us that isolation may be thrust upon us or that through the course of unforeseen events. We may even opt for isolation during moments of intense pressure or fear which perpetuate feelings of emotional, spiritual, and relational separation from God and other people.

In the life of Jesus and many of his followers since, we also see a pattern of chosen solitude. It is in chosen times of isolation that we can connect with God in a way that is both here and now and connects with the past. In a sense, we may be alone but even in our aloneness, we are among a

¹³⁵ Richard T. France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, Repr, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries 1 (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2008).

¹³⁶ Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Kregel Publications, 1990).

group of people who have walked with and waited on God in the silence. Ruth Haley Barton states, "Although the journey into solitude and silence is a solitary one, we take the journey within a larger community of those who have gone before and those who share the journey with us now."¹³⁷

Could it be that the Lord so desires an intimate and personal relationship with humanity that when we don't submit to that invitation, God can and does manipulate circumstances to get us to a place of aloneness and fellowship with himself? God provides what and who we need to advance on the journey of life. For the servant of God, solitude in any form and for any reason is met with a divine grace that goes before the sovereign decisions of God or human choice. There is much biblical evidence pointing to God's presence and abundant supply during humanity's solitude. To the lonely, God has provided people to journey with us. To the hungry, God has made sustenance available through supernatural means. To the depressed, God's voice has been a source of great encouragement. In the life of Jesus, God's wisdom, discernment, and power was imparted for ushering in the Kingdom of Heaven. Our location in life is never a secret from God.

In many cases, there seems to be causation behind the isolation that saints find themselves in. I endeavor to take notice of the almost imperceptible moments from scripture and everyday life to see how God was and is working in the hearts and lives of those who find themselves tired, lonely, and isolated. I also desire to walk with and learn from others to fend off feelings of emotional, spiritual, and relational isolation and to prepare for the unavoidable moments when those sentiments come.

Section 2: Topic History, Ministry or Vocational Context, and Key Voices

Topic History and Ministry or Vocational Context

The topic of spiritual, relational, and emotional isolation among God's ministers is as vast and as long as God's ministers have been around. Wherever there is a desire to serve God and an unction to love and assist the Lord's people towards spiritual maturity, a spiritual battle is sure to ensue. Both testaments of scripture are chocked full of stories of those who have done great exploits and experienced great disappointment, fear, and loneliness. God and his agents have forever been faithful to minister to those who are in the hour of their isolation. The topic history will focus on the last 75 years of physical, spiritual, and emotional health among Christian ministers, especially as it relates to isolation.

¹³⁷ R. Ruth Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence: Experiencing God's Transforming Presence*, Expanded ed (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2010), 13.

BEHIND THE STRUGGLE

Certainly, the demands and expectations of clergy members have morphed over the last three quarters of a century and may not even resemble what they were in the church of the 1950's. Today's senior leaders cannot afford to be singularly focused on teaching and preaching. It is expected that this generation of pastors can and will be efficient experts in all areas related to church ministry and business. "Today's clergy seem to have greater demands, less support, and the radical changes in our society over the past 50 years have fundamentally redefined the very nature of what it means to be in ministry."¹³⁸ One pastor was quoted as saying, "I wish someone had told me how tough it is to be a pastor. My single counsel was to preach the Word, and I understand the priority of preaching. But, after a year or so in my first pastorate at age 31, I saw the underbelly of local church life. I was just caught off guard. And it took me some time before I realized I was truly depressed."¹³⁹

There is no question that those who have been called to vocational ministry experience a high degree of satisfaction in their work, even though studies indicate that contentment comes at a high price. Nearly 1,000 former leaders from various major denominations who had chosen to leave vocational ministry responded to a 2001 Pulpit and Pew Project on the reason(s) that ministers leave church ministry this way, "the main factors pushing local church ministers away are organizational and interpersonal. These pushes have to do with conflict, feelings of being stymied, and isolation. Also, the former pastors, compared with active pastors, reported more stress, conflict, and alienation, a lack of clarity about the proper role of a pastor, and more resentment from spouses. Pastors who have left do not feel that they had sufficient support from their denominations, especially during times of conflict. They often feel lonely and isolated and have little support from other clergy. They experience communication among denominational officials, pastors, and local churches as inconsistent and insufficient. Often, they feel that they have had little opportunity to voice their opinions or air their positions."¹⁴⁰ "Statistics on the dropout rate of ministers vary. But conditions of ministry have changed in the past few decades and that too many local church ministers leave as a result."¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Sherri S. Ferguson, "Clergy Compassion Fatigue," *Family Therapy* (March-April 2007): 16.

¹³⁹ Thom Rainer, "Five Reasons Many Pastors Struggle With Depression," Church Answers (blog), churchanswers.com, February 26, 2018, <https://churchanswers.com/blog/five-reasons-many-pastors-struggle-depression/>.

¹⁴⁰ Dean R. Hoge and Wenger, Jacqueline E. "Experiences of Protestant Ministers Who Left Local Church Ministry" (Presented to the Religious Research Association, Norfolk, VA, October 25, 2003): 15.

¹⁴¹ Bob Burns, Tasha Chapman, and Donald Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us about Surviving and Thriving* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2013), 12.

THE EFFECTS OF THE STRUGGLE

According to Gwen Halaas, the Vice Chancellor for academic affairs at Washington State University and a consultant in ministerial health and wellness for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, a major study in the 1950's began following a large cohort. The researchers found that clergy had lower rates of disease for virtually every possible diagnosis and lived longer and healthier lives than any other professional group. The results were quite different however when similar studies were conducted on the generations of clergy that were to follow. A 1983 study for example, found the Protestant clergy had the highest overall work-related stress of various religious professionals and the next to lowest number of personal resources to cope with the strain. In 1999, another study found that clergy have one of the highest death rates from heart disease of any occupation. "Basically", Halaas summarizes, "it's become a more difficult job with fewer rewards, and all those things add to stress and take a toll on health."¹⁴²

And the toll isn't just physical. The overall health of many ministers is being negatively affected by ministerial stressors and is leading to burnout and isolation. Authors and pastoral advocates H.B. London Jr. and Neil B. Weisman cite some very alarming statistics about active clergymen: "Of the 500,000 full-time, vocational pastors in the United States today, approximately one out of every four (125,000) are experiencing 'burnout'.

- 60% work more than 60 hours per week
- 80% believe that ministry has adversely affected their families
- 90% feel they are inadequately trained to cope with ministry demands
- 40% report a serious conflict with a parishioner at least once a month
- 37% confess to inappropriate sexual behavior with someone in their church (which is about the same percentage as the general population)
- 70% do not have someone they consider a close friend
- 70% have a lower self-image than when they entered ministry
- 70% say they get less than seven hours of sleep each night
- 75% do not take a regular day off for Sabbath rest
- 76% are overweight or obese (compared with 61% of the general population)

¹⁴² David O. Williams, "Sustaining Spiritual Leadership for the Long Haul: The Center for Spiritual Renewal at Barclay College" (2009). Doctor of Ministry. Paper 183. <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin/183>: 6.

- 40% reported being depressed or worn out "some or most of the time"
- Not surprisingly, 40% of these pastors have considered leaving their ministries in the last three months alone."¹⁴³

Though a relatively new idea, the issue of clergy burnout which naturally leads to depression, loneliness, isolation, and ultimately resigning from ministry altogether has been taken seriously since at least the 1980's when a number of high-profile church leaders had to make immediate and public exits from ministry. Immorality and scandal were the ultimate result of their actions but somewhere along the way the soul of these leaders was tired and tainted. "Many in ministry quote Christmas Evans, a famous Welsh preacher from the early 19th century, who supposedly said, 'I'd rather burn out than rust out in the service of the Lord.' One of Evan's contemporaries, James Berkley, is said to have retorted, 'I admire the bravado. It sounds dedicated, bold, and stirring. However, when I view the burnt-out and almost burnt-out who lie by the ecclesiastical Road, the glory fails to reach me. Is there not a third alternative? In Acts 20:24, Paul stated, 'I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me.' Herein lies the model I choose to follow. I want neither to burn out nor rust out. I want to finish out the race."¹⁴⁴

Burnout is the first stop on a dangerous path that many ministers end up accidentally walking down. "When they experience burnout, leaders emotionally decompress, distance themselves from others, and have difficulty functioning normally."¹⁴⁵ If an internal or external intervention isn't engaged in, depression, loneliness and isolation are sure to follow. There have been several avenues which have been explored which seem to lead to ministerial depression, addiction, and isolation. "Nearly half of pastors' report struggling with depression at some point during their tenure in ministry (46%). A smaller but still significant proportion, about one in five, says that they have struggled with an addiction (19%)."¹⁴⁶ Another sad reality is that the vast majority of churches in North America consist of congregations with less than 100 people and those who pastor smaller churches tend to struggle even a little harder with depression. "Roughly half of pastors who lead churches of fewer than 100 (51%) or between 100 to 250 people (56%) have experienced depression."¹⁴⁷ According to Barna, one in four pastors has first-hand knowledge of a ministry colleague who has left the ministry due to mental health reasons.

¹⁴³ H. B. London, *Pastors at Greater Risk* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2014), 25.

¹⁴⁴ Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 61.

¹⁴⁵ Diane J. Chandler, "The Impact of Pastors' Spiritual Practices on Burnout", *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling*, 64(2), 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1177/154230501006400206>.

¹⁴⁶ Barna Research Group and Pepperdine University, *The State of Pastors*, 47.

¹⁴⁷ Barna Research Group and Pepperdine University, *The State of Pastors*, 47.

In the end, if burnout isn't addressed, loneliness and isolation are sure to follow. In a 2017 study by the Barna Group and Pepperdine University, researchers Dale and Tod Brown observed, "Perhaps because of the nature of their work - which can serve to set pastors apart from those they minister to and even from their peers - pastors report feeling lonely more often than most adults."¹⁴⁸ The study indicated that in the previous three months before being interviewed, 52% of pastors indicated that they either frequently or sometimes feel isolated from others. "Most clergy are relatively isolated, emotionally, and spiritually, without enough peer support. They stand alone, as helpers to others, but are not appreciated or affirmed as equals... participating in a genuine spiritual community as an equal is very important for a cleric's health and well-being... clergy who recognize that they are relatively isolated need to take the initiative to find or create the kind of peer spiritual community in which they can live and grow."¹⁴⁹ Much has been done in the past few decades to help ministers avoid isolation, but the issues still linger.

Key Voices

KEY VOICE 1 - DALLAS WILLARD

Arguably, one of the more influential voices in Christian thinking and formation is that of Dallas Willard. Willard's contribution to countless lives cannot be overstated and his approach to the spiritual disciplines has truly been a soul saving venture. Willard affirms the loneliness and isolation that is existent in our world, "loneliness is loosed upon the landscape. It haunts the penthouse and the rectory, the executive suite and the millionaire's mansion, as well as the barren apartment, the assembly line, the cocktail bar, and the city streets. It is, as Mother Teresa of Calcutta once said, the leprosy of the modern world."¹⁵⁰

Willard asserts that lonely people are those who have not fully realized the abiding presence of God in their lives. He infers that the believer can and must maintain a sense of God's abiding presence, "In this life with God, his presence banishes our aloneness and makes real the meaning and full purpose of human existence. This union with God consists chiefly in a conversational relationship with God while we are consistently and deeply engaged as his friend and co-laborer in the affairs of the kingdom of the heavens."¹⁵¹

Willard also claims that with the presence of God comes an ability to do with God what we could never do independent of him, "Life with results beyond the natural always depends on intimate

¹⁴⁸ Barna Research Group and Pepperdine University, *The State of Pastors*, 38.

¹⁴⁹ Donald R. Hands and Wayne L. Fehr, *Spiritual Wholeness for Clergy: A New Psychology of Intimacy with God, Self, and Others* (Washington, DC: Alban Institute, 1993), 67.

¹⁵⁰ Dallas Willard and Jan Johnson, *Hearing God: Developing a Conversational Relationship with God*, Updated and expanded (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Books, 2012), 61.

¹⁵¹ Willard and Johnson, *Hearing God*, 75.

interactions between us and God, who is therefore present. These results could never come from you alone.”¹⁵² The power to live life freely and empowered is highlighted, “Through the ages, the sustaining power of the Beloved Presence has made the sickbed sweet and the graveside triumphant; transformed broken hearts and relationships; brought glory to drudgery, poverty and old age; and turned the martyr’s stake or noose into a place of coronation.”¹⁵³

Willard also notes some of the inherent gifts and danger in solitude, “But solitude, like all the disciplines of the Spirit, carries its risks. In solitude we confront our own soul with its obscure forces and conflicts that escape our attention when we are interacting with others. Thus, ‘solitude is a terrible trial, for it serves to crack open and burst apart the shell of our superficial securities. It opens out to us the unknown abyss that we all carry within us... and discloses the fact that these abysses are haunted.’ We can only survive solitude if we cling to Christ there. And yet what we find of him in that solitude enables us to return to society as free persons.”¹⁵⁴ That God calls to humanity, leads humanity, and sometimes forces humanity into solitude is a beautiful and terrifying thing.

Like any discipline, spiritual or otherwise, Willard contends that solitude must remain a consistent practice and may be the foundation stone upon which all other disciplines rest on, “Locked into interaction with the human beings that make up our fallen world, it is all but impossible to grow in grace as one should. Just try fasting, prayer, service, giving, or even celebration without the preparation accomplished in withdrawal, and you will turn into despair by your own efforts, very likely abandoning your attempt altogether.”¹⁵⁵

KEY VOICE 2 - RUTH HALEY BARTON

Dr. Ruth Haley Barton has been a practitioner and thought leader in the area of Christian spirituality and formation for several decades. Her stance on solitude is quite different and compelling. In the foreword of Barton’s book “Invitation to Silence and Solitude”, Dallas Willard defines the practices of silence and solitude this way, “It is an invitation to enter more deeply into the intimacy of relationship with the One who waits just outside the noise and busyness of our lives. It is an invitation to communication and communion with the one who is always present even when our awareness has been dulled by distraction. It is an invitation to the adventure of spiritual transformation in the deepest places of our being, and adventure that will result in greater freedom and authenticity and

¹⁵² Willard and Johnson, *Hearing God*, 66.

¹⁵³ Willard and Johnson, *Hearing God*, 61.

¹⁵⁴ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (Pymble, NSW; New York, NY: HarperCollins e-books, 2009), <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=267732>, 161.

¹⁵⁵ Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 161.

surrender to God then we have yet experienced.”¹⁵⁶ Barton describes the practices this way, “To enter into solitude and silence is to take the spiritual life seriously. It is to take seriously our need to quiet the noise of our lives, to cease the constant striving of human effort, to pull away from our absorption in human relationships or a time in order to give God our undivided attention.”¹⁵⁷

Many, perhaps most estimate that solitude or isolation are birthed out of a desperate place and therefore must be bad. In her discussion of silence and solitude, Barton states that desperation is actually a key to our spiritual journey, “Desperation is a really good thing in the spiritual life. Desperation causes us to be open to radical solutions, willing to take all manner of risk in order to find what we are looking for. Desperate ones speak with an all-consuming intensity, for they know that their life depends on it.”¹⁵⁸

Throughout the scripture, in the lives of prophets such as Jonah and most especially Elijah it is seen that the Lord God will use any and all measures to get His people to the place where He desires for them to be. If the people of God will seek the place of solitude with the Lord, so be it. If God’s people need to be guided to a place of solitude, God will oblige by allowing desperate situations to invade their space. Barton notes, “Looking back on my own beginnings with silence and solitude, I know that without desperation I would have been much less willing to face these challenges. I doubt I would have been willing to enter into such unfamiliar territory - the silent places of the soul is not sure what one will find, the risky quest for God beyond wordy prayers and content laden sermons and bible study - and stay there long enough for the waters of my soul to become clear. Without the desire for something more, I probably would have just kept on doing what I was doing.”

¹⁵⁹

Barton asserts that loneliness or solitude may be a tool of God to lead us away from or to different situations on our faith journey. She states about Elijah, “On top of the willingness to walk away from the peopled places of his life, places that had a bit of definition, Elijah had an even deeper willingness: he was willing to walk into the emptiness of the wilderness in order to find what he was looking for.”¹⁶⁰ When an individual is willing to look at his walk with God from varying angles, it is likely that he may find varying facets of what God is attempting to produce in him. Dr. Barton helps to give a different view of how isolation may be a tremendous blessing in life.

¹⁵⁶ Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence*, 18.

¹⁵⁷ Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence*, 34

¹⁵⁸ Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence*, 30.

¹⁵⁹ Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence*, 31-32.

¹⁶⁰ Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence*, 87.

KEY VOICE 3 - EUGENE PETERSON

"Eugene Peterson was an American Presbyterian minister, scholar, theologian, author, and poet. He wrote over 30 books and was the James M. Houston Professor of Spiritual Theology at Regent College in Vancouver, British Columbia, from 1992 to 1998."¹⁶¹ The inclusion of his work is to refocus ministers on the work to which we are truly called. One of the many reasons for ministerial burnout which leads to other spiritual maladies is a misalignment of priorities and purpose. Our spiritual overseers and our congregation have a part to play in that tragedy, but truly our own hearts are led astray to chase golden calves of our own making. Peterson's call for pastors to return to the mission of God is both challenging and inspiring.

Speaking of ministers, churches, and entire denominations getting off track, Peterson states, "It is interesting to listen to the comments that outsiders, particularly those from third world countries, make on the religion they observe in North America. What they noticed mostly is not the greed, the silliness, but narcissism. I appreciate the size and prosperity of our churches, the energy, and the technology, but they wonder at the conspicuous absence of the cross, the phobic avoidance of suffering, the puzzling indifference to community and relationships of intimacy."¹⁶²

Truly, Peterson's work is a call to the heart of the pastor to return to what is right and good. Describing his own heart's longing as a struggling young pastor, Peterson recalls having a conversation with his church board about the scope of his position, "I want to study God's word long and carefully so that when I stand before you and preach and teach, I will be accurate. I want to pray slowly and lovingly, so that my relationship with God will be inward and honest. And I want to be with you, often and leisurely so that we can recognize each other as close companions on the way of the cross and be available for counsel and encouragement to each other."¹⁶³ This is the heart of most every pastor. The business of running the church so often impedes deep spirituality and thwarts the true work of the minister.

Peterson also puts to word some of the thoughts that flash through the minds of modern-day pastors, "The people in our congregations are, in fact, out shopping for idols. They enter our churches with the same mindset in which they go to the shopping mall, to get something that will please them or satisfy an appetite or need."¹⁶⁴ This and other reasons lead us to accommodate consumerism and away from the true mission of the ministry. Peterson further quipped, "John Calvin saw the human heart as a relentlessly efficient factory for producing idols. Congregations

¹⁶¹ Anne Grethe Kroger Nielson, *Come to Me*, July 5, 2020, September 5, 2021, <https://www.danishchurchsocal.com/sermons/2020/7/5/come-to-me?cv=1>.

¹⁶² Eugene H. Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant: An Exploration in Vocational Holiness* (Grand Rapids, Mich. : Leominster, England: W.B. Eerdmans ; Gracewing, 1992).

¹⁶³ Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant*, 39.

¹⁶⁴ Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant*, 81.

commonly see the pastor as the quality control engineer in the factory. The moment we accept the position, though, we defect from our vocation."¹⁶⁵

The role of the minister in this era of church work has changed. So much more is expected from both the congregation and the minister. The role of the local church pastor needs a revival, a retooling. Chief servant, sage advisor, friend of God - these are appropriate titles for the minister. But there is little notoriety, appreciation, or adulation in any of those things. "Most pastoral work takes place in obscurity: deciphering grace in the shadows, searching out meaning in a difficult text, blowing on the embers of a hard-used life. This is hard work and not conspicuously glamorous. But in these everyday obscurities in which we do most of our work, if we stay with them long enough, we often have the sense of being genuinely needed."¹⁶⁶

- Organizations need leaders. People need pastors.

KEY VOICE 4 - DR. BOB BURNS, DR. TASHA D. CHAPMAN, DR. DONALD GUTHRIE

Drs. Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie combined to study the lives of pastors over a seven-year period and compiled their evidence into a book titled, "Resilient Ministry, What Pastors Told Us About Surviving and Thriving". In general, the book has tremendous insight into the lives of pastors and their spouses. Specifically related to the topic of burnout, depression, and isolation in ministry, the results indicated that those feelings are quite common, "Depression can be very complicated, with roots that go much deeper than a response to immediate circumstances. Regardless of the reasons, it was commonplace to find pastors struggling with these feelings. One admitted, 'I am not in a good state. I kept thinking, "I wouldn't mind if the Lord took me home." 'I'm not thinking of sucking a gun or anything, but when those thoughts cross your mind, you go, "Whoa, I'm losing it."'"¹⁶⁷

While the authors confirm that loneliness and isolation are tremendous problems that exist in the life of ministers, their study also revealed a potential remedy, "All leaders - and pastors in particular - can experience deep loneliness. A summit participant shared, 'I've found that the times in my life I've been isolated the most are when I'm a senior pastor.' Another assessed, 'I am dangerously isolated.' To counteract the loneliness of ministry leadership, pastors must be intentional in developing relationships."¹⁶⁸ "Every human being needs relationships. at the time of creation God declared, 'it is not good that man should be alone' (Genesis 2:18). Even people with the most

¹⁶⁵ Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant*, 81.

¹⁶⁶ Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant*, 86.

¹⁶⁷ Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 73.

¹⁶⁸ Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 81.

introverted personalities meet others with whom they can share their lives. So, pastors, as persons created in the image of God, need to be in relationship.”¹⁶⁹

The ultimate findings of the research (which was funded by the Lilly Endowment, Inc.) indicated that involvement in peer groups has a profound impact on ministers and they benefit in many ways. “They (peer groups) strengthen their (ministers) ability to deal with conflict in their congregations. They enhance their understanding of ministry skills. They improve in emotional health. They develop better self-care habits. They experience church growth. They find a place of relational safety and support in the group.”¹⁷⁰ Feedback from pastors who joined a peer group in this experiment reported the following:

“Learning when positive change occurs most deeply in the context of relationships.”

“It was a treat having freedom from being ‘on’ all the time and to be able to share with mutual understanding about our lives and work.”

“The Pastor’s Summit was about our health, not the health of our church.”

“My Summit Group is the only place I can be myself and laugh from my gut.”

“I don’t want to lose this because I don’t have this anyplace else. I hope that if I veer off, you all will come and get me. Because I don’t know who in the world, literally, will come and get me if you don’t.”¹⁷¹

What is apparent is that there is a problem of loneliness and isolation among Christian ministers. Another lesson learned is that sometimes it is the Lord himself who is trying to lead people into solitude so that they may grow and learn and love. Additionally, God meets humanity in the isolation and sustains, nourishes, and teaches them in the midst of it. We are never alone, and God’s design is for the Ecclesia to dwell among those who can encourage, strengthen, and mutually champion one another’s’ hopes and dreams.

Section 3: Synthesis and Conclusion

DISCOVERY

Perhaps one of the great stumbling blocks which has been laid by our enemy is persuading ministry leaders to believe that since they are experiencing isolation, everyone else must be fine. It turns out that everyone else is not fine. It is very apparent from the literature and research that the subjects

¹⁶⁹ Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 81.

¹⁷⁰ Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 81.

¹⁷¹ Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 88.

of loneliness, depression, and isolation in the lives of ministers has been written about extensively. As more and more sources were explored regarding this subject, the focus shifted. The thought of trying to convince an audience that ministerial isolation is a viable issue which needs to be addressed morphed into, "Where and how can ministers receive the training and support to understand and deal with the loneliness that they may be experiencing."

Many sources acknowledge that the challenges of pastoring today can be overwhelming. Many pastors fill more roles in this era of ministry than those of generations past. In some church cultures, the pastor is expected to be proficient - if not an expert in many fields including: preaching, teaching, finances, visionary leadership, pastoral care, counseling, staff development and management, landscape design and upkeep, building maintenance, community relations, social media director, and the list goes on. It is not only impractical for these expectations to be in place, but also impossible. Unrealistic expectations are one of the tripwires which often triggers feelings of inadequacy and failure leading to a myriad of more harmful issues.

From Adam to Christ and beyond, the call to come away with God is seen and heard. It is clear from the scripture that God's desire is to be with us, alone with us. However, we also witness those throughout the Bible who refuse to take time away from people to be with God. This rarely ends well. The steadfast love of the Lord is so strong and so jealous that if humanity ignores God's call to intimacy, God will oftentimes initiate an event or series of events that will lead humanity back to oneness with him. That series of events is rarely invited or welcomed.

TENSIONS, DISAGREEMENTS, PRESSURE POINTS

One of the pressure points that was encountered in the reading was the lack of a concrete plan of action for those in the throes of isolation. When a person falls into a pit and cannot seem to find a way out, they need a practical and proven plan to follow. While certainly every individual is different and God deals differently with them, some sort of universal action plan as a starting place would be very useful. Perhaps even more importantly that finding a path through isolation would be a plan to avoid it altogether.

There is also the tension between discerning whether a person is in a season of isolation of their own making or if God is attempting to lead them to a place of solitude so that communion can be had with the creator. Did Elijah find himself in the cave at Horeb because he was faithless, intimidated, and depressed or was it the Lord who manipulated the circumstances so that encouragement, strength, and vision could be imparted to the prophet? The answer seems to be a resounding yes! Of course, Jesus showed that private solitude with his Father was of the utmost importance and yet we know that even he experienced a sense of abandonment and isolation while on the cross. In every case, whether seeking to flee from God's presence or running into it, the Lord is so gracious to meet us there.

Several factors seem to be consistent from the reading: 1) Loneliness was never God's desire for humanity, 2) God does desire solitude with each of his children and, 3) Individuals tend to flourish

most when they find a balance between fostering a relationship that includes both solitude with God and life within the community of believers.

GAPS

One of the major gaps that was discovered in the material, which was studied may be small to most, but not many sources were found for those in the Pentecostal/Charismatic streams of Christianity. Many years of experience in this movement have fostered the belief that the tendency among Charismatics is to focus more on the external workings of the Spirit than the deep work of the heart of the individual. The idea of spiritual formation which could assist in seasons of isolation or even to avoid those seasons altogether is strikingly and painfully absent from the toolbox of the Assemblies of God.

Another divide that has not been adequately crossed is the production of material dealing with matters of emotional and spiritual isolation among those in the ministry. While more formational training leading to better coping mechanisms may be available to ministers in other faith traditions, the ministers in the "Spirit Filled" movement(s) are often left to work it out on their own.

A last gap that needs to be further explored is that of preparing for seasons of isolation within by entering the context of small groups or cohorts. Ruth Haley Barton explores the subject deeply and has an institute which would be wonderful to look further into. The three persons of God have been in a loving community from eternity past. Jesus functioned in the context of community while preparing for his passion. Surely there is tremendous value in learning and preparing in community.

CONCLUSION

There certainly is a need to further develop systems within the Assemblies of God movement which could enable ministers to work through and potentially maneuver around some of the pitfalls surrounding ministerial depression, burnout, and isolation. The goal is for ministers to learn and grow in community to cultivate the skills and tools necessary to help them achieve long term ministry success.

Appendix C—Milestone 3 Design Workshop Report

NPO Statement

Assemblies of God pastors can expand their capacity for lifelong thriving by avoiding or recovering from burnout.

NPO Scope and Constraints

Non-negotiables for any one of the proposed projects must include: 1) An absolute commitment to confidentiality among the participants, 2) Truthfulness and honesty among the participants, 3) An openness to new methods and practices, and 4) A desire for transformation. Some of the boundaries of the project(s) may include denominational affiliation, length of ministerial tenure, and geographical location. Cultivation of original ideas which fit the ministry context, the cost of design and printing a legitimate product, along with the input of time and energy will all be significant, cost wise.

NPO Context

The NPO setting would of course vary depending on the varying models. One model would be in more of a classroom setting while another may function best in a cohort style format. The NPO ministry context primarily addresses the Assemblies of God ministerial fellowship in the Peninsular Florida District of the Assemblies of God. This particular district consists of over three hundred churches and twelve hundred credentialed ministers reaching from Jacksonville, Florida to the Florida Keys. Because of the demographic makeup of our ministerial fellowship, the project would predominantly consist of white male middle class pastors or ordines ranging in age from their early twenties to mid-seventies. Depending on the selected model, the optimal group size for each model would vary. The depth of conversation and spiritual transformation formation also differ depending on the ministry model.

Root Causes

While discovering stakeholder perspectives, numerous root causes which lead to clergy fatigue and burnout were presented.

1. Continuing, lifelong spiritual transformation is not taught and is not a priority.
2. There tends to be a competitive spirit among ministers and churches.
3. Pastors do not trust one another with heart level issues.
4. At the highest levels, it feels like some churches are lauded as "significant" and by default the others are made to feel insignificant.
5. There does not seem to be an inclination or an opportunity for ministers to be heard regarding their concerns or needs. The leadership structure is not designed for or executed with a sense of urgency or relevancy.

6. There are no readily accessible opportunities for continuing education / spiritual formation or relational engagement for ministers (retreat, seminars, mentoring, etc.).
7. Very little pastoral care is available until someone is in an ethical or moral dilemma. That kind of intervention is reactive more than preventative.

Definition of 'Done'

"Done" would mean that pastors would attain the knowledge, tools, and relationships to thrive in the ministry for the entirety of their ministry.

Three Big Ideas

1. A handbook for church boards and pastors outlining how they might partner to create a long term, healthy pastor.
2. A class (or an addendum to a class) addressing pastoral health which would be added for those seeking credentials.
3. An overall system for pastoral health executed at an executive level.
 - 3 Concept Pitches.

A handbook for church boards and pastors outlining how they might partner to create a long term, healthy pastor.

Audience

This handbook is intended for pastors and church leaders who desire their pastors to thrive in long term ministry leadership.

NPO

Assemblies of God pastors can expand their capacity for lifelong thriving by avoiding or recovering from burnout.

Benefit

A pastor who is spiritually, emotionally, and relationally healthy will be able to lead out of a place of abundance and strength.

Approach

The approach to meeting the needs of pastors will be that of educating and modeling pastors and church leaders.

Risks

This approach may fail because it assumes that people are aware there is a need for the handbook before they may actually need it.

Assumptions/hypotheses to Test

This would be testing the long-term spiritual, emotional, and relational health of the pastor and their sense of “thriving”.

Benchmarks of Success

1) A questionnaire which establishes a baseline of perceived spiritual, emotional, and relational health. 2) A current scale of “thriving”. 3) A follow up questionnaire to address results.

Other Approaches

There are many other approaches to producing healthy pastors. Some of those include books, workshops, retreats, and cohorts. This approach deals not only with the pastors themselves but also those who co-labor among them and have a vested interest in their well-being.

A class (or an addendum to a class) addressing pastoral health which would be added for those seeking credentials.

Audience

This class is intended for potential pastors or ordines who desire to thrive spiritually, emotionally, and relationally in long term ministry leadership.

NPO

Assemblies of God pastors can expand their capacity for lifelong thriving by avoiding or recovering from burnout.

Benefit

The minister would receive needed tools for successful long-term flourishing. I would benefit by being able to assist in the process.

Approach

Students would receive some needed tools from instructors who have experience in leading a healthy and successful life in a ministry context.

Risks

This approach may fail because it could be perceived as unnecessary by students in their current context.

Assumptions/hypotheses to Test

A quantifiable, fixed number such as “How many ministers are still in ministry at the five-, ten-, or twenty-year mark” versus previously recorded numbers.

Benchmarks of Success

A baseline of current perceived spiritual, emotional, and relational health versus a follow up questionnaire(s) to address expected results.

Other Approaches

This approach is unique in the sense that the course material would be presented to those who are not enrolled in college or seminary yet are pursuing ministry credentials. Also, the material would ideally be presented by practitioners who could add their experience to the material.

A cohort style system for pastoral health offered at an executive level.

Audience

This cohort-based experience would be directed at and focused on those in preparation for or currently in pastoral ministry.

NPO

Assemblies of God pastors can expand their capacity for lifelong thriving by avoiding or recovering from burnout.

Benefit

The minister and spouse would receive relational and practical assistance for long term flourishing. I would benefit by being able to assist in the process.

Approach

Using a unique variety of tools including meetings, retreat(s), books, relationships, and encouragement, the minister could potentially avoid or overcome burnout.

Risks

This approach may fail because it requires a significant investment of time, energy, and resources of both the leader and participant.

Assumptions/hypotheses to Test

Can Assemblies of God pastors successfully avoid or recover from ministry burnout and thrive for the entirety of their ministries?

Benchmarks of Success

Benchmarks of success would require periodic follow up with the participants using quantifiable questions regarding perceived spiritual, emotional, and relational health.

Other Approaches

This approach is unique in the sense that emotional, relational, and spiritual health is much needed in our denominational structure but is not being widely addressed. Many ministers are not properly prepared for the struggle that they will or are facing while pursuing their pastoral calling.

Design Workshop Stakeholders

The Design Workshop Stakeholders included:

- One male lead pastor
- One female co-lead pastor
- One retired minister.

One-on-One Interviews

The roles of the three one on one interviewees were: college professor, denominational leader, and pastoral care director for an Assemblies of God district.

Annotated Bibliography

Hebden, Isaac. "The Avoidance of Burnout Among Open Bible Pastors: Creating Healthy and Vibrant Leaders in Ministry" DMin diss., George Fox University, 2020,

<https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1375&context=dmin>

This dissertation deals exclusively with the perils of vocational ministry among Open Bible Church pastors and how these pitfalls can often contribute to emotional fatigue, disillusionment, and exhaustion, all commonly referred to as "burnout." This project sought to discover how ministers can remain spiritually healthy while actively leading the local church. Hebden quotes Jesus, "I came to give life, and give it abundantly" (John 10:10). The inference is that since Jesus espoused that abundant life for individuals can be a reality, pastors can also experience a "vibrant, fruitful life in the ministry". Hebden helps pastors to identify the issue of burnout in their lives and points out some steps in developing a plan of action to emerge from ministry fatigue and burnout.

Shigematsu, Ken. *God in My Everything: How an Ancient Rhythm Helps Busy People Enjoy God*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2013.

"God In My Everything" has been one of the most transformation inducing reads in many years. Shigematsu writes of the Benedictine "rules" in a way that makes them attainable and malleable. The topics which Shigematsu covers such as sabbath, sacred reading, friendship, rest, and dealing

with money are not new or revelatory in many senses but he speaks of them as friends who invite us on a journey which brings us close to God. The exercise of cultivating and living by a rule of life has been and I believe will continue to be life and spirit altering. More and more I am realizing that when coupled with a disciplined spiritual life, the Spirit enables growth to be multiplied.

Yanke, Roy. "Isolation and Loneliness - The Danger Zone for Pastors" Partners In Renewal. May 2013. <https://pirministries.org/isolation-and-loneliness-the-danger-zone-for-pastors/>

This article addresses the problem of loneliness and isolation among pastors. The author chronicles his "crashing and burning" while involved in full time pastoral ministry. Yanke points out that pastors need to be reminded that they are not just pastors, they are people who were created for relationship. Some of the proposed solutions offered to combat loneliness and isolation include: 1) Acknowledging the need for relationship - "While there are some things that only a relationship with God Himself can supply, there are things that He wants us to experience in connection with others like us. 2) Not hiding - Reaching out to other, like-minded ministry people to come out of the cave of loneliness. 3) Sharing our heart, and not just our heads - To be able to share your true and unfiltered feelings is a rare and precious gift. 4) "Refusing the Shallows" - Being involved with a regular accountability group. This article is helpful in introducing some design elements in the next phase of the project.

Appendix: Documentation

APPENDIX 1: DESIGN WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

The Design Workshop was held at People's Church in Winter Haven, Florida on October 14, 2021, from 9 am until 2 pm. The agenda was as follows:

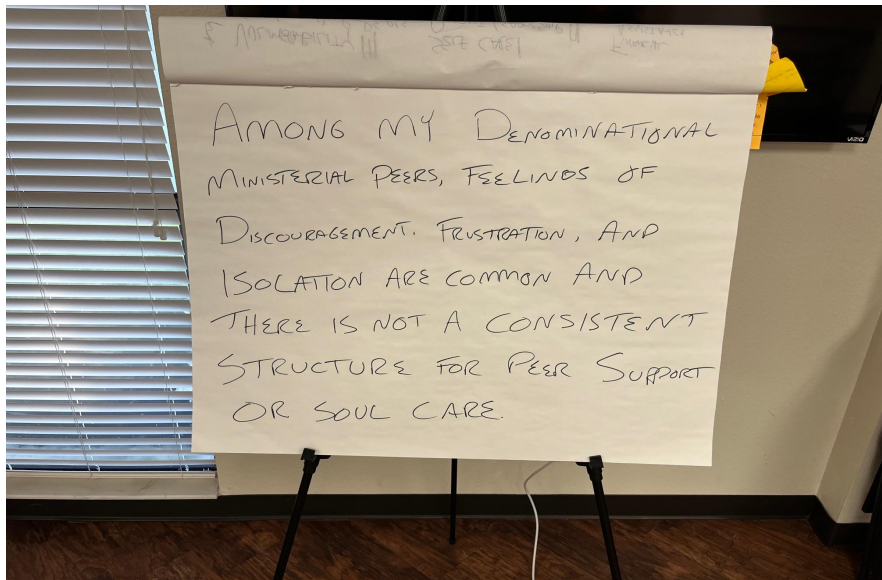
- A complimentary continental breakfast was served.
- Participants were introduced to one another, and the basic schedule of the day was outlined.
- Three exercises were worked through,
- "Anti-Problem" - "By asking players to identify ways to solve the problem opposite to their current problem, it becomes easier to see where a current solution might be going astray or where an obvious solution isn't being applied."¹⁷²
- "Start, Stop, Continue" - This exercise is broad enough to work well as an opening or closing exercise. It's useful in framing discussion at "problem-solving" meetings, or as a way to brainstorm aspirational steps toward a vision.
- "Make a World" - All successful ventures start with a vision and some small, initial effort toward crystallization. The purpose of Make a World is to create a three-dimensional model of a desired future state."¹⁷³
- Lunch was served.
- The Napkin ideas were formulated.
- The stakeholders who were present included: one current male pastor of a small to medium sized church, one female co-pastor of a small to medium sized church, and one male former pastor who ministered in medium to large churches in size. Three other three stakeholders were not able to be present for the workshop for various reasons. Because we were missing half of the expected participants, some of the activities took less time and yielded less ideas than anticipated. Scaling the workshop experience is difficult because attendance was so scarce. On a scale of one to five, I'd give the overall experience a three. At least in my estimation there seemed to be a lack of energy in the room regarding the exercises. In the end, I believe some good ideas came forth that can be built on. God was not surprised by anything that happened and I'm certain that the right project will emerge.

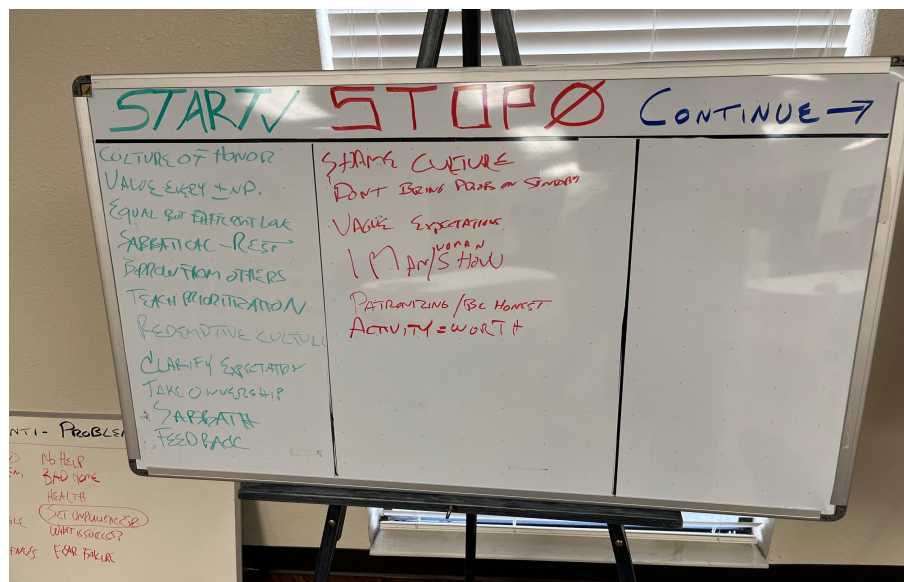
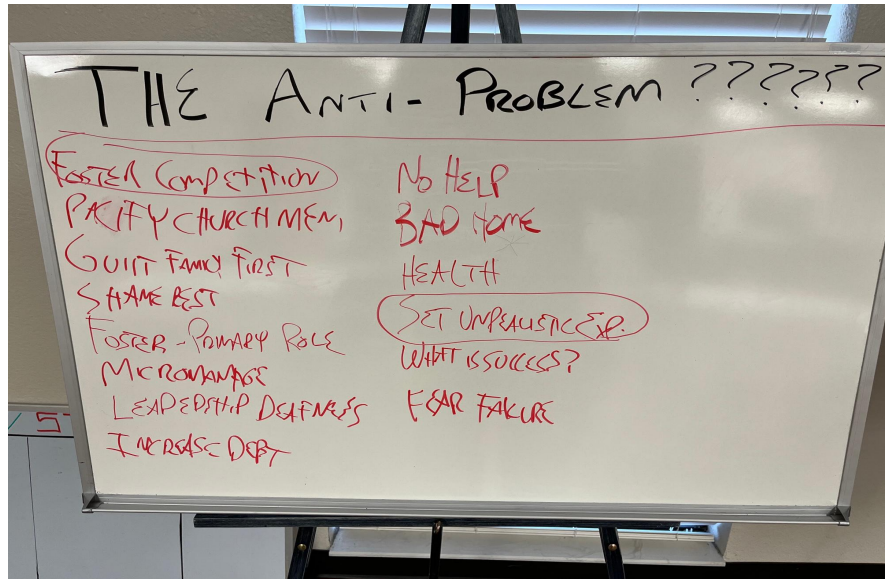
¹⁷² Dave Gray, Sunni Brown, and James Macanufo, *Gamestorming: A Playbook for Innovators, Rulebreakers, and Changemakers* (Beijing Boston Farnham Sebastopol Tokyo: O'Reilly, 2010)," 80.

¹⁷³ Gray, Brown, and Macanufo, *Gamestorming*, 249.

APPENDIX 2: DESIGN WORKSHOP DOCUMENTATION







WORKSHOP NOTES

- Work on NPO
- Games
 - Anti Problem
 - Start Stop Continue
 - Make a World
- Where does this start
- When does this start
- How does this start

The Anti - Problem

- Keep ministers segregated
- Our significant churches
- Tier churches & leaders
- Stagnation
- No Vision
- Lack of Direction
- Listening is a key word
- Shutting down voices
- No ministers retreat
- Never check up on ministers, No pastoral care
- No affirmation
- No mentoring
- Don't be relevant
- Fear of legal issues
- People infect people

As Individuals

- Excuse our behavior when others hurt
- Not proactive in love
- Being powerless people
- Have an expectation of failure or bad
- Seek the negative, non solutions
- Afford to be generous with thoughts, words, finances
- Isolate ourselves
- Self protection form the church
- Live in fear of hurt
- Don't engage with people
- Don't have a confessor/friend
- Lack of boundaries8

Start Stop Continue

- District
- Practical
- Start
 - Regular meetings for pastors
 - Fellowship
 - Prayer
 - Yearly retreat
 - Pastoral Care

- Training
- Stop
 - Levels of significant
 - Stop minimizing
 - Isolation
 - Event driven
 - Valuing presentation instead of presence
 - Program driven agenda's
 - Numbers over health
- Solutions
 - Executive Level Pastoral Care
 - Connection to ministers
 - Retreat
 - Regular meetings
 - Pastoral care/mental health
 - Confidentiality
 - Online Forum
 - Training for presbyters (how to talk and communicate)
 - Continuing Training (practical) /Education
 - Cohort not accountability
- School of ministry?
- Teaching self responsibility
 - Pain management
 - Growing a healthy you
 - Growing a healthy church
 - Sabbath
 - Grace filled message for pastors
 - Perfectionism - fear of failure
 - Money
- Local church Level - Church manual
 - Board - Pastor Relations
 - Sabbath
 - Expectations
 - Sabbatical
 - Salary/Benefit considerations

APPENDIX 3: ONE-PAGE POST-WORKSHOP MESSAGE TO STAKEHOLDERS

Dear XXXXXXXXXX,

I want to thank you for giving your time, energy, and wisdom in attending my workshop on October 14, 2021. As I told you during the workshop, the *Need, Problem, or Opportunity* that we were addressing was: "Assemblies of God pastors can expand their capacity for lifelong thriving by avoiding or recovering from burnout." The three big ideas that you were able to commend were as follows: 1) A handbook for church boards and pastors outlining how they might partner to create a long term, healthy pastor. 2) A class (or an addendum to a class) addressing pastoral health which would be added for those seeking credentials. 3) An overall system for pastoral health executed at an executive level. The definition of being done with this project would be as follows: Pastors would attain the knowledge, tools, and relationships to thrive in the ministry for the entirety of their ministry. The benchmarks of success would require periodic follow up with the participants using quantifiable questions regarding perceived spiritual, emotional, and relational health. One of the key insights from the workshop was that several ministers who were in the room have experienced lack at the spiritual, emotional, and relational level and had at least flirted with ministry burnout and that addressing the NPO is an important endeavor. If you have any additional comments, ideas, or direction please touch base with me. Again, I appreciate you so very much

APPENDIX 4: ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS DOCUMENTATION

"By engaging in spiritual transformation and peer support, Assemblies of God pastors increase their capacity for preventing and recovering from discouragement, isolation, and burnout."

3 Big Ideas

1. "Manual" for pastors & churches discussing pastoral health.
 - Do we know of resources?
2. "Manual" DSOM course or addendum to a course.
3. Development of a system to help pastors thrive for the long haul.
 - Definition of done
 - Rough draft of 3 Concept Pitches
 - Other key insights
 - Areas that need more research
 - With what do you agree?
 - Why?
 - With what do you disagree?
 - Why?

Synthesis of interview 1 - University Professor

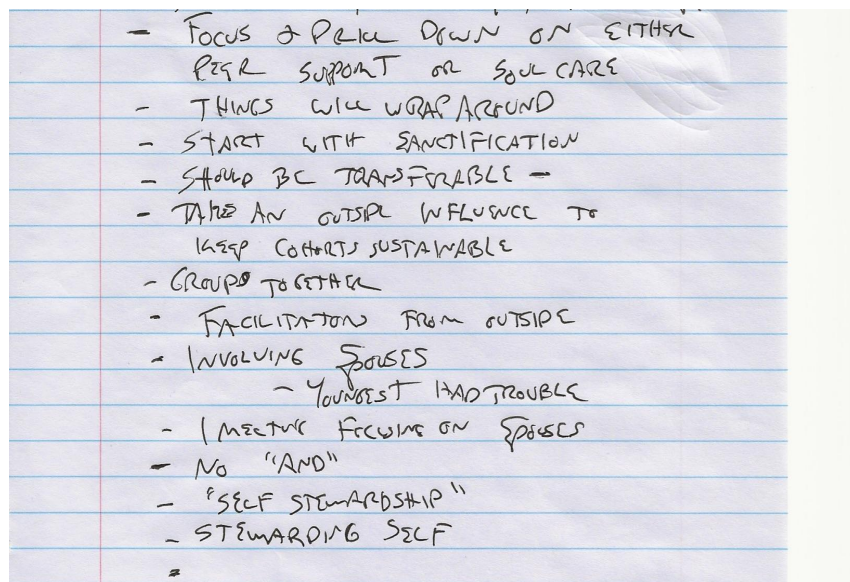
- The interviewee saw value in each potential model but specifically mentioned a cohort style journey for those who are experiencing ministry fatigue and or burnout.
- Drill down on either Peer Support or Soul Care (both may not be possible but there will be natural wrap around).
- Start at Sanctification (being set apart for the Lord's purposes).
- An "outside" expert voice may be the most effective in helping denominational colleagues.
- Try to involve spouses in any healing process.
- Teach "Self-Stewardship" as the means forward.

Cohorts

- Are these ongoing?
- Are you aware of any group doing this on a large scale?

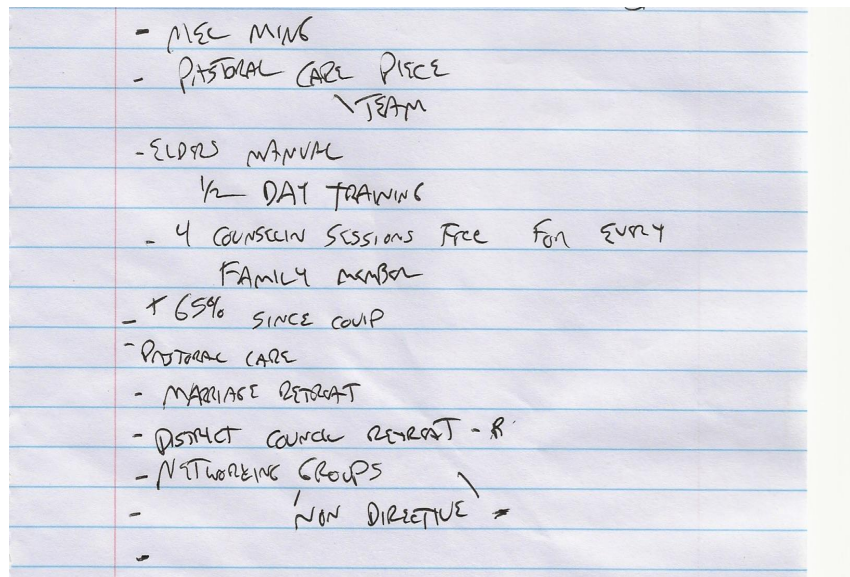
Peer Groups

- Could this be a pre-cohort?
- Post Cohort peer group improvements?



Synthesis of interview 2 - Pastoral Care Director

- The interviewee agreed that all three models could be beneficial and asserted that an overall approach from a denomination executive level has been very productive in their context.
- This interviewee administrates a model wherein regional "Elders" coordinate pastoral care for all the ministers in their district.
- Some of the services offered to ministers include:
 - Hand delivered gifts for occasions such as:
 - New ministers to the district.
 - Family births or deaths.
 - Significant anniversaries (personal or church).
- Four free sessions of professional counseling per year for anyone in the pastor's family.
- A paid annual marriage retreat.
- Networking groups to facilitate spiritual friendships.



Synthesis of interview 3 - Denominational Leader

- The interviewee did not like the use of "Spiritual Formation" language. They stated that it is not the *native tongue* of Assemblies of God people and would be ambiguous to many. The interviewee stated that I would potentially have to educate people about what formation was before they could even attempt to receive it.
- Sabbath and Sabbatical were of particular interest to the interviewee, and they recommended a special emphasis on those.
- Having "journey partners" was also a topic of conversation. Having someone or some group to be able to assist on the journey is of vital importance.
- It was stated that ministers are the most unaccountable people in the workforce. Ministers can do as much or as little as they please without much oversight. Self-Regulation was of utmost importance to this interviewee.

- DON CLAY MENTAL HEALTH CARE
 - 38K MINISTERS
 - DR. CROSBY
 - SABBATHICAL
 - SOUL CARE - RUTH HALEY BARTON
 - 2ND MONKEY IN CAGE
 - DON CICHÉE
 - SABBATH, SABBATICAL
 - UNACCOUNTABLE - MINISTERS
 - WHAT DO YOU WANT TO TALK ABOUT HERE
 THAT YOU CAN'T TALK ABOUT ANYWHERE ELSE
 - COMMON GUIDELINES
 -
 N.W. DISTRICT - DON ROSS - DON DETRIK DIST. SEC - DON PE
 NORCAL NEV. DAVID COLE - davee & northwestern minstr

DEC 15 - JAN 15
 JAN 9 - PREACHING - CLYNN & AG. CLK
 COURTNEY
 MORAL FAILURE

SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Appendix D—Milestone 4 Design Research Report

Background Research Essay on the Emerging Solution

What I Thought I Knew

Upon embarking on this DMin journey I knew that whatever the final product of the research, workshops, and interviews were, I wanted to assist ministers in my fellowship. Since I have been a minister for over two decades now, I thought I knew what we needed to flourish in ministry for a substantial length of time.

I thought I knew that burnout is a major problem in our fellowship, the statistics bear it out. In a survey of Assemblies of God ministers, "Approximately 65 % of those surveyed were either suffering from burnout or on the verge of burnout."¹⁷⁴ I thought I knew the reasons for burnout. Authors and pastoral advocates H.B. London Jr. and Neil B. Weisman cite some very alarming statistics about active clergymen: "Of the 500,000 full-time, vocational pastors in the United States today, approximately one out of every four are experiencing 'burnout'.

- 60% work more than 60 hours per week.
- 90% feel they are inadequately trained to cope with ministry demands.
- 40% report a serious conflict with a parishioner at least once a month.
- 37% confess to inappropriate sexual behavior with someone in their church (which is about the same percentage as the general population).
- 70% say they get less than seven hours of sleep each night.
- 75% do not take a regular day off for Sabbath rest.
- 40% reported being depressed or worn out "some or most of the time"
- Not surprisingly, 40% of these pastors have considered leaving their ministries in the last three months alone."¹⁷⁵

One of the great problems in our church culture is that we wear "busy" as a badge of honor. Many in the ministry quote Christmas Evans, a famous Welsh preacher from the early 19th century, who

¹⁷⁴ Joseph D. Visker, Taylor Rider, and Anastasia Humphers-Ginther. "Ministry-Related Burnout and Stress Coping Mechanisms Among Assemblies of God-Ordained Clergy in Minnesota." *Journal of Religion and Health* 56, no. 3 (June 2017): 951-61. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-016-0295-7>.

¹⁷⁵ H. B. London, *Pastors at Greater Risk* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2014), 25.

supposedly said, "I'd rather burn out than rust out in the service of the Lord." One of Evans's contemporaries, James Berkeley, is said to have retorted, "I admire the bravado. It sounds dedicated, bold, and stirring. However, when I view the burn-outs and the almost burn-outs who lie by the ecclesiastical road, the glory fails to reach me. Is there not a third alternative?"¹⁷⁶ I thought I knew that burnout is the result of a slow and painful process of losing oneself in the "doing" of the ministry externals such as working too much or not getting enough rest. William Willimon states, "From what I observe, our pastoral problem of constancy is more a matter of 'blackout' or 'brownout,' the gradual dissipation of meaning in ministry, a blurring of vision, the inability to keep the theological rationale for ministry that is necessary to enliven our imagination. We wake up one day and no longer have a reason or purpose for doing the things that the church expects us, as pastors, to do."¹⁷⁷

I thought I knew what the solutions to burnout might look like. Clearly, building some formational components into the life of clergy people would be a key to combating the "brownout" or "blackout" that hits before burnout. Adjusting schedules to allow for Sabbath keeping and establishing better boundaries would also play a part in helping pastors to become healthier. As my research and questions regarding burnout progressed, indeed the externals did surface time and again but so did the relational aspect of ministry. Loneliness and isolation were issues that I had certainly dealt with, but as time went on, this aspect of ministerial life came much more into focus in my head and heart. Dallas Willard affirms the loneliness and isolation that is existent in our world, "loneliness is loosed upon the landscape. It haunts the penthouse and the rectory, the executive suite and the millionaire's mansion, as well as the barren apartment, the assembly line, the cocktail bar, and the city streets. It is, as Mother Teresa of Calcutta once said, the leprosy of the modern world."¹⁷⁸ Dr. Mary Kate Morse also addresses the isolation issue, "In the West, our independent mindset and lone ranger lifestyles make it easy to isolate our personal lives from our public lives. We don't need anyone."¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁶ Bob Burns, Tasha Chapman, and Donald Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us about Surviving and Thriving* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Books, 2013), 61.

¹⁷⁷ William H. Willimon, *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry*, Revised Edition (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016), 103.

¹⁷⁸ Dallas Willard and Jan Johnson, *Hearing God: Developing a Conversational Relationship with God*, Updated and expanded (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Books, 2012), 61.

¹⁷⁹ MaryKate Morse, *Lifelong Leadership: Woven Together through Mentoring Communities*, 2020, 4.

What I Didn't Know

I didn't know that life giving relationships would be so rare. After two decades of vocational ministry, I had failed to recognize that I had either altogether jettisoned or allowed my relationships to dwindle through the years to the point that I only had one real confidant on the face of the earth. Loneliness and isolation had led me to believe several narratives that were negatively affecting my life and ministry. Unfortunately, mine is not a rare story. "In trying to keep strong enough to endure the challenges of ministry, it is a temptation for ministers to keep, or at least allow distance between them and other people. At the same time, it seems that forces of evil work all the angles to trouble ministers in relationships, often drawing men and women into isolation and despair."¹⁸⁰ In his work *Connecting*, Dr. Larry Crabb states, "We were designed to connect with others. Connecting is life. Loneliness is the ultimate horror. In connecting with others, we nourish and experience that life as we freely share it. Rugged individualism, proud independence, and chosen isolation violate the nature of our existence as much as trying to breathe underwater."¹⁸¹ In their book *Friends and Friendship*, Jerry and Maggie White suggest that "On average, most people have four current and active intimate friends. But the number can range from only one person up to six."¹⁸² "According to London & Wiseman, "70% (of pastors) do not have someone they consider a close friend."¹⁸³ Not one intimate friend. I didn't know that.

I didn't know that deep relationships would not naturally form among my denominational peers and overseers. Those relationships did not materialize in my life, but I assumed that my situation must be unique - it was not. Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie observed, "One place pastors generally do not feel safe is their local denominational meetings. As one Presbyterian put it, 'I think presbyteries see themselves as judicial bodies and not pastors of the pastors... There are no relationships of trust.'"¹⁸⁴ In a 2016 study, Eddy Brewer recognized the disconnect of the average Assemblies of God minister from the denominational structure and made four recommendations that could help denominational leadership re-engage with ministers:

¹⁸⁰ Ryan C. Staley et al., "Strategies Employed by Clergy to Prevent and Cope with Interpersonal Isolation," *Pastoral Psychology* 62, no. 6 (December 2013): 843-57, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-012-0473-9>, 80.

¹⁸¹ Larry Crabb, *Connecting: Healing for Ourselves and Our Relationships: A Radical New Vision* (Nashville, Tenn: Word Pub, 1997), 53.

¹⁸² Jerry White, *Friends & Friendship: The Secrets of Drawing Nearer*. (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1987), 37.

¹⁸³ London, *Pastors at Greater Risk*, 25.

¹⁸⁴ Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 85.

1) Yearly enrichment retreats, 2) The development of social networks, 3) Continuing education and enrichment programs, and 4) Internships for less experienced ministers.¹⁸⁵ Currently, our district of the denomination offers none of these.

Surely, I have a personal responsibility to reach out to others and I do that, but most of those interactions lead to shallow and superficial “acquaintance” type relationships. Ministers need a mechanism to assist with cultivating life giving, spiritual friendships. I knew we needed relationships; I just didn’t know how much. Aelred of Rievaulx posed an insightful question that is just as poignant today as it was in his day, “If one were present, however, whom you loved as yourself and by whom you would not hesitate to be equally loved, would not everything that previously seemed bitter turn sweet and delicious”?¹⁸⁶ If, as ministers we could have some group of comrades with whom we could laugh, lament, explore, and grow with, life certainly would become a little more sweet and delicious.

What I Am Learning

I am learning that there are mountains of information about the subject of clergy burnout in general and many great resources regarding the effects of isolation and loneliness among ministers. Whether isolation begets inadequacy or vice versa, the result is misery. Regarding clergy isolation Seamands notes, “Satan uses your nagging sense of inferiority and inadequacy to isolate you. For the commonest way to cope with feelings of inferiority is to pull within yourself, to have as little contact with other people as you possibly can, and just occasionally to peek out as the rest of the world goes by.”¹⁸⁷ The false narratives of inferiority and inadequacy breed isolation and vice versa. It is a brutal cycle.

I am learning that I will be tweaking the wheel, not reinventing it. I was a police officer for several years and have been a pastor for a lot of years. I like to help... too much at times. If I’m honest, I like to play the role of the superhero. I understand this motivation is unhealthy and I struggle alongside others in this way, “It is a temptation, for ministers especially, to pursue what Henri Nouwen calls “individual heroism” within our competitive culture.”¹⁸⁸ Coming into this program I arrogantly purposed to find and present the solution to help Assemblies of God ministers thrive for

¹⁸⁵ Eddy Brewer, *Burnout Among Assemblies of God Clergy with Implications for Support from Church and Denominational Leaders*. (PhD diss., Dallas Baptist University, 2016), accessed April 3, 2022, <https://www.proquest.com/openview/368d37dfa7ac355b57dd0aca51833978/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750>

¹⁸⁶ Aelred, Lawrence C. Braceland, and Marsha L. Dutton, *Aelred of Rievaulx: Spiritual Friendship*, Cistercian Fathers Series, no. 5 (Collegeville, Minn: Cistercian Publications, 2010), 118.

¹⁸⁷ David A. Seamands, *Healing for Damaged Emotions*, 2nd edition (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2015), 52-53.

¹⁸⁸ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership with Study Guide for Groups and Individuals* (New York: Crossroad Pub. Co, 2002), 57.

a lifetime of service for the Lord. I am learning that there is not a singular way to accomplish this huge task but there are myriad “bite sized” approaches to contributing towards ministerial wholeness and vitality. I cannot, indeed must not approach this or any other significant issue cloaked in a savior mentality. This is God’s work, and I am but a link in the long chain of helpers.

I am learning to trust the Spirit’s wisdom in beckoning my heart towards building ministers in the context of community. The Leadership and Spiritual Formation cohort in general and the intensives in Cannon Beach in particular have given me a glimpse into what can be. I am aware that some of the emotions and passion that I feel when in that context cannot be sustained for a lifetime, but it is in moments that God has given me exactly what I needed to move forward. If I can move forward in this endeavor and offer moments for the Spirit to work in others, in community, it will be a win. I’d be so deeply honored if God would allow me to facilitate a group like Aelred speaks of, “To chat and laugh together, to treat each other kindly, to read or confer with, to be lighthearted or serious together, to disagree at times but without rancor as anyone might argue with himself, and through disagreement now and then to give sparkle to the countless times we agree, to share in turn our experiences in teaching or learning, to long for each other anxiously when absent, and gladly to welcome each other’s return.”¹⁸⁹

I am learning that not everyone sees value in or perceives the need for what I am offering. There have been those along this learning path who are more well-adjusted or less experienced and simply don’t buy into the idea of need for community to flourish. Thankfully there are those who do understand and speak to this great need. Hands and Fehr state, “Participating in a genuine spiritual community as an equal is very important for a cleric’s health and well-being... clergy who recognize that they are relatively isolated need to take the initiative to find or create the kind of peer spiritual community in which they can live and grow.”¹⁹⁰ “In the discussion of clergy burnout, Dr. Jody Becker suggested that wholesome community is essential. “When coupled with the fact that pastors feel ill-equipped to function in their ministry role, isolation becomes the perfect breeding ground for complacency and self-reliance.”¹⁹¹ It is the Holy Spirit’s initiative to draw men and women into a new adventure and help us to realize, “Christian brotherhood is not an ideal which we must realize, it is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate.”¹⁹²

I am learning that Trinitarian theology demands community on earth as it is in Heaven. Leonard Sweet explained the value of relationships and the importance of others in one’s future: “All notions

¹⁸⁹ Aelred, Braceland, and Dutton, *Aelred of Rievaulx*, 120.

¹⁹⁰ Donald R. Hands and Wayne L. Fehr, *Spiritual Wholeness for Clergy: A New Psychology of Intimacy with God, Self, and Others* (Washington, DC: Alban Institute, 1993), 67.

¹⁹¹ Jody Decker, “The Ecological Gift of Spiritual Formation: A Renewal for Healthy Clergy” (PhD diss., George Fox University, 2017), accessed March 30, 2022, <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin/229>, 93.

¹⁹² Dietrich Bonhoeffer and John W Doberstein, *Life Together* (London: SCM, 2002), 30.

of self-sufficiency need abandoning. Without the involvement of others in your future, you have no future the trinitarian nature of God, which means that my very 'self' cannot be found outside of relationships, outside the 'three hypostases' of communion with (or 'hypostatic union' of) God, self, and neighbor."¹⁹³ "If humans are indeed relational by nature, and if we take the doctrine of the trinity seriously, then we must change the way we talk about our spiritual journey. It is really not "my" journey, but "our" journey."¹⁹⁴ I have not considered loneliness and chosen isolation as matters of theology but I am learning that "Either we can live as unique members of a connected community, experiencing the fruit of Christ's life within us, or we can live as terrified, demanding, self-absorbed islands, disconnected from community and desperately determined to get by with whatever resources we brought to our island with us."¹⁹⁵ I have been an island at times but have returned from exile to the mainland of the Kingdom and greatly desire to lead others back as well.

Prototype(s) Summary and Findings

Prototype 1: A personal spiritual retreat designed for Assemblies of God ministers and their spouses.

- The retreat would focus on rest for their bodies, receiving encouragement, and a renewal of personal spiritual transformation.
- NPO Statement:
 - Assemblies of God pastors can expand their capacity for lifelong thriving by avoiding or recovering from ministry fatigue and burnout.
- Research question
 - Do you feel a greater sense of spiritual, physical, and emotional fatigue and/or burnout since the beginning of the pandemic and if so, would a retreat be helpful in recovering?
- Assessment Benchmark(s)
 - After considering the information presented, do you sense the need for a personal spiritual retreat?
 - Do you sense the need for greater engagement in spiritual transformation?
 - Do you feel safe re-engaging in face-to-face meetings in light of the current Covid-19 situation?

¹⁹³ Leonard I. Sweet, *11 Indispensable Relationships You Can't Be Without*, 1st ed (Colorado Springs, Colo: David C. Cook, 2008), 95.

¹⁹⁴ Rodney L. Bassett, "Finding Our Way Home: Turning Back to What Matters Most." *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*, 2006: Vol. 25, No.3, 274-280.

¹⁹⁵ Crabb, *Connecting*, 31.

- Is the content and format of the retreat compelling enough for you to sign up and/or recommend it to another colleague?
- Participant description.
 - Participants included personally known ministerial colleagues from several districts of the Assemblies of God. There were a mixture of ages, ministerial contexts, and genders.
- Summarize what you learned:
 - What worked?
 - The Zoom session was the perfect format for this workshop. Between the workshop and subsequent questionnaire, each participant was able to give honest, substantive feedback. The diverse nature of the group was very insightful. Most of the participants expressed a sincere need for some time away at a spiritual retreat.
 - What could be improved?
 - There was a consensus that most retreats are too structured and required activities/sessions need to be scaled back.
 - What matters to the participants?
 - What seemed to matter most is connecting relationally with peers. The actual content of the information which would be presented at a retreat took a back seat to connection among colleagues.
- What was your important discovery?
 - While compiling the questionnaires, the overwhelming sense was that ministers are craving relationship. The global pandemic ushered in a time of isolation and discouragement from a lack of relationship and ministers are desperate to re-engage with their peers. When asked about meeting face to face, one stakeholder stated, "Oh, heck yeah! I'm so far past protocols for safe meetings that I must look for a mask to go into a medical building. Meet. Meet. Meet. Meet. Meet face to face." My sense was that regardless of the venue, content, or structure, the issue that concerned all stakeholders was that of authentic community. If a retreat could help to equip attendees with a few tools for the journey and provide them with an opportunity to connect with some friends along the way, it would be a smashing success. The stakeholders want to be spiritually formed and to grow in Christ, but they need to do that in the context of trusting, open, and safe relationships. The important discovery should not have been a surprise since it was an echo from the very first human dilemma, "It is not good that the man should be alone." (Gen. 2:18)

Prototype 2: A one-year pastoral cohort (6-8 pastors) which encourages pastors towards ongoing systematic spiritual transformation and spiritual friendships.

- NPO Statement:
- Assemblies of God pastors can expand their capacity for lifelong thriving by avoiding or recovering from ministry fatigue and burnout.
- Research question
 - Does the cohort concept connect with the minister's felt needs and desires?
- Assessment Benchmark(s)
 - After considering the presentation, would you find a tool such as this cohort helpful with staying spiritually healthy and avoiding burnout?
 - Is this a medium that encourages greater engagement in spiritual transformation?
 - Is a face-to-face cohort meeting important to the user or could a virtual cohort be just as effective?
 - Is the content and format of the cohort compelling enough for you to join and/or invite another colleague?
- Participant description.
 - Participants included personally known ministerial colleagues from several districts of the Assemblies of God. There were a mixture of ages, ministerial contexts, and genders.
- Summarize what you learned:
 - What worked?
 - All the stakeholders expressed a desire for continued growth in Christ in the context of spiritual community.
 - What could be improved?
 - Several stakeholders noted that time is an issue for them and that devoting themselves to something for a year may create some difficulties. Also, since the language of spiritual formation is not native to the Assemblies of God, some clarification on terminology will be necessary.
 - What matters to the participants?
 - An issue that surfaced in several stakeholder responses dealt with: 1) Making the content relevant and forward thinking, as one participant stated, " If the Cohort is led effectively and subject matter stays on point for personal growth/integrity, personal refueling I believe a cohort could help." 2) Attending the cohort in person rather than online, "My preference, far and away, would be face to face. Virtual leaves too much opportunity to multi-task, or otherwise be distracted. And seems to me that virtual would lead to a lot less opening up and less real honesty." 3) It may be advantageous to group cohorts by similarities. One stakeholder posed this

question, "Would it be beneficial or a drawback to putting folks together whose ministries have similar demographics (rural churches, metro churches, large ministries, small, etc.). I don't know. You definitely want diversity all around but how do make you sure folks are getting what they need? Maybe it's not an issue...idk. Are the pressures, stresses the same no matter what the ministry demographics."

- What was your important discovery?
 - Again, I came away from the stakeholder responses with the sense that information is important, but not in an online delivery method. Even if groups are formed around areas of commonality, the material point is that people would like others to join them on the journey. With the average size of churches in America being 75 members¹⁹⁶, there may not be much synergy or encouragement happening in their local church context. It is my suspicion that many ministers may echo the thoughts of one workshop participant, "I can see where being part of an honest, totally confidential cohort would indeed benefit my walk with the Lord and help me stay fresher in leadership."

MVP (Most Viable Prototype)

Based on: 1) Three workshops that I have hosted and the feedback from stakeholders in those workshops, 2) Information gleaned from researching a plethora of resources, 3) My own unique journey through the issues of isolation and *brown-out*, and 4) The leading of God's Spirit, my Most Valuable Prototype is designing a one year cohort based *Journey Group* such as the low fidelity prototype from this semester which will target ministers from the Peninsular Florida District of the Assemblies of God. It is my belief that journeying together with intention and purpose can and will make a huge difference in the lives of ministers. As Dr. Morse states, "Christian leaders need safe environments in which they can unpack their inner worlds and their outward realities. They need to be able to pray and play and process together in community. They need to cultivate in community a maturing expression of Christ's character and mission in their lives."¹⁹⁷

I believe this prototype lends itself to my brand of Authentic Servant Leadership and a strong desire to see others flourish. I also have a great relationship with our district leadership who have expressed an interest in this project and have agreed to allow me to lead a group on this journey. Both the final prototyping and the actual leadership of the cohort will require a significant investment of time and resources and I'm very grateful that my church leadership has been very

¹⁹⁶ Hartford Institute For Religion Research, "Fast Facts About American Religion", 2005, April 1, 2022, http://hirr.hartsem.edu/research/fastfacts/fast_facts.html.

¹⁹⁷ Morse, Lifelong Leadership, 14

gracious towards me to this end. I am most encouraged that I feel a strong sense of direction in this process and believe that the Most Valuable Prototype will be a labor of love and passion.

Appendix 1

Clergy Colleague Suggestions for Addressing Needs

- Anglican Priest
 - Discipleship as a mentoring model
 - Retirement & Tax Planning
- Baptist Pastor
 - Making Sabbath & Rest a priority
- Presbyterian Pastor
 - Covenant group
 - Monthly meeting for prayer, fellowship, & support
- Baptist Pastor
 - Greater level of accountability
 - Spiritual fathers presumed too much
- Church of God Pastor
 - Value of Godly friendships
 - A consistent prayer life
 - Taking responsibility for yourself, stop blaming
- Episcopalian Priest
 - Daily offices

APPENDIX 2

Talking Points of Workshop

- How I got here
- NW Network
 - Sectional or Regional Elders
 - Pastoral Care
 - Encouragement
 - Support
- HB London study stats
- How should people be grouped?
- Is this a need for you?
- How have you been affected the last 2 years?
- Which prototype speaks most to you?

APPENDIX 3

Email Invitation to Zoom Meeting

Good afternoon _____,

I pray all is well with you & yours. As you may or may not have known, I am working on a Dmin in Leadership and Spiritual Formation through George Fox University. I'm a little over the halfway point in the program and I'm beginning to focus on what my final project will look like. As you know (and probably feel), the last couple of years especially have taken quite a toll on our colleagues. I'd like to develop an overall strategy for helping ministers towards lifelong thriving in ministry. I've had two previous sessions with different ministers and have done lots of research to try and drill down on what activities may help A/G ministers avoid fatigue and burnout and pursue a sustainable, flourishing relationship with God and others.

I treasure our friendship and have a tremendous amount of respect for you and the wisdom you have acquired through the years. I wondered if you would do me the incredible favor of meeting with me and some other ministers via a Zoom meeting on Friday, February 25th at 10 am? I anticipate the meeting will take 45 minutes to an hour. The purpose of the meeting is to present two potential prototypes which may aid in ministerial thriving. I'd like your honest feedback and recommendations on the prototypes. I appreciate your consideration very much and if you're able to help, please send me your response by email (revspivey@gmail.com) & I'll get the Zoom link to you. Thanks so much!

Grace and Peace,

Michael Spivey

APPENDIX 4

Follow Up Questionnaire

Good morning,

I pray your week has been good & that God is moving in area ways in your life. I just wanted to send a quick reminder about the follow up questions. I have included them in this email & very much look forward to your response asap. Blessings to you!!!

- What did you like/dislike about the presentation?
- Were there issues that were presented that do not affect you or your context?
- Were there issues not presented that should have been?

APPENDIX 5

Prototypes

PROTOTYPE 1 - 1 YEAR COHORT

- Do you feel a greater sense of spiritual, physical, and emotional fatigue and/or burnout since the beginning of the pandemic and if so, would a retreat such as this be helpful in recovery?
- Does the cohort concept connect with your felt needs and desires?
- Do the topics presented resonate with your needs?
- After considering the presentation, would you find a tool such as this cohort helpful with staying spiritually healthy and avoiding burnout?
- Is this a medium that encourages greater engagement in continual spiritual transformation?
- Is a face-to-face cohort meeting important to you or could a virtual cohort be just as effective?
- Is the content and format of the cohort compelling enough for you to join and/or invite another colleague?

PROTOTYPE 2 - SPIRITUAL RETREAT

- Do you feel a greater sense of spiritual, physical, and emotional fatigue and/or burnout since the beginning of the pandemic and if so, would a retreat such as this be helpful in recovering?
- After considering the information presented regarding the retreat, do you sense the need for a personal spiritual retreat?
- Do you sense the need for greater engagement in continual spiritual transformation?
- Do you feel safe re-engaging in face-to-face meetings in light of the current Covid-19 situation.
- Is the content and format of the retreat compelling enough for you to sign up and/or recommend it to another colleague?
- What else would you like to add or comment on?

APPENDIX 6

Follow Up Email

Good morning _____,

As a stakeholder in my project, I wanted to keep you apprised of the progress on my final project. After three workshops with ministry leaders such as yourselves, it looks like I will be designing a final project which will be a cohort style "Journey" Group. Each group will be comprised of 10-12 ministry leaders which will meet face to face eight times during the one-year cohort. The readings, topic discussions, and interaction will be centered around being continually transformed by Jesus for the sake of the world. Topics may include among others: Making Sabbath & rest a priority, The value of spiritual friendships, developing spiritual practices, and Cultivating a Rule of Life. One of the prayers that I pray most every day is the model prayer given by Jesus in Matthew 6 - "Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil." There's a lot of "us" and "our" in the prayer of Jesus. Ministry life can be lonely (you know this better than anyone) and God has given us to one another to love, encourage, champion, and bless along this ministry journey. As the project takes better shape, I will keep you posted on my progress, and I really hope to launch some of these groups at the sectional and even district level at some point. Much love and gratitude for your contributions and prayers towards the project!

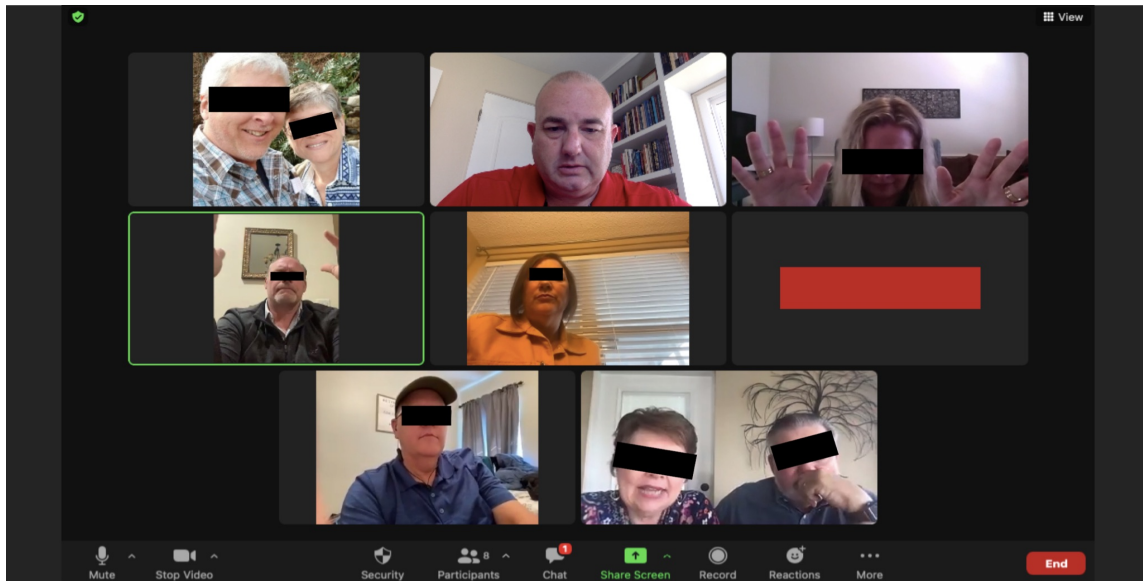
"Either we can live as unique members of a connected community, experiencing the fruit of Christ's life within us, or we can live as terrified, demanding, self-absorbed islands, disconnected from community and desperately determined to get by with whatever resources we brought to our island with us." - Dr. Larry Crabb

"We were designed to connect with others. Connecting is life. Loneliness is the ultimate horror. In connecting with others, we nourish and experience that life as we freely share it. Rugged individualism, proud independence, and chosen isolation violate the nature of our existence as much as trying to breathe underwater."

Grace & Peace,

Michael

Screen Capture From Zoom Stakeholder Meeting



APPENDIX 7

Follow Up Questionnaire with Answers

What did you like/dislike about the presentation?

- RB - From a logistics standpoint I appreciate your preparedness, respect of time, & getting to the point. The power point presentation made it easy to follow along with your comments, as well as use as a reference as you were sharing. I appreciated your requesting our feedback, however, I was frustrated with the lack of feedback from my peers. I believe that your project addresses a huge need in ministry leadership.
- SH - I appreciated the fact that you were clear about your objective and concise with the introductory comments.
- FH - I enjoyed that we got together, and the conversation was good.
- LA - What I liked most was the intent to help ministers learn to not be overwhelmed by the task before us - which have been exacerbated by all things COVID these past two years. And I liked the idea of combining the two - retreat followed by cohort style ongoing accountability and encouragement - IF the commitment to the time and process can be managed by the participants. Not much to dislike (unless you count the less than enthusiastic support from the district level).
- PK - The presentation was good. Pretty concise.
- MP - Nothing I can think of. I loved the diversity of the pilot group.

Were there issues that were presented that do not affect you or your context?

- RB - No
- SH - No. However, I did appreciate your “boundaries” that helped avoid simply restating obvious problems and assigning blame. I thought you did a good job keeping the conversation “solution” based.
- FH - The conversation related to me in more ways than one. I am an older minister looking into the face of transition in the next several years. Loneliness, burnout, and fear of the future are very real factors. The possibility of having a group of Pastors and leaders to fellowship with and live life together would be great.
- LA - I'm not sure there were any that do NOT affect me or my context. I will say that I have been blessed to be in a situation without as many of the most obvious stressors pastors face. For instance, during COVID our attendance and financial support have grown and flourished. However, even with those positives, I saw where certain stresses of the past two years - masks, or no; vaccine, or no; political angles; etc. - were having a negative effect on my health, rest (or lack thereof), emotional health, and even - at times - strength.
- PK - I believe as a full-time minister of the gospel, all issues addressed would pertain to myself and any other minister.
- MP - None

Were there issues not presented that should have been?

- RB - Not that I can think of. You obviously have done your research,
- not to mention the fact that you live this. Your presentation was relevant & authentic.
- SH - No
- FH - There are things Michael that are weighing on the hearts and minds of ministers today. We are not in Kansas anymore.
- LA - None off the top of my head, and none I've thought of in the days since. I thought it was a well thought out presentation, and plan of action.
- PK - Not to my knowledge.
- MP - If I put this in the context of pitching a business idea to investors, I think I had the data I would have needed to make a decision.

APPENDIX 8

Prototype 1 - 1 Year Cohort

Do you feel a greater sense of spiritual, physical, and emotional fatigue and/or burnout since the beginning of the pandemic and if so, would a retreat such as this be helpful in recovery?

- RB - Yes & Yes
- SH - Yes, we worked harder during the shut-down than we did going into it. We definitely weren't prepared for it to be more taxing, and we haven't taken time off to recover. Conversations with friends has been helpful.
- FH - Yes
- LA - Yes and yes. (Mostly physical and emotional fatigue.) In my setting, some of the things that have helped manage the effects of the pandemic have been a small group of pastors that I meet with 3-4 times a month for prayer and sharing; and that our District has a minister and spouses' "breakaway" that gives us opportunity for positive reinforcement and a little intentional R&R.
- PK - Absolutely have felt the effects on every level since the pandemic. A retreat designed to encourage and refuel in these areas could be very beneficial. A retreat with a full schedule and a location with a lot of mandates in place due to the pandemic could add more pressure, stress and could be more depleting than refueling.
- MP - Most definitely. I'm probably more frustrated with how to re-start. Once you lose momentum it is a struggle getting folks moving again. I would love a program like this...sharing with folks going through same stuff.

Does the cohort concept connect with your felt needs and desires?

- RB - Yes
- SH - I would be willing to connect and test it for a year. I'm already in a loose version of what you described with a few younger women. I'm also part of a group I pay to participate with because they offer training as well as "friendship."
- FH - Yes
- LA - I'm not sure I would have identified it as a felt need, but after the aforementioned opportunities took hold for me, I can honestly say that it has been a huge help in managing the emotional challenge and struggle; as well as addressing the physical weariness with more intentional rest and relaxation.
- PK - The cohort connect is something if done correctly I believe could address and refuel, refresh tired ministers.
- MP - Yes. The only thing I would say to ask the group is, "Would it be beneficial or a drawback to putting folks together whose ministries have similar demographics (rural churches, metro churches, large ministries, small, etc.). I don't know. You want diversity all around but how do make sure folks are getting what they need?? Maybe it's not an

issue...idk. Are the pressures, stresses the same no matter what the ministry demographics. IDK.

Do the topics presented resonate with your needs?

- RB - Yes. However, I believe these may be fluid moving forward.
- SH - I'm not clear on what the specific topics were.
- FH - Yes
- LA - Yes
- PK - Topics that actually deal with issues and that presented well, with self helps and applications offered for the issues could be very beneficial.
- MP - Yes

After considering the presentation, would you find a tool such as this cohort helpful with staying spiritually healthy and avoiding burnout?

- RB - Absolutely
- SH - I can see where being part of an honest, totally confidential cohort would indeed benefit my walk with the Lord and help me stay fresher in leadership.
- FH - Yes
- LA - Yes
- PK - If the Cohort is lead effectively and subject matter stays on point for personal growth/integrity, personal refueling I believe a cohort could help.
- MP - I would love to participate.

Is this a medium that encourages greater engagement in continual spiritual transformation?

- RB - Yes. Iron Sharpens Iron
- SH - I believe it would.
- FH - Yes
- LA - It would seem that it should be.
- MP - I think so.

Is a face-to-face cohort meeting important to you or could a virtual cohort be just as effective?

- RB - I prefer face to face, however, I'm not opposed to virtual. For me personally, face to face is more impactful & less tiring...something I'm trying to avoid after so much virtualness.
- SH - The other group I'm part of meets via zoom. But I believe it's success can be attributed to the fact that it is more instructional than relational in nature. If relationship is the primary objective, face to face meetings would be my vote.
- FH - Face to face

- LA - My preference, far and away, would be face to face. Virtual leaves too much opportunity to multi-task, or otherwise be distracted. And seems to me that virtual would lead to a lot less opening up and less real honesty.
- PK - Face to face is definitely a win for me
- MP - It really just depends. I prefer face to face, but every now and then a virtual might be OK.

Is the content and format of the cohort compelling enough for you to join and/or invite another colleague?

- RB - Yes. Let's be honest. People who want or need this in their lives will respond & commit & engage. Those who don't won't. Attrition is to be expected for those in the middle.
- SH - Yes to both
- FH - Yes
- LA - If the schedule and time allotment were viable, most certainly I'd be interested in one within driving range; and would be willing to invite another/others.
- PK - I would need to see dates, expectations, time commitment, cost and know exactly what I was going to get out of it personally before I would join another cohort or invest my time in one. If I joined, I would definitely speak to colleagues about it. What sadly happens in so many areas of ministry offered, those who need it the most, don't usually make the time or investment.
- MP - Yes

Prototype 2 - Spiritual Retreat

Do you feel a greater sense of spiritual, physical, and emotional fatigue and/or burnout since the beginning of the pandemic and if so, would a retreat such as this be helpful in recovering?

- RB - Yes
- SH - Yes, a retreat would be most helpful.
- FH - Yes, we have felt the weight of this pandemic in the areas of fatigue. A time away with friends would be great. (8 to 10 couples)
- LA - (Yes. See answer to similar question in Prototype 1 discussion.)
- PK - Yes-same thoughts as previous answer
- MP - I just came back from a short men's working retreat and it was the most rewarding time, I've had doing ministry business in some time. Probably since the pandemic stuff began 2 years ago.

After considering the information presented regarding the retreat, do you sense the need for a personal spiritual retreat?

- RB - Yes
- SH - Absolutely. You may also want to consider a three-day experience such as Tres Dias or Emmaus Walk for context. While what you're describing would be intentionally less structured than these, the overall experience did have a lifetime impact on Frank and me. For our purposes, less structured would be necessary.
- FH - Yes, a three month one.
- LA - Yes. For me personally, I would like something like that twice a year. (I realize that district wide schedules may not allow for a District event such as this.)
- PK - I love spiritual retreats. As long as I know what I am spending my time, funds on. I look for opportunities to invest in my spiritual growth and renewal. It's a lifeline for me. I have been to retreats that seem to almost be more depleting than refreshing. I believe the dynamics of a great spiritual, mental, emotional retreat are a sure win for every leader/minister. My council is structure it wisely. Go the extra mile and make people feel so special, it can be the little things that refuel a tired soul.
- MP - I recall our retreat to the Ignatius house a few years ago. It was wonderful.

Do you sense the need for greater engagement in continual spiritual transformation?

- RB - Yes, emphasis on continual. If not, I don't need to be doing this. It could become a danger to myself & others.
- SH - Yes. A lack of accountability fosters an attitude of hiding which benefits no one.
- FH - Yes. I personally need to keep growing. I think that we all need to desire the Transformation a time away and of being engaged is badly needed.
- LA - Absolutely. The more I know, the more I realize I don't know. Continual spiritual formation is for EVERYBODY, in my opinion.
- PK - I absolutely believe that there is a great need for every leader/minister to invest in, find the time for spiritual transformation in their life. My thoughts are if something is presented well and speak to the real needs of people, they will want to take part.
- MP - There is a need for it. Not sure if the church really understands yet. I slip it into my preaching and teaching every chance I get.

Do you feel safe re-engaging in face-to-face meetings considering the current Covid-19 situation.

- RB - Yes
- SH - Yes
- FH - Yes I do
- LA - Oh, heck yeah! I'm so far past protocols for safe meeting that I have to look for a mask to go into a medical building. Meet. Meet. Meet. Meet. Meet face to face.
- PK - I just got off a cruise so what do you think my answer is 😊. Absolutely!
- MP - Of course my brother. I am weary of it.

Is the content and format of the retreat compelling enough for you to sign up and/or recommend it to another colleague?

- RB - Yes
- SH - Yes
- FH - Yes, when are we going?
- LA - (Yes. See answer to similar question in Prototype 1 discussion.)
- PK - If I believe it would benefit me I would highly recommend to a colleague. Even if I wasn't apart and I knew someone could benefit from such a retreat I would strongly encourage their participation.
- MP - No doubt in my mind. Now whether or not they will admit the need, is another story. But I'll sure try.

What else would you like to add or comment on?

- RB - I believe strongly in what you're proposing. Personally, I think that the lack of strong contribution during the Zoom call is a symptom of why face to face interaction is necessary. People don't seem to be as engaged virtually. It also serves the isolation & fatigue that we've all experienced recently. Trust & comfortability to engage & interact is not a strong emphasis of vocational ministry peers, so the cohort & retreat force this necessary element.
- SH - Thank you again for not allowing this to take on an accusatory tone for current leadership. We all know the current methods for encouraging and holding ministers accountable for spiritual growth are outdated. The next generation will not stay on board unless we find a way to equip them in a more personalized way. They want relationship. We must offer it. They want to converse. We must stop lecturing and start listening if we hope to have a voice with them. That would have to be part of the guidelines for being part of a cohort. Listen, Encourage, instruct if asked.
- FH - Michael I believe in what you are doing. There are as you know men and women who need this kind of vital ministry. I would like to be involved in an event that would give great content with times of ministry. I appreciate your friendship.
- LA - For me personally, if I only had the option of one or the other, I would take the retreat. While I realize it's just a one-time thing per year, it is possible to establish a connection with another minister or ministers to continue to "keep tabs" on one another in this way, about this topic. (Though I realize it would take great intent to do so.) It's just that for me, personally, fitting in even a quarterly cohort meeting - as valuable as I see them as being - it would be a calendar challenge. That being said, I think the best answer to the overall challenge being discussed is a retreat to kick off a cohort that meets quarterly, bi-monthly, or so.
- PK - I like the idea of kicking off a cohort with a retreat. This could be a great launching pad for a successful cohort. As far as the district level. I would set it up, sell it to a handful of ministers and let them take part. Run it extremely well and the ministers would in turn help you sell it to the district. Maybe have your first retreat/cohort with a few key people in the area that need this now. Results speak volumes...

- MP - It is something that is needed. Particularly by us emotional, expressive Pentecostals. We don't spend enough time taking care of ourselves. Maybe Pastors/leaders just don't know how to? The statistics you shared should be enough to make any leader stop and wonder what we are doing wrong and how can we fix it?

Appendix E—Project Appendix Documentation

Appendix 1

Thriving Pastors Cohort Webpage

WELCOME

HOME WHAT WE DO ▼ THE SPIVEY'S CONTACT

WHAT WE DO

Caring For YOU

Michael Spivey draws on 25+ years of pastoral ministry experience, LOTS of relevant research, and walking through life with ministry colleagues to assist you on your ministry journey. The Thriving Pastors Initiative is not a church growth tool. We exist to help you in your personal walk with God, ministry & calling so you can sustain for the long haul. This is a relationship based approach that will help grow you as an apprentice of Jesus and leader in your specific ministry context.

Cohort Based Journey

Ministry fatigue and burnout are at an all time time high in the church. This year long Thriving Pastors Cohort addresses real ministry and personal issues that every leader faces. Also, the experience will help you cultivate relationships not only with your lead mentor but with those who are walking a similar road. In this atmosphere of shared values, trust, and confidentiality, you will grow in your relationship with Christ and one another. Life-long friendships will be forged in this sacred space.

Individual Consultation

Michael and/or Jennifer are also available to meet with you either in person or online/phone. To reserve a time, please click [HERE](#).



Thriving Pastors Cohort Webpage

WELCOME

HOME WHAT WE DO ▼ THE SPIVEY'S CONTACT

THRIVING PASTORS INITIATIVE

Our Experience

Michael & Jennifer have served the Lord in vocational pastoral ministry since 1996. Their experience includes being staff pastors in small & large church environments, church planting, and church revitalization.

Our Approach

We were created for community. The first thing that God declared to be "not good" is the loneliness of mankind. 70% of ministers don't have a single person that they can be completely honest with - and that's *not good*. It is our belief that learning in the context of community produces the best and most healthy results. This cohort could

+ Show More

Our "Why"

You are our "Why". We are pastors & understand the blessing & difficulties that come with pastoral work. We all need mentors and friends to walk with us on the God journey for the entirety of our lives. If you find yourself tired, lonely, or in the throes of ministry burnout, come walk with us. Strength, purpose, and encouragement are wa

+ Show More

PODCAST



Thriving Pastors Cohort Webpage

WELCOME

HOME WHAT WE DO ▼ THE SPIVEY'S CONTACT

THRIVING PASTORS COHORTS

Who Is This For?

- The cohort is designed for pastors but other ministry leaders will also benefit
- Men & Women
- All Ages
- Any Denominational Affiliation

What Happens?

- 9 Face To Face cohort meetings throughout the year.
- Each meeting will include teaching, group spiritual direction, topical discussion, & prayer.
- The themes of Rest, Sabbath, Spiritual Exercises, Soul Care, and Self Leadership will be woven through all topics & discussions.
- Reading & discussion of relevant material
- Weekly call with a journey partner



Thriving Pastors Cohort Webpage

WELCOME

HOME WHAT WE DO ▼ THE SPIVEY'S CONTACT



2022 THRIVING PASTORS COHORT

FALL 2022 COHORT IS FULL

For more information about the next cohort, please fill out the form below.

CONTACT US

To apply for the cohort or if you have questions, please fill out the form.

Thriving Pastors Initiative

Lakeland, Florida, United States

Thriving Pastors Cohort Webpage

WELCOME

HOME WHAT WE DO ▼ THE SPIVEY'S CONTACT

THE SPIVEY'S



Michael & Jennifer

Michael is a beloved pastor, skilled communicator, and accomplished leader with more than 25 years of pastoral experience. Michael has successfully advanced church vision, mission, and strategies in multiple settings that have resulted in tremendous growth, congregational engagement, and spiritual maturity. Michael is a life-long learner and is currently a doctoral candidate at Portland Seminary. Jennifer is an anointed speaker, ministry leader, and published author. Michael and Jennifer have been married for 26 years and they have three grown children. Both of the Spivey's are ordained with the Assemblies of God.



Thriving Pastors Cohort Webpage

WELCOME

HOME WHAT WE DO ▼ THE SPIVEY'S CONTACT

Diversity

We are intent on developing relationships with those of different ethnicities, cultures, and theological persuasions. We believe this broadens our perspectives and gives us a greater appreciation for those outside our denominational "tribe".



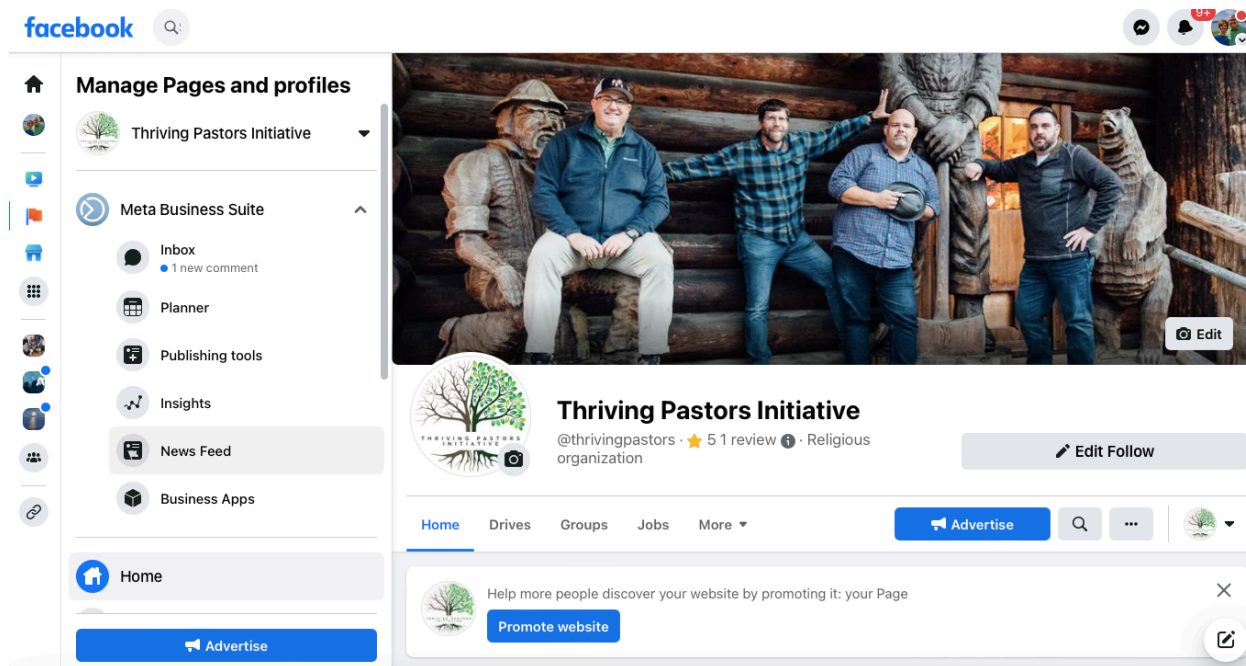
Our Approach

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, intentional relationships, targeted discussion, and prayer, our lives can and will be transformed for lifelong flourishing.

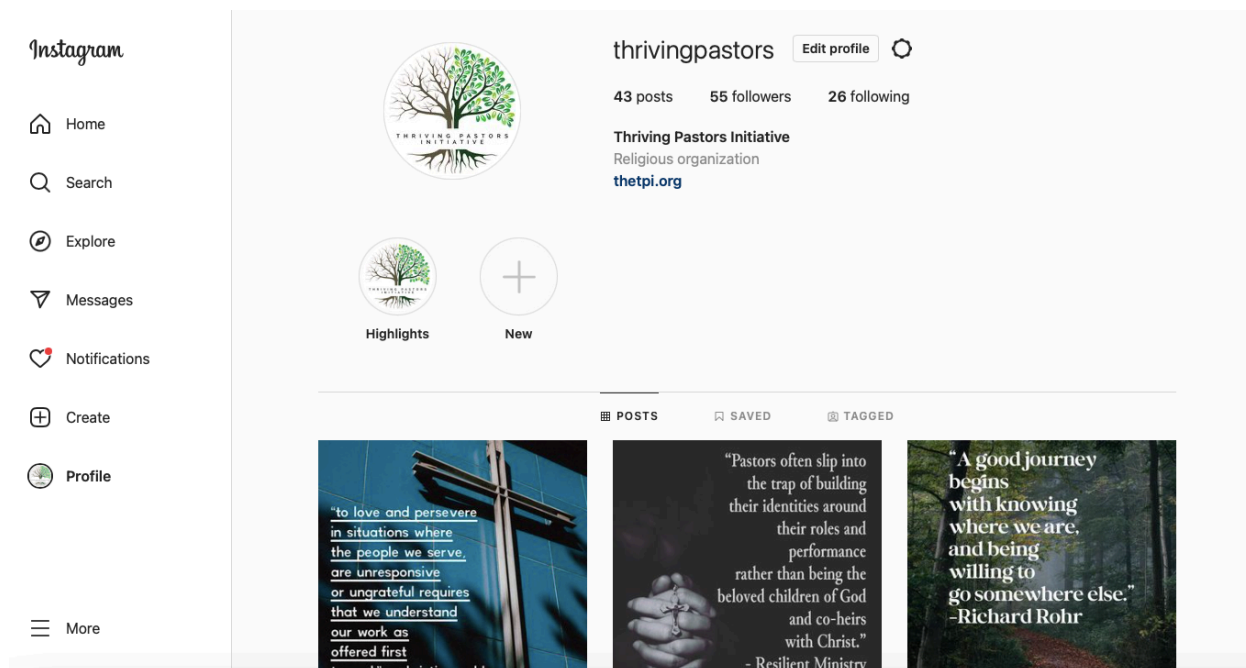


Appendix 2

Thriving Pastors Social Media Development ([Facebook](#))

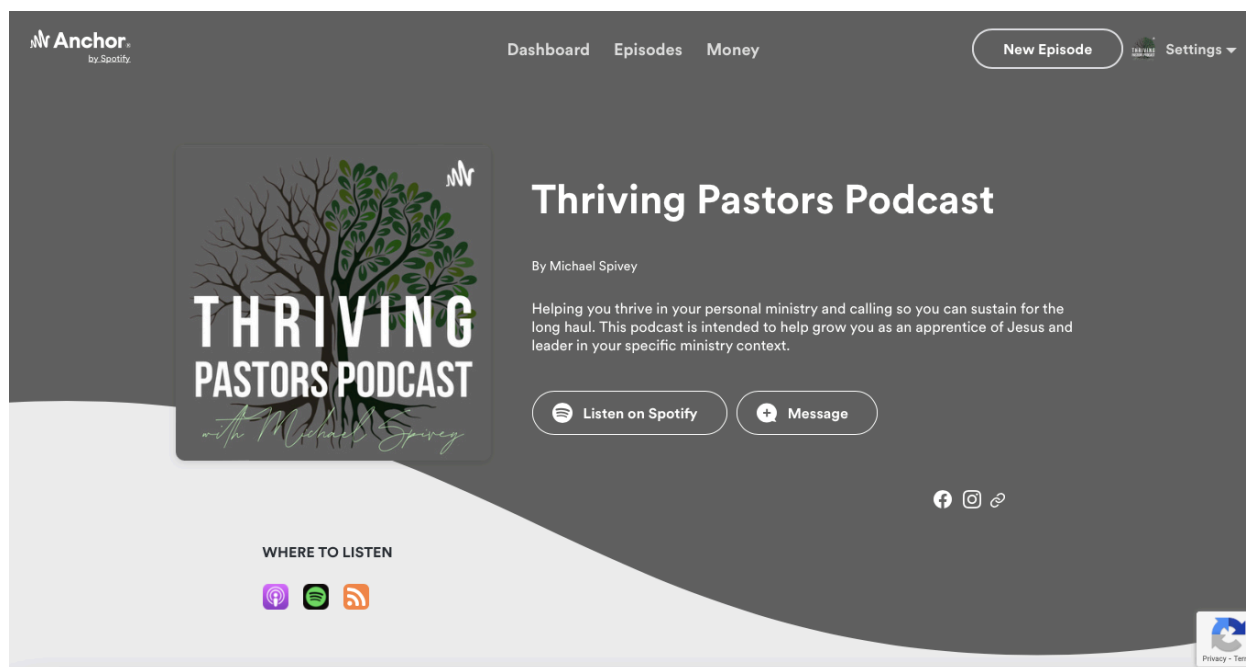


Thriving Pastors Social Media Development ([Instagram](#))

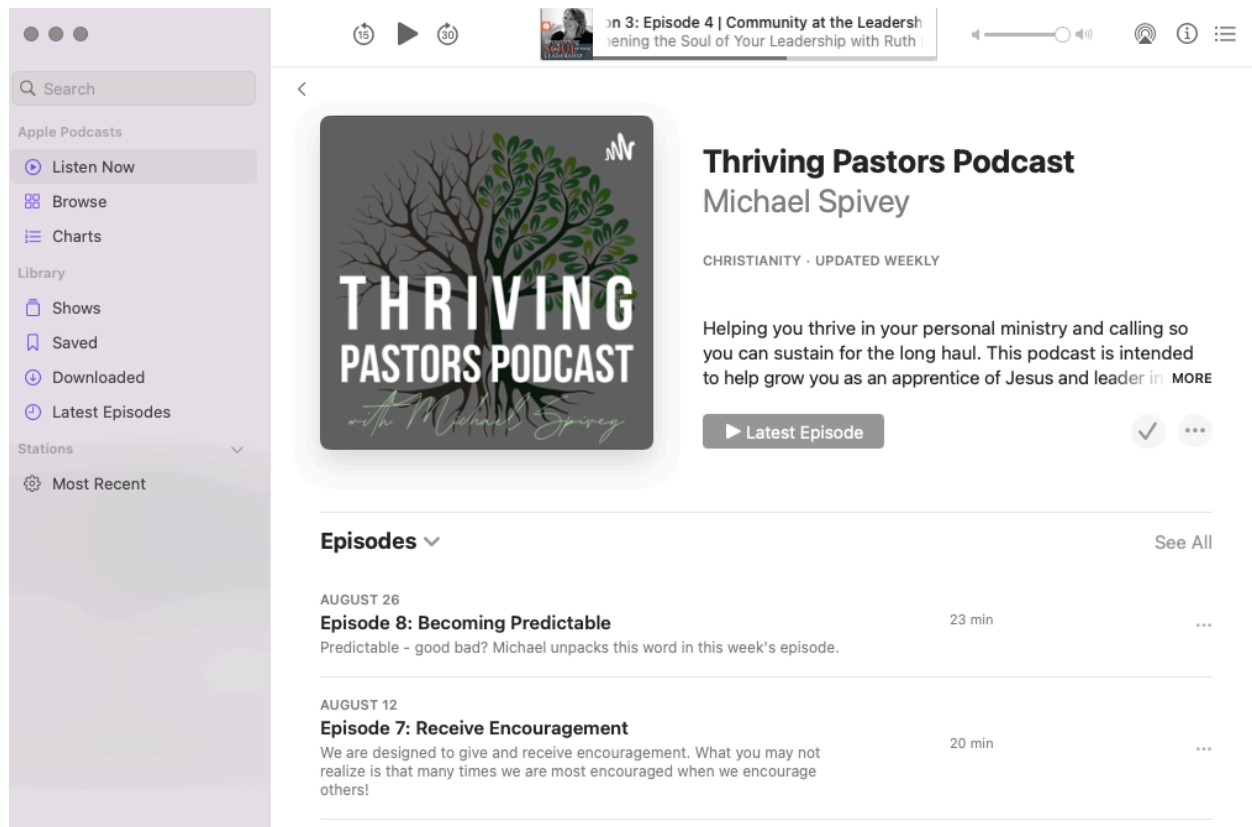


Appendix 3

Thriving Pastors Podcast Development ([Anchor](#))



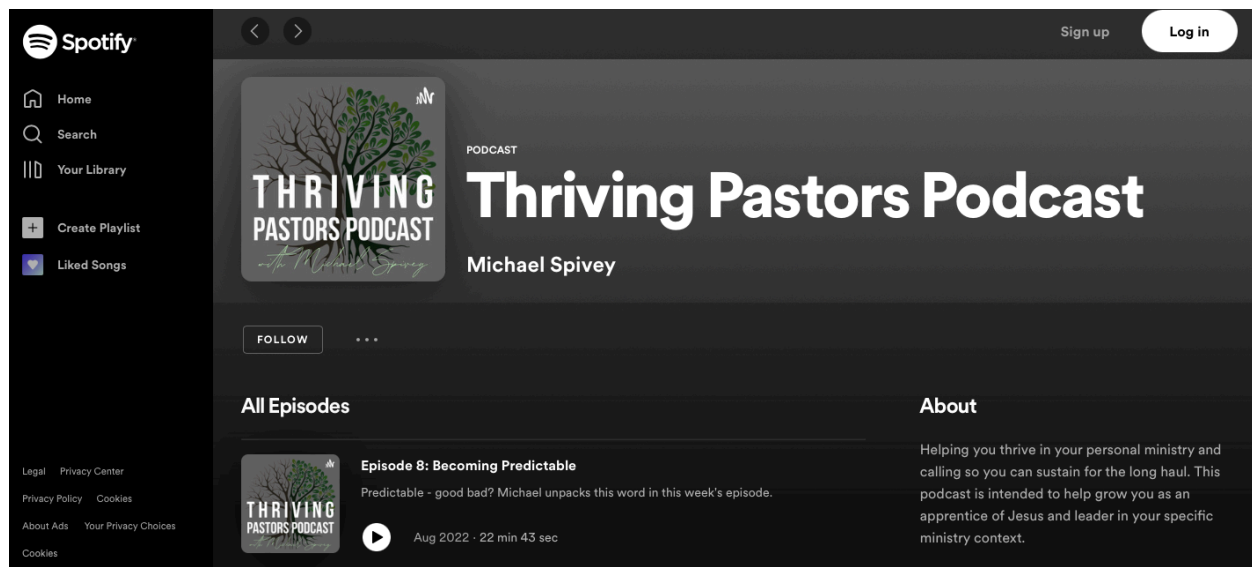
Thriving Pastors Podcast Development ([iTunes](#))



The screenshot shows the iTunes app interface. On the left is a sidebar with navigation options: Search, Apple Podcasts, Listen Now, Browse, Charts, Library (Shows, Saved, Downloaded, Latest Episodes), and Stations (Most Recent). The main content area displays the podcast 'Thriving Pastors Podcast' by Michael Spivey, categorized as 'CHRISTIANITY · UPDATED WEEKLY'. The podcast cover art features a tree with the text 'THRIVING PASTORS PODCAST with Michael Spivey'. Below the cover, there's a description: 'Helping you thrive in your personal ministry and calling so you can sustain for the long haul. This podcast is intended to help grow you as an apprentice of Jesus and leader in...'. A 'Latest Episode' button is visible. The 'Episodes' section lists two episodes:

Date	Episode Title	Duration	More
AUGUST 26	Episode 8: Becoming Predictable Predictable - good bad? Michael unpacks this word in this week's episode.	23 min	...
AUGUST 12	Episode 7: Receive Encouragement We are designed to give and receive encouragement. What you may not realize is that many times we are most encouraged when we encourage others!	20 min	...

Thriving Pastors Podcast Development ([Spotify](#))



The screenshot shows the Spotify app interface. On the left is a sidebar with navigation options: Home, Search, Your Library, Create Playlist, and Liked Songs. The main content area displays the podcast 'Thriving Pastors Podcast' by Michael Spivey, categorized as 'PODCAST'. The podcast cover art is the same as in the iTunes screenshot. Below the cover, there's a 'FOLLOW' button and a 'More' menu. The 'All Episodes' section lists two episodes:

Episode Title	Description	Date	Duration
Episode 8: Becoming Predictable	Predictable - good bad? Michael unpacks this word in this week's episode.	Aug 2022	22 min 43 sec

The 'About' section contains the following text: 'Helping you thrive in your personal ministry and calling so you can sustain for the long haul. This podcast is intended to help grow you as an apprentice of Jesus and leader in your specific ministry context.'

Appendix 4

Thriving Pastors Beta Cohort

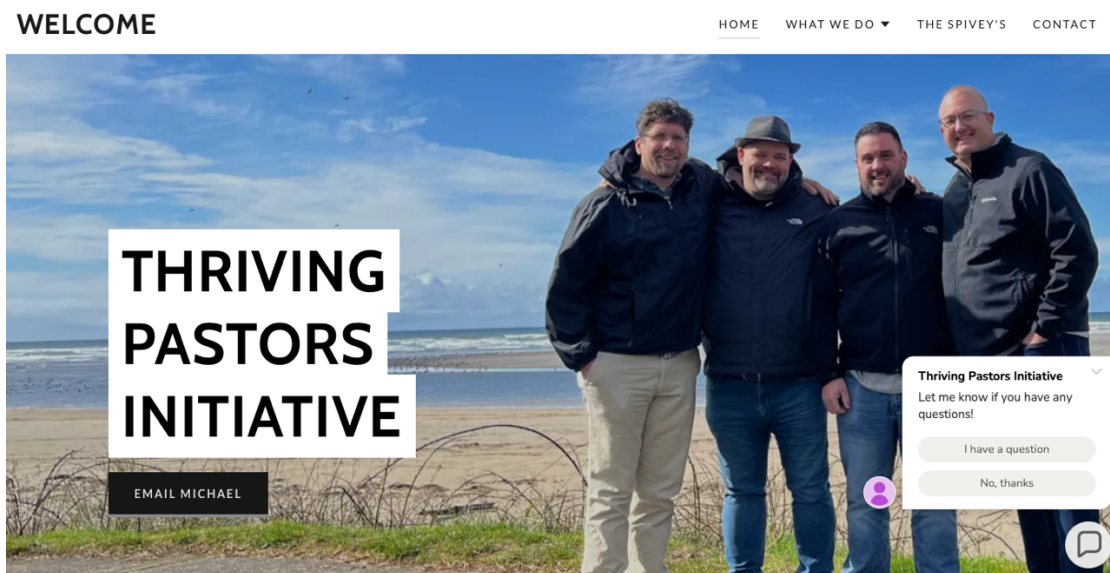


Appendix F—Milestone 6 Project Launch Plan Documentation

Appendix

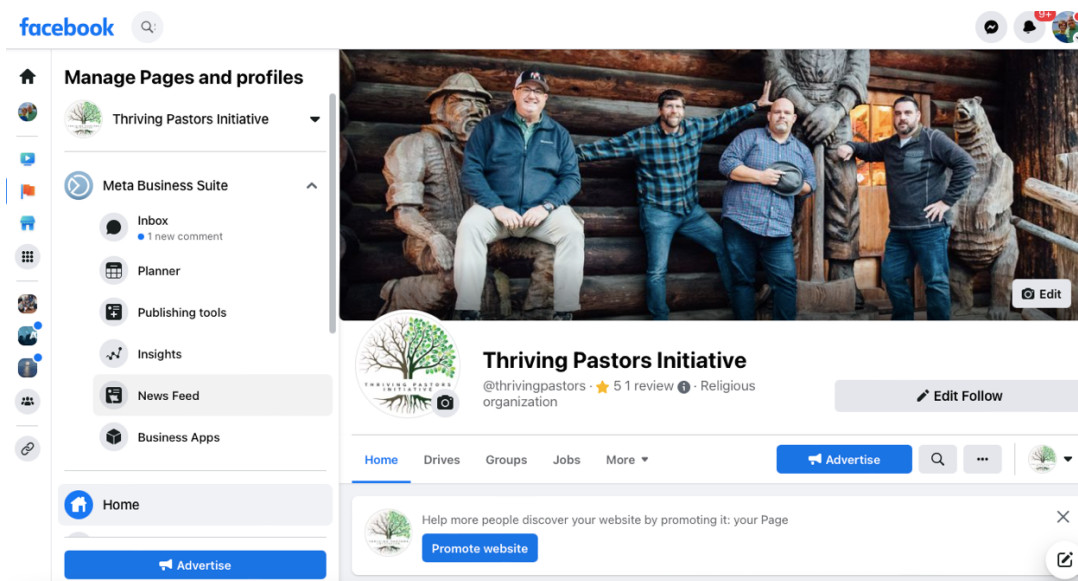
Appendix 1

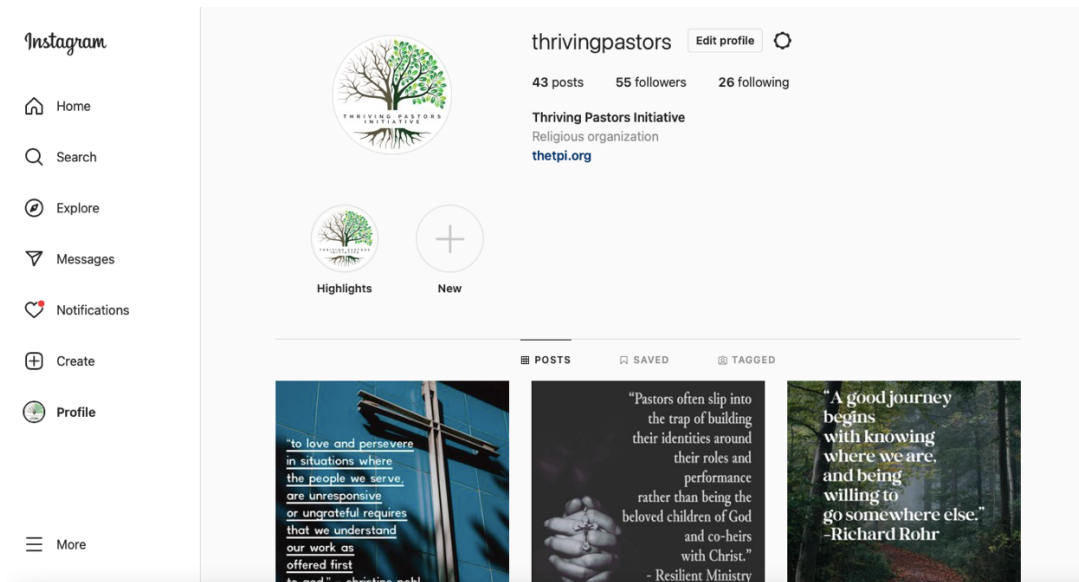
Thriving Pastors Cohort [Website](#) Homepage



Appendix 2

Thriving Pastors Social Media Home Pages ([Facebook](#), [Instagram](#))





Appendix 3

Thriving Pastors [Podcast](#) Homepage



Appendix 4

Sample Feedback from Cohort

Is there anything you would like to concentrate more on (conversation, prayer, teaching, spiritual practices, etc.)?

8 responses

I would like to see more intentional conversation from all members rather than just a few of the most outgoing members. Everyone has a wealth of knowledge to add to the group and I'd like to hear from them.

Spiritual formations

Teaching from experience, practical suggestions for implementing practices

Not really

no

Conversation

I would enjoy a time of teaching,dd

Conversation/Interaction seems to be lacking

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