

LIBERTY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

COMPASSIONATE PROCEDURES FOR THE DISMISSAL
OF CHURCH STAFF MEMBERS

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY PROJECT

A Thesis Project Submitted to
Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

By

Mark David Nalepa

Lynchburg, Virginia

May 2011

LIBERTY BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

THESIS PROJECT APPROVAL SHEET

GRADE

MENTOR

READER

ABSTRACT

COMPASSIONATE PROCEDURES FOR THE DISMISSAL OF CHURCH STAFF MEMBERS

Mark D. Nalepa

Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011

Mentor: Dr. Charles Davidson

The purpose of this project is to offer church leadership compassionate procedures for dismissing a church staff member for reasons other than immorality and impropriety. This will increase the likelihood he will continue to fulfill his calling to serve Christ elsewhere in ministry. For this to be accomplished the process must recognize and address the needs of all spheres impacted by the dismissal. The project will integrate the Biblical account of John Mark, collect sampling of church data on termination procedures, stories and perspectives of previously terminated staff members and family, and resource related literature on this subject.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
The Statement of the Problem.....	10
The Statement of Limitations.....	10
The Theoretical Basis	10
The Statement of Methodology.....	15
The Review of Literature.....	17
CHAPTER ONE. THE NATURE OF CONFLICT AND DOCTRINE OF GRACE	21
Grace: To You.....	26
Grace: In You.....	29
Grace: Through You.....	31
CHAPTER TWO. THE ROLE OF PERSONALITY IN CONFLICT	33
Personality Overview	36
Type óDô	37
Type óÍô.....	37
Type óSô.....	38
Type óCô.....	38
Personality Weakness	39
Personality Interactions.....	43
CHAPTER THREE. COMPASSIONATE INTERACTIONS: THE STAFF MEMBER.....	47
Targeting Compassion	48
Compassion to His Identity	48
Compassion to His Calling.....	49
Compassion to His Feelings	50
Compassion to His Family	53
Meeting with the Staff Member	55
Scheduling the Meeting.....	55
Face to Face	56
Three is Not a Crowd.....	56
Be Direct.....	57
Be Gentle	57
Be Specific.....	57
Be Affirming.....	58
Compassionate Practicalities.....	61
Review the Severance Package	61
Allow Time Off	62

Assist with References	63
Removing Responsibilities	64
Informing the Church.....	64
After the Meeting	66
CHAPTER FOUR. COMPASSIONATE INTERACTIONS: THE FAMILY	67
Stress: Termination Timing	68
Stress: Marital Maladies	71
Stress: Support Systems.....	75
Congregational Friends	77
Professional Ministries.....	79
Church Leadership	80
The Healing Touch.....	81
Time Can Heal Wounds.....	82
CHAPTER FIVE. COMPASSIONATE INTERACTIONS: THE CHURCH.....	86
Impact on the Body	86
Their Allegiance	88
Their Momentum	89
Their Maturity.....	90
The Cycle of Compassion.....	91
Leadership: Ministering to the Church Family.....	91
Communicating to the Church	91
Content: The Message	92
Accepting versus Projecting Responsibility.....	92
Generalities versus Specifics	94
Sympathy versus Irritation	95
Content: Leadership's Character.....	95
Be Available	95
Take It on the Chin	96
Church Family: Ministering to the Staff Member and Family.....	97
Entering the Swamp	98
Mud on Their Face: Shame	99
Mud around Their Heart: Bitterness	100
Mud in Their Eye: Perspective	102
Staff Member: Ministering to the Leadership	103
Saying Goodbye	104
Before They Leave.....	104
After They Leave	105
CHAPTER SIX. COMPASSIONATE INTERACTIONS: THE LEADERSHIP.....	106
Leadership's Calling.....	106
Leadership's Character	107
Leadership's Perspective: Those who Depart.....	109
Don't Burn Any Bridges	111
Leadership's Behavior: Those who Remain	112

Defining Groups and Boundaries	113
Leadership's Confidence: Those on the Team.....	115
Confidence in Each Other	115
Confiding in Each Other	116
BIBLIOGRAPHY	118
VITA	122

INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2002 the author began his first tenure in fulltime Christian service in a large, multi-staff church. Entering the ministry was one of the highlights of his life. It represented the culmination of a calling into vocational ministry that was placed on his life shortly before graduating high. It was the fruition of much focused prayer and educational training from a reputable Christian college and seminary. His resume was selected out of 180 applicants with the hopes of addressing ministry needs within this church. After satisfactorily answering detailed questionnaires and personal phone calls covering everything from personal beliefs to lifestyle, he and his spouse were flown to the community where the church resides to experience a "candidating weekend." For three days they met with various groups from within the church in numerous settings. The intent was for them to thoroughly get to know each other in a short period of time. The weekend concluded with the author addressing the church membership on a Sunday night. Within an hour of the conclusion to the evening service, they had learned of the church's desire. The church membership had voted 104-0 to extend an invitation to him to serve as one of their new associate pastors.

From the initial call of God into ministry many years earlier; to the invested hopes, prayers, and ministry preparation; to the crescendo like build up of entering this specific fulltime ministry context, it all came together to make that moment one of the highlights of his life.

It stands to reason why two years later his dismissal from that very position would serve as one of the darkest days of his life. He struggled to reconcile over twelve years of ministry preparation over and against his early termination. Much of what he believed about himself, ministry, and calling were deeply challenged. And what added greatly to this tumultuous period of his life was the manner and process in which the termination took place.

There exists a disproportionate treatment of writings and conversations on the subject of staff ôfiringsô to that of ôhirings.ô Much has been written and discussed on the most effective and efficient ways to find and add ôMr. or Ms. Rightô to a church staff, where correspondingly little in comparison to staff terminations. While there is no shortage of books and writings that lead many leaders to common, almost universal approaches to hiring staff, it would appear that many leaders are left to their own devices and wisdom in terms of ending the staff relationship.

There are numerous reasons why significantly less thought has been given to developing holistic processes for terminating staff members. Some of which are quite obvious. Hiring is exciting, firing is depressing. The former is what many want to embrace, the latter they wish to avoid. The former represents hopeful ministry possibilities and outcomes, the latter opportunities missed or never fully realized.

Some reasons for the deficiency of well thought through approaches to staff dismissals can be less obvious. When one is disappointed and frustrated their sensitivities to others can become dull. There is little within the context of church ministry that can be as mentally and emotionally taxing as the dismissal of a staff member. It's understandable that church leadership wishes to ôturn the pageô as quickly

as possible on that disappointing chapter in their history. When a staff member is no longer the object of joy and optimism, it can become increasingly difficult to offer grace and tenderness. It is therefore understandable how the emotions and methodology associated with the hiring process may not be present in the dismissal process.

When leadership looks to hire staff, they do so with a great sense of optimism and expectation. In order to avoid seeing a candidate through órose-colored lenses,ô leaders consult numerous writings that offer sound and tested principles to help maintain objectivity throughout the process. Wise leaders seek to make sure emotion and idealism are not driving their decision-making process, but sound information, logic, and reason. The combination of good feelings and good information can lead to hiring decisions that lead to good results.

However, the dismissal process is not afforded the same luxuries. When the decision is made to terminate a staff member, it has been the result of deliberations and conversations that have extended over quite a period of time. Much emotional and mental energy has been spent throughout the process of arriving at the decision. So once a decision is reached, there can be very little interest or emotional energy left among the leaders to expend. The good feelings and optimism that were present during the hiring process are all but spent. Along with depleted feelings and increasing frustrations, there may be little interest or perceived value in thinking through and extending a termination process in time duration and application.

The lack of information on proper termination procedures and protocols may in some ways also be attributed to a ódisposableô approach to life which has infiltrated the church in subtle ways. This can be especially true among self-serving and insecure

leaders. While leaders know that the congregation does not exist to serve their purposes but Christ, and therefore should be treated with dignity and value in times of both elation and disappointment, those same rules may not always apply to staff. Staff members serve in a nebulous and powerless place between the leaders and congregants. When they no longer serve a leader's perceived or real needs, the temptation can be to treat them like a servant, versus serve them as they would the laity.

Another reason why many churches have thought little through the termination process may be due to a failure to count or tabulate correctly. Ministers know the God's children exist to serve God. Ephesians states "And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ."¹ Wise leaders are careful to make sure that they are never using a person to satisfy their own personal agendas, but God's. It can be equally tempting at times to view and treat God's sheep who are to be nurtured, fed, and led as mere tools and instruments that help achieve God's purposes. How people are treated in the "name of ministry" also counts "as ministry" to God. Staff members can be subjected to this as well. It is quite possible for a staff member to be viewed as a mere tool or instrument used to develop people in a community of grace without necessarily experiencing it themselves. Leaders must remain mindful that a staff member is simply a child of God who at one time was called by God to serve his interests in developing his children to do the same. A staff member

¹ Eph. 4:11-13 (New American Standard Version)

does not remove his title and standing as a child of God when becoming employed by a church and therefore does not forfeit his right to be treated as Christ and be a recipient of his grace throughout his tenure.

The instinctive thinking that "quick and clean" is the best approach to staff terminations may have unconsciously contributed to the offering of little in terms of written termination processes.

Many assume that in the best interest of the church family, a staff termination should be conducted speedily. The termination of a staff member is rarely done "cleanly" when it is pursued "quickly." And as a result, the church family can be the poorer for it. Church leadership is wise to understand that to terminate a staff member is to not end a single relationship, but multiple ones.

The process of terminating staff should be viewed more as a surgical procedure. A physician knows that the human body is intricately tied together and dependent upon each other. A procedure on one part of the body can have implications and affects on another area. Though operating on one specific area of the body, physicians must be mindful and address its implications on the whole body. This is in part why surgical procedures may take a considerable amount of time to perform. Much must be considered and factored in. If numerous hours can be devoted in pre-op, surgery, and post-op for the purpose of insuring a patient's recovery, then a significant amount of time and planning should go into the "surgical" removal of a staff member from the Body.

The quality of life and health of the Church is determined by its relationships. It experiences the blessings of God when it maintains a proper vertical relationship with him and horizontal relationship with its members. The vertical and horizontal

relationships are incumbent and dependent upon each other. One cannot not fully know or enjoy God apart from an increasing knowledge and interaction with their church family. The book of Hebrews states, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near."² The Body of Christ needs the intra-ministry and encouragement of its individual members in order to better know and become like Christ.

Members who are experiencing deep and accelerated growth and maturity in their relationship with Christ are both mindful and grateful to those individuals who have contributed to their enrichment. Often time church staff members are recognized individuals among the Body who help create the structures, organization, and contexts that help facilitate the personal growth for many within a church. It therefore stands to reason that the emotional and relational bonds between a staff member and church members, who have been directly or indirectly positively impacted by his ministry, would be significant.

Under the most ideal of circumstances the dismissal of a staff member will still have injurious affects upon many within the church. Even if his departure is understandable and amicable, those impacted by his ministry will feel the emotional and relational loss. How much more so if church members perceive the process of his removal to be unfair and insensitive? It is instinctive to come to the defense of those one feels are powerless and mistreated. The command in Romans to "mourn with those who

²

Heb. 10:23-25

mourn³ is still applicable and recognized by church members despite the church leadership's changing of a staff member's working status.

Church leadership that proceeds forward without giving some reflection and consideration upon the church wide impact of a staff termination will find that the 'quick and clean' approach can lead to a 'long and messy' outcome for the church body.

Many church leaders may be unaware of how much the mission of the church is suffering damage and compromise as a result of the seemingly little attention given to the staff termination process. An illustration from the National Football League (NFL) is helpful. A team drafts a promising prospect from college. They enjoy a lengthy relationship with each other before the day comes when management decides his services are no longer needed or profitable for the team and the direction that club wishes to go. This is a very common scenario that teams and players experience. It is therefore common for players to have accrued a resume that includes a list of several teams for which they have played for prior to 'hanging up of the cleats.' Rarely will a dismissed player, who has much to offer the NFL not find a place to eventually play. What a travesty for the NFL if that were to happen. The NFL still stood to profit from that player's participation in the league. Their exemplary skills and talents could still be employed to provide entertainment to the fans, albeit with a different team.

Unfortunately the NFL and ministry do not fully share this experience in common. Staff members are often terminated from churches when their skills, talents, and callings are no longer deemed needed or of value to a particular church. But instead of leaving one 'franchise' (church) to 'play' (minister) for another, some find

³

Rom. 12:15

themselves forever on the sidelines. Not of another team, but in ministry. Their departure from the one church team has inevitably led to their departure from the ministry league.

Studies have revealed that one in four ministers will experience a forced resignation at some point in their ministry. Only 54% of this group will go on to another full-time ministry position. How much loss has the Kingdom suffered, unbeknownst to many in the church, because terminated staff members suffered additional injury in the process of dismissal that served to be a career ending? While justifiable terminations will always exist is it possible that a poorly thought out and executed approach to termination can produce unjustifiable results in terms to the negligent impact it may have had? Do grounds for a justifiable termination fully justify all of the negative fallout and consequences that can arise? The very nature of terminations will always be difficult and laden with challenges. It is both difficult for leadership to come to that point of action as well as the staff member to experience. And yet the inherent difficulties cannot dissuade leadership from making those decisions. Yet it is the aftermath and potentially unnecessary and added damage the Kingdom incurs that must be addressed and guarded against.

What unfortunate and devastating irony have so many churches created for the Kingdom in an attempt to minister on behalf of the Kingdom. Many local churches approach the staff termination process in a poorly thought out and hurried manner in an effort to return their energies and focus back on making quantifiable Kingdom results. They do so not realizing that following a well thought out approach and strategy for staff terminations can yield the Kingdom greater returns since it helps to ensure the increased

probability of future placement of that disposed staff member elsewhere in the óvineyardô of God's work. The mission will always net more returns from the compounding contributions of many laborers versus that of a few.

Churches are well served to understand that when a staff member is no longer of value or use to their purposes that he still may have significant value and contributions to make to the Kingdom elsewhere. They are still called by God even when his usefulness at a particular ministry setting is perceived to be done. It is imperative that church leadership not only recognize this, but allow their process of dismissal to be informed and shaped by this truth. Compassion and tenderness must be communicated to the staff throughout the termination process. The staff member needs to see, hear, and feel this from the leadership. It need not be contradictory or confusing for a dismissed staff member to have the same leadership team who ófiredô him also serve to inspire him in finding and preparing him for that place of future ministry. It will actually serve to undermine and dilute the confusion that would have naturally ensued through a poorly thought out termination process.

It is the intent of this project to offer a termination process that is compassionate and in keeping with the needs of God and all involved. A compassionate process will be informed by those spheres to which the termination process touches and impacts. Those spheres include the staff member, his family, the church family, and leadership team. The author will attempt to analyze how the termination process affects these spheres and make recommendations for navigation through those areas. It is the hope of this project to serve as a comprehensive manual to help church leadership through the tumultuous process of staff terminations.

The Statement of the Problem

This project will serve as a manual in how to approach the staff termination process. It is not the intention to dissuade, inhibit, or reverse the leadership's decision to terminate a staff member. It is primarily written as a proactive and holistic plan for leadership to follow in the process.

The Statement of Limitations

The scope of this work is limited to staff terminations on the grounds of non-moral issues. Terminations resulting from immorality and impropriety are beyond the reach and intent of this project. And yet it is the author's conviction that a wholly different termination process and approach should be enacted for dismissals based on personality, philosophical and/or methodological differences, or other non-moral issues.

This project does not address the process whereby leadership determines the need to remove a staff member. Such decisions should only be made after much prayer, multiple interactions with the leadership team and staff member, and all attempts to preserve the working relationship have been exhausted. This project begins its contribution when it is determined that the working relationship must end.

The author will be writing and researching from the perspective of a previously terminated staff member as well as a senior pastor who currently serves over a staff. The perspective offered should therefore be balanced and objective.

The Theoretical Basis

The New Testament story of John Mark offers much to the conversation of

developing ócompassionateô dismissal procedures for staff members.

In Acts 13 the Holy Spirit had called Paul and Barnabas to serve as missionaries. With reference to their first missionary trip it states in Acts, óSo, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus. When they reached Salamis, they began to proclaim the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews; and they also had John as their helper.ô⁴ It is commonly understood that John Mark accompanied them on this trip. His role was to assist them in the Kingdom work, perhaps in helping with baptisms or the teaching of new converts. In many respects he served as a subordinate staff member to Paul and Barnabas.

In Acts 13:13 it states that upon arrival in Perga of Pamphylia that óJohn left them and returned to Jerusalem.ô The reason for his departure is not clearly stated and has thus been the subject of much speculation. Many commentators have suggested that his departure was due to theological differences he may have had with Paul and Barnabas over the terms of Gentile conversions. The councilô's discussion in Jerusalem over such matters in Acts 15 would lend some credence to that speculation since it became a major issue among the Jewish Christians early in the missionary endeavors to reach the Gentiles with the Gospel.

The next context mentioned with John Mark may offer additional support to that theory. With the Jerusalem Councilô's decision, Paul is now prepared to continue their missionary work. It states in Acts, óAfter some days Paul said to Barnabas, ãLet us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.ö Barnabas wanted to take John, called Mark, along with them also. But

⁴

Acts 13:4-5

Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. And there occurred such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus. But Paul chose Silas and left, being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord. And he was traveling through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.⁵ There are a few observations to be made from this section.

First it can be inferred that Mark's initial departure from the team was not over issues of immorality or impropriety, but rather over theology and practice. Even if one concedes that his theological differences were the result of an immature and inaccurate understanding of God's soteriological work, his likely disagreement with Paul and Barnabas over requirements for Gentile conversion were legitimately shared by many among the early Church. It appears that once that issue was resolved by the Church leadership, Mark was also resolved in his willingness to rejoin Paul and Barnabas in reaching the Gentiles.

The second observation was Paul's reaction to the notion of Mark rejoining the team. He was adamantly against it. For whatever reason, in Paul's mind, his initial departure was grounds for prohibiting his future ministry with them. He ultimately did not see Mark as an asset to future ministry.

The third observation is of Barnabas. It was he who initiated the restoration of Mark to the missionary work. He apparently believed that the initial issue that previously caused Mark to depart from the team was no longer an issue and should therefore not keep him from rejoining the work. Barnabas held that conviction so strongly that he was

⁵

Acts 15:36-41

not only willing to have a ósharp disagreementô with Paul, but ultimately separate from Paul in order to reinstate Mark to the ministry. It is clear that Barnabas felt he still had much to offer the Kingdom.

It is revealed later in the New Testament that Paul eventually comes to share that perspective as well. While in Rome, nearing the time of his death, he writes in 2 Timothy, óMake every effort to come to me soon; for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service.ô⁶ Paul was able to truthfully say of Mark that óhe is useful to me for serviceô because years earlier Barnabas believed he was still useful to God for service.

The disagreement and ensuing separation between Paul and Barnabas over Mark was both significant and pivotal to the Kingdom in many respects, both for then and now. Imagine how many churches would not have been planted, strengthened, and encouraged along the way had Barnabas not taken Mark. The positive, compounding, ministry returns that came as a result of Paul and Barnabas separating were greater than had they remained together.

And yet it cannot be overstated how easily the Kingdom could have been robbed of such net gains had Mark remained on the ósidelines of ministryô if not for the intercessory work of Barnabas. The Scriptures give no insight into the transformation of Mark's thinking which took place between his initial departure from Paul and Barnabas and his willingness to rejoin them in Acts 15. It is not a stretch to believe that Barnabas may have played a critical role in that preparatory process. No doubt Barnabas, who

⁶

2 Tim. 4:9-11

would publicly campaign for Mark's reinstatement to the team, had also first privately encouraged him to return to that work. Barnabas had to have convincingly seen something in Mark to cause him to put his reputation on the line before Paul in vouching for his ministry worthiness. Mark had to have received something from Barnabas that would cause him to stand before Paul, a man he had previously disappointed, and offer himself again to the work. Had Barnabas not lived up to his name, "the Son of Encouragement", Mark may have not lived up to his God given potential and calling. It was the combination of his grace and foresight that led to Mark's restoration in ministry.

The first half of Mark's story may unfortunately constitute the whole story for many previously dismissed staff members throughout the country. Mark proved that he possessed the trust and confidence of many in the church when he was chosen to accompany Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey. Paul and Barnabas also felt he possessed the credentials and abilities to minister effectively with them. Men and women who serve as church staff members, like Mark, had initially gained the trust and confidence of their church leadership to join them in their particular work.

And like Paul, many church leadership teams may at some point deem that staff member's service to no longer be of value. And like Mark, staff members may have lost favor in the leadership's eyes due to non-moral issues such as ministry immaturity, methodological and personality differences, or unsatisfactory work.

But unlike Mark, staff members may lack a "Barnabas" among their leadership team to intercede for them and their potential future ministry contributions. The lack of compassion and encouragement experienced in the process of being terminated from the "ministry team" has caused many to never rejoin another team. The Kingdom suffers

because fewer laborers are in the field, less compounding efforts to be multiplied, and greater potential net gains are never realized.

It is the second half of Mark's story of ministry redemption and restoration that many staff members need to experience. This project hopes to introduce a "Barnabas" approach for leadership to follow in their staff member termination procedures. A compassionate, holistic plan for addressing the needs of the terminated will significantly increase the likelihood that staff members will experience the second half of Mark's story in their lives.

The Statement of Methodology

A compassionate approach to staff terminations gives consideration to several areas. The first chapter will be a discussion on the nature of handling conflict among believers. This chapter will explore its nature and necessity as designed by Christ. It is imperative that both Biblical values and healthy behavioral principles inform and guide the process of managing conflict when navigating through the termination process. The doctrine of "grace" will be developed in this chapter and how it is to interface with conflict.

It is critical that these macro-truths be established at the beginning of the conversation on compassionate terminations. These truths will serve to correctly frame leadership's thinking and perspective as they initiate the process of staff termination and help assure that all decisions and actions are shaped by and in compliance to these truths.

Chapter two will be a discussion on the role and influence of personality in conflict. Each of the four personality types respond to conflict and challenge in different

ways. In order for a termination process to be "compassionate" leaders must understand their personality and how they are disposed to approach conflict and communication. Leadership must possess a self awareness and understanding in order to effectively and intentionally minister from their strengths and not their potential weaknesses.

In this chapter leaders will not only identify and understand their own personality's disposition in conflict, but the staff member's as well. Understanding the staff member's personality and its affect on how they process conflict and disappointment will allow the leader to administer effective and compassionate procedures. A discussion of how each personality interacts with the others will be provided.

Once leadership reviews the Biblical principles of conflict, doctrine of grace, and is committed to allowing their personality to be governed by such, they are now greater prepared to initiate a compassionate termination process.

Chapter three will cover the leadership's initiation of the dismissal process with the staff member. Discussion will be centered on several spheres of the staff member's life that will be directly impacted by the termination. Such areas include the psychological, emotional, financial, and vocational. All of these areas will experience disruption. Having an understanding of these areas can prepare leadership to address these with focused attention and thus help to minimize the long-term and negative effects on the staff member's life.

A compassionate approach in dealing with a staff member can yield compounding returns. A terminated staff member, who is the recipient of compassionate actions from the leadership, will have a greater likelihood, interest, and ability to minister to those also impacted by the termination process, his family and church. The healing ministry is now

greatly expanded.

Chapter four will discuss the terminations impact on the staff member's family. Spouses of staff members experience the termination's impact in some unique ways. Understanding these challenges and experiences can better equip the leadership to prayerfully engage the couple and help strengthen their marriage, families, and future ministry.

Chapter five addresses the termination's impact on the church family. When their unique perspective is understood and meaningfully addressed, they too can become ministers of compassion to each other, the staff member, and his family.

Chapter six will address the needs of the leadership team during the termination process. As initiators in the staff member's dismissal they are not exempt from facing unique challenges associated with the decision.

The Review of Literature

The following highlighted resources are of particular value in the preparation of this project. The *New American Standard Bible* not only provides the Biblical and theoretical precedent for this project, but also the authoritative relational commands throughout necessary to implement a termination process characterized with compassion.

Compassionate procedures will originate from the life and character of leadership as described in *1 Timothy 3:1-7* and *Titus 1:5-9*. The ministry of compassion will be expressed through verbal and nonverbal communication. *Proverbs 12:18* and *18:21* speak of the power and influence of the tongue. *James 1:19-20* and *Ephesians 4:31* give Scriptural commands on restraining the negative and verbal impact of the tongue, while

Proverbs 27:5-6 and *1 Thessalonians 5:11* reveal its proactive and healthy influences.

The Scriptures also disclose nonverbal actions conducive to a compassionate termination process. Being mindful of the command to prioritize the needs of others as stated in *Romans 12:10*, a dismissal procedure will be characterized by gentleness as shown in *James 3:17*, the humility of *Philippians 2:3-4*, the emotional self-control of *Ephesians 4:26-27* and *Philippians 4:6-7*, and positive perspectives as articulated in *Philippians 4:8*, *Colossians 3:23-24*, and *2 Timothy 1:7*.

David Seamands's *Healing for Damaged Emotions* discusses the role that damaged emotions can have on a person's behavior. Ill treated or ignored wounds will eventually manifest itself in dysfunctional behaviors. In conjunction with Seamands's book, *The Emotionally Healthy Church* by Peter Scazzero stresses the emotional side of discipleship that is often minimized and misunderstood in a believer's developmental process. The unfortunate repression of strained emotions has led to the stymied growth of many Christians. In addition, Scott Barfoot's working paper entitled *Forced Pastoral Exits* shares insightful statistical data on the numerous areas a pastor's life and family are negatively impacted through a termination process.

Author Harriet Lerner's *The Dance of Anger* and *The Dance of Connection* offer much to the conversation on ministering to a terminated staff member's family. In *The Dance of Anger* Lerner discusses how women should proactively process and express legitimate anger in their relationships in an effort to maintain emotional soundness. *The Dance of Connection* compliments the previous work in discussing the value and rules whereby healthy interpersonal communication can take place. Dean Merrill's *Clergy Couples in Crisis* is a classic work among those written to address the challenges present

in the married lives of pastors and their families. Of particular value is the author's contention that couples in ministry must voice their frustrations in ministry aloud for the purpose of maintaining their health.

The book *How Your Church Family Works* by Peter Steinke discusses at length the concept of systems theory and its influential role in shaping the relational dynamics at work in a church. Understanding of this principle is indispensable.

Two particular books which offer insights on how church members can be empowered to participate in a compassionate termination process are Larry Crabb's *Connecting* and Lewis Smedes's *Shame and Grace*. Crabb's work stresses the potentially powerful ministry the average Christian can have in bringing therapeutic healing to other believers. Smedes gives practical advice on mitigating the effects of shame in an individual's life who has suffered pain at the hands of another.

A compassionate termination process will be informed by the function of personality. Roy Oswald's *Personality Type and Religious Leadership* will help leadership understand how personality and temperament influences the interactions and perceptions of the staff member and vice versa.

For church leadership to successfully navigate through a termination process it will require a healthy understanding and response to conflict. Hans Finzel's *Empowered Leaders* gives practical insights and steps for leaders to embrace conflict in a manner that will help them greater identify with the character of Christ. *Transforming Conflict in Your Church*, by author Marlin Thomas, further adds to this conversation by describing the broad Christ's pleasing outcomes which can result from an approach to conflict in keeping with God's desires.

The Purpose Driven Church by author Rick Warren will provide the basis for a healthy conceptual understanding and plan for leadership to process and balance their emotions and thoughts in response to others. The book *Boundaries* by Henry Cloud further provides the rationale for leadership to consciously establish relational rules and boundaries in their interactions with the spheres impacted through the dismissal process.

CHAPTER ONE

THE NATURE OF CONFLICT AND DOCTRINE OF GRACE

In this author's teen years he studied martial arts. As an adult he can look back on those years and affirm that he learned some valuable things about life and discipline. Yet, as a teenager his original motivation and desire for studying martial arts was not to gain great insight on life as much as it was to adequately "hold his own" should he find himself in a physical altercation. As slightly embarrassing as this admission may be, what keeps him from experiencing greater shame for such motivation is that many, if not the majority, of those who study karate are driven by the same intent.

The practice and theory of "self defense" is quite simple. In order to minimize one's own pain in an altercation, one must maximize the pain of his opponent. And so through the practice of a balanced offense and defense, under the supervision of trained instructors, and within a controlled environment, the author essentially studied an artful exercise in "conflict management."

Exercises in conflict management should not be relegated to martial art studios, since conflict can arise in any context. That includes ministry. Churches may enjoy tax exempt status, but they are not conflict exempt. That truth is evidenced in even some of the earliest recorded New Testament examples of church life. The first and arguably greatest church planter in Christendom experienced conflict in his work. The apostle Paul found himself at odds with a ministry coworker named John Mark.

As was stated previously, the reasons for such differences are entirely open to

conjecture. It is unclear whether issues of methodology, philosophy, theology, or personality led to their separation. It apparently was not over a moral failure on the part of John Mark. There exists a great deal of ambiguity surrounding Paul's decision to part ways with John Mark since the Scriptures later reveal that Paul's opinion of him changes so as to request his assistance. Some may unfairly draw the conclusion that Paul handled the situation poorly, may have over-reacted, and should have listened to the counsel of Barnabas.

Prudence would prohibit declaring moral judgments on the rightness or wrongness of Paul's decision to part ways with John Mark. In the absence of information, the Scriptures resist attributing moral blame to Paul or John Mark. Neither one is reprimanded by the Scriptures over their actions and responses. A great lesson longs to be learned here. There are some relational conflicts that may arise over non-moral issues in ministry that do not permit the participants to be easily categorized in compartments labeled right and wrong. There are some conflicts that occur which require resistance to impugning the character of its participants. There are some contexts where the reason for disagreement and conflict, though unfortunate and undesired, are valid and understandable. The source of all conflict is not inherently evil.

This truth needs to be underscored when church leadership finds itself in the precarious situation of having to remove a staff member over non-moral issues. There are times when the reasons for ministry separation, though unfortunate and undesired, are valid and understandable. While that truth does not completely serve to extract the difficulties associated and fraught throughout the process of staff termination, it should at a minimum inform the leadership's posture towards that staff member.

When relational conflict arises it is natural to find oneself in a guarded state, practicing a relational form of self-defense. In order to protect one from the wounds that conflict brings, one tries to minimize his own pain and discomfort by maximizing the pain and discomfort of his perceived opponent. By recognizing that grounds for some staff terminations over non-moral issues does not require the assessment of blame nor rendering the label of *ówrongô* or *óat faultô* upon the staff member, it allows the process to be depersonalized and tone down the naturally heightened levels of defensiveness. Here church leadership does not have to equate winning the conflict with the staff member *ólosing.ô* Their comfort does not have to come at the expense of the terminated staff member.

Recognizing that this conflict does not require the perception of the *ósoon to beô* terminated staff member as an enemy will go a long way in decreasing the difficulties associated with the termination process, yet there is more to be considered.

A compassionate approach to releasing a staff member cannot be achieved unless the church leadership feels compassion towards that individual. One of the most common words for compassion found in the New Testament is *racham*. It is translated *óto love, pity.ô* It is difficult for leadership to make the staff member the object of their *ópityô* when they themselves can often become the chief recipients of such.

The phrase *ópity partyô* refers to the self-abasing experience one chooses to have based upon their unwitting participation or placement in a negative and undesirable context. Unless a different perspective is achieved, it is common for church leadership to practice *ópity partiesô* when in such difficult circumstances. With all the challenges associated with removing a church staff member, including both short and long term

implications and ramifications to the church that such a process inevitably brings, it can serve as a source of great contention and ultimately lead to bitterness within the hearts and minds of the leadership. Resentment, not compassion, can easily be lavished upon the staff member. Because that staff member did not “work out,” in the real or perceived eyes of the church leadership, they can quickly become viewed as primarily responsible for bringing the conflict into existence and forcing the leadership to be responsible for navigating through it.

Leadership must resist the temptation to make themselves the chief beneficiary of all pity in such circumstances. There is something to be said for understanding the gravity and difficulties surrounding the situation of removing a staff member. It is natural to mourn over with disappointment the situation the leadership finds them in. It is reasonable to have preferred avoiding such a challenging context. Yet it is helpful to keep in mind that though leadership must now navigate through difficult waters, the staff member too is along for the uncomfortable ride. Had most previously terminated staff members known how and or possessed the ability to avoid the tumultuous experience of being removed from a church, they would have gladly chosen it.

Leadership is well served when they choose to go beyond simply tolerating the conflict, to embracing it. A “tolerating conflict” mentality means one sees it as an anomaly, something that could have been avoided, but now must be endured. That mentality seeks to move through the discomfort as quickly as possible so as to return to a sense of normalcy relating to ministry. The problem with this approach, that while instinctive, it lacks a complete understanding of conflict and thus subjects the conflict process to potentially incomplete outcomes.

Conflict within the church is not to be viewed as an irregular experience, something that could have been avoided, but now must be endured. It must be seen as part of God's process by which the church becomes better conformed into the image of Christ and therefore able to accomplish more of his purposes.

Conflict has always had a refining effect upon the church. God used conflict to cause the early church to demonstrate reliance and codependence upon each other as was seen in Acts chapter two. It was conflict which God used to disperse the early Christians out of Jerusalem and into the world to begin accomplishing the dictates of the Great Commission. Born out of conflict the Jerusalem council was better able to understand and articulate the conditions for receiving the Gentiles into Kingdom fellowship. It was in their responses to conflict that the apostles revealed, through their writings, the secrets to experiencing greater sanctification and growth. Author Marlin Thomas writes, "We can come to know God more deeply in times of conflict. Conflict can damage relationships and tear apart community. But conflict can also be an opportunity, strengthening relationships and building up the body of Christ. How we approach conflict helps determine what the result will be. If we actively look for growth and illumination, we can find it."⁷

Conflict does not come without difficulty or challenge. Yet greater Christ-likeness does not come without conflict. Relational conflict within the Body of Christ is not necessarily a violation of God's will, but sometimes can serve as a means to its fulfillment.

The work of the church is to communicate the grace of Jesus to the world. He

⁷ Marlin E. Thomas, *Transforming Conflict In Your Church* (Scottsdale, PA.: Herald Press, 2002), 22

extends his kindness and benevolence to an undeserving world. An often cited laymen's definition of grace is "unmerited favor." In order for *agape* love to be offered and administered, the normal conditions for loving a person must fail to be met. Typically love is extended among individuals with whom one experiences love. A person offers kindness to those who have been kind to him. One reciprocates patience towards those who have demonstrated patience towards him. However, *agape* love is to be offered to others despite failing to receive love from others. If one loves because they have experienced love, then conditions for loving have been met and thus preclude unconditional love from being manifested. In the same sense, grace cannot be administered and received by a party that has merited or earned it. It fails to be grace at that point. For the wonderful expression of grace to be revealed it requires a dark and ugly backdrop. Conflict provides the perfect, dark canvas for the bright colors of grace to be contrasted upon.

Church leadership should see the difficulties of removing a staff member not only as a context for their own continued growth, maturation, and development as Christ's appointed leaders in the church, but as a powerful context for demonstrating the grace of Christ to that staff member with whom the working relationship must end.

In order for compassion to characterize the termination experience of a church staff member, grace must permeate the whole process. In order for grace to find its expression, leadership must revisit its work and purposes in their lives.

Grace: To You

Becoming ministers of God's grace in difficult relationships is easier to

accomplish when leadership considers how they personally have been made recipients of that same grace. Consider the following verses.

“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;⁸

through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God.⁹

But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.¹⁰

The grace referred to in the above passages speaks to the kindness that God universally extends to all who would enter relationship with him through Jesus. He extends that grace to all in the midst of mankind’s hostile standing before God. The New Testament states,

“because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the

⁸ Rom. 3:23-24

⁹ Rom. 5:2

¹⁰ Titus 3:4-7

flesh cannot please God.¹¹

óFor if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.¹²

óAnd although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach.¹³

God's kindness and grace is magnified when leadership considers the dark backdrop of their sinfully, detestable behavior and desires. The demonstration of his universal grace, while welcomed and wanted, will forever remain unfathomable.

As leadership contemplates the universal application of grace, they should also consider its particular application in their lives. While all have their standing before God because of grace and are continuously living under its influence, there are particular moments and seasons in each person's life where they can especially recall with deep gratitude God's dispensing of grace upon them. Every person has acquired a resume of sinful moments and experiences that have led to great shame and regret. It is especially here where one feels immense gratitude for God's expression of grace and forgiveness upon him. It is his grace that removes that sin, guilt, and feelings of estrangement. It is his grace that keeps him from not allowing his identity to be tied to the numerous acts he

¹¹ Rom. 8:7-8

¹² Rom. 5:10

¹³ Col. 1:21-22

committed outside of God's will. It is that grace that continuously expunges him of all uncleanness before God so that he may enjoy his camaraderie and a new future. Giving some prolonged thought to grace and its particular value and expression in the leader's life will empower the desire to express it.

Grace: In You

Starting with a fresh revisit and contemplation of the doctrine of grace may stir and inspire the minds and emotions of the church leadership towards the terminated staff member, but alone it is insufficient to guarantee its expression throughout the termination process. The staff removal process is laden with challenges. It will be emotionally, mentally, and physically taxing on the church leadership and all those involved. As leadership continues to navigate through the tumultuous process, the will and good intentions can suffer from fatigue. Leadership may start off the blocks running fast and determined to express compassion and grace continuously, but at some point in the race the legs become heavy, lungs become sore, muscles begin to burn, and the desire to slow down in energy exertion becomes all too irresistible. Simply thinking or wanting to administer grace throughout the process is insufficient. There must be reliance upon it. Below are examples of grace dependence.

“But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.”¹⁴

¹⁴

1 Cor. 15:10

“And He has said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.’ Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.”¹⁵

“You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.”¹⁶

As the passages illustrate there is to be reliance upon the grace and power that the indwelling Holy Spirit provides, in order to do all that pleases him. It is God in them that provides the ability to sustain the perceptions and responses needed to administer compassion throughout the staff dismissal process.

There must be recognition that the power to accomplish Christ's purposes in this moment is beyond their own resources and abilities. Like Paul, leadership should choose to rejoice in the “weakness” of what appears to be a debilitating and abhorrent context and see it as an opportunity for God to glorify himself through their actions and responses. They must embrace not only the power that God makes available to them, but the opportunity and context in which that power is available.

¹⁵ 2 Cor. 12:9-10

¹⁶ 2 Tim. 2:1

Grace: Through You

In order for grace to permeate a compassionate approach to dismissing a staff member, leadership must not only cognitively embrace the grace which has embraced them, or depend upon grace to administer grace, but consciously be aware of all the multiple forms and expressions of grace that will be required throughout the termination process.

The Scriptures reveal that giving grace to one another includes more than the content of what is said, but the manner. In his letter to the church in Colossae, Paul writes, "Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person."¹⁷

Yet the expression of grace to the staff member will require leadership to think in terms that go well beyond the content and manner of verbal communication, but forms of non-verbal communication as well. Author Blake Neff writes,

Words do have power, but observers conclude that the nonverbal message system may have an even greater power. Some social scientists have argued that 93 percent of the emotional impact of a message comes from nonverbal sources. Others have reasoned more convincingly that the figure is closer to 65 percent (Adler and Towne, 2003, p.223). Regardless of the precise figure, it is clear that a large part of the emotional impact of a message is borne through nonverbal communication (Burgoon, 1994). The effective pastor will need to have a clear understanding of the role of the nonverbal message system.¹⁸

Grace must inform not only what and how leadership verbally interacts with the terminated staff member, but all forms of non-verbal communication. There exists an old

¹⁷ Col. 4:6

¹⁸ Blake J. Neff, *A Pastor's Guide To Interpersonal Communication* (Binghamton, NY: Haworth Press, 2002), 77

axiom that 80% of all learning is ócaughtô in observation verses ótaughtô in verbal communication. People are inclined to believe, remember, and retain what they observe with their own eyes. What a person sees makes a powerful and long lasting impression. In order for a terminated staff member to experience compassion and grace he must see it emanate more from the leadership's lives and actions than from their lips. Recommendations of non-verbal expressions of grace will be further developed in the ensuing chapters.

It is one's experiences and perspectives in conflict and grace that will determine whether compassion will inform the removal process. If viewed and responded to in a Biblical manner, church leadership can have the confidence to know, that as they navigate through these difficult ówaters,ô they not only place themselves in a position to receive God's blessing and position God to receive greater glory.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ROLE OF PERSONALITY IN CONFLICT

The author recalls an interaction, several months prior to his dismissal, with the senior pastor whom he previously served under. The pastor shared with him his frustration over what he perceived to be a lack of ministry effort and drive on the staff member's part. He was accused of not being a "go getter." The author can recall strongly disagreeing with him and citing examples to his defense. Conversations and contexts such as this ultimately preceded and led to his dismissal. It wasn't until the decision to be terminated was rendered and the transition process begun, that the author became acquainted with the subject and study of personalities. In an attempt to understand and reconcile all the factors and variables that helped create this unpleasant and climatic context, the conversation on the role and influence of personality was discovered. This provided a great deal of insight and illumination into what contributed to the ministry demise. It became increasingly clear that a lack of understanding on personality differences had significantly influenced the outcomes of the termination. One study revealed the following relationship between personality, conflict, and pastoral terminations. It shows how the author's experience is unfortunately not unusual.

Furthermore Willis (2001) also documents personality conflicts as one of the major reasons for pastoral terminations. Our exploratory study indicates that 35% of pastors found personality conflicts with board members to be a significant source of tension and when asked for the main reason for their forced exits, approximately 31% of the pastors

participating in this current study claimed personality conflict with board members.¹⁹

The phrase “personality differences” was never mentioned or discussed throughout the decision-making process to remove the staff member or in the transitioning process. Despite the leadership’s failure to acknowledge it and the staff member’s inability to recognize it, the influence of personality had an exasperating effect on both the process of deciding and releasing the staff member.

In the book *Personality Type and Religious Leadership*, authors Oswald and Kroeger discuss at length the critical need for clergy to understand the role personality has in shaping their relational experiences with each other. Using the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator* (MBTI) as a tool to discover personality and temperament types, the authors explain the impact of personality on church staff relationships.

“the MBTI will help you see your relationships with professional colleagues in a new light. You will begin to understand why you are attracted to some people and their style of ministry and turned off by others. Over the years we have experienced how those people who annoy us, frustrate us, and even make us down-right angry become much less offensive as we understand their type and the implications of their preferences. The MBTI instrument has produced much healing in staff relations in business and industry. It’s time now that it be more widely used within the church.”²⁰

Hindsight has made it clear to this author that personality not only influenced the decision to release him as a staff member, but then went on to shape and inform his experience and understanding of the termination process.

A proper view of conflict is essential to begin the arduous process of releasing a staff member. Administering grace is required in order for the termination process to be

¹⁹ D. Scott Barfoot, Bruce E. Winston, and Charles Wickman, “Forced Pastoral Exits: An Exploratory Study” (Working Paper, Regent University, 2005), 3

²⁰ Roy M. Oswald and Otto Kroeger, *Personality Type and Religious Leadership* (Herndon, VA.: The Alban Institute, 1988), 8

characterized by compassion. Yet the role of personality will greatly influence and determine the expression of grace on the leadership's part and the perception and reception of it on the part of the terminated staff member.

The role of leadership's understanding and management of personality in the termination process can be likened to that of a glass pitcher. The purpose of the pitcher is to serve as both a container and dispenser of liquid. Those in the design industry are mindful that while a pitcher can be designed in numerous shapes and styles, some designs are more conducive for pouring purposes. The shapes, contours, and lip of a pitcher's body can determine whether the pouring of the liquid will be efficient, manageable, and mess-free.

Church leadership is to serve as dispensers of grace and compassion. The terminated staff member and all involved are the glasses into which leadership must pour these two contents. The leadership's personality serves as the shape of that pitcher. Wise understanding and governance of personality will allow the dispensing of grace and compassion to be efficient and effective to its recipients. A lack of appreciation and attention to the role and influence of personality can have adverse effects on the termination process by impeding the flow of the pitcher's contents.

Personality will influence the experience of both the staff member and leadership as they navigate through the termination process. Personality affects one's *perspective*. It serves as a lens by which one processes and evaluates information. Personality effects one's *presentation*. Each personality has a predisposition to present and interact with individuals differently. Personality effects how one *processes*. How one applies what he perceives and understands to how he lives is largely shaped by personality. Grace and

compassion will characterize the termination process to the extent that personality is managed and monitored by church leadership.

Personality Overview

A general overview of personality types reveals that there are four types. In the book *Life Keys*, the authors write, “Your personality type is really your essential nature, the most basic way to describe you and all your assets and strengths. Each type is equally valid and valuable - just like violins and fiddles - but each approaches life in ways different from other types.”²¹ While each person’s composition includes portions of all four, one or two will generally dominate in expression and influence. The graphic serves as a visual reference point.



Each personality type possesses strengths that are complimentary of each other. Each type possesses its own unique characteristics and contributions in its interactions with people and tasks. They determine particular motivations and expected patterns of behavior. It is of particular importance that whoever serves as the representative face of leadership to the terminated staff member (i.e. lead pastor, head elder, chairman of the deacons) possesses a good understanding and self-awareness of his own personality as

²¹ Jane Kise, David Stark, and Sandra Hirsch, *Lifekeys: Discovering Who You Are, Why You're Here, What You Do Best* (Minneapolis, MN.: Bethany House Publishers, 1996), 126

well as the staff members since he will serve as the chief mediator of grace. The information below is intended to help facilitate that understanding and assist leadership in identifying both theirs and the staff member's personality.

TYPE 6D6

Type 6D6 personalities are characterized as direct, demanding, decisive, and dominant. They are the 6go getters6 of the world. They are undaunted and undistracted in their pursuits and the achievements of goals. Words that further characterize the strengths of this personality are below.²²

<i>Asserting</i>	<i>Firm</i>	<i>Strong</i>	<i>Bold</i>	<i>Daring</i>
<i>Convinced</i>	<i>Decisive</i>	<i>Sure</i>	<i>Certain</i>	<i>Risk-taking</i>
<i>Courageous</i>	<i>Adventurous</i>	<i>Brave</i>	<i>Positive</i>	<i>Optimistic</i>
<i>Winner</i>	<i>Competitive</i>	<i>Challenging</i>	<i>Motivating</i>	<i>Confident</i>
<i>Self-reliant</i>	<i>Persuading</i>	<i>Convincing</i>	<i>Serious</i>	<i>Unwavering</i>
<i>Powerful</i>	<i>Driving</i>	<i>Industrious</i>	<i>Hardworking</i>	<i>Unconquerable</i>
<i>Determined</i>	<i>Direct</i>	<i>To the point</i>	<i>Devoted</i>	<i>Dedicated</i>
<i>Outspoken</i>	<i>Opinionated</i>	<i>Zealous</i>	<i>Eager</i>	<i>Bottom line</i>

TYPE 6I6

Type 6I6 personalities can be characterized as inspiring, influential, and interactive. Excitement and enthusiasm typify this group. They energize gatherings with their personality and enjoy interacting and communicating with individuals and groups. Words that further characterize the strengths of this personality are below.²³

²² Mels Carbonell, *Extreme Personality Makeover* (Blue Ridge, GA.: Uniquely You Resources, 2005), 35

²³ Ibid., 40

<i>Outgoing</i>	<i>Active</i>	<i>Playful</i>	<i>Fun-loving</i>	<i>Delightful</i>
<i>Pleasant</i>	<i>Trusting</i>	<i>Gullible</i>	<i>Open</i>	<i>Friendly</i>
<i>Cordial</i>	<i>Popular</i>	<i>Promoting</i>	<i>Encouraging</i>	<i>Hyper</i>
<i>Energetic</i>	<i>Enthusiastic</i>	<i>Influencing</i>	<i>Smooth talker</i>	<i>Articulate</i>
<i>Entertaining</i>	<i>Clowning</i>	<i>Admirable</i>	<i>Elegant</i>	<i>Joyful</i>
<i>Jovial</i>	<i>Talkative</i>	<i>Verbal</i>	<i>Animated</i>	<i>Expressive</i>
<i>Persuading</i>	<i>Convincing</i>	<i>Sociable</i>	<i>Interactive</i>	<i>Merry</i>
<i>Cheerful</i>	<i>Smiling</i>	<i>Happy</i>	<i>Dynamic</i>	<i>Impressing</i>
<i>Sharp</i>	<i>Appealing</i>	<i>Charming</i>	<i>Peppy</i>	<i>Responsive</i>

TYPE 6S6

Type 6S6 personalities are characterized as being steady, stable, servant, and shy.

Though more reserved than the other personalities they are best suited to relate to each of the four types. They enjoy volunteering and helping others accomplish tasks. Words that further characterize the strengths of this personality are below.²⁴

<i>Kind</i>	<i>Nice</i>	<i>Caring</i>	<i>Gentle</i>	<i>Soft</i>
<i>Humble</i>	<i>Loyal</i>	<i>Pleasing</i>	<i>Peaceful</i>	<i>Calm</i>
<i>Obedient</i>	<i>Submissive</i>	<i>Satisfied</i>	<i>Reserved</i>	<i>Considerate</i>
<i>Thoughtful</i>	<i>Contented</i>	<i>Mild</i>	<i>Loving</i>	<i>Sincere</i>
<i>Honest</i>	<i>Shy</i>	<i>Agreeable</i>	<i>Diplomatic</i>	<i>Peacemaking</i>
<i>Flexible</i>	<i>Adaptable</i>	<i>Merciful</i>	<i>Steady</i>	<i>Dependable</i>
<i>Stable</i>	<i>Balanced</i>	<i>Giving</i>	<i>Sensitive</i>	<i>Sweet</i>
<i>Tender</i>	<i>Generous</i>	<i>Patient</i>	<i>Timid</i>	<i>Compassionate</i>
<i>Soft-spoken</i>	<i>Tolerant</i>	<i>Hospitable</i>	<i>Serving</i>	<i>Sacrificing</i>
<i>Courteous</i>	<i>Polite</i>	<i>Assisting</i>	<i>Helpful</i>	<i>Quiet</i>

TYPE 6C6

Type 6C6 personalities are characterized as competent, calculating, and cautious.

They are very conscientious and follow the 6rules6 in all things. They approach decision-

²⁴

Ibid., 45

making in a logical and orderly manner. Words that further characterize the strengths of this personality are below.²⁵

<i>Proper</i>	<i>Formal</i>	<i>Law-abiding</i>	<i>Right</i>	<i>Conscientious</i>
<i>Analytical</i>	<i>Conservative</i>	<i>Inflexible</i>	<i>Careful</i>	<i>Calculating</i>
<i>Straight</i>	<i>Conforming</i>	<i>Compliant</i>	<i>By the book</i>	<i>Cautious</i>
<i>Correct</i>	<i>Competent</i>	<i>Does right</i>	<i>Thinker</i>	<i>Contemplative</i>
<i>Deep</i>	<i>Intense</i>	<i>Perceptive</i>	<i>Sees clearly</i>	<i>Pondering</i>
<i>Wondering</i>	<i>Guarded</i>	<i>Masked</i>	<i>Protective</i>	<i>Preparing</i>
<i>Faithful</i>	<i>Systematic</i>	<i>Follows plan</i>	<i>Inquisitive</i>	<i>Questioning</i>
<i>Original</i>	<i>Creative</i>	<i>Strict</i>	<i>Unbending</i>	<i>Inventive</i>
<i>Imaginative</i>	<i>Organized</i>	<i>Orderly</i>	<i>Researching</i>	<i>Consistent</i>

Personality Weakness

Just as every coin has two sides, so does each personality type's expression. Each type not only has its potential strengths, but also weaknesses and liabilities. Author Tim LaHaye writes, "At the moment of our conception we all inherited a basic genetic temperament that contains both our strengths and our weaknesses. This temperament is called several things in the Bible: 'the natural man,' 'the flesh,' 'the old man,' and 'corruptible flesh,' to name a few. It is the basic impulse of our being that seeks to satisfy our wants."²⁶

In the context of a termination process, the likelihood that personality weakness will express itself must be anticipated. Being terminated from a job produces feelings of worry, defensiveness, and frustration. Such feelings can inevitably serve to suppress the expression of personality strengths and therefore allow for the manifestation of

²⁵ Ibid., 49

²⁶ Tim LaHaye, *Spirit-Controlled Temperament* (Wheaton, IL.: Tyndale House Publishers, 1994), 2

weaknesses. If church leadership is going to effectively administer a compassionate termination process infused with grace it is therefore imperative that it recognizes the factors and contexts which can lead to the demonstrative expression of personality weaknesses, the characteristics of weaknesses expressed, and remedial steps to limit their expression.

Irritability and frustration are two things which serve as a catalyst for the expression of personality weakness. What typically causes irritation with a type óDô personality is the perception of weakness, indecisiveness, laziness, a lack of discipline, purpose, and direction.

When leadership identifies with the type óDô personality, weakness responses to the above may include forcefulness, intensity, anger, and a domineering and demanding spirit. Impatience and insensitivity are common traits of this personality's weakness. When in conflict the natural tendency is to want to attack.

To counter and suppress these expressions, type óDô personalities should prepare to preemptively address the following areas with meditation and pray on the following verses.

1. *Be Gentle* - óBut the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.ô²⁷
2. *Control Feelings* - óBe angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity.ô²⁸
3. *Put Others First* - óBe devoted to one another in brotherly love; give

²⁷ James 3:17

²⁸ Eph. 4:26-27

preference to one another in honor.²⁹

When leadership identifies with the type *óI* personality, they may find themselves frustrated and irritated with the staff member when they perceive disinterest, pessimism, antagonism, and a lack of enthusiasm and team participation.

The type *óI* weakness responses may include being overly optimistic, emotional, wordy, and irrational. Because recognition and approval are basic motivations for this personality type, it can quickly descend into self-centeredness. When in conflict the natural tendency is to want to expose others.

Preemptive measures include prayerfully meditating and applying these verses to leadership's behavior.

1. *Be Humble* - *óDo nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.*³⁰
2. *Control Speech* - *óThis you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.*³¹
3. *Affirm* - *óTherefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.*³²

²⁹ Rom. 12:10

³⁰ Phil. 2:3-4

³¹ James 1:19-20

³² 1 Thess. 5:11

When leadership identifies with the type *óSô* personality, they may find themselves frustrated and irritated with the staff member when they perceive aggressiveness, inflexibility, instability, insensitivity, and disloyalty.

Their type *óSô* weakness response may include becoming insecure, fearful, weak-willed, and withdrawn. When in conflict their natural tendency is to support and submit. Leadership will want to prayerfully meditate on the following responses.

1. *Confront with Love* - *óBetter is open rebuke than love that is concealed.*

Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.³³

2. *Be Confident* - *óFor God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline.³⁴*

3. *Be Enthusiastic* - *óWhatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.³⁵*

When leadership identifies with the type *óCô* personality, they may find themselves frustrated and irritated with the staff member when they perceive incompetence, disorganization, inaccuracy, and inconsistency.

The type *óCô* weakness response may include becoming moody, critical, worrisome, and negative. When in conflict their natural tendency is to criticize. They will therefore want to prayerfully meditate on the following responses.

1. *Avoid Bitterness* - *óLet all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and*

³³ Prov. 27:5-6

³⁴ 2 Tim. 1:7

³⁵ Col. 3:23-24

slander be put away from you, along with all malice.³⁶

2. *Don't Worry* - Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.³⁷

3. *Stay Positive* - Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.³⁸

Personality Interactions

Possessing an understanding of one's personality, with both its strengths and weaknesses, is essential in facilitating a compassionate termination process. Knowing the staff member's personality and how to interact with it requires wisdom and effort. The information below is some general observations on various scenarios of personality matching as well as recommendations for interactions. The left side of the pairing represents church leadership, while the right side the staff member.

The D/D relationship can function well so long as the staff member recognizes leadership as superior in position. Even within the relationship the subordinate will still seek to exert his will and dominance at times. Leadership must seek to control itself, rather than the other person. Resist the temptation to make quick decisions, but

³⁶ Eph. 4:31

³⁷ Phil. 4:6-7

³⁸ Phil. 4:8

thoroughly think through the implications. Where possible, giving choices instead of ultimatums will help the subordinate.

Within the $\acute{o}D/I\hat{o}$ relationship leadership will want to dominate while the staff member is motivated to communicate. Expression is essential for him. If verbally suppressed, he will feel leadership does not care about him. Leadership must therefore communicate in keeping with his needs. Because $\acute{o}I\hat{o}$ types seek to impress others, $\acute{o}D\hat{o}$ leadership should seek opportunities to praise and affirm

A $\acute{o}D/S\hat{o}$ relationship will require a great deal of restraint and discernment on the part of leadership. In addition to their subordinate vocational position, the staff member possesses a submissive and subservient disposition. He will generally be compliant to dominant and assertive leadership. Unless leadership purposely inquires and creates contexts for him to communicate, he will simply be compliant. Leadership must implore the staff member to speak without fear of reprisal and to exercise more determination.

The $\acute{o}D/C\hat{o}$ relationship will demand leadership interact cordially and with sensitivity. Because the staff member is already disposed to be concerned with details and careful planning, to undergo a termination process can be particularly exasperating. He is by nature pessimistic and such an experience will serve to increase the pessimism and negativity. Leadership will need to listen to his concerns but also help direct him into envisioning a picture of a positive future that his pragmatic and detailed disposition would otherwise forbid him to imagine.

The $\acute{o}I/I\hat{o}$ relationship with a staff member means leadership must demonstrate and encourage him to not overreact or exaggerate the termination situation. $\acute{o}I\hat{o}$ types can both perceive challenge more badly than it really is or treat it glibly and not appreciate its

gravity. The staff member will require leadership's availability, attention, and affirmation throughout the process.

An $\acute{o}I/S\hat{o}$ relationship will require leadership to create moments and contexts for the staff member to share his thoughts. Type $\acute{o}I\acute{o}\hat{o}$ are generally talkative and are known to interrupt and control conversations. Greater intentionality and restraint will therefore be required. Leadership must concentrate on listening closely rather than thinking of how they'll respond.

The $\acute{o}I/C\hat{o}$ relationship can be complementary, despite having opposite dispositions. In this context, the leadership's optimism and the staff member's pessimism will go head to head. Leadership should encourage him to express himself and not merely internalize his conflict and criticisms. Leadership also needs to sympathize with the legitimate concerns he has while also being optimistic and offering encouragement.

The $\acute{o}S/S\hat{o}$ relationship can be a harmonious one. They can express to each other great sensitivity, tolerance, and forgiveness. Here again leadership should seek to create contexts and conversations for the staff member to express himself. He may need assistance in taking greater initiative in communication and in planning for the next season of his life.

The $\acute{o}S/C\hat{o}$ relationship is marked by two parties that can be both quiet and private. Because the staff member is more task and project oriented, it falls into the leadership's $\acute{o}lap\hat{o}$ of responsibility to get him to express himself.

The $\acute{o}C/C\hat{o}$ relationship can be challenging since both perceive their perspectives and approaches on how to do things is correct. Grace and sensitivity can often be absent from this relationship. Leadership must take the lead by being complimentary and

outgoing with the staff member.

After leadership has reviewed the personality profiles, identified the personality of the staff member and themselves, considered their respective strengths, weaknesses, and recommended interactions the next step is to sit down with the staff member and begin initiation of a compassionate termination process.

CHAPTER THREE

COMPASSIONATE INTERACTIONS: THE STAFF MEMBER

The previous chapters served as preparation for the termination process by examining the nature of conflict, doctrine of grace, and role of personality. The intention of such a review is to identify errant or underdeveloped thoughts and perspectives on the said areas and thus recognize and remove obstacles for compassion's expression.

The next phase is initiation of the termination process. Leadership must be prepared to minister simultaneously to the four spheres impacted: the staff member, his family, the church body, and the leadership. However, the process begins when the staff member is notified of his dismissal.

What will further enable leadership to offer grace and compassion to the staff member is to begin to empathize with his imminent plight. Proverbs says that "Death and life are in the power of the tongue" ³⁹ When the staff member hears those words indicating the ministry relationship is ending, a metaphorical death begins to occur. It affects multiple areas of his life. His thoughts, feelings, and perspective about self and ministry become compromised and undergo destabilization.

When leadership comprehends the impact the termination process has on the many spheres of that staff member's life, they will in turn be better prepared to inject compassion into the termination process through a well measured approach. They will be

³⁹

Prov. 18:21

mindful of the proverb that states, “There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.”⁴⁰

Targeting Compassion

When the time comes for the staff member to learn of their dismissal, he will experience a wide range of feelings. Much of it will constitute pain, confusion, and embarrassment. There are several areas of the staff member’s life that a dismissal will render particularly vulnerable. Leadership should anticipate administering compassion to the following areas throughout the termination process.

Compassion to His Identity

The nature of church ministry is unique for the staff member in that it represents a coagulation of his vocation, relationships and social network, financial revenue stream, leisure and recreation, and much more. In a word, ministry represents his “world.” Ministry is the thread that unites these areas into one. When his ministry ends, all the other pieces associated and tied together by that thread of ministry become unraveled. Questions of identity can surface.

Issues of identity are further raised as the staff member will frequently reflect on what he did or failed to do which led to his dismissal. In his mind had he only “performed better,” the crisis could have been averted. Leadership needs to assist the staff member in distinguishing his overall value to God and His mission versus the staff member’s involvement in a particular expression of that mission (i.e. that church). A poor fit in his current church context does not equate to a poor fit to participating in

⁴⁰

Prov. 12:18

ministry.

Compassion to His Calling

If the non-moral reasons for dismissal are things that can be addressed and developed over time and in another context, then leadership can legitimately encourage and support that staff member's pursuit and placement in a future ministry context. Leadership should help the staff member understand that "calling to ministry" and "competency in ministry" are distinguishable. Competency is determined by the individual. The calling is determined by God. Competency is the earthly exercises and endeavors ministers give themselves over to in order to expand their influence and effectiveness in ministry as a result of God's calling upon their lives. The divine calling to serve in ministry precedes the development of ministry competencies. The calling is not dependent upon one's skill sets. However competencies are dependent upon the calling and need not be developed apart from it.

It is imperative for the staff member to understand that while the absence of particular ministry proficiencies and skill sets may lead to one's dismissal from service at a particular church, it does not necessarily speak to his calling. The calling by God is absolute and objective. Leadership's determination of the value and potential ministry contribution of a staff member can be relative and subjective. Leadership must differentiate the two for the staff member, lest his blurred perspective fail to recognize and distinguish this truth. How many previously terminated ministers never returned to ministry because they equated their current deficiency in ministry proficiency with that of their future calling?

The distinguishing of competency from calling may provide some clarity for the staff member, but it may also raise some confusion. In an attempt to better understand and reconcile his distressful situation, the released staff member may likely question the value and purpose for which he served at the church. The question of “What did all this mean?” can commonly cross his mind vainly in search of an answer.

The author can recall (and still does) pondering those questions. In the absence of concrete and objective answers, he was able to learn some lessons through the experience. He learned a great deal about himself. He left that ministry wiser and more mature than when he first entered it. In hindsight he is able to look back and see genuine contributions he made to the betterment of the church. But he also learned that God, in his sovereignty, can use a non-moral departure issue as a means of transitioning a person to the next place He has designated for him. It is ideal when there is a simultaneous recognition from both staffer member and leadership that a needed transition is appropriate. Ideal as it may be, it is also unlikely. It can ultimately be of God even when the terminated staff member fails to recognize God’s fingerprints on that moment. God’s will does not require consensus among the staff member and leadership in order to be accomplished. Leadership may be afforded contexts and moments throughout the termination process to share these and other insights in an attempt to minister to the staff member.

Compassion to His Feelings

One study that surveyed pastors who had experienced a forced termination revealed the emotional impact they felt during and after the forced exit. It revealed that

60% and above would characterize their feelings as being that of ôbetrayed, sad, frustrated, lonely, forgotten, and depressed.ô⁴¹

Leadership should anticipate and prepare that their staff member will likely experience the same feelings and sentiments. Knowledge of his likely emotional response to the news of his dismissal can help leadership in two ways.

First it will better prepare the leadership to understand the emotional repercussions of their decision. The staff member's subsequent behavior will be within alignment of what should be expected. Author David Seamands writes,

Understanding that being a Christian does not preserve one from experiencing suffering in their emotional health. ôIt is necessary to understand this, first of all, so that we can compassionately live with ourselves and allow the Holy Spirit to work with special healing in our own hurts and confusions. We also need to understand this in order to not judge other people too harshly, but to have patience with their confusing and contradictory behavior. In so doing, we will be kept from unfairly criticizing and judging fellow Christians. They're not fakes, phonies, or hypocrites. They are people, like you and me, with hurts and scars and wrong programming that interfere with their present behavior.ô⁴²

Leadership needs to be accommodating to the emotional plight that the staff member will soon be experiencing. The dismissal will initially impact him emotionally and thus behaviorally. There is an emotional ôcause and effectô that is put into motion when the termination process is initiated.

Knowledge of their likely emotional response can serve leadership in an additional way. The information can serve as a means to compassionately minister to that staff member by providing him with this knowledge. The information will

⁴¹ Barfoot, *Forced Pastoral Exits*, 13

⁴² David A. Seamands, *Healing for Damaged Emotions* (Colorado Springs, CO.: David C. Cook, 1991), 13

essentially serve as emotional mile-markers for the staff member to recognize as he must now navigate through the “emotional dark road” that a dismissal process initiates. Giving him foresight into his likely emotional responses can help him know that it is natural and not unspiritual. As author Peter Scazzero states, this runs counter-intuitive for many Christians. He writes, “In the minds of many today, the repression of feelings and emotions has been elevated to the status of Spirit or virtue. Denying anger, ignoring pain, skipping over depression, running from loneliness, avoiding confusing doubts, and turning off our sexuality has become a way of spiritual life.”⁴³

To the contrary, the staff member needs to be encouraged to express and give voice to his disappointment, frustration, and hurt. Suppressing such expressions is to deny one’s humanness and can ultimately impede compassion and grace from running its course in his life. Scazzero states, “Denying any aspect of what it means to be a fully human person made in the image of God carries with it catastrophic, long-term consequences, especially the tendency to separate emotional and spiritual health. Unhealthy developments are inevitable when we fail to understand ourselves as whole people, made in the image of our Creator God.”⁴⁴

Leadership needs to encourage the staff member to acknowledge and embrace the wounds that a dismissal process yields. In addition to the leadership creating such a context for the staff member to voice his hurts and disappointments, the next chapter will offer additional contexts that will infuse compassion into the lives of the staff member and his spouse.

⁴³ Peter Scazzero and Warren Bird, *The Emotionally Healthy Church*. (Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan, 2003), 53

⁴⁴ Ibid., 52

Compassion to His Family

The severance package that a church offers a staff member and his family is extremely important. It should be noted that while severance packages are common to offer departing ministers, they are not legal obligations that must be met unless contractually stated. Yet where the law of the land may require no such action, the law of Christ strongly compels churches to do so.

There are no set criteria for the development of severance packages. Common considerations include the position held, whether it be a senior or mid-level position as well as time served by the staff member. The author's research reveals the variety of approaches that churches have taken in this regard. Some churches have given as little as two weeks salary as severance, while others up to six months. Still other churches have provided salary and health benefits for the staff member and his family until they transitioned to another place.

Siding with generosity can be a great means of dispensing compassion upon the staff member's family and home. The opposite approach can yield the opposite effect. A previously cited study revealed, "If any of these pastors were suddenly forced out of their present positions thirty-nine percent could survive financially for no more than a month. An incredible seventy-five percent could not survive longer than four months. About five out of ten of these pastors actually received a severance package from one to six months."⁴⁵

The author received a six month severance package consisting of salary, retirement, and health benefits. It was adequate to provide for his family's needs until a

⁴⁵

Barfoot, *Forced Pastoral Exits*, 10

ministry transition was made within that time frame.

The timing of the staff member's dismissal can also significantly influence his financial stability and continuity. There are certain times of the year that can work in favor of a transitioning staff member. Many churches are looking to hire staff at the beginning of the summer. Hiring at the beginning of the summer allows the new staff member and family time to move into the area, enroll the children in school, find local physicians, and become established and acclimated to their new community. For a staff member to finalize a new church position and relocate by the beginning of the summer, it would infer that the staff member and new church were engaged in conversation and interactions, both face-to-face and through other mediums of communication, which could potentially cover a period of two to three months. That also does not factor in the amount of time that transpired between the staff member learning of that church's staffing need and their receiving his resume with subsequent follow-up. As one can see, if a church is looking to hire a staff member in the summer, it will generally require a staff member who is inquiring in the late winter.

Church leadership can afford the staff member they are dismissing a great advantage by releasing him in the early part of the year. The staff member is provided adequate time to prepare for the transition. A compassionate termination process factors this in and seeks to minimize the difficulties associated with such a transition. Leadership should plan accordingly and communicate these insights to the staff member in an effort to demonstrate to him their care and concern for his family and thus minimize potential anxieties.

Meeting with the Staff Member

Scheduling the Meeting

As was mentioned previously the timing of the dismissal should be considered with great care in order to afford the staff member a time advantage for future ministry placement. But when the actual time comes for leadership to meet with the staff member and officially release him, they should also consider some additional timing implications that surround the announcement.

There is great wisdom in scheduling that conversation in the early part of the week. The meeting is going to be very difficult and will tax much of leadership's time, emotions, and mental energy. Notwithstanding other responsibilities, senior pastors spend their week preparing for Sunday's message. As the week progresses the need to minimize distractions increases for the pastor who is preparing for worship on Sunday. The week a staff member is formally dismissed will be difficult and filled with distractions. A senior pastor can help his other ministry responsibilities by not delaying the conversation for later in the week. The senior pastor may want to consider arranging for pulpit supply that Sunday to help alleviate some of the stress he will experience. Scheduling the meeting early in the week also allows leadership more time to handle and manage any fallout that may occur.

In scheduling the meeting, leadership should consider whether the staff member and family have any major or public ministry obligations to meet that week or the following. If those commitments cannot be postponed, leadership may want to consider delaying the announcement. Announcing to the staff member his dismissal will have an immediate and negative impact on his job performance in the days and weeks to come.

Leadership wants to avoid immediately having the dejected staff member in congregational contexts where he is providing leadership. His demoralized state will serve to accomplish little in ministry and raise the suspicions and attention of the congregants.

Face to Face

The dismissal process deserves and requires its initiation with a "face to face" meeting with the staff member. Memos, e-mails, voicemails, and texts are inappropriate for this moment. These would only serve to intensify feelings of resentment and bitterness. The personal approach allows for the natural and needed expression of emotions from both sides.

Three is Not a Crowd

Church leadership may consider having another leader attend this meeting. Not only would this person serve as a witness to the transaction, but may help assist in the conversation. A senior pastor who is releasing a staff member may likely be viewed as a hostile voice to that person. The additional leader's presence may offer a perceived impartiality in that moment to the staff member. His comments and presence may have a mediating effect and serve to keep the tensions from escalating into something inappropriate.

It is preferable that the additional leader attending the meeting be someone the staffer member respects and views as an ally. This person is then potentially positioned to minister to the staffer member throughout the termination process.

Be Direct

From the moment church leadership schedules a meeting with the staff member; he has most likely envisioned the meeting with a worst case scenario since the details and purpose of that meeting were not disclosed to him. The working relationship shared with the staff member may have been noticeably taxed for some time. It is therefore not unreasonable for the staff member to feel this way towards the anticipated meeting. Don't draw out the inevitable. Get to the point of the meeting at the beginning of the meeting.

Be Gentle

Gentleness must accompany leadership's candidness. Sensitivity and disappointment that this ministry relationship is ending should be demonstrated by the leadership. Compassion must exude through the verbal and non-verbal actions of the leadership. The staff member needs to hear and feel leadership's regret over the decision. A stoic face and presentation will communicate indifference and complicate the entrance of grace into his life.

Be Specific

Let the staff member know the grounds of his dismissal. A compassionate termination will resist a lengthy list detailing the person's shortcomings as well as ambiguity. One pastor communicated to the author his frustration with his leadership's lack of specifying reasons for his dismissal. He stated, "There was never any stated reason for dismissal. This was the most frustrating aspect of the entire experience for me.

There were no formal charges and no stated reasons. Leadership needs to provide enough information for the staff member to make sense of the life-changing impact of their decision. It is sufficient to state the non-moral issues, with documented examples, for his release such as an incompatibility of personality and ministry context, philosophical differences of ministry, methodological differences in ministry, or inability to perform or meet ministry expectations.

While the staff member may disagree with the assessment and conclusion, he should not be surprised by it. Healthy relationships and interactions between staff members and church leadership would have required previous interactions over such issues in ministry evaluations and job performances.

Be Affirming

Leadership should take the opportunity to affirm the staff member in this difficult moment. They can resource and use the previous information on how the staff member should view his identity, calling, family, and feelings throughout the dismissal process.

Leadership understands that such intentions may initially go unappreciated or rebuffed. If the staff member shows little appreciation for the gesture of support it is because their perception of leadership, at that moment, would resemble more foe than friend. It is therefore difficult for him to fathom a context in the dismissal process where leadership's support would be needed and valued.

An important consideration may be to draft a personal letter containing these affirmations for him to have, take home, read, and re-read. The initial shock that comes with being terminated may prohibit him from fully hearing, understanding, or

appreciating the verbal encouragements. Feelings of anger and resentment may cause the staff member to tune out the words leadership intended to bring healing. A drafted letter can help him to review this valuable information at a time and season when he is mentally and emotionally prepared. He may even repeatedly reference this letter and return to those words throughout the termination process and years to come. It can serve as an ongoing source of healing for the staff member and family.

Compassion will require that leadership affirm to the staff member their desire to minister to him throughout the dismissal process. While it would seem unlikely that the perceived inflictor of the wound would have anything legitimate to offer towards the healing of the wounded, church leadership should nonetheless communicate that they are not just committed to initiating this dark season in the life of the staff member and his family, but to also journey through it with them to the extent they will permit.

Leadership can demonstrate their commitment to journey with the staff member through the difficulties wrought in a termination process by allowing him the freedom to express his hurt, anger, and disappointment. The author can recall the context in which he was notified of his dismissal. As the initial shock gave way to anger and hurt, he communicated what he believed were the failed responsibilities of the senior pastor that helped expedite the undermining of this ministry relationship. The senior pastor quickly sought to suppress the author's agitation by stating; "Now I'm not going to let you put this on me." He was then interrupted by an elder who attended this meeting. The elder gently put his hand on the senior pastor's shoulder and said "It's okay, let him speak."

Allowing the staff member to feel and demonstrate hurt is the beginning of compassion making entrance into his life. While there is a risk that his expression of raw

and unedited emotion can create awkward and uncomfortable moments for those in the room, the positives outweigh the negatives. Not only is it healthy for the staff member in that moment to express hurt and disappointment, but also for his future.

Even under the most ideal of partings, a staff member that is released will still remember the discomfort of that moment when he was terminated for many years to come. The ability to speak his mind and share his frustrations in that moment will keep them from looking back with regret and wishing he had said what was on his heart and mind. Not having that moment would make the pain of that memory even worse.

Allowing him to express his feelings will keep leadership from being perceived as manipulative. Allowing the staff member to react with frustration will communicate to him, in that moment and in the future, that leadership did care for his well being.

In order to allow this the senior pastor and leadership must possess a great deal of humility and security in their identity. It is an insecure and manipulative person that will not allow any real or perceived fault to be placed on themselves. Secure leaders do not operate from a defensive posture and do not make guarding their reputation a priority. These kinds of leaders are not threatened by an undeserved and verbal "black eye" from the staff member.

A pastor shared with the author that upon notifying his staff member the reasons for his dismissal, the staff member became defensive and projected much of the responsibility for the failed relationship on the pastor. In that moment the pastor chose not to respond and counter every misunderstanding and misperception the staff member had. He offered compassion in that moment by allowing the staff member to vent and choosing to listen to him rather than speak. There would be other occasions in the days

to come to address inaccurate and emotional laden perspectives.

Compassionate Practicalities

Given the nature of the meeting, the staff member will initially be unable to comprehend all the implications of the course that has been set into motion. The initial shock and subsequent tsunami of thoughts and emotions will prohibit such processing from taking place. Leadership can take their cues from the staff member whether he feels overwhelmed with the moment and information he is being asked to process. It may be enough to communicate to some staff members the essentials and that there is a plan in place to help support them. Leadership will be prepared to share more when the staff member finds himself emotionally prepared to listen and interact. Leadership should continuously reiterate to the staff member his need to refrain from worry regarding the future.

The following are simple, but significant gestures of compassion which leadership can offer the staff member to assist in undermining the compounding growth of anxieties initiated by a dismissal process.

Review the Severance Package

Explain to the staff member the severance package being offered. Make him aware of the normative search process churches engage in when looking to staff a church position. Communicate how that factored into the timing of the dismissal, so as to not leave the staff member at a disadvantage when attempting to relocate.

Allow Time Off

Upon conclusion of the meeting, leadership should encourage the staff member to take the remainder of that day off and next few days to grieve and process what has just transpired. He will need some initial time for reflection and soul searching. The staff member need not feel he must begin working on his resume that same day. Before he even begins to think of another position, he must process what has just transpired in his current one. An article in *The Washington Post* suggested that those terminated from a position need time to reflect and heal prior to initiating a new job search. It stated, "Experts say that even before starting a job search, layoff victims should take steps to overcome the debilitating psychological effects of being dismissed. People who feel confident are more likely to conduct thorough searches and to do well in job interview."⁴⁶

When a terminated staff member is still suffering the emotional and psychological effects of his dismissal, it can have an undermining affect on his transition. *The Washington Post* article stated that, "Letting go of bitterness is critical because anger and discouragement can easily be noticed in an interview."⁴⁷ In hindsight this author can recall how the truthfulness of this statement was present in his own experience. While developing his resume cover letter in preparation for his own transition, his spouse detected an air of defensiveness present in the letter body upon proofreading. The defensive and guarded posture can go before and accompany the staff member unbeknownst to himself. It can prematurely close the doors of good vocational opportunities.

⁴⁶ Anne Swardson, "Hanging On To Confidence; After Losing a Job, Guard Self-Esteem," *The Washington Post* (March 23, 1992)

⁴⁷ Ibid

The lingering emotional and psychological effects can unfortunately serve to open doors of vocational opportunity that a suffering staff member should not walk through. The combination of a crisis of identity and low self esteem could cause the terminated staff member to accept a position that is a poor fit for him. His feelings of inferiority may contribute to him not feeling good enough, qualified, or confident to wait or pursue something better. Thus, in seeking to escape one difficult context, he exchanges it for another.

Assist with References

When possible, leadership should avail themselves to serve as a reference for the staff member. It need not be construed as a contradiction. Accentuate the strengths of the staff member. Be honest about his weaknesses if asked, but temper the information with an understanding that leadership's experience with that staff member might include an immature or incomplete understanding of the role of personality or personal experience. This could have contributed significantly to the working relationship's demise. One author wrote, "One of the problems in church work is that so much is dependent upon references," explains Chandler. "If you're terminated from GM or any other business, you can begin applying for another job the next day. It takes a minister 18 months to move even in a normal context, and a tarnished reputation can extend that time frame considerably."⁴⁸

The senior pastor that this author previously worked under informed him of what he would say if inquiring churches called him for a reference. He would only answer the

⁴⁸ "Reaching Out To Displaced Shepherds: Ministering To Ministers," *Carson-Newman Publication for Alumni and Friends* (Fall, 1998)

questions that were asked and not seek to offer more information than what was required or appropriate. This helped relieve the author knowing that the senior pastor would try to assist, but not at the expense of violating ethics or his conscience in shaping or presenting the information erroneously.

Removing Responsibilities

Of those surveyed for this project, nearly 40% were dismissed from their position and relieved of their ministry responsibilities immediately. Nearly 30% were given two weeks and 20% a month. Over 90% surveyed released the staff member within a month. This is in keeping with what one author suggests, "The last day of work ought to be within a month, if not sooner. The longer people have to drag on, the lower their productivity and the more they depress the zeal of others. A drawn-out firing process opens the door to lobbying for a reversal and excuses for poor performance. We may even begin to lose our objectivity when we start getting pressure, and begin to second-guess our decision to fire."⁴⁹

Leadership should communicate to the staff member their ending date and determine the plan for delegating his responsibilities to others. Leaving it to the staff member to determine is not recommended. His ability to make judgments in keeping with the best interests of the church will be impaired and compromised.

Informing the Church

Communicate to the staff member when the announcement will be made

⁴⁹ James D. Berkley, *Leadership Handbook of Management and Administration* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Book House, 1994), 263

informing the congregation of his imminent departure. This allows him to know the amount of time he has to break the news to his family and thus prepare accordingly. Delaying the announcement for too long a period of time will increase the likelihood that the news gets leaked. Leadership wants to control the timing, tone, and content of that message.

Leaving the timing of that announcement to the staff member's discretion is not advisable. The staff member and family will be undergoing significant stress in their feelings, thoughts, and emotions. Objectivity is something they are pursuing, but will not possess fully in the crisis. The ability to fully appreciate and weigh what is in the best interests of all parties involved is too much to ask the wounded to consider. Because the decision to dismiss someone affects more than that person, the staff member should not be in the driver's seat of this decision. Again, emotion may influence his decisions more than wisdom and therefore compromise his assessment abilities.

One pastor shared how he allowed his recently dismissed staff member to determine the timing of the announcement to the church. Once the staff member shared the news with his children, the church could then be informed. What initially seemed like a sensitive and compassionate gesture on the part of the pastor had become something that he later regretted. The staff member moved extremely slowly in breaking the news to his children. Because leadership did not determine the timeline for informing the church, thus establishing time restraints on how long the staff member could postpone the inevitable, the delay allowed for congregational leaks to begin.

After The Meeting

In the days that follow, church leadership will want to intentionally minister to the staff member. Compassion can touch them through the small gestures of concern on behalf of the leadership. Whether it be through a combination of e-mails, hand written notes, stopping in his office, or taking him out for lunch, these actions, even if initially rebuffed by the staff member, will communicate to that person both then and in the years to come that leadership truly cared for him.

CHAPTER FOUR

COMPASSIONATE INTERACTIONS: THE FAMILY

The author recalls leaving work early the day he was notified of his dismissal. He did not rush right home, but stopped at a park for about an hour. He sat in his car weeping, staring numbly out the window occasionally. He was still in shock that he had just been fired a little more than an hour earlier. He struggled with how to break the news to his wife. He drove past his driveway and around the block three times before finding the courage to park his car. He recalls walking sullenly through the front door. His wife was sitting in the living room, pleasantly surprised to see him home early. He motioned for her to come downstairs to talk so as not to disturb their three year old child from his nap. She joined him on the couch. The author cannot recall exactly how he introduced the news, but he will certainly never forget her response.

It has been stated that the termination of a church staff member directly affects multiple spheres of relationships. The staff member's home is next in line to experience the impact a dismissal brings.

One study revealed 67.5% of pastoral families had to move to a new residence. 66% reported that their children had to move to a new school. 64% of pastor's spouses had to change jobs. 60% of ministers say their family's ability to trust church leadership was undermined. 70% of pastors surveyed said they didn't have a single close friend they could talk with about their problems.⁵⁰

⁵⁰

Another View: "Aunt Ida is very perceptive," *Religious Herald* (March 8, 2007)

The family of the staff member experiences instability in that their lives within the community, relationships, and routine will quickly come to a close. They experience feelings of insecurity because they are forced to exchange what they do know, the familiar and present, for what they don't know, the unfamiliar and future. They experience feelings of isolation since they must do this alone and few know how to adequately relate to their plight.

The primary focus of this chapter will be for leadership to understand how a dismissal experience impacts the staff member's spouse and marriage, and therefore, determine where and how to administer compassion. It is the author's contention that if leadership focuses on contributing towards a healthy relationship between the couple during this traumatic time, there can be a compounding and positive impact upon their children's lives and possibly minimize the wounds associated with a dismissal process. The staff member and spouse will serve as the primary caretakers and healers of their children's wounds. Leadership should concentrate on adequately addressing the parent's wounds.

In an effort to minister to the staff member's spouse and relationship, the single greatest work leadership can give themselves over to is to minimize stress. A termination will naturally bring stress and produce emotional and relational fractures in their lives. Unless compassion is applied, time and the nature of a dismissal process will aggravate and expand those stresses which in turn multiply the fractures.

Stress: Termination Timing

April 19th is a significant day in United States history. On that day in 1775 the

shot heard round the world was fired in the Battle of Lexington and Concord. The American Revolution had begun and the course of history was never to be the same. For the author January 19th carries the same connotation for his life. It was on this day that he was terminated from his staff position and the course of his life was never to be the same.

The date that a staff member is released from his job will be remembered by him. It will forever have an unpleasant association attached. Leadership cannot remove the entire stigma surrounding the date and season of the departure, but with sensitivity and compassion they can help reduce needless and excess pain for the staff member and family that could accompany this difficult time.

In regards to their own dismissal, one spouse communicated to the author their departure was during the holiday season, and we had a newborn. I would have rather them dismissed [my husband] in the spring. It really had a negative effect on our baby's first Christmas. In this example the pain and stress the couple experienced was multiplied by the church leadership. That Christmas and their first child's experience of it were marred. Years later, it still serves as a source of hurt and pain for this couple.

The author's dismissal took place a month before the scheduled birth of his second child. Nine days after he and his wife were notified of his termination, their second child was born. The stress of the dismissal may have played a part in the child's premature birth. The birth of the child brought with it joy, yet slightly diluted as the author and his spouse were still grieving the loss of his job and weighing its financial repercussions with their growing home. The unpleasantness of this moment was compounded when the senior pastor made his obligatory visit to the hospital. Tension, awkwardness, and discomfort characterized that visit for everyone. The birth of the child

was the reason for the visit. The recent dismissal and its timing was the reason each person wanted the visit to end quickly.

Church leadership should avoid dates and seasons of life associated with joy for the staff member and family. When possible, it is wise to briefly delay the dismissal notification so as not to interfere with celebratory events such as holidays, birthdays, vacations, and such.

Leadership should avoid notification of dismissal prior to events requiring the participation or appearance of the staff member's spouse. Five days after the author was notified regarding his termination, his wife attended a church-wide baby shower in honor of her. She was extremely reluctant to attend. She initially did want to be at the church or attend anything sponsored by it. At that moment the church represented a place of wounding, not healing. Would anyone attending the shower have knowledge of her husband's dismissal? How was she supposed to interact with the senior pastor's wife knowing that her husband was responsible for initiating their pain? The countenance of the author's wife was downcast for days because of his release. She couldn't feign happiness for those around her when she couldn't find it for herself. Would people begin to inquire what was wrong and therefore out of concern only serve to exasperate the problem? She was conflicted over attending the shower in her honor. She did attend, but with much internal bitterness and resentment of the leadership for inadvertently taking what was meant to be a pleasant and fun context and turning it into something painful.

Demonstrating compassion through sensitively timing the dismissal will protect the couple from experiencing needless and compounding pain. Protecting them from added injury increases the prospect of them successfully navigating through this difficult

season.

Stress: Marital Maladies

The author began the chapter by describing the difficulty he had in revealing the news of his dismissal to his spouse. When he finally did share, her response was unexpected, but exactly what he needed. Upon hearing the news her initial response was not to ask “Why did it happen?” or “Did you see this coming?”, rather it was to physically embrace and verbally affirm him. While he wept she kept repeating in his ear phrases such as, “I am sorry” “we’ll be fine” “I know you gave your best.” The Lord allowed her a grace and sensitivity to respond in a manner that did not increase his despondency. He was already in the beginning stages of a fragile state of mind. It would have been perfectly natural for her to show hurt and disappointment. Yet that natural and fitting response could have served to increase his hurt and pain by adding guilt to his sense of failure to provide for the needs and security of his family.

Reflecting on her own response to the news of her husband’s release, one woman wrote, “I think it drew us closer because we were in it together and no one else was really on our side or knew so much of what was going on. We prayed more together, and I prayed more frequently and fervently for him. I worried about the toll it was taking on him.”

Such affirming responses from the spouses of dismissed staff members are not always initially offered. The toll a dismissal can have on the spouse can be quite taxing. In some cases the termination may have a greater negative impact on the spouse. One expert stated, “Usually the spouse will experience more pain, have more anger and be

slower to recover.⁵¹

Consider the truthfulness of that statement, regardless of how much the spouse may want to adequately encourage and console her husband. As the wounded staff member struggles to maintain healthy emotions and perspective, his helpmate may at times become the object of his indignation. One spouse wrote that she, “felt [my] husband treated me like the pastors at times, like I was the enemy. He even called me their names when he felt I was repeating [or] simulating their behaviors.” Not only must she deal with the flood of emotions and responses elicited by her wounded spouse, she must process her own. News of the dismissal may evoke from her feelings of frustration that the lives of her family must now face disruption on multiple levels. Current and future plans made with consideration of where they live and what they do must now be abandoned altogether and thus create disappointment. There is also the embarrassment over being removed from a church position and the subsequent and repeated explanations to family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, and peers.

There may also exist for some spouses a deep-seeded anger and resentment toward their husband. One spouse viewed the relationship with her dismissed husband as “us versus the world.” It is not an uncommon perspective to have when going through a termination process. It can have a fortifying effect in the relationship, strengthening their solidarity and commitment to each other. There is comfort in having an ally when it feels as if the world is against one. But the taxing effects of a termination can eventually cause some spouses to question whether their spouse could have preempted the “world’s attack” by having done something different to avoid the dismissal. An internal blame for

⁵¹ Megan Norris Jones, “Retreat To Help Terminated Ministers Move On, Help Family Recover,” *The Alabama Baptist* (March 22, 2008)

the dilemma can easily and frequently be assigned from one spouse to the other.

The same weakened mental and emotional disposition that allows a spouse to assess blame to her partner, can also fail to restrain them from inappropriately communicating injurious and unhealthy expressions of anger. This in turn can create a cycle of unhealthy exchanges and interactions between the couple. Author and psychologist Harriet Lerner states, "This is the who-started-it game - the search for a beginning of a sequence, where the aim is to proclaim which person is to blame for the behavior of both. But we know that this interaction is really a circular dance in which the behavior of one partner maintains and provokes the behavior of the other. The circular dance has no beginning and no end. In the final analysis, it matters little who started it. The question of greater significance is "How do we break out of it?"⁵²

It is important for the spouse of a dismissed staff member to understand the role she has in entering this unhealthy cycle as well as exiting it. Lerner continues by saying, "A good way to make this break is to recognize the part we play in maintaining and provoking the other person's behavior. Even if we're convinced that the other person is ninety-seven percent to blame, we are still in control of changing our own three percent. So the central question becomes: "How can I change my steps in the circular dance?" This is not to say that we don't have good reason to be furious with the other person."⁵³

Exiting the "blame cycle" does not require a denial of one's anger and disappointment. Like the staff member, her humanity necessitates its expression.

Compassion cannot minister to a wound that is not recognized or acknowledged. There

⁵² Harriet Lerner, *The Dance of Anger: A Woman's Guide to Changing the Patterns of Intimate Relationships* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005), 56

⁵³ Ibid., 56-57

is a need to recognize anger and disappointment, whether in her spouse or the situation they have been thrust into. Author Dean Merrill notes how couples in ministry need to communicate their frustrations. In one scenario, he compliments the outburst of a wife to her husband. He states, “She was very angry and expressed that, but this prevented a long slow burn of repression for years and years. She blew a gasket early, which was very fortunate. It was a shock treatment that forced communication before she developed hardness of heart.”⁵⁴ Repressed anger can lead to numerous unhealthy consequences both in the life of the spouse, their marriage, and home for years to come.

However, the alternative is not an unbridled anger. Though instinctive for some, its outcomes are counterproductive to achieving a healthy marriage and navigation through a dismissal process. As feelings of hurt, frustration, and anger come in cycles and intervals throughout the termination process, author Harriet Lerner recommends the following steps for women.

1. *Do speak up when an issue is important to you* – “to let something go can be an act of maturity. But it is a mistake to stay silent if the cost is to feel bitter, resentful, or unhappy.”
2. *Don’t strike while the iron is hot* – “the worst time to speak up may be when you are feeling angry or intense.” Enter or return to the conversation when emotions are not heightened.
3. *Do take time out to think about the problems and to clarify your positions* – Be able to articulate exactly what the real issues are, why they are a source of anger, and what specific changes need to be implemented.
4. *Don’t use “below-the-belt” tactics* – refrain from sharing or inferring anything that effectively serves to put the other person down.
5. *Do speak in “I” language* – “A true “I” statement says something about self without criticizing or blaming the other person and without holding the other person responsible for our feelings or reactions.”
6. *Don’t make vague requests* – “Don’t expect people to anticipate your needs or

⁵⁴ Dean Merrill, *Clergy Couples in Crisis: The Impact of Stress on Pastoral Marriages* (Carol Stream, IL.: Word, 1985), 144

do things that you have not requested. Even those who love you can't read your mind.

7. *Do try to appreciate the fact that people are different* - Each person may have a different perspective and responses to a situation. One is not more right than the other. Recognizing legitimate differences can diffuse tensions.

8. *Don't participate in intellectual arguments that go nowhere* - The goal is not to convince others of the rightness of your position but to simply articulate your position.

9. *Do recognize that each person is responsible for his or her own behavior*

10. *Don't tell another person what she or he thinks or feels or "should" think or feel* - Avoid criticizing or directing the other's feelings.

11. *Do try to avoid speaking through a third party* - Don't use others as a pretense to bolster and share your own perspective and feelings.

12. *Don't expect change to come about from hit-and-run confrontations* -

Recognize that change occurs slowly in close relationships. Restoring health into a relationship will take some time. Adjust expectations to accommodate this.⁵⁵

Knowing how a termination process may impact the staff member's spouse and their relationship is critical for church leadership to understand. Their prayers for the family can be better informed and focused. Any future interactions, whether formal or informal, may be a context for sharing such information with the couple. Hearing this information may assist them in helping to normalize their understanding and perspective of their current emotional and relational experience. The offering of these suggested relational tools may directly make a positive impact on their relationship with each other and indirectly in their relationship with church leadership.

Stress: Support Systems

Upon learning of her husband's dismissal from his church position, one staff member's wife shared the following with the author:

It was very lonely feeling. In fact shortly after we were both let go I went to a

⁵⁵

Lerner, *The Dance of Anger*, 199-201

large church down the street on a Saturday evening to attend their service. The service had already started so I asked the church parking security guard if there was anyone inside I could pray with. He said no because the service had already begun. I began to cry, and tell him I had nobody to talk to about what had happened because my family didn't trust [husband], and the church was moving on whether they supported the pastor's decision or not. I then just began to tell him in tears everything that happened. I left the parking lot feeling lonelier than before I entered it.

A crisis such as a termination can have a destabilizing effect on the spouse of a terminated staff member. As her story and many others illustrate, spouses alone are insufficient to provide each other with the total and necessary emotional, relational, and spiritually support required in such a traumatic and difficult time. The table below illustrates and ranks the places that terminated pastors received support during their dismissal process.⁵⁶ This may serve as a likely indicator of their spouse's experience as well.

Place of Support	Somewhat Supportive	Very Supportive	Combined Total	Combined Percent
Family	17	49	66	61.11
Spouse	8	57	65	60.19
Friends in the congregation	18	40	58	53.70
Fellow pastors outside of church	16	31	47	43.52
Christian Counselor	14	23	37	34.26
Others (did not fit a category)	6	18	24	22.22
Support team	7	14	21	19.44
Fellow staff member	8	13	21	19.44
Denominational leader	8	11	19	17.59

⁵⁶

Church board	13	5	18	16.67
Professional consultant	9	8	17	15.74
Senior Pastor	3	4	7	6.48

Church leadership should identify those categories of support dependence that they can strongly influence, and work to create or enhance what is offered to the staff member and spouse. The following are suggested areas and approaches.

Congregational Friends

Author and expert in the field of forced pastoral terminations, Charles Chandler writes, “Navigating in the fog of conflict without guidance from trusted friends and professionals is a flight plan destined for a crash. Five support system components are essential if the minister/minister’s spouse is to emerge from the fog of conflict without sustaining crippling wounds.”⁵⁷ The supporting cast begins with a “feedback group of two or three trusted friends from within the congregation who will be brutally honest in their feedback.” It’s worth noting that the author placed this group as the first among needed support relationships.

The table above demonstrated that the category of “friends within the congregation” ranked the third highest in places of support for the staff member and family. The categories of “family” and “spouse” were the only two that scored higher. This indicates that for many staff members and their spouses the first place outside of their nuclear and immediate family that they look to receive support is from friends

⁵⁷ Charles H. Chandler, “Five Relationships Every Minister Needs to Develop,” *Ministering to Ministers Foundation* (Richmond, VA.: 2010)

within the church they served.

Friends within the congregation possess an influential role in the lives of a staff member and spouse. Leadership can externally influence the behavior and actions of a staff member through use of the authority and power they exert over them. A friend's influence comes through the authority and power they exert within that staff member and spouse. Unlike the previous authority, this one is bequeathed upon the friend by the staff member and spouse. It is the product of a great deal of trust created over an extended period of time.

Chandler recommends that the "feedback group," which consists of these trusted friends, meet periodically on an informal basis. Their conversations should center on how they can navigate through the crisis, as well as identify impediments to be removed or changed so as to circumvent this type of crisis from happening again. He states "the minister must, however, be willing to listen to what they say without reacting to them or arguing with them. They can provide a fairly good picture of what is happening and why. When they caution the minister concerning his or her ministry style or direction, the minister should listen carefully. After all, the minister selected these people because of their support and trustworthiness."⁵⁸

Church leadership should consider meeting with some of the staff member and spouse's closest friends within the church once the church is notified of their dismissal. Make them aware of their strategic placement in their lives and how God can use them as a powerful medium for dispensing compassion and healing into their lives. Offer to them the materials that they can resource, enabling them to be better equipped for the vital

ministry opportunity before them.

Professional Ministries

Church leadership can assist in reducing the marital stress couples experience in a termination process by resourcing Christian ministries outside of the church. This is the second of five support systems Chandler recommends and one which church leadership can avail to the couple. He refers to this system as the "Ministers Support Group." With reference to this group he states,

Tunnel vision becomes the norm when under severe pressure; so do feelings of isolation and inadequacy, denial, lack of trust, withdrawal, and a desire to run. A minister's support group can address many of these issues with a participant in a safe setting. Benefits of formal minister support groups include "helps develop deep fellowship, helps develop a sense of 'belonging,' helps participants gain different perspectives, enhances leadership confidence, helps person get in touch with their feelings, provides affirmation and confrontation in a healthy way, helps reduce the competition among ministers, encourages long tenures."⁵⁹

There are nationally recognized support groups that exist to minister to the wounded pastors and their spouses who have experienced a forced termination from their church. Chandler states, "Couples who attend the retreats usually have more anger than they have allowed themselves to express or even realize."⁶⁰ Many who attend such retreats soon realize that they have essentially denied a great deal of their pain and hurt. He further adds,

Because many participants feel isolated even from God, the retreats seek to renew a sense of spirituality and reliance on God's presence in their lives. Since they often have been crushed by the power structures in their churches, the ministers have come to distrust and avoid power. We use Bob Perry's *Pass the Power*,

⁵⁹ Ibid

⁶⁰ Jim White, "Rejected Ministers Find Acceptance and Help," *Religious Herald* (July 24, 2008)

Please as the starting point and emphasize that power is simply the ability to get something done. Ministers need to develop a healthy sense of power in themselves and their ministries.⁶¹

Church leadership should consider including in their severance package the cost of attending one of these retreats. Communicate to the staff member and spouse that it is available as a resource to them during this difficult time, and it is being availed to them to help minimize the short and long-term pain of a termination process. Should the couple initially rebuff such an offer, they at least are informed that such ministries exist and may choose to resource them in the future. Whether they choose to attend or not, leadership's gesture of care and concern will not go unnoticed.

Church Leadership

According to the table, church leadership (i.e. senior pastor and church board) represented two of the three least resourced support systems available to dismissed pastors. In one sense this is not surprising since leadership may view itself as responsible for the couple's agitation and problem. To offer support to the couple could be perceived as adding injury to insult.

For church leadership to decisively reach out to the staff member and spouse would seem counterproductive given what was said above. But it is this author's contention that while leadership may perceive itself to be an unlikely place for the couple to solicit and receive support, it is also the place where the couple may come to find they need it most. The relationship that may have caused them the greatest pain may also

⁶¹

Ibid

come to be perceived as the very one that offers the greatest potential of healing to that pain.

The Healing Touch

One pastor shared with the author the story of an unexpected moment. An elder from his church was attending the small group meeting which was being led by a recently dismissed staff member. It was one of the last meetings the staff member was facilitating as he was winding down his responsibilities at the church. When the meeting was over the elder brought his coffee cup into the kitchen to assist with the clean up. He walked over to the staff member's spouse, who was washing dishes, placed his hand on her shoulder and said "We're praying for you both during this transition and that God will show you exactly where He wants you." The response was unexpected. The staff member's spouse quickly turned around and embraced the elder with a strong and prolonged hug. The elder took a chance in demonstrating love and concern through his words and touch. The gesture could have easily been rebuffed by her since she may have viewed him and the other leaders as the perpetrators of their problems. However in this case it was not only warmly received, but desperately wanted.

Often leadership may withhold offering verbal and nonverbal expressions of concern to the staff member and spouse for fear it would go unwelcome and unwanted. There is validity in this. Some couples will, through their own verbal and nonverbal messages, communicate as much to the leadership. It will most certainly be rejected by the staff member and spouse who have failed to see or experience any tangible demonstrations of care and concern in the early stages of their dismissal process. As one

spouse communicated to the author, “A few times we received fake concern from the leadership, which was sickening.”

Church leadership which has attempted to infuse compassion and grace throughout the termination process need not fear their gestures be perceived as “sickening.” To the contrary, some staff members and their spouses need the leadership’s affirmation lest they interpret themselves as “sickening” in the eyes of the leadership.

Caring verbal and nonverbal communication to the staff member and spouse confirms that the leadership is not disgusted with them. They are not acting like the parent who sends their child to his room because they are so irritated with them that they want them out of their sight. It can be extremely damaging to the couple if they detect such feelings or sentiment from the leadership. The couple has already begun to significantly question their value as a result of the termination. Leadership can play a strong role in affirming their value.

Time Can Heal Wounds

It was discussed in the previous chapter that leadership should make themselves repeatedly available to the staff member throughout the termination process so as to help them manage and come to grips with the dismissal. This same ministry should be afforded to the spouse. The spouse too can struggle to understand and reconcile the rationale and reasons behind her husband’s dismissal. Having access to those with the authority to make decisions that impact their lives and future, and a forum for the spouse to share her questions, thoughts, concerns, and hurts over that decision, can potentially

produce outcomes that will assist in bringing them closure. Having said that, while there exists the possibility of great outcomes, there is a possibility of negative ones. In her book *The Dance of Connection*, Harriet Lerner discusses that in an effort to find one's voice (honest and heartfelt communication) inherent risks are associated with it.

Speaking out and being real are not necessarily virtues. Sometimes voicing our thoughts and feelings shuts down the lines of communication, diminishes or shames another person, or makes it less likely that two people can hear each other or even stay in the same room. Nor is talking always a solution. We know from personal experience that our best intentions to process a difficult issue can move a situation from bad to worse. We can also talk a particular subject to death, or focus on the negative in a way that draws us deeper into it, when we'd be better off distracting ourselves and going bowling.⁶²

Unfortunately when the context is not managed correctly it can produce the feelings Lerner mentioned. This author's past experience serves as an example. His supervising senior pastor wanted to give his wife a context to ask questions, communicate thoughts, voice concerns, and help contribute to a healthy facilitation of closure for her. What was intended and what was experienced were two different things. It unfortunately degenerated into a meeting where the senior pastor was in one corner justifying his decision, and the author's wife in the other corner speaking to his defense. She left the meeting even more upset than when she entered it.

If compassion is the motive for leadership availing their time and attention to the spouse and healing is their goal, then leadership will want to avoid certain landmines. The first thing leadership must recognize is that the spouse should determine the agenda for the meeting. Allowing her to dictate the topic and the tone will go a long way in ensuring the time is viewed as profitable to her. The meeting needs to serve the interests

⁶² Harriet Lerner, *The Dance of Connection: How to Talk to Someone When You're Mad, Hurt, Scared, Frustrated, Insulted, Betrayed, or Desperate* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 5

of the spouse, not the leadership.

Leadership will want to avoid any statements, references, or inferences to the spouse that may come across as impugning to the staff member. Avoid saying anything that may be interpreted as tantamount to throwing salt in a wound. Consider that the spouse may be in a heightened state of agitation. Carelessness with words can add callousness to their hearts. Below is an example one pastor's experience that he shared with this author.

The wife actually asked if we could talk. The three of us sat down. She wanted an explanation of what it was about her husband that wasn't a good fit for the position he was in. I told her I was very grateful that she would come to me and ask the question rather than just talk it up with other people. She has a track record of coming to me first, so I had some past history to build on. With her husband right there, I explained to her what I had explained to her husband on at least two occasions -- what it was about him that made him not a good fit. It wasn't that he didn't have anything to offer or that he had been a complete failure. I affirmed what he had done well and what others had appreciated about him. Then I explained how the needs of our organization had changed and called for a change in his role -- a change that would stretch him into failure. I gave a couple of examples of how he had not been able to handle the tasks we had given him in the new role and how he had tended to fall back on his proven strengths rather than showing that he could learn the new role. The reason the conversation really helped was because she agreed with me in my assessment of her husband and could see his strengths and weaknesses. So she actually became my ally.

The combination of sensitivity, gentleness, affirmation, and truth created a healthy context of interaction between the senior pastor and the staff member's spouse. The potential for a more thorough healing and closure was offered by that pastor to the staff member and his spouse. Compassion and grace were present in that room.

Leadership's willingness to administer compassion through touching and talking will serve as a significant puzzle piece of God's grace to the couple in that tumultuous season. They will be able to look back and know that leadership was not attempting to control the situation by suppressing their feelings through the failure to

provide contexts for its expression. The staff member and spouse will know they were afforded the opportunity to respond and interact with leadership.

CHAPTER FIVE

COMPASSIONATE INTERACTIONS: THE CHURCH FAMILY

This author can recall the reactions among many church members upon learning of his dismissal by the church leadership. One particular member invited him out to lunch and questioned the author on how and why this decision was reached. The author could only speak in generalities and not offer specific information. This added greatly to that church member's frustration since he felt leadership's public explanation for the reasons of his dismissal were vague and ambiguous.

Unfortunately this type of story often accompanies the dismissal of a staff member over non-moral issues. When over a moral issue, congregants can more easily reconcile the need to remove them. It is more clear cut in their minds, even with a staff member they have grown to appreciate. It is the dismissal over non-moral issues that cause the greatest consternation for the church body.

Impact on the Body

The Scriptures depict the church as a family. Most families experience interpersonal stress at times. Most churches do not bode well in accommodating such familial expressions within congregational life. Churches that prefer to pursue and identify with the lovelier and more pleasant associations of family, while denying or minimizing relational stresses within the body, will eventually succumb to disillusionment. Author Peter Steinke suggests churches must embrace the entirety of the

meaning and implications of a church functioning like a family. He writes, "It is not that our metaphors and ideals are false but that we fail to realize that the church functions as an emotional system. As long as people gather and interact, emotional processes occur. There are positive aspects of these processes - joy, comfort, support, cooperation, and friendship. But emotional systems are inherently anxious. The downside, therefore, is the intense anxiety that distracts the congregation from its purpose, sets people at odds with each other, and builds walls against outsiders."⁶³

"System Theory" helps explain the conceptual reality that is at work within churches. "System thinking considers the interrelatedness of the parts. Instead of seeing isolated, unrelated parts, we look at the whole."⁶⁴ The conversation in 1 Corinthians 12 advocates a "system" understanding of the church. Using the metaphor of a physical body, Christ describes the value and interdependence each part has upon the others. The body can function fully when all of its parts are fully functioning. Debilitation or removal of any one part has adverse effects on the rest. The Bible states, "And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it..."⁶⁵

Leadership must understand that the church body is not a dispassionate observer in a staff member's termination process, but they too are profoundly impacted by his removal.

⁶³ Peter Steinke. *How Your Church Family Works: Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems* (Bethesda, MD.: The Alban Institute, 1993), ix

⁶⁴ Ibid., 3

⁶⁵ 1 Cor. 12:26

Their Allegiance

When a family experiences a divorce, the children suffer significantly. One area of great stress for the children is in relating to their parents. Even before the divorce is fully finalized, children are put in the precarious position of having to mentally and emotionally choose which parent to side with in terms of their time, affection, and support. When neither parent has egregiously wounded the other, it can make the child's choice more difficult since neither one can be identified as the chief protagonist. Congregations can experience a similar emotional stress as they try to reconcile the dissolving of a pastoral team that has worked for their edification and growth. How and in what proportion are they to divide their affections, loyalty, and support between the dismissed staff member and church leadership?

The spouse of one staff member shared the following observation of the church body's predicament:

We were booted out quickly and without explanation. I think this was a mistake the leadership made that caused a lot of stress within the congregation. It raised a lot of questions and sent people to us for answers. We tried not to put anyone down when we spoke with church people. We didn't want to drive people away from the church, but it was hard to explain things in a positive light while trying to be truthful. Many of them figured things out on their own, so we didn't have to explain. Many people struggled with the decision and wanted to leave the church but didn't have any other churches to choose from, so this caused them stress.

In an ideal situation church members are able to offer support to both the leadership and dismissed staff member. They are only able to offer support to both parties to the degree that they support what they see, hear, and observe from the two. Leadership should be mindful that there will be many within the congregation that will side with the perceived underdog. The staff member is in a weaker position since

ultimate authority in the church does not subside with him. Unless leadership extends compassion to the staff member in a demonstrative way before the congregation, they can expect some of the congregants to view leadership as the “bully” and therefore transfer loyalties to the staff member. Other factors which can determine a congregation’s allegiance to the church leadership is leadership’s tenure of their position, the degree of personal contact leadership has had in their lives, as well as their accessibility to the congregation. If the staff member being released has had a high amount of contact with the church body and is perceived as more approachable than the leadership, it can be challenging to balance allegiances.

Their Momentum

When staff terminations are not handled in a sensitive and compassionate way before the congregation, the current and future effectiveness of ministries become compromised. “Forced termination has a high cost for both the congregation and the minister. There are emotional wounds to the congregation that result in the loss of parishioners, loss of revenue, broken fellowship and worst of all for the church, the gospel message is dampened.”⁶⁶

In one particular church, the botched dismissal cost the church greatly. As a result of failing to adequately understand the role of family systems within their church, poor communication to the congregation, and other missteps along the way, a church of 350 people was reduced to 175 within several months of the minister’s forced dismissal.

⁶⁶

“Another View: “Aunt Ida” is very perceptive,” *Religious Herald* (March 8, 2007)

That church and many others suffer greatly when they do not see or participate in a compassionate termination process. Note the compounding and negative effects for the church mentioned above. The growth in attendance they experienced and maintained for several years was negated in several months. The ministry momentum they were experiencing was brought to a standstill. Giving dramatically decreased and therefore all ministries and their budgets were affected. Giving reductions may have compromised the church's ability to maintain other pastoral and support staff. Those who have left the church do so dispirited. Those who remain may be feeling disillusioned. The setback is great with potential ramifications for many years to come.

Their Maturity

Despite all the difficulties for a church body that are associated with a staff member's dismissal, there exists an opportunity for the corporate growth of a church. As leadership must choose to embrace conflict and receive the Holy Spirit's perspective on it and empowerment to navigate through it, so too should the congregation. There is a refining and maturing process that awaits the congregation in such a context.

Leadership has a duty to protect the congregation from experiencing needless and unnecessary challenges and threats, but it must be remembered that there is no substantive growth apart from a crisis. Crises can either prove detrimental when not handled correctly or be a means of development when managed correctly. For the staff member positions that are very public and prominent within the church life, it is impossible and inappropriate to fully hide the dismissal process from the church. In an

effort to minimize negative fallout from the congregation, leadership which attempts to keep them in the dark on their perspective and process may ultimately help facilitate even more problems. Failing to facilitate and navigate the congregation's growth and maturity through the crisis will, by default, do nothing to prevent immature responses and reactions from manifesting among the congregation. Their responses now become counterproductive. Instead of journeying together in the crisis, the church family is left to fend for themselves. Instead of potentially resourcing their assistance in the conflict, leadership may have served to elicit their resistance and therefore exasperate the problem.

The Cycle of Compassion

Leadership: Ministering to the Church Family

Communicating to the Church

Inevitably the moment will come in the termination process when it is time to disclose the decision to the church body. Churches with larger staffs are afforded some options in communicating the dismissal. If the staff member being released serves in a specialized ministry area with low visibility to the congregation, leadership may deem it appropriate to communicate their departure through the church bulletin, newsletter, website, or e-mail. However, those staff positions in both large and smaller churches that are very public and have a wider breadth of ministry responsibilities will generally require a public announcement by church leadership. A general recommendation is for leadership to make the announcement upon conclusion of the largest corporate gathering service. For most churches this is the Sunday morning service.

The announcement should be a prepared written statement. This will help to

ensure that leadership communicates everything they deemed appropriate. In that moment when nerves are high and fearing the worst is present, having a well edited and thought through message can serve to lower leadership's anxieties.

It is common for the senior pastor to make an announcement of this magnitude. However, leadership may consider it appropriate to have another representative of the leadership team make the announcement (i.e. chairman of the elders, deacons, etc.). Depending on the situation and church, having someone other than the senior pastor make the announcement may show the congregation a solidarity and unity among the leadership team in the decision.

Content: The Message

Leadership will want to spend a great deal of time and energy considering the content and tone of the message they will deliver to the congregation. This message will be reiterated to the congregation both publicly and privately throughout the duration of the termination process. The message they deliver will frame the congregation's understanding of the matter. There can be no revision or updating of the message along the way. That creates confusion among the congregation and lowers credibility among the leadership.

Accepting versus Projecting Responsibility

Leadership must be careful not to infer or place full blame upon the staff member for his dismissal. Rarely does one party own full responsibility for a relationship not working. Though disproportionate and unequal in number, there are usually two sets of

fingerprints on a problem. Even if the greater responsibility falls on the staff member for the failure of the working relationship, it is wise for leadership to not insinuate such. Publicly placing full blame on the staff member can come across to the congregation as naïve, disingenuous, or self-serving.

In addition to refraining from projecting responsibility, leadership will want to avoid communicating anything bordering condescension. In his own dismissal announcement to the church, leadership stated they believed the author would flourish in a more controlled and structured environment. The inference was that a church setting may not be a great fit for him. Though not intended, the statement was belittling in expression, in contradiction to his calling, and contrary to many of the congregants interactions and experiences with the staff member.

An example of a sensitive and tactful way to communicate a staff member's dismissal may be as follows.

After having served with *(name)* for quite some time, church leadership has come to believe that, while we have the same desire of fulfilling God's mission, there exists a better ministry fit for *(name)* and for our church. We have discovered that we are just at different place in terms of ministry philosophy, methodologies, etc. And there is nothing wrong with having different philosophies or methodologies, but for a church ministry to be fruitful and experience the greatest productivity, it requires a precise compatibility in all related areas. We want God to get the greatest return from all of our services. At times that may require adjusting the relationship and proximity of working together in the Lord's vineyard.

This approach preserves the dignity of the dismissed staff member, exudes humility and sensitivity on the part of the leadership, and thus makes it more palatable for the congregation. The fact that the staff member doesn't fit best here isn't an indictment on him or a challenge to his calling, but recognizes some of the relativity and subjectiveness that surrounds a leadership team's composition and cohesiveness. That he

doesn't fit best here doesn't make him the worse. It recognizes that the ministry needs and expressions of one particular church can vary from other churches.

Generalities versus Specifics

The author recommends communicating the grounds of dismissal in general terms and avoiding elaboration of unnecessary specifics. To borrow a phrase, leadership should focus on the "forest" and not the individual "trees" that comprise it.

Attempting to offer a great and detailed explanation to the average congregant is not fair to them, the staff member, or the process. The average church member does not have the ministry background or context to fully appreciate the process by which a termination decision is reached. Leadership cannot fully account, communicate, and put into context all the interactions, discussions, deliberations, and praying that went into the decision. It may be helpful to communicate this to the church as well.

In detailing the "trees," leadership runs the risk of inadvertently and publicly impugning the staff member. It can also place the staff member in an awkward position should congregants approach him with such information. He is forced to then choose whether to clarify the situation, defend himself, or avoid the conversation. Any of the alternatives are not helpful to church leadership.

If saying too much is not helpful, so also is saying too little. If the "forest" is not adequately described in general terms, it can raise questions and suspicions among the congregation. In the author's case, because the reasons for his dismissal were communicated vaguely, it actually caused some people to question whether leadership was actually hiding a moral failure on the staff member's part. For the average church

member they cannot conceive of reasons that would justify terminating a staff member outside of moral grounds.

Sympathy versus Irritation

Prior to initiating the termination, leadership was encouraged to review the nature of conflict and the doctrine of grace. Reviewing these two topics will help frame leadership's perspective and responses in a healthy way. Feelings of defensiveness and irritability over the dismissal dilemma can be exchanged for compassion and sympathy. The latter should not only characterize leadership's interactions with the staff member and spouse, but the church family, too.

Both in the public address and in subsequent private conversations with church members, leadership should communicate both verbally and nonverbally their sadness and remorse for the situation. The church family needs to see leadership share in their feelings of grief, too. They need to see and feel that the leadership is just as hurt and disturbed over the dissolving of the staff member's relationship to the church as they are. Withholding such expressions could communicate indifference to the congregation.

Content: Leadership's Character

Once the church is notified of the staff member's dismissal, leadership should be prepared to meet the congregation's needs in the following manner.

Be Available

After the initial public announcement, leadership should make themselves

available to follow up with any who have questions through a scheduled meeting. Special attention and communications should be given to the leaders of the primary ministries impacted by the dismissal. Budget time for calls and visits from the church family in the days and weeks following the dismissal announcement.

Being open and available to hurting and questioning church members communicates compassion and care on the part of leadership. In the absence of giving answers that may fully satisfy all their questions, leadership's availability and concern will assure them that the spirit behind this decision was made with deep sadness, reflection, and integrity.

Take It on the Chin

Following the above recommended procedures cannot fully prevent leadership from being misunderstood, criticized, and maligned by some church members. Being fair and kind in the treatment and representation of that staff member to others is a non-negotiable. Such treatment may not initially be reciprocated to the leadership from some within the congregation. Be willing to momentarily take a "black eye" from some in the congregation. The color and severity of leadership's bruise will be in proportion to their love and admiration for the dismissed staff member.

One author said the following, "One of the most helpful definitions I know is this: 'Leadership is the ability to absorb pain.' The sooner a pastor realizes not everyone will love him or her, and some will misunderstand even the purest of motives, the better adjusted that pastor will be. Perhaps the whole question of expectations would become academic if we could constantly monitor our lives by this standard: Does it meet God's

expectations.⁶⁷

It may be unpleasant and tiring to have leadership's motives and actions called into question. However, over the course of time as church members see how they have consistently taken the "high road," even at the detriment of their own reputation, leadership will win greater trust and support from the congregation in the long run because of the character they demonstrated throughout the process. Preparing for misunderstandings will keep leaders from reacting in a defensive and self-justifying manner that is counterproductive to a compassionate termination process.

Church Family: Ministering to the Staff Member and Family

Congregations that confront conflict constructively learn to be creative. They experience themselves not as hapless, helpless victims of external circumstances but as creative, resourceful people who have been given the skills and insights needed to be the church. Inversely, congregations that suppress conflict find it acts like a pressure cooker: the heat builds and finally explodes. The issues triggering the explosion often seem irrational and petty, but the aftermath is not trivial. An open, active parish allows for a continuous release of pressure, and conflicts are less likely to be destructive.⁶⁸

Leadership was encouraged to share with the congregation that their goal is for compassion and grace to characterize the termination process. Communicate to the church members that they play a vital and critical role in the dispensing of that compassion.

This is great news for church members. They typically stand fidgety on the sidelines of a dismissal process wanting to help and alleviate some of the pain that the

⁶⁷ Berkley, *Leadership Handbook of Management and Administration*, 193

⁶⁸ Ibid., 189

staff member and family are experiencing, but don't know how.

The Bible says to *ômourn with those who mourn.*⁶⁹ God wants to minister to the hurting staff member and family and will use his people for that purpose. The dismissal context is ripe for God's children to allow the expression of such spiritual gifts of mercy, encouragement, and helps. In his book *Connecting*, author Larry Crabb contends that the spiritual health and wholeness that people desire and seek can be afforded to them through the life and ministry of other Christians. These *óother Christians*⁶⁹ that he refers to are not primarily Christian professionals (i.e. pastors, counselors, and therapists), but the average believer who is controlled by the Holy Spirit.⁶⁹ It is God's will and design that average believers make an *óabove average*⁶⁹ contribution to each other's health and development.

In many ways their ministry to the staff member and family can be more powerful and productive than the leadership's influence. Mathematically speaking, releasing a few hundred people to minister can be more productive than the efforts of a few. What also adds to the potential ministry influence of a church member is their standing before the staff member. Because leadership initiated the dismissal, the staff member and family can still be found apprehensive and closed to the compassionate gestures of the leadership. The average church member can maintain a favorably standing and thus greater influence.

Entering the Swamp

Acknowledge that in order to minister to the staff member and family, church

⁶⁹ Larry Crabb, *Connecting: Healing Ourselves and our Relationships* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997)

members must choose to step into the "emotional swamp" that they may be in. Grief, sadness, and depression may characterize the emotional and mental state of the staff member and his family. To empathize with them is to feel their pain and that can have a taxing effect. Yet every time a church member chooses to enter "the swamp" for brief times of interaction they are actually helping the staff member to progressively "exit the swamp" and clean themselves of its effects.

Mud on Their Face: Shame

Once the church becomes aware of the intentions of the leadership to remove a staff member, that staff member will become self-conscious around the church members. He will struggle with feelings of personal embarrassment when in the company of other church members. He may feel socially stigmatized. He may feel he's wearing a terminated staff member's version of the "Scarlet letter A" whenever he is around church members. Of this shame author Lewis Smedes writes,

Long before modern psychologists came along to discover it, ancient philosophers were curious about the shadow of shame that darkened the lives of so many people. What most interested them was the shame we felt when we were disgraced in the eyes of our own people. To be disgraceful to people who care for us means that our own people have no grace in their hearts for us. To be disgraceful is to be weighed and found unacceptable to those whom we need most to accept us. It is, in short, to be despised and rejected by our own. Is not this the shame we all fear most? Is it not the primal shame that we dread more than death itself? The label I am giving it here is social shame.⁷⁰

The author goes on to share how shame is experienced most and deepest within the relational context of those we know most and love deepest. He writes, "Shame digs

⁷⁰ Lewis Smedes, *Shame and Grace: Healing the Shame We Don't Deserve* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), 53

deeper when it is our own people who reject us, who shame us because they feel shamed by us. Only people who are members of a community ever feel it, and only a community that cares for its members can effectively make them feel it. This is the paradox of all true communities: the closer knit and caring a community is, the more cruel its shaming can be.⁷¹

Encourage the church to acknowledge the awkwardness they may initially feel when interacting with the staff member and family, but empower them to be agents of grace. The more they choose to interact with them, the more the stigma and humiliation of being fired is removed. Church members should avoid always speaking directly or indirectly on the topic of their dismissal, but not go to the other extreme of avoiding it. It is the proverbial elephant in the living room. Initially acknowledge it, but then move beyond it.

Mud around Their Heart: Bitterness

The author recalls an interaction he had with an elderly woman from the church shortly after being notified of his dismissal. The woman stopped him in the hallway of the church, briefly shared a few words of sympathy, placed a piece of paper in his hand, and walked away. The folded paper was a ripped out portion of a magazine article. Its theme was on forgiving others. He bristled at the notion that this elderly woman thought it was important for him to read and apply. He felt anger and irritation towards the leadership, but did not feel forgiveness was necessary for him to offer or for them to receive. He threw the article away, never having read it. But its purpose was still

⁷¹

Ibid., 56

accomplished. The small, folded portion of an article had served to plant the seed of forgiveness's theme into his context. The seed that was planted years ago into the author's thinking has years later begun to produce its fruit. This author has come to realize that even if the reasons for his release were justifiable, it still hurt and he would blame the individual with the power and authority to bring that pain into existence. He still needed to forgive him in order to keep his own spirit from growing bitter.

By the grace of God, through the intentional interactions with the staff member and family, certain church members may gain deeper levels of standing and trust in their lives and so be able to address issues of forgiveness and bitterness that may be present. Again, because they are not perceived as the protagonist in their pain, they may serve as God's physician in their healing.

Author Lewis Smedes suggests there is a process of how those who are wounded should come to view those who have shamed and hurt them. He illustrates the act of forgiveness as a personal drama with five scenes.

Scene One: We blame the shamer. We hold him or her accountable. If we do not hold people accountable for what did to us, we will not forgive them. We may indulge them, perhaps, as if it did not matter much, or we may excuse them, as if they could not help doing what they did. But we will forgive them only if we hold them responsible for what they did to us.

Scene Two: We surrender our right to get even. We take our natural right to a balanced account - a right to fairness, mind you, that is all, only what we deserve - we take it in our hands, look it over, consider its possibilities, and then surrender it. We agree to live with the score untied.

Scene Three: We revise our caricature of the person who shamed us. When we taste our resentment, we roll it around our minds the way we roll a sour lozenge around our tongues, and, as we taste it, our minds draw a caricature of our shamer. We turn him into a monster for what he did to us. We see him; we feel him; we define his whole person in terms of how he shamed us. However, as we move with the forgiving flow, we gradually change our monster back into the

weak and faulty human being he is (or was), not all that different from ourselves.

Scene Four: We revise our feelings. As the frozen tundra of resentment melts, a tendril of compassion breaks through the crust. Sorrow blends with anger. Sympathy softens resentment. We feel emerging in our consciousness a hesitant desire for the other person's welfare.

Scene Five: We accept the person who made us feel unacceptable. In the last scene in the drama, we offer our shamer the grace that God has offered us. We not only pardon him; we also accept him. We take him back into our lives as a fellow member of the human family. Chances are that we are not able to restore the special relationship we had before. But if we cannot be reconciled, it will not be our resentment that prevents it.⁷²

As previously mentioned, leadership may want to share these stages with the staff member's trusted friends and relationships in the congregation. Providing those with this information may prove helpful should those persons have an appropriate context and moment to share. It is of great benefit for the hurting staff member and family to know there exists a process of forgiveness and to identify those mile-markers along the way.

Mud in Their Eye: Perspective

Part of the compassionate ministry of the church family is to not only help the staff member and family navigate through the emotional darkness, but to help them see the bright spots of their lives and ministry. Whenever possible encourage church family to personally affirm the positive impacts the staff member and spouse have had in their lives and church.

The spouse of one terminated staff member wrote, "The positive responses from our church family were encouraging. It made [husband] feel that he wasn't the failure that he thought he was." He saw what a positive impact he had made on so many lives.

⁷²

Ibid., 136-7

We felt better because it showed that people were on our side and loved us. She added that through the dismissal process, We had many church people send us letters, cards, and emails. Many called us or stopped by. They were loving and concerned and showed support.

During a termination experience, a staff member and spouse can be tempted to dwell upon the negative. While a very natural and instinctive response, it has a distorting effect on their perspective. It is not a balanced or representative view of their whole time at that church. Church members need to continuously inject into the couple's thinking positive moments and outcomes associated with their lives and ministry.

Staff Member: Ministering to the Leadership

This last area of compassion's ministry cycle is not always present or to be counted on in a staff member's termination process. The author recalls the morning the church learned of his dismissal. The elders met prior to the start of the service to review the procedures and finalize any details before announcing his dismissal. The author asked if he could briefly come in and speak to them. He shared with the elders that he would work alongside of them to put out any fires that may come from this. He shared that his desire was to minimize the hurt the church would experience.

His desire to assist was made possible by the leadership. Because he had experienced a good deal of compassion and grace from them, it made it easier to reciprocate support. To this day the author disagrees with the purported grounds for his termination, but he stands behind his decision to minister to the leadership through ministering to the church family.

When compassion is applied to a staff member's life, it increases the likelihood of him playing a significant healing role in the lives of the congregation. Contention with leadership can be reduced as compassion from the leadership is offered. The congregation in turn is blessed as they observe little hostility between the two groups and are the object of each group's care and concern. In such a difficult season, it is indeed a beautiful picture of the exchanging of grace among the Body of Christ.

Saying Goodbye

Before They Leave

Many staff members and their families are immediately removed from their position without a final opportunity to say goodbye to people within the church. One spouse reflected, "I did not get to say, 'goodbye,' at either church or at all publicly." They were relegated to saying goodbye to those who intentionally came by their home or they ran into in town. Such endings deepen the wound the staff member and family experience in a forced termination.

Church leadership should plan for the staff member and family to experience one final and special time of corporate fellowship with the church family. Celebrate their lives, ministry, and future by having a well attended fellowship. Select individuals ahead of time to share both humorous and meaningful experiences they shared with the family. It will be a bitter-sweet time for all those attending, but will assist the process of closure and healing for all.

After They Leave

An uncommon but welcome demonstration of compassion on the part of the church family is to extend support to the dismissed staff member and family once they have permanently left the fellowship. Support for them need not end with their last day. Designate several individuals from the congregation, persons whom they love and respect, to follow up with the family. The frequency of contact may be more in the immediate weeks following their departure and less as time goes by. One spouse wrote, "The most emotional point was when the phone just stopped ringing. It had rung nonstop up until the day [husband] was fired, then nothing. It was a very lonely feeling."

Extending periodic contact to the family, well after their removal, continues to communicate to them that they are still loved and valued. This expression of compassion can encourage the staff member and family to revisit their past ministry experience and reflect on their positive experiences and contributions. They do not need to see that season of their lives as something to be fully shunned from their memories or conversation.

CHAPTER SIX

COMPASSIONATE INTERACTIONS: THE LEADERSHIP

The last sphere of the church that is impacted by the termination process is the leadership. They do not merely set the dismissal process into motion for the other three spheres to experience. They too experience difficulties associated with the termination. In addition to ministering compassion to the staff member, spouse, and church, they also are in need of being ministered to. They too can suffer wounds that must be sutured. Awareness of struggling church members who remain or have left the fellowship due to the termination process can take a significant toll on the leadership. If the emotional and mental health of leadership is found deteriorating, their ability to give oversight and administer a compassionate termination process will be compromised.

Leadership's Calling

Church leadership that is serving effectively will be challenged in their call to serve and the manner and character by which they render that service. The primary function of the calling in church leadership is to lead. Leading is relatively easy when leadership is asking a group of people to move in a direction that group is already disposed to. It's an entirely different situation when asking a group to follow when they may disagree or have reservations about the direction. In the face of anticipated opposition or negative fallout, some leaders choose to abandon their calling and not attempt to lead. One author wrote, "One of the distasteful things about leadership is that

it is more important to lead than to be liked. The courageous decision, the decision based on conviction, the right decision - this is what we are after. The easy decision may avoid controversy, but the correct decision is whatever will enable growth toward greater Christ likeness in the lives of everyone involved.⁷³

Church leadership which has initiated the compassionate termination process of a staff member for non-moral reasons can anticipate a faction of people within the church who will offer their resistance and disapproval. Even as Korah opposed Moses, they may privately and publicly question leadership's decision-making and discernment on what is best for God's church, both present and future. Leadership should factor in this cost for leading and not be deterred from making or supporting the decision to release the staff member. Leaders are accountable to God to lead. Followers are accountable to God to follow.

Leadership's Character

The Bible says "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."⁷⁴ The dismissal of a staff member will bring trials and challenges in the form of criticism for the church leadership to face. How leadership interacts with the criticism will determine whether they become "perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." Author Hans Finzel writes, "I have seen through the years that God uses criticism and personal attack to

⁷³ Berkley, *Leadership Handbook of Management and Administration*, 264

⁷⁴ James 1:2-4

deepen and mature us. It seems to be a process that He uses to knock off the rough edges and to deepen our humility and our sense of dependence upon him. When we are attacked our first response should be to realize God has something to teach us in the experience.⁷⁵

God will use adversity to reveal, refine, and build the character of leadership. Criticism will elicit a response from its target. God's desire is that that response be in keeping with his character. Scripture passages found in 1 Timothy and Titus reveals some of the qualifying character traits for leadership. The same character traits that qualify an individual to serve as a leader will also be called upon in times of conflict.

It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money. He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?), and not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.⁷⁶

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, namely, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Hans Finzel. *Empowered Leaders: The Ten Principles of Christian Leadership* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1998), 77

⁷⁶ 1 Tim. 3:1-7

⁷⁷ Titus 1:5-9

Leadership should note that qualities such as being ógentle, peaceable, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, sensible, devout, and self-controlledô are essential to resource when experiencing conflict and criticism. Adversity will reveal how deep these traits run in the lives of the church leadership. Leaders will need to offer these and many other expressions of Christ-likeness repeatedly in order to promote health in the church body and their own lives.

Criticism not only serves to draw these character traits out, but also serves as a tool whereby God can diagnosis character deficiencies. In Robert Clinton's *The Making of a Leader* he discusses the role conflict has in a leader's life. He states:

For maturity purposes the most important thing learned is awareness of one's own character, its strengths and weaknesses. God will use conflict to point out areas of character needing modification, to point out or confirm areas of strength, or to point out areas of character entirely missing. Personal conflicts can deal with inner fears, lack of self-image, fear of failure, guilt, etc. The emphasis is not just on the insights learned about conflict, but also on the intended development of character orchestrated by God in those conflict situations.⁷⁸

Though undesirable to leadership, the process of conflict and criticism will uncover spiritual shortcomings for God to address within the leader. Leadership's acquiescence to the Holy Spirit's work in them will further bring the image of Christ out of them.

Leadership's Perspective: Those who Depart

No one understands more than leadership the difficult work of building a church. Entering the óPromised Landô for churches is equivalent to experiencing exciting and robust ministry results. Every church and its congregation wants this. They intentionally

⁷⁸

Robert Clinton. *The Making of a Leader* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1988), 163

and continuously engineer and refine their ministry practices in order to achieve these results. Most understand that great effort always precedes great reward. What is often overlooked is that before Israel crossed the Jordan River to enter Canaan, they first crossed a wilderness and a desert.

The wilderness and deserts are paths God chooses for his churches to cross through in order to bring them into "Canaan-like" seasons of Kingdom fruitfulness and effectiveness. And equally true is the human response to resist being led into such difficult and seemingly lifeless places.

The releasing of a staff member can feel like a "wilderness or desert" experience for some within the church family. They see and feel it to be an unnecessary and unfortunate detour in the church's journey toward "Canaan." It's difficult for some to believe and accept that where the wilderness ends the banks of the "Jordan River" begin. So in their unwillingness or inability to see over the future's horizon they are left to ferment over the hot sand and rugged terrain they are being asked to walk upon with the staff member's release.

Under the leadership of Moses, many Israelites complained of the direction he was leading. Some even suggested the group change leaders and go in a whole different direction. God would forbid Israel from dividing into multiple groups traveling multiple routes. They would move as a group together and in only one direction. The local church is not afforded such a luxury. When an individual or group of people find themselves disgruntled with the direction leadership is leading they have the option to join another "caravan of believers" or church that God is leading. People prefer to travel in a direction with the least amount of resistance and requiring the least amount of effort.

It is therefore not uncommon for some to leave a church because of the taxing effects a dismissal process can have on all involved. However, while the criteria for joining the next fellowship may have been the perception of it having a ministry calmness and serenity, the reality is that the departing member may be unaware of any existing challenges within the new church or simply joined the caravan in between their "wilderness wanderings." Unbeknownst to that person, the new church they are identifying with may have recently exited a "wilderness," is in the middle of one, or will be heading into one in the near future. The believer that chooses his church based on how much adversity and challenge they can avoid will never put deep roots into any one fellowship. No church can experience Canaan without first experiencing wildernesses and deserts.

This perspective may be of some value for leadership to reflect upon in some cases. No one wants to be viewed as responsible for a person or family leaving a fellowship. Leadership can feel hurt when they are viewed as the culprits for their departure. Consider that leadership's difficult decision to remove a staff member is not a move that "forces someone's hand" in leaving. It simply means that the church family has been presented with a "wilderness" to cross. For some who choose to abandon the journey with leadership, it may betray a mild cross-bearing approach to discipleship.

Don't Burn Any Bridges

When possible, leadership should reach out to people who have left the fellowship because of the termination process. Extend an invitation to sit down with the individuals and hear their hearts, struggles, and concerns. If they refuse a personal meeting or have

had one, and still chose to leave the church, consider sending them a letter communicating love for them, acknowledging the difficulty of the situation, and imploring them not to “burn bridges” in their relationship with the church. Let them know that the church would be overjoyed to have them return to fellowship at any point in the future.

Leadership’s Behavior: Those who Remain

Church leadership can not only be pained by the departure of church members, but also by some who remain. Just as leadership should prepare for a number of struggling people to leave the church fellowship because of their decision, so too leaders must prepare to accommodate those struggling members who remain. There will actually be a number of people who choose to stay in fellowship with the church yet have difficulty reconciling and supporting the decision. Some of these individuals will do so silently, while others will vocalize their displeasure. Author Hans Finzel offers ten actions that “can help feelings and frustrations from further escalating when leadership interacts with the struggling who remain.

1. Keep silent (John 19:9; Prov. 17:27-28; Isa. 53:7)
2. Think before you react (Prov. 15:28; 29:20; James 1:19-20)
3. Really listen (Prov. 19:20; 18:2; James 1:19)
4. Respond gently (Prov. 15:1; 16:21; 25:15)
5. Agree (Matt. 5:25; John 18:37)
 - With whatever is true
 - In principle
 - With the possibility of truth
6. Give caring feedback (John 19:11; Prov. 15:1)
7. Ask for more (John 18:34; Matt. 5:39-41)
8. Avoid quarreling (Eph. 4:31; Prov. 17:14)
9. Offer to help (Matt. 5:40-41; Luke 6:27-28)
10. Ask for forgiveness (1 Sam. 15:24-30; 25:28)⁷⁹

⁷⁹

Finzel, *Empowered Leaders*, 79

Following steps such as these is not only a means towards ministering to the hurting that remain in the church fellowship, but also to the leaders. Exhaling Christ-like responses into that difficult conversation undermines the growth and traction of bitterness upon the heart of leadership.

Defining Groups and Boundaries

Another means of protecting and healing the hearts of leadership during a dismissal process is to consider what type of church member is struggling, whether departing or remaining. In author Rick Warren's book *The Purpose Driven Church*, using concentric circles he identifies five categories of people that exist within the life and influence of a church. The first and outermost group is "community." These are the people who live near the church who have never, or occasionally, attend. The second group is the "crowd." These are individuals who are not members of the church, but attend regularly. The third group is the "congregation." These are individuals who are committed to Christ and the church through membership. The "committed" is the fourth group. These individuals are serious in their desire and practice of growing spiritually. The final and innermost group is the "core." These members actively serve in ministry and expressing the mission of the church.⁸⁰

It is helpful for leadership to understand the different groupings of people that exist within a church. Recognizing and assigning disgruntled church members to those categories can reduce some of the emotional taxation a dismissal process can have on the leadership. No one wants to see anyone leave a church. It hurts. Leadership is not

⁸⁰ Rick Warren. *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth without Compromising Your Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995)

immune to these feelings. However, the degree of hurt and disappointment leadership experiences should be proportional to the level of that person's involvement in the church. The type and category of person should inform the emotional response leadership gives.

Peripheral families and attendees who are loosely connected to relationships, ministry, and the mission of the church should not exact from leadership the same emotional or mental energy as the "core" group. It takes significantly less to destabilize the former group versus the latter. The "core" group is deeply vested in the life of the church. They enjoy good communication and standing with the leadership. They are relied upon heavily to sustain the work and momentum of ministry. Their departure or level of dissatisfaction will have a greater impact on the church as opposed to the "congregation" or "crowd." Leadership is to exercise sensitivity to all regardless of what category they belong. However, for the sake of leadership's own health and influence they must establish and define boundaries in their relationships with the church family.

In the book *Boundaries*, authors Henry Cloud and John Townsend write, "Any confusion of responsibility and ownership in our lives is a problem of boundaries. Just as homeowners set physical property lines around their land, we need to set mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual boundaries for our lives to help us distinguish what is our responsibility and what isn't."⁸¹ The inability or unwillingness to set boundaries can have damaging effects on leadership. The authors further describe the effect of not maintaining boundaries with critical individuals.

⁸¹ Henry Cloud. *Boundaries: When to Say Yes, How to Say No, To Take Control of Your Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 27

People will get hooked into either trying to win over the critical person, which can almost never be done, or by allowing the person to provoke them to anger. Some people internalize the criticism and get down on themselves. All of these reactions indicate an inability to stand apart from the critical person and keep one's boundaries. Allow these critical people to be who they are, but keep yourself separate from them and do not internalize their opinion of you. Make sure you have a more accurate appraisal of yourself, and then disagree internally.⁸²

Feeling disappointment and hurt over struggling individuals and families is natural and appropriate. An over-internalization of that loss is inappropriate, unproductive, and unhealthy. Leadership must choose to not allow those with misunderstanding to influence their self-understanding.

Leadership's Confidence: Those on the Team

Making the right decisions will never exempt leadership from feelings of heartache. This is especially true when the dismissed staff member is endeared by many in the congregation. The regret is not from making the right decision, but the ensuing fallout and consequences. There are feelings of remorse from being associated with the context which facilitated such grief.

Confidence in Each Other

Making tough decisions is the calling of leadership. It not only requires of leadership soundness in the decision made, but in the constitution of the team making it.

In *The Power of Team Leadership*, author George Barna writes:

⁸²

Ibid., 209-10

Teams also need partners who respect and believe in one another. Without a firm conviction that the leadership partners can be trusted to make good decisions, protect one another's best interests, and remain focused on the vision rather than personal glory, the team will go nowhere - regardless of how gifted and experienced each of the team members may be. Leaders take risks. It is difficult to pursue risks if you do not trust the motives or abilities of others to make appropriate choices or to provide support. If a deep level of trust does not exist, team members are not likely to rely upon one another's judgment or capabilities when key moments arise.⁸³

The collective character of the individuals comprising the leadership team will not only serve to identify and make the right decision, but to support the decision and fellow decision makers. Leaders need each other when in the face of conflict. The Bible states, "Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone? And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart."⁸⁴ The difficulties surrounding a dismissal process will create greater interdependence among the leadership team.

Confiding in Each Other

Having a shared trust among the leadership team can allow for transparency and vulnerability among each other. The "fallout" from initiating the termination process can periodically cause some within the team to second guess the decision. Others may feel guilty for making a decision that dramatically affected so many. Still others can feel moments of anger and frustration over the process and their involvement in it. All of

⁸³ George Barna. *The Power of Team Leadership* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrooks Press, 2001), 111

⁸⁴ Eccl. 4:9-12

those feelings and perspectives need a context to be aired throughout the dismissal process. Leadership needs to create safe and frequent contexts for the team to speak forthrightly. They need a place to vent. Their frustrated feelings and perspectives need to be fully expressed without reservation or fear that it be received by the team as unspiritual. The same counsel leadership gave to the staff member to express their hurt and disappointment is the same counsel they too should follow. Setting aside times designated for this practice and for prayer will allow God's compassion to permeate this much needed sphere.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Augsburger, David. Caring Enough to Confront: How to Understand and Express Your Deepest Feelings Toward Others. Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1973.
- _____. When Caring is Not Enough: Resolving Conflicts through Fair Fighting. Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1983.
- Barna, George. The Power of Team Leadership. Colorado Springs: Waterbrooks Press, 2001.
- Bartell, Barry. Let's Talk: Communication Skills and Conflict Transformation. Newton, KS: Faith & Life Press, 1999.
- Clinton, J. Robert. The Making of a Leader. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1988.
- Cloud, Henry and J. Townsend. Boundaries: When To Say Yes, How To Say No, To Take Control of Your Life. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992.
- Coate, Mary Anne. Clergy Stress: The Hidden Conflicts in Ministry. London: Abingdon Press, 1989.
- Cook, Jerry. Love, Acceptance and Forgiveness. Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1979.
- Cousins, Don, L. Anderson, and A. DeKruyter. Mastering Church Management. Portland, Oregon: Multnomah, 1990.
- Crabb, Larry. Connecting: Healing Ourselves and our Relationships. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997.
- _____, and D.B. Allender. Encouragement: The Key to Caring. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984.
- _____. The Marriage Builder: A Blueprint for Couples and Counselors. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992.
- Crowell, Rodney J. Musical Pulpits: Clergy and Laypersons Face the Issue of Forced Exits. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992.
- Dobson, James, S. Leas, and M. Shelley. Mastering Conflict and Controversy. Portland, OR: Multnomah Press and Christianity Today, 1992.

- Edwards, Gene. Letters to a Devastated Christian. Auburn, ME: Christian Books, 1984.
- Edwards, Lloyd. How We Belong, Fight, and Pray: The MBTI as a Key to Congregational Dynamics. Bethesda, MD: The Alban Institute, 1993.
- Fisher, Roger and S. Brown. Getting Together: Building Relationships as We Negotiate. New York: Penguin Books, 1988.
- Finzel, Hans. Empowered Leaders: The Ten Principles of Christian Leadership. Nashville: Word Publishing, 1998.
- Friedmann, J.M. Helping Resolve Conflict. Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1990.
- Greenfield, Guy. The Wounded Minister: Healing from and Preventing Personal Attacks. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001.
- Hands, Donald R. and W.L. Fehr. Spiritual Wholeness for Clergy: A New Psychology of Intimacy with God, Self, and Others. Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 1994.
- Huttenlocker, Keith. Conflict and Caring: Preventing, Managing and Resolving Conflict in the Church. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988.
- Kock, Ruth and K.C. Haugk. Speaking the Truth in Love: How to be an Assertive Christian. St. Louis: Stephen Ministries, 1992.
- LaHaye, Tim. If Ministers Fall, Can They be Restored? Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990.
- Leas, Speed B. Discover Your Conflict Management Style. Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 1998.
- Leas, S., and P. Kittlaus. Church Fights: Managing Conflict in the Local Church. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973.
- Lerner, Harriet. The Dance of Anger: A Woman's Guide to Changing the Patterns of Intimate Relationships. New York: Harper Collins, 2005.
- _____. The Dance of Connection: How to Talk to Someone When You're Mad, Hurt, Scared, Frustrated, Insulted, Betrayed, or Desperate. New York: Harper Collins, 2001.
- Lutz, Robert and B. Taylor. Surviving the Ministry: Navigating the Pitfalls, Experiencing the Renewals. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1990.
- Marshall, Myra, D. McGee, and J.B. Owen. Beyond Termination: A Spouse's Story of Pain and Healing. Nashville: Broadman, 1990.

- McSwain, L., and W. Treadwell, Jr. Conflict Ministry in the Church. Nashville: Broadman, 1981.
- Merrill, Dean. Clergy Couples in Crisis: The Impact of Stress on Pastoral Marriages. Carol Stream, IL: Word, 1985.
- Moore, Christopher. Opening the Clergy Parachute: Soft Landings for Church Leaders Who Are Seeking a Change. London: Abingdon, 1995.
- Oswald, Roy M. and O. Kroeger. Personality Type and Religious Leadership. Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 1988.
- Pinion, Gary L. Crushed: The Perilous Side of Ministry. Springfield, MO: 21st Century Press, 2006.
- Prinzing, Fred. Handling Church Tensions Creatively: Adjusting Twelve Tensions to Avoid Conflict. Arlington Heights, ILL.: Harvest Publishers, 1986.
- Rassieur, Charles. Stress Management for Ministers. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1982.
- Scarf, Maggie. Intimate Worlds: Life Inside the Family. New York: Random House, 1995.
- Scazzero, Peter, and W. Bird. The Emotionally Healthy Church. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003.
- _____. Emotionally Healthy Spirituality: Unleash the Power of Life in Christ. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006.
- Schaller, Lyle. The Multiple Staff and the Larger Church. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988.
- Schrock-Shenk, Carolyn and L. Ressler, eds. Making Peace with Conflict: Practical Skills for Conflict Transformation. Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1999.
- Sciaccia, Fran. Wounded Saints: The Secrets of Elijah, Moses, David, Jeremiah, Job, Jonah, Jesus and Others Who Triumphed over Emotional Pain. Albuquerque, NM: Ravens Ridge Books, 1992.
- Seamands, David A. Healing for Damaged Emotions. Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 1991.
- _____. Redeeming the Past: Recovering from the Memories that Cause Our Pain. Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 1986.
- Smedes, Lewis. Shame and Grace: Healing the Shame We Don't Deserve. New York: Harper Collins, 1993.

Steinke, Peter L. How Your Church Family Works: Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems. Bethesda, MD: The Alban Institute, 1993.

Swenson, Richard A. Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves to Overloaded Lives. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2004.

Ury, William. Getting Past No: Negotiating Your Way from Confrontation to Cooperation. New York: Bantam Books, 1991.

Warren, Rick. The Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message and Mission. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995.

Washburn, Patricia and R. Gribbon. Peacemaking Without Division: Moving Beyond Congregational Apathy and Anger. Bethesda, MD.: The Alban Institute, 1986.

White, James E., R.L. Sheffield. Equipping Deacons to Confront Conflict. Nashville: Convention Press, 1987.

White, John and K. Blue. Healing the Wounded. Downers Grove, ILL: InterVarsity Press, 1985.

Willimon, William. Preaching about Conflict in the Local Church. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987.

_____. Worship as Pastoral Care. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979.

Newspaper Articles and Journals

Anne Swardson. Hanging On to Confidence, *Washington Post*, March 23, 1992.

Dan Reiland, "The Art of Managing Staff," *Enrichment Journal*, http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/200304/082_stf.cfm (accessed September 24, 2010).

Chandler, Charles, "Another View: Aunt Ida is Very Perceptive," *Religious Herald*, March 8, 2007.

Jones, Megan Norris, "Retreat to Help Terminated Ministers Move On, Help Family Recover," *Alabama Baptist*, March 22, 2008.

White, Jim, "Rejected Ministers Find Acceptance and Help," *Religious Herald*, July 24, 2008.

VITA

Mark D. Nalepa

PERSONAL

Born: March 12, 1972

Married: Whitney A. Nalepa, May 20, 1995.

Children: Jacob Wayne, born April 22, 2000.

Andrew Michael, born January 28, 2004.

EDUCATIONAL

B.S., Toccoa Falls College, 1995.

M.A., Columbia Biblical Seminary, 2001.

PROFESSIONAL

Associate Pastor, Calvary Baptist Church; Woodbridge, VA., 2002-2004.

Senior Pastor, Campbell Alliance Church, Campbell, NY., 2004-2007.

Senior Pastor, Washington Alliance Church, Washington, NJ., 2007-present.