

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

The Pastor's Faithless Child: Strengthening Methods for Hurting Parent-Pastors

A Thesis Project Submitted to

The faculty of Liberty University Baptist Theological Seminary

In Candidacy for the Degree of

Doctor of Ministry

by

**Ryan K. Ayers**

Lynchburg, Virginia

September 2014



Liberty University Baptist Theological Seminary

**Thesis Project Approval Sheet**

---

Mentor: Dr. Charlie Davidson,  
Director, Doctor of Ministry Program  
Associate Professor Of Chaplaincy

---

Reader: Dr. David W. Hirschman,  
Acting Dean  
Assistant Professor of Religion

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, thanks to Jesus Christ my Lord and Savior for giving me wisdom and knowledge to write this thesis project. The success of all I do is based on power from the Holy Spirit. Without God, there is no success worthy of determination and hard work. To Him be all the glory, honor, and praise.

I would also like to thank the entire thesis committee, especially Dr. Charlie Davidson, my mentor, and Dr. David W. Hirschman, my reader. Without their guidance and input, this project would not be molded into the work it has become. Through their direction, I have been pushed to a higher level of understanding in this subject.

To all the parent-pastors with faithless children, this is for you! Being a resilient parent-pastor is difficult, but achievable. Keep focused on strengthening your lives, and God will bring you through. Thank you for sharing your stories and bringing to life the hurt and pain countless parent-pastors experience.

To my wife, Thu-Thao, thank you for letting me zone out while I thought about how to write the next section. Your love, support, and guidance did not go unnoticed. Without your patience and encouragement, it would have been too easy to give up. To “the boys,” Sean and Peyton, I know there was a lot of time in the office, but I am done writing. Let my work and mom’s support be an example of the importance of a supportive wife and good education. This goes to show hard work will pay off. Never be afraid to try, even when people say you can’t. Let God be your source of power, not the world. When people say you can’t, remember, God says He can!

# THE PASTOR'S FAITHLESS CHILD: STRENGTHENING METHODS FOR HURTING PARENT-PASTORS

Ryan K. Ayers

Liberty University Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014

Mentor: Dr. Charlie Davidson

Parent-pastors face challenges when balancing vocational and familial responsibilities every day, and when faithless adolescent children are part of their family dynamic the hardship is magnified. These pastors often experience debilitating critique from their faith communities and colleagues while carrying the burden of raising a rebellious child. Utilizing a phenomenological study process, one hundred transparent interviews with parent-pastors are used to identify assumptions and realities surrounding the hurting parent-pastor's dilemma. Leading principles that have helped other parent-pastors cope with the overwhelming affects of their child's behavior will be introduced, empowering those who are hurting identify their stress points and overcome personal distress.

Thesis Project Topic Length: 102 Words

## CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS. ....	iv
ABSTRACT. ....	v
FIGURES. ....	x
INTRODUCTION . ....	1
Statement of the Problem. ....	1
Statement of Limitations . ....	3
Theoretical Basis . ....	4
Statement of Methodology. ....	6
Review of Literature. ....	7
CHAPTER I: CRITICAL REVIEW: PARENT-PASTORS' AND THEIR CRISIS. ....	20
The Four-Fold Crisis. ....	20
Social . ....	21
Spiritual . ....	23
Emotional . ....	24
Physical. ....	27
Defining the Prodigal Child . ....	28
Nomads. ....	29
Prodigals. ....	30
Exiles . ....	30
Attributes of Rebellion. ....	31
Influence. ....	32
Expectations . ....	39

Desire for Independence. . . . .	45
CHAPTER II: RESEARCH CONSTRUCTION: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY	
PROCESS. . . . .	51
What This Study Hopes to Produce . . . . .	52
Why Use Phenomenological Data . . . . .	54
Advantages & Difficulties . . . . .	55
Establishing The Study. . . . .	57
Locating Research Participants . . . . .	58
Data-gathering Methods. . . . .	60
Explication of the Data. . . . .	63
CHAPTER III: RESEARCH FINDINGS: THE UNGUARDED ANSWERS . . . . .	
Findings . . . . .	68
Why did the Child Rebel? . . . . .	69
What did the Pastor Experience? . . . . .	74
What Impact did it have on Church and Family?. . . . .	80
What Were the Pastor's Hopes? . . . . .	87
How did the Pastor Get Through the Issue?. . . . .	94
Conclusive Results. . . . .	101
CHAPTER IV: FINDING A SOLUTION: FIVE STRENGTHS OF COPING . . . . .	
Principle 1: Spiritual Strength . . . . .	105
Spiritual Differentiation . . . . .	105
Prayer . . . . .	107
Principle 2: Marital Strength . . . . .	110

Carrying the Weight. . . . .	111
How to Unite . . . . .	115
Becoming a Parenting Team . . . . .	117
Principle 3: Emotional Strength. . . . .	119
Strength in Emotion . . . . .	120
Six Steps to Defusing Emotional Crisis . . . . .	122
Principle 4: Social Strength . . . . .	125
Finding a Confidant . . . . .	126
Overcoming Social Phobias. . . . .	129
Principle 5: Ministry Strength . . . . .	131
1 Timothy 3:4-5 . . . . .	132
Titus 1:6 . . . . .	134
Pastoral Calling. . . . .	136
CHAPTER V: IMPLEMENTING AND SUMMARY . . . . .	138
Implementing Coping Skills. . . . .	138
Do the Hard Work . . . . .	139
Believe, Submit, and Trust. . . . .	142
Attitude is Everything. . . . .	145
Summary. . . . .	148
The Issue. . . . .	149
The Research . . . . .	151
The Solution. . . . .	153
Change is Possible . . . . .	157



BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	159
IRB APPROVAL.....	166

## FIGURES

Figure 1	Pastors with Faithless Children: Why do you think your child rebelled? . . .	69
Figure 2	Pastors with Faithful Children: Why do you think pastors' children rebel? . .	73
Figure 3	District-supervised Pastors: Why do you think pastors' children rebel? . . . .	74
Figure 4	Pastors with Faithless Children: What did you experience in times of struggle? . . . . .	75
Figure 5	Pastors with Faithful Children: What do you think pastors' experience when their child rebels? . . . . .	77
Figure 6	District-supervised Pastors: What do you think pastors experience when their child rebels? . . . . .	79
Figure 7	Pastors with Faithless Children: What impact did it have on your church & family? . . . . .	81
Figure 8	Pastors with Faithful Children: What impact do you feel a faithless child has on a pastors church & family? . . . . .	83
Figure 9	District-supervised Pastors: What impact do you feel a faithless child has on a pastors church & family? . . . . .	85
Figure 10	Pastors with Faithless Children: What were your hopes for support in times of struggle? . . . . .	88
Figure 11	Pastors with Faithful Children: What do you think pastors hope for when dealing with issues related to their faithless child? . . . . .	91
Figure 12	District-supervised Pastors: What do you think pastors hope for when dealing with issues related to their faithless child? . . . . .	93

Figure 13	Pastors with Faithless Children: How did you cope with the struggles of your faithless child's behavior? . . . . .	95
Figure 14	Pastors with Faithful Children: How do you think pastors with faithless children cope with struggles related to their child's behavior? . . . . .	98
Figure 15	District-supervised Pastors: How do you think pastors with faithless children cope with struggles related to their child's behavior? . . . . .	100
Figure 16	Individual Weight. . . . .	112
Figure 17	Suspended Weight . . . . .	113
Figure 18	Carrying the Weight Together . . . . .	114

## INTRODUCTION

On average, 1 in 3 young people growing up in a Christian home walk away from their inherent Christian values by age 18.<sup>1</sup> Despite spiritual value systems a Christian home provides, teaching the Christian faith does not guarantee salvation. For each young person choosing to walk away from their upbringing, there are parents left in the wake of an adolescents faithless lifestyle; parents who have sleepless nights, and families that implode from the social, spiritual, emotional, and physical fallout of their child's behavior.

Even when pastoral parents spend time training their child in the direction they should go, some will disregard the gospel message.<sup>2</sup> Parents desire the best for their children, and have faith they will become productive members of society. Even more, Christian parents yearn for their children to become productive members for the Kingdom of God. As children grow older, they take on the responsibility for making choices outside of the parent's control.<sup>3</sup> For a pastor's child, these choices not only influence the family, but also additional ministerial obligations parent-pastors<sup>4</sup> have to their congregations.

### Statement of the Problem

Pastoral parents who are accountable to a church congregation along with their children assume a difficult task that non-pastoral parents will never experience. The ability for pastors to

---

<sup>1</sup> The Barna Research Group, "Five Myths About Young Adult Church Dropouts," *The Barna Update* (November 2011), accessed November 15, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Proverbs 22:6. Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible references in this paper are to the New International Version (NIV) (Colorado Springs, CO: Biblica, Inc., 2011).

<sup>3</sup> Elyse Fitzpatrick, Jim Newheiser, and Laura Hendrickson, *When Good Kids Make Bad Choices: Help and Hope for Hurting Parents* (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 2005), 7.

<sup>4</sup> Common term used for pastors who have children. This gives the connotation that family is the primary responsibility of the pastor, while vocation and congregation is a secondary care point for pastoral leadership. The Barna Research Group, "Prodigal Pastor Kids: Fact or Fiction?" *The Barna Update* (November 2013), accessed November 15, 2013.

escape from stressors of church and family life are challenging because both are encompassed in the pastoral lifestyle. For evangelical clergy, leading people to faith in Jesus Christ is the capstone of their pastoral duties. When children choose to walk away from the Christian faith, it can project a sense of personal failure in reaching those who are closest to home. The pastor's ability to escape these feelings can become overwhelming, even damaging to the pastors soul.

Similar to mainstream statistics for young adults raised in Christian homes, 3 out of 4 pastors claim their child fifteen and older has experienced significant doubts of faith.<sup>5</sup> In the midst of the stress caused by a wayward child, pastors in autonomous evangelical churches are often fighting two battles that require a balancing act. Congregants use Scripture to oust the pastor from positions in which God has called them to serve because of their child's behavior. In the midst of vocational struggles, siblings and spouses are demanding attention as a husband, father, and household spiritual leader.

The previous statistics show that pastors are experiencing a similar issue to modern Christian families. This means faithless children are not a complication confined to congregants who attend church on the weekends, and embellish the world during the week. The dilemma of faithless children is infiltrating spiritual leadership in the Christian culture at the same, if not greater, alarming rate.

While the influences of the world have become greater and the ability to protect children from these influences is increasingly difficult, pastors can do only so much to lead their children to faith and purity in Christ. When a child chooses to walk away from these foundations, pastoral parents are left hurting emotionally and spiritually. Families experience a wide variety of concerns that alter the normal functioning of the household. There is no simple example of the

---

<sup>5</sup> The Barna Research Group, "Prodigal Pastor Kids: Fact or Fiction?".

distress a parent might feel when dealing with issues. The emotional and spiritual impact will always manifest itself differently. Many factors play a role in the extent of the parental distress.<sup>6</sup> With this evidence, the pastor is in need of simple tools that will encourage them in the midst of the discouraging behavior from the church and his/her prodigal child.

The matter of a prodigal child is very broad; there is no shortage of information on reaching prodigals themselves; however, until recently little to no research has been done on the pastoral family resulting in deficient support and comfort for pastors and their families who have faithless children. In turn, the issue of a faithless child is often a struggle many parent-pastors face alone.

### **Statement of Limitations**

This thesis project will not attempt to address issues surrounding parental responses to wayward children's behaviors. Additionally, this thesis project will not address how the pastor and others can reach the prodigal child or bring them back to the church. The prodigal's spiritual journey will not be presented in this project as Billy Graham writes in his autobiography, "the prodigal's story is theirs to tell or not tell."<sup>7</sup> This thesis does not attempt to address the pastor who has rejected his/her family for the ministerial calling.

One must understand there are four audiences parent-pastors might have to encounter as they deal with a faithless child: family, congregational, community, and pastoral colleagues. The magnitude of a study that evaluated all four groups is too great for the essence of this study. Therefore, only pastors and their colleagues will be interviewed for this thesis project. It only

---

<sup>6</sup> Margie M. Lewis and Gregg Lewis, *The Hurting Parent: Help for Parents of Prodigal Sons and Daughters*, Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 19.

<sup>7</sup> Billy Graham, *Just as I Am* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 776.

attempts to reflect the other audiences through parent-pastor's experiences, and not direct stories from others.

### **Theoretical Basis**

Jesus tells a parable in the book of Luke about a son who leaves his home for a life of excitement. He squanders the money his father gives him and ends up in the pigpen before he decides to return home.<sup>8</sup> In this story, the three main characters represent three aspects to God and His creation. The father represents God, who gives the gift of eternal wealth and extends grace despite the prodigal's misuse of the gift. The prodigal son represents humanity who, despite the gift, takes advantage of what the world has to offer. The brother represents those who do not fully understand why the heavens rejoice when the prodigal returns, despite their own perceived faithfulness.

The grace and celebration of the father is inconceivable unless one realizes the degree of strife and grief experienced by the father during the son's time away. When parent-pastors are able to identify their child's cause for faithless behaviors, they begin to equip themselves to address the argument some church members might present, and can begin applying some principles to overcoming the discouragement they face. The prodigal is not always the child who runs away looking for a life of sin and the church is not an angry mob searching for ways to lynch the pastor. Collectively, however, these small groups implanted in the parent-pastor's life can turn their world upside down.

While pastors' families are desperately seeking guidance from others, a majority of the attention is given to the faithless child in an attempt to bring him or her to salvation. The stress placed on the pastor by the congregation is carried over to the home life, and family relationships

---

<sup>8</sup> Luke 15:11-32.

begin to erode. Family issues progress to create greater problems with the congregation. The vicious cycle continues until the parent-pastor gives up on the family, ministry, or both.

A Minister of the Gospel must be called by God to serve the church as a shepherd; however, their children are not always called to ministry, and some chose not to accept salvation through Jesus Christ despite the efforts of his or her pastoral parent.<sup>9</sup> This expectation ultimately places unrealistic standards on the children and can drive them further away from faith in Jesus Christ. When children are driven away from their personal relationship with Christ, congregational issues arise as the pastor's qualifications for spiritual leadership are questioned.

Serving God in a pastoral role is not based in the salvation of the pastor's children when autonomous evangelical churches classify it as a disqualifier; undue pressure is placed on spiritual leaders. This offsets the balance of the pastoral lifestyle, which encompasses the congregation and family. At the root of the offset is the adolescent's choice, which can negatively affect the emotional and spiritual confidence of the parent-pastor. If the pastor is able to find the delicate balance between family and church, and resist the negative input of opposition to find encouragement through refined coping skills, that pastor will overcome many of the challenges facing ministerial leaders with faithless children.

The parent-pastor's ability to cope is found in the family and church's ability to understand the crisis related to the "call" their leader is experiencing. While important, the child's crisis of faith is not the only stress point for the parent-pastor. Pastors must not neglect the rest of the family or their congregation while balancing the need to save their child. Similar

---

<sup>9</sup> The statistic for children who permanently turn from the faith is the lowest statistic at 7%. Most youth growing up in a pastoral home will have a period of doubt, but will return to the faith at a rate of 40%. The Barna Research Group, "Prodigal Pastor Kids: Fact or Fiction?" *The Barna Update* (November 2013), accessed November 15, 2013.



to Jesus' parable, sometimes the father must let their child go, despite what others might think, in order for the child to find true repentance, and the pastor to continue in successful ministry.

### **Statement of Methodology**

Data regarding pastoral experience was gathered from multiple sources. This thesis project utilized evidence from published material and personal pastoral interviews. The interviews were conducted and recorded and each member was assigned a code. Upon completion of the interviews, the data was compiled and used to establish a phenomenological basis for this project.

Chapter 1, "Critical Review: Parent-Pastors and Their Crisis," will give a critical overview of the crisis parent-pastors face in light of spiritual, emotional, social, and physical dynamics. Additionally, this chapter will define the prodigal child and bring to light attributes that draw children away from Christian upbringing. Evaluation of this issue begins with the Garden of Eden and the fall of man,<sup>10</sup> and progresses towards modern pastoral relationships. After reading this, one will have a clear understanding of parent-pastor struggles giving way to the phenomenological study processes.

Chapter 2, "Research Construction: A Phenomenological Study Process," will review the research process and give appropriate rationale for the development of this study. Looking at the research methods, and construction of interview processes, the study will be validated by a brief overview of the family crisis and the need for further research beyond currently published articles on parent-pastor coping mechanisms when faithless children are involved.

Chapter 3, "Research Findings: The Unguarded Answers," informs the reader of processes and control measures taken throughout the research. This chapter explains how the

---

<sup>10</sup> Genesis 3:1-24.

pastoral interviews were completed, and a statistical analysis utilized in the theoretical process. An in-depth breakdown of each question asked assisted in producing the conclusive results needed for solutions to the pastoral problem. This chapter represents the search for answers in the pastor's story, how families were affected, congregational reactions, and parent-pastor thoughts on why their child rebelled.

The researched stories and collected data will feed into possible solutions one can implement if they are facing similar issues. Chapter 4, "Finding a Solution: Five Strengths of Coping," will present the most common principles that have helped other pastors turn areas of discouragement to encouragement in family, faith, and vocation. This chapter will be a reflection of how the parents in Chapter 1 were able to cope with their child's behavior and remain successful in their various endeavors.

Finally, Chapter 5, "Implementing and Summary," will summarize the entire project through encouragement of all the principles and successful future processes. This includes a recap of why having an unbelieving child does not disqualify a minister from their call, how to implement the transformational process, and help choosing which principles will fit the needs of the parent-pastor.

### **Review of Literature**

One of the primary resources to this thesis project is the use of published literature. This includes books, journals, and biblical references. The published literature is listed in order of source text with books listed first. Second, journals are listed in order of their importance to the research of this project. Finally, biblical references were reviewed and broken down into primary text and classified by its purpose in the thesis project.

### Published Literature

*You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church and Rethinking Faith* is a book about the epidemic facing churches today.<sup>11</sup> This book contributes an understanding of church dropout cultures and why young people leave the church to pursue various exploits in life. *You Lost Me* breaks down the prodigal culture and redefines prodigal stigmas into three groups relayed in this thesis project. Bringing one of the most up-to-date studies on the church dropout culture, the author reveals how parents can equip their children with the lasting principles that, if they go astray, will help eventually lead them back to the faith.

*Prodigals and Those Who Love Them: Words of Encouragement for Those Who Wait* is a book designed to give encouragement through stories of people with prodigal children.<sup>12</sup> This was used to glean a deeper perspective into the prayers, strategies, and issues faced by other parents who have experienced the faithless child. Not only will this book assist in developing issues surrounding the prodigal life of the Graham family, it will bring to light complications surrounding other pastoral families. It reflects the hope and encouragement parents can have in their child's situation.

*The Hurting Parent: Help for Parents of Prodigal Sons and Daughters* is a book that brings to light how easy it is for children to go astray.<sup>13</sup> It contributes to the idea that parents struggle with appropriate rearing habits and encourages the reader with thoughts that there is no special formula for perfect kids. The main point of coping is that nothing will stop the child from going astray, and normalizes the parent's emotional hurt. This book provides some of the

---

<sup>11</sup> David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians are Leaving Church and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011).

<sup>12</sup> Ruth Bell Graham, *Prodigals and Those Who Love Them: Words of Encouragement for Those Who Wait* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008).

<sup>13</sup> Margie M. Lewis and Gregg Lewis, *The Hurting Parent: Help for Parents of Prodigals*, Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010).

foremost expert advice on encouraging parents in the midst of the child's choices. It will contribute to the project through its practical advice and unvarnished look into the hurting parent's internal strife.

While the previous books reflect the contrast between the child and the youth, *Parents in Pain: Overcoming the Hurt & Frustration of Problem Children*, focuses on the parents struggle.<sup>14</sup> The book uses many of the emotional struggles parents revealed in the authors' research to assist in developing coping principles found useful by others. This book is designed to help parents cope with their own feelings common to the issue. While addressing the parental issue, White also touches on the marital strife a prodigal child might create. Giving practical advice to overcome the issues of regret in the child rearing process, White presents the material in a comprehensible manner easily worked into the theory of this project.

Hope and encouragement is offered to the parents of prodigal daughters in the book *Praying for Your Prodigal Daughter: Hope, Help, and Encouragement for Hurting Parents*.<sup>15</sup> This book offers a first person experience of dealing with a prodigal daughter after exposing her daughter to the mother's prodigal lifestyle when the daughter was younger. This book not only looks at Thompson's life story, but along the way shares candid stories of other parents who have experienced the pain of a prodigal child. Through her memoirs and journal entries, Thompson reveals the importance of prayer for both her daughter and herself. This book makes significant contributions to the thesis as it focuses on the prodigal issues those with daughters face as well as struggles the parent might face if they came to salvation and ministry after their own wayward lifestyle.

---

<sup>14</sup> John White, *Parents in Pain: Overcoming the Hurt & Frustration of Problem Children* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1979).

<sup>15</sup> Janet Thompson, *Praying for Your Prodigal Daughter: Hope, Help & Encouragement for Hurting Parents* (New York: Howard Books, 2008).

*Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves to Overloaded Lives* speaks to the balance of the hectic life people live today.<sup>16</sup> Richard Swenson relays the message that success is not justified by how packed one's schedule is, and that a hectic schedule only results in overload. Finding the emotional, spiritual, and physical balance is as essential to giving the best anyone has to all aspects of their life. While this does not directly address the pastoral balance, it does give practical advice for leveling personal lifestyle to restore energy and excitement back into a vibrant lifestyle.

Tim Clinton and Joshua Straub speak to the attachment styles one has when building relationship with God in their book *God Attachment: Why You Believe, Act, and Feel the Way You Do About God*.<sup>17</sup> With a new perspective on how God made people for a relationship with Him, spiritual attachment develops reasons people are fascinated with God and choose to have relationship with Him or run to Him for safety when crisis hits. The authors develop the reader's idea of a relationship based in the psychological principles of attachment, and mirror the theory in one's spiritual relationship. The concept develops the thought that regardless of one's understanding of who God is, whether they like Him or not, they most likely return to Him when they are in need of emotional and spiritual security.

*When They Turn Away: Drawing Your Adult Child Back to Christ* is a book that describes the struggle of parents with adult children who go astray.<sup>18</sup> The thesis of this book is the feeling of failure and confusion when a child turns from the faith and addresses the fear of what happens once they divert from their faithful upbringing. This biblically based book helps teach parents the

---

<sup>16</sup> Richard A. Swenson, *Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves to Overloaded Lives* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2004).

<sup>17</sup> Tim Clinton and Joshua Straub, *God Attachment: Why You Believe, Act, and Feel the Way You Do About God* (New York: Howard Books, 2010).

<sup>18</sup> Rob Rienow, *When They Turn Away: Drawing Your Adult Child Back to Christ* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publishing, 2011).

importance of forgiving themselves, their children, and seeking to mend the relationship with their child.

The voices of faithless children are revealed in *They Like Jesus But Not the Church*.<sup>19</sup> After many hours in coffee shops and engaging in discussion with people who have a belief in Christ, but disdain for the local church, Kimball sounds the call for pastors and churches to change ways they are reaching the young adult population. The author spends time engaging with young people in candid conversation about church, Jesus, spirituality, and religion. The book provides an insiders look at how pastor's children are influenced by an ever-changing secular culture.

*Caring for People God's Way: Personal and Emotional Issues, Addictions, Grief, and Trauma* develops a systematic way to approach counseling and emotional support to common issues faced by the parents of prodigal children.<sup>20</sup> Though the book does not directly address the parents of prodigal children, it does undertake the task of evaluating people who are facing emotional struggles and how they can be supported in counseling. This information is pertinent to the development of counselors and support networks but is not considered a self-help book. It is used in this project as a foundational text when addressing the generalized emotional struggle of the parent(s).

*Bringing Home the Prodigals* gives a message of hope and encouragement to parents and church congregations.<sup>21</sup> Parsons commissions the church to stop judging others and to begin supporting each other as they reach out to those with prodigal children. Enlightening the reader

---

<sup>19</sup> Dan Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church: Insights from Emerging Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009).

<sup>20</sup> Tim Clinton, Archibald Hart, and George Ohlschlanger, *Caring for People God's Way: Personal and Emotional Issues, Addictions, Grief, and Trauma* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005).

<sup>21</sup> Rob Parsons, *Bringing Home the Prodigals* (Colorado Springs: Authentic Publishing, 2007).

to the fact that even the “perfect parent,” God, has trouble with his children, he challenges the church to be the celebrating servants in the prodigal story instead of the faithful brother. Though this work focuses on the church changing their actions to reach prodigals, it also addresses the responsibility of churches to support parents and not just push them away because of their child’s decisions.

When parents are faced with the fear of their wayward child’s decisions, they need hope and support to get through the issue. *When Good Kids Make Bad Choices: Help and Hope for Hurting Parents* is a practical guide for parents who are in desperate need of support when dealing with the child who goes astray.<sup>22</sup> This book offers solid advice on positive reactions when their wayward child makes some negative choices in life.

*It Starts at Home: A Practical Guide to Nurturing Lifelong Faith* speaks to the responsibility of parents to bring their children up in the church so they have a lifelong love for God and communion with His people.<sup>23</sup> If the church is left to raise children, there are conflicting messages between home and church that ultimately causes childhood rebellion. This book helps parents evaluate their spiritual leadership in the home and how they can become a stronger spiritual leader. By stressing the importance of raising the child for lasting morals and values that, even if they go astray, will serve as a subconscious compass of right and wrong. *It Starts at Home* shows how the parent can instill these lasting characteristics to return to their faithful upbringing when life becomes overwhelming.

---

<sup>22</sup> Elyse Fitzpatrick, Jim Newheiser, and Laura Hendrickson, *When Good Kids Make Bad Choices: Help and Hope for Hurting Parents* (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 2005).

<sup>23</sup> Kurt Bruner and Steve Stroope, *It Starts at Home: A Practical Guide to Nurturing Lifelong Faith* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2010).

*Through the Eyes of a Prodigal* focuses on reflections from a prodigal's hurtful and destructive behavior within his family.<sup>24</sup> Through his story, readers will see how the authors' parents were impacted by his decisions. The prodigal child's situation is likened to a puzzle that piece-by-piece must be put together. One missing piece gives way to an incomplete story from the struggling parent. This book uses the prodigal's journey only to relay the message of the hurting parent. The author gives normalization to the feelings parents experience with a wayward child and gives advice how they can overcome their struggles.

Using Emotionally Focused Therapy is a simple way to reestablish safe emotional connections and preserve the bond in relationships.<sup>25</sup> The developer of this counseling technique writes *Hold Me Tight: Seven Conversations for a Lifetime of Love* to help the reader understand how to integrate this process to achieve strong attachment relationships.<sup>26</sup> This book develops seven conversations that can open the doors to forgiveness and reunion with the child. It develops the coping skills needed for successful relationship mending in the family environment.

The article "Prodigal Pastor Kids: Fact or Fiction?" provides research from more than six-hundred-fifty pastors who have experienced a child with faith issues.<sup>27</sup> These pastors reveal their impressions regarding their child's rebellion. The pastors also report failures and accomplishments while raising their child. This groundbreaking study is the most recent data on the prodigal children of ministry workers.

---

<sup>24</sup> Danny Casas Jr., *Through the Eyes of a Prodigal: Hope for Parents and Leaders with Wayward Children* (Bloomington: WestBow Press, 2012).

<sup>25</sup> Sue Johnson, "About Us: What is EFT," *The International Centre for Excellence in Emotionally Focused Therapy*, accessed January 20, 2014.

<sup>26</sup> Sue Johnson, *Hold Me Tight: Seven Conversations for a Lifetime of Love* (New York: Hachette Book Group, 2008).

<sup>27</sup> The Barna Research Group, "Prodigal Pastor Kids: Fact or Fiction?" *The Barna Update* (November 2013), accessed November 15, 2013.



The web-journal article “Five Myths About Young Adult Church Dropouts” details the misconceptions of the church dropout.<sup>28</sup> Giving the top five mistakes churches make when a youth turns from their Christian upbringing the Barna Group informs people why youth are leaving the church, how the church is letting them go, and the spiritual journey of the wayward youth. It is easy for a congregation to overlook millennial youth today and require standards customary to the 1960s; demanding standards youngsters are not willing to endure. This article illuminates those concepts and compiles them while offsetting the most common prodigal myths.

In “Married, With Prodigals,” the author interviews marriage and family counselor Norman Wright about the difficulties faced by parents of prodigal children.<sup>29</sup> The author defines the prodigal nature along with the impact the child has on family systems. The hurt parents experience, and the toll it has on marriages create a huge impact on the way families’ function. While possible, it is difficult for households to deal with wayward children and remain intact. This article focuses on the marital impact of prodigal children.

### Scripture

There are many examples of pastoral parents who are pleasing in God’s sight. These parents are by no means perfect, but they are committed to the Lord. Despite their commitment and the way they bring up their children, they frequently go astray. Some children come back to faith in Christ, while others completely disregard their upbringing. Three of these pastoral parents will be reviewed in this thesis project.

The parable of the prodigal son is the scriptural foundation of this thesis project. Found in Luke 15:11-32, Jesus tells the story of a father whose son demands his riches and quickly

---

<sup>28</sup> The Barna Research Group, “Five Myths About Young Adult Church Dropouts,” *The Barna Update* (November 2011), accessed November 15, 2013.

<sup>29</sup> Caryn D. Rivadeneira, “Married, with Prodigals” *Marriage Partnership* 17, No. 2 (Summer 2000), 38, accessed November 28, 2013.

squanders them only to return home after he has failed. The father who let his son go, celebrates the son's return, to the dismay of the prodigal's brother. This story is about the love and forgiveness God has for those who walk away and then return to the faith. It is also about the forgiveness the church should have in supporting pastoral leadership when they have to let their child go on a spiritual journey.

The spiritual journey many take creates a longing for deeper understanding of God. While parent-pastors reveal biblical understanding to their children, there is no promise they will follow the guidelines. In Gen 3:1-24, an all-perfect Father had a relationship, and dwelt with his children, but later faced the strain of their prodigal ways. Adam and Eve strayed and fell into the temptation of the world. This temptation has not subsided over time. Despite the actions of His children, the Father's unconditional love prevailed and a strong relationship was restored.

In 2 Chr 29, 32:24-33, 33:1-20, King Hezekiah was considered a man of great faith restoring the temple, but his son was evil in the Lord's sight.<sup>30</sup> The story shows the restoration of a prideful king, and an evil king who, because of his upbringing found repentance. This parent never had the opportunity to see his son's repentance, but did have the opportunity to implant a value system that was victorious in the end. Likewise, some parents might not see their child return to faith in Jesus Christ, but can only pray for the hope of a repentant child.

When a pastor is called to ministry, they are called to shepherd a flock. This task is not to be taken lightly. Each person called to ministry must meet strict biblical guidelines. They must be someone who is dedicated to teaching and guiding others as well as dedicated to encouraging and helping people grow in the Lord. The pastor must be able to inspire the congregation to reach the nations with the love of Christ.

---

<sup>30</sup> 2 Chronicles 33:2.

Every member in the Body of Christ is gifted to function in the church. Eph 4:11-13 speaks to the different callings God places on His people. For those who are called, the responsibility is to build up the Body of Christ, growing them to full maturity “measured by Christ’s fullness” in their life.<sup>31</sup> The call to ministry comes first and the focus on Christ is important because once the Holy Spirit empowers people, the call and gifting is not removed for another cause.<sup>32</sup>

If the pastoral gift cannot be taken away, then one must evaluate the qualifications and strictly determine the calling within qualifications of eldership. In 1Tim 3:1-7, Paul writes to Timothy, encouraging him to beware of false teachers. Combating false teachers who are prone to inappropriate behavior is an issue Paul had to address in the church as Timothy established leaders in the growing faith. In the passage, two verses focus on the household and management of the elder’s children.<sup>33</sup> It requires them to be obedient, and under control in order to prove their ability in the church. The parent’s example in the house will reflect the pastoral example he or she will provide to the congregation.

Being above reproach is the example each elder is called to portray. In Titus 1:5-9, Paul, once again presses the message of uprightness for eldership. The primary controversy for parent-pastors of faithless children lies in verse 6. Many translations use the word “believer” to describe a requirement for their children. Through assay of this scripture in following chapters, one will see the word has different meaning and how context plays a key role in parsing this passage.

Raising children is not an easy task for the average parent in today’s society. Even Christian parents who raise their children according to biblical guidelines can have challenges.

---

<sup>31</sup> Ephesians 4:13.

<sup>32</sup> Romans 11:29.

<sup>33</sup> 1 Timothy 3:4,5.

When parents are also pastors, there is an expectation they are teaching their children at a much higher standard than the average congregant. A selection of guidelines is given to establish biblical parenting. Some of the scriptures used for these guidelines have been taken to extreme as they are forced upon parents and used as justification to make accusations against their parenting style, but collectively they provide a holistic approach to parenting.

It is understood that discipline is the first step to parenting, and establishing boundaries within the household is essential to obedience and order. Good biblical parenting, however, can be found in Deut 6:4-9 where God's children are not only commanded to impress the words of the Lord on their hearts, but to teach them to their children. This shows that teaching children the Bible is just as important as flexing discipline.

When the parent teaches biblical standards to their child, they can also teach them discipline just as God provides when His children do wrong. Parents are not excluded from the responsibility of discipline themselves. When used appropriately, Prov 13:24 provides insight to the necessity of discipline when it comes to parenting. There must be appropriate consequences for the wrongful actions of a child.

Consequences cannot be dealt out without proper instruction. In Prov 22:6 parents are instructed to raise a child in the value systems they should live by. This value system is a combination of teaching and discipline that will bring the concepts of parenting together for lasting effects. When the child is influenced by the world, they might fall into temptation, but they will always have these values imprinted on their hearts.

The unfortunate aspect to raising a child is taking discipline and teaching to an extreme. When Paul writes to the church in Ephesus he is instructing parents to avoid provoking their

children to anger.<sup>34</sup> In the midst of frustration, parents can become angry and provoke their children to anger, especially in the pre-teen and teenage years. This sometimes causes children to rebel against their parents.

Childhood rebellion is common, but rebellion to the extreme of damaging the family unit is an unwanted behavior. Encapsulating the biblical guidelines is guidance for both children and parents. In Col 3:21, Paul instructs the family and gives direction for each member to follow. Children are to obey their parents, and parents are not to exasperate their children. Often rebellion is founded in the children's disobedience and parents constantly harping on the children.

When the child rebels, the parents spend a large amount of time dealing with issues as opposed to enjoying family time with their children. The issues become stressful and parents must endure hardship in the process of trying to turn their children back to faith. The hardship of dealing with faithless children is not an easy process. The toll on parents can be taxing and even create marital issues among other social and spiritual problems in the household.

In Paul's prayer for the church's spiritual growth, he asks in Col 1:11 that people would be "strengthened with all power...for all endurance and patience." This prayer is foundational to the parent who is experiencing spiritual decline due to a wayward child. Parent-pastors must have strength to endure the hardship. Most of all, they must have patience to withstand the months, even years of faithlessness.

When parent-pastors have a faithless child, it is important for them to be patient in the salvation process. The decision to follow Christ is a choice that can be taken or resisted. Depending on the child's willingness to submit to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, the child could accept Christ at an early age or it could take several years. It is important for one to realize

---

<sup>34</sup> Ephesians 6:4.

that salvation cannot be forced through discipline, or imposed as a requirement for family membership. God only wants people who surrender, but calls all Christians to love and nurture the non-believer.

In Rev 3:20, Christ tells John that he is standing at the door knocking and if anyone lets him in, they will be with him. This is a decision that has to be made by the person. No man can open the door for another. They can only encourage others to open the door to Christ. When children rebel against their parents, and God, it is a decision they have to make to receive or reject Christ in their life. Just as the prodigal son had to make the choice to return home, children independently make the choice of returning to their foundational biblical teaching.

Anxiety overshadows many parent-pastors with the reality of Mark 16:16. Thoughts of salvation and prayers for the child consume the parental instinct. The possibility of living eternity in salvation or condemnation is a frightening cognition for any parent who desires the best for their child. This verse brings a reality of responsibility to the parent, all the while knowing that teaching and disciplining only leads the child down a path. If the child chooses to take a different path, there must be hope the child returns to the path of salvation at some point in their life.

## CHAPTER I

### CRITICAL REVIEW: PARENT-PASTORS' AND THEIR CRISIS

It is easy for people to place blame on family members for a faithless child's behavior, but suppose the child's behavior is to blame for the family member's actions. If this theory were the case, a child's actions can dictate parental reactions to situations in extreme cases. Children who enjoy the faithless lifestyle can initiate parental behavior contradictory to Christian values and standards parents claim to live by. If parents were to raise their children with every Christian value, along with living the example, but children choose to ignore those values, it is impossible to blame parents for their child's behavior. Once an adverse reaction takes place in the household, parent's behaviors can change socially, spiritually, emotionally, and physically. This does not encourage their child's behavior, but in this light, the child's behavior encourages parental reaction.

Parent-pastors are constantly competing with societal influence, and often strive to teach differences in societal and biblical influence. Despite a child's biblically based mentoring, nothing stops temptations offered in secular worldviews. When faithless children succumb to worldly pressures, they enter into realm of influence that demonstrates appealing characteristics, but contradictory to Christian value. In order to understand a parent-pastor's struggle, it is essential to appropriately define the prodigal child, and discern attributes that contribute to their wayward actions.

#### **The Four-Fold Crisis**

Faithless children are not the only ones facing a great deal of influence from outside sources. Parent-pastors face positive and negative influences from family, friends, colleagues,

and congregants willing to give input into the pastor's crisis. Each group gives unique input and challenges to parent-pastors based on their understanding of the issue. Despite the proximity of influential groups in a parent-pastor's life, immediate family members and friends have the greatest advantage as trusted agents.

Giving attention to domestic issues while balancing vocational demands present internal struggles in four major areas aforementioned. Each area is affected differently based on the severity of a child's behavior and the parent's stage of life. For example, some can experience greater affects in social settings whereas others will be impacted more in emotional or physical areas. However, spiritual coping affects everyone who struggles with challenges like these.

### Social

In many cases, social challenges initiate decline in other areas of a parent's personal life. Meddling family, insensitive friends, and even unthinking congregants contribute to the parent's social crisis.<sup>1</sup> With good intentions, those who are supposed to be the greatest support network for the family deepen a parent-pastor's crisis with their constant input. Because a parent-pastor's trusted agents might be feeding them discouragement, parents can misperceive accurate social perceptions. Parents who are consumed with their child's inappropriate behavior foster self-imposed social anxiety.<sup>2</sup> Parent-pastors experiencing a few people reacting negatively to their situation may cause them to believe everyone in their social circle is casting judgment behind their backs.

Friends have a significant impact on a family's life. Often children grow up together, holidays are spent with each other, and many burdens are shared; however, friends do not always

---

<sup>1</sup> Margie M. Lewis and Gregg Lewis, *The Hurting Parent: Help for Parents of Prodigals*, Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 24.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 26.



know how to encourage one another. Job, in the midst of his crisis, had three friends come to visit him.<sup>3</sup> As Job lay there suffering, his friends stayed by his side for seven days without saying a word, only to sympathize with him. Finally, after the silence broke, Eliphaz spoke words of discouragement instead of encouragement, and the other two followed.<sup>4</sup>

Many times adult friends do the same in the midst of parental crisis. They listen to the parent-pastor's lament over their faithless child, and when they have heard enough they decide to give advice. Much like Job's friends, individual statements sound like good advice, but put together they can be very discouraging. Finally, when the situation does not get fixed as expected, most parents realize their social interactions have dwindled. Unfortunately, the parents once again reduce their social interactions based on the perception that others are talking about their family situation. In a parent-pastor's home, many of those friends are church members who worship and pray under their leadership, as a result, the impact carries over to vocational strain as well.

Congregants can become inappropriately judgmental of the pastor's family in the midst of their crisis. Often times the major issue with traditional evangelical churches is found in the expectation of how pastor's families should act and not full understanding of scripture.<sup>5</sup> Parent-pastors in crisis are no different, each of them have rules they feel should be followed in church. When the expectations for their children in the Christian environment are not met, they feel as if they have failed the church, and in return assume they will be asked to leave. Consequently, communities of faith are perceived as the most judgmental environment families in crisis will encounter. When a child goes astray, church members find blame in the parenting style and not

---

<sup>3</sup> Job 2:11ff.

<sup>4</sup> Job 4:1ff.

<sup>5</sup> Rob Parsons, *Bringing Home the Prodigals* (Colorado Springs: Authentic Publishing, 2007), 15.

circumstances surrounding situations. Statistically, among church members polled in 1979, the largest majority of child behavior issues are attributed to parenting at 33.7%.<sup>6</sup> More than 30 years later, many traditional and some modern churches continue to claim digression from Prov 22:6 as the reason for adolescent behavior issues.<sup>7</sup> As a result, parent-pastors either leave the ministry, or migrate to churches that take a less judgmental approach to personal accountability.<sup>8</sup>

### Spiritual

God has created man for relationship, and if social relationships are affected parent-pastors generally turn to God in order to address their pains.<sup>9</sup> In the midst of extreme behaviors, even talking with God becomes less of comforting resource for parent-pastors and families. Spiritual destruction begins to take place when parent-pastors feel God is no longer listening.<sup>10</sup> When it seems as if prayers are not being answered, families become discouraged and even the strongest of pastors can question God's involvement in their difficult situation.

If families migrate to socially acceptable church environments, the family has given way to mainstream moral theology.<sup>11</sup> Parent-pastors who have struggled with preferred theologies of the conservative evangelical church have the ability to get away from feelings of judgment in exchange for liberal theologies that manipulate scripture to what feels right. Pastoral families have the ability to worship and minister in this type of environment without feeling as though

---

<sup>6</sup> John White, *Parents in Pain: Overcoming the Hurt and Frustration of Problem Children* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 27.

<sup>7</sup> Kurt Burner and Steve Stroope, *It Starts at Home: A Practical Guide to Nurturing Lifelong Faith* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2010), 90.

<sup>8</sup> Rob Rienow, *When They Turn Away: Drawing Your Adult Child Back to Christ* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2011), 29.

<sup>9</sup> Tim Clinton and Joshua Straub, *God Attachment: Why You Believe, Act, and Feel the Way You Do About God* (New York: Howard Books, 2010), 101.

<sup>10</sup> Jeff Lucas, *Will Your Prodigal Come Home* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 96.

<sup>11</sup> Rienow, *When They Turn Away*, 30.

they are being judged for their child's behavior, and find comfort in the emphasis of acceptance being the key to Christian love. While still learning/demonstrating biblical principles, spiritual crisis occurs when a strong emphasis on Christian values are eliminated from the family environment, and prayer life begins to dissipate from family routines, resulting in a loss of true faith and relationship with Christ.<sup>12</sup>

Secondly and more destructive, is the parent-pastor's discouragement in their personal daily walk with God. Christian parents develop a level of faith in God that their child will be healthy, strong, and God will provide for their family. Consequently, when a child goes astray, their faith is tested. Natural reactions to crisis for pastoral homes are to respond with increased spirituality. Parents put their child on prayer lists, search for counsel in devotionals and from trusted friends and colleagues; however, when it does not seem like God is answering their cries for strength, and the situation is getting worse, pastoral families might even question the value of being a Christian.<sup>13</sup> Spiritual crisis takes place as the parent feels further from God, and does not see the tangible fruit of their prayers and ultimately the value of their walk with God.

### Emotional

There is a wide range of emotional distress felt from the actions of faithless children. Guilt, anger, anxiety, and depression are the main emotional stressors families will experience. While social and spiritual aspects of families can remain intact, emerging individual emotional consequences can create issues. Emotional impacts present as the most common crisis parent-

---

<sup>12</sup> David Bloor, "Epistemic Grace," *Common Knowledge* 13, no. 2/3: 250-280 (April 2007), 251, accessed November 28, 2011.

<sup>13</sup> Lucas, *Will Your Prodigal Come Home*, 35.

pastors face, but are not always apparent as they attempt to suppress their feelings over the situation.

Human beings are one of the few creatures God created completely dependent on their parents at a young age. Since parents provide for the needs of their children, an attachment to that child is built.<sup>14</sup> Much of the emotional impact is grounded in the human attachment process. Because parent-pastors care for and nurture their children as they grow up, only to be rejected in the midst of their actions, parents suffer emotional crisis.<sup>15</sup> It is important to understand that the emotional issues parent-pastors might experience are not considered a disorder unless the symptoms present an acute interruption in daily functioning. In addition, most cases require timeframes where consistent occurrence of symptoms presents themselves to be considered a disorder.<sup>16</sup>

Guilt and anger are the most common emotional reactions to behaviors of wayward children. Guilt is usually the emotional experience to an outward expression of anger. Many parents feel guilty that they might have failed their children as parents.<sup>17</sup> As parent-pastors develop feelings of guilt, parenting techniques are questioned and a search for ways to modify situations take place.<sup>18</sup> As a result, parent-pastors adjust techniques and try to reconnect with children, or pressure a more conservative lifestyle within domestic environments. These feelings

---

<sup>14</sup> Tim Clinton and Gary Sibcy, *Attachments: Why You Love, Feel, and Act the Way You Do* (Nashville: Integrity Publishers, 2002), 26.

<sup>15</sup> Jack Balswick and Judith Balswick, *The Family: A Christian Perspective on the Contemporary Home* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 245.

<sup>16</sup> For those determining emotional issues as symptomatic of a disorder, or reaction to a crisis situation it is recommended to seek advice from a mental health professional who can appropriately evaluate the symptoms in comparative functioning.

<sup>17</sup> Ruth Bell Graham, *Prodigals and Those Who Love Them: Words of Encouragement for Those Who Wait* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2008), 58.

<sup>18</sup> Daniel Hughes, *Attachment Focused Family Therapy* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009), 211.

are especially enhanced when parents see other families who appear to be unified and have no issues.

Anger is an equally common emotional reaction, and is the byproduct of the emotional issues parent-pastors face. The prevailing mistake many parents make is toward whom they direct their angry emotions. Anger is a characteristic action of guilt, anxiety, and grief. Anger acts as an outward response to feeling out of control in a situation.<sup>19</sup> In many cases, faithless children are not available for the anger to be expressed, and therefore emotions are channeled to the rest of the family. When faithless children are present, parents are so relieved it becomes difficult for them to be angry. Family crisis occurs when anger is taken out on each other for simple issues that should be addressed in a calm manner. Parent-pastors acting out in anger create disunity among families and increases vocational ineffectiveness.

Anxiety manifests as emotional and physical reactions to a stressful situations.<sup>20</sup> Many parents experience increased focus, breathing, and heart rate when unsubstantiated thoughts of their child's impending harm enters their mind. A reaction like this is normal in any parent, but is intensified with the parent of a wayward child.<sup>21</sup> This can interrupt a parent-pastor's daily life in work, family, and sleep. The progression of anxiety creates a crisis that could lead to post traumatic stress disorder and serious emotional issues if not evaluated or treated appropriately.

In some cases, grief is not bad, it means to let go of what you cannot keep. Though difficult, grief requires the family to accept mentally and emotionally that something they love

---

<sup>19</sup> American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. TR (Arlington: American Psychiatric Association, 2000), 665.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 429.

<sup>21</sup> Lewis and Lewis, *The Hurting Parent*, 62.

and value is no more.<sup>22</sup> The young child they have invested their lives into is no longer, and will never be the same innocent child. Occasionally families will see glimpses of the child they had raised, but life becomes overwhelmed with denial, anger, sadness, and finally acceptance. There is no determination on the length of each stage, and some parents will never make complete transitions between phases of grief, but will remain stagnant at denial and anger.

Stagnation in denial and anger also hinders a parent-pastor's prayer life for the situation, faithless child, and family leadership. When parent-pastors deny their child's behavior, they also deny the ability to pray for their circumstances. As well, when parents are angry with children, prayers might be focused on parents having patience, or to handle situations in a calm manner. Still, denying rightful prayer to God regarding issues reduces the power of prayer over the spirit and emotion.

### Physical

The final affect parent-pastors might feel from faithless children is physical impacts caused by overwhelming amounts of stress with little avenues for release. There is very little research connecting adult physical ailments to prodigal children, but this should not be discounted in light of numerous studies connecting social and emotional distraught to physical issues. Neither parents nor siblings are exempt from physical effects because of a faithless child's behavior. The affects do manifest themselves in different ways and can progress from simple fatigue to serious medical complications.

With the onset of social, spiritual, and emotional issues, an overwhelming amount of stress begins to develop. In multiple clinical studies, stress is found as a major contributor to

---

<sup>22</sup> John Townsend, *Beyond Boundaries: Learning to Trust Again in Relationships* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 94.

physical complications.<sup>23</sup> Feelings of lethargy, diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, and stroke are progressive issues to stress.<sup>24</sup> Physical impacts of such serious nature can result in many complications, including death from progressed physical ailments. Crisis occurs in the family because family members try to reduce stress through avoidance. When a parent avoids stressful situations, issues begin to compile, forcing the body to deal with stress subconsciously. Compiled stress issues in the family will trigger physical reactions.

The direct crisis parent-pastors face is often based in a lack of knowledge towards various situations. Those who do not try to understand their child's situation or predicament will make "worse case" assumptions that also harbor adverse affect in the four-fold crisis areas. In the process of evaluating parental crisis, parents have to understand their child's issues, and then determine where their child stands in the faithless lifestyle.

### **Defining Prodigal Children**

One should understand broad a term such as "prodigal" does not encompass the unique situations many young people face or desire today. In many Christian circles, youth who leave their Christian upbringing are automatically classified as prodigals regardless of their reason for leaving or what kind of life they lead outside of a community of faith. Contrary to this belief, wayward youth are better classified as dropouts and not prodigals. Despite the effective parenting of a pastoral family, dropouts still choose to reject the church in one of three ways, not all of which are total rejection of faith, but rejection of religious processes.<sup>25</sup> Understanding

---

<sup>23</sup> Lisa Terre, "Risk and Resilience in Coping with Chronic Life Stress," *American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine* 5, no. 6: 494-496 (November 2011), 495, accessed December 30, 2013.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians are Leaving Church and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 21.

characteristics of prodigals will enable readers to identify and gauge major issues pastoral families might face in the midst of their crisis.

### Nomads

Nomads are people who walk away from the church, but still consider themselves Christians.<sup>26</sup> For one reason or another, the church experience has tainted their opinion of organized religion, but not their thoughts or relationship with God and the Christian lifestyle. In these situations, families face issues from local congregations because their child is no longer participating in home church communities. This is the most common type of church drop out, and about 2 in 5 young people can be classified in this group.<sup>27</sup>

Nomads search for faith experiences, and embark on spiritual journeys in an attempt to comprehend their purpose. They feel the local church has failed to meet their spiritual needs and do not feel comfortable asking questions to gain a deeper knowledge. As a result, their vulnerability to erroneous spiritual influence is high. Nomad's basis for leaving is the belief that institutional religion is more concerned about heartless piety and empty answers than genuine worship. Sporadically, the nomad could seem completely spiritual, or have a total disregard for corporate worship. The most dangerous situation is not their identity with Christ, but the failure to pursue a consistent relationship with Christ.<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 29.

<sup>27</sup> The Barna Research Group, "Five Myths About Young Adult Church Dropouts," *The Barna Update* (November 2011), accessed November 15, 2013.

<sup>28</sup> These thoughts were developed from a combination of two sources. Ibid. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 21.



## Prodigals

Prodigals are the most notable, but the lowest populated group in church dropout cultures.<sup>29</sup> This group represents 1 in 9 adolescents who are raised in the church, and drop out by the age of 18.<sup>30</sup> Those who represent true prodigals have turned their back on Christian standards and in some cases declared war on God. One subgroup of prodigals is children who attack church stances on issues, degrade, or persecute those who claim belief in God and Christian values. In the story of the Prodigal Son,<sup>31</sup> the child went to a distant land and squandered his estate with loose living. Today the prodigal's loose living can include pornography, drugs, prostitution, excessive spending, sexual sin, blasphemy of God, or anything faith stands for.<sup>32</sup>

A second group of prodigals often overlooked because of their weekly church participation is "prodigals in the pew."<sup>33</sup> They might attend church regularly, but they go home and abuse their families, covet their neighbors, and criticize Christian teaching as legalistic and offensive. Often adolescent prodigals in the pew are forced into church by parents trying to give their child Christian values, but are pushing them further away through mandatory religion.

## Exiles

The final group of church dropouts is people who are torn between the Christian lifestyle and the modern culture they feel called to influence.<sup>34</sup> Exiles participate in church activities, but want to ensure their place in the world. This group feels a strong passion to pursue God, but feel

---

<sup>29</sup> Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 21.

<sup>30</sup> The Barna Research Group, "Five Myths About Young Adult Church Dropouts."

<sup>31</sup> Luke 15:11-32.

<sup>32</sup> Parsons, *Bringing Home the Prodigals*, 25.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>34</sup> Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 21.

emotionally or physically disconnected from organized religion.<sup>35</sup> An estimated 1 in 5 young Christians fall in this category.<sup>36</sup> Exiles do not deny their faith traditions and are excited about God, but are eager to find their place in the world. They maintain their spiritual roots, but emotionally or physically leave the local church in order to achieve their calling in life.

This group represents the middle of the pack dropout, and least damaging to family structures because they are remotely attached to local churches. Exiles are also more volatile because they can be swayed either way depending on how they are treated spiritually, intellectually, and socially. Exiles can speak about God on a basic level, but do not have a deep relationship that can influence choices when faced with secular or spiritual crisis. This group is often seen in college-age students who are inveigled by secular communities while maintaining the Christian theology of their upbringing.<sup>37</sup>

### **Attributes of Rebellion**

According to a 2013 study performed by the Barna Research Group a combined 69% of young people who turn away from the faith fall into one of three primary categories.<sup>38</sup> First, influences from others represent the lowest factor a pastor feels might persuade his or her child from the faith.<sup>39</sup> Next, expectations represent the largest portion of why a child turns away. This category includes unrealistic expectations placed on the child by the church and their parents for

---

<sup>35</sup> Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 76.

<sup>36</sup> The Barna Research Group, “Five Myths About Young Adult Church Dropouts.”

<sup>37</sup> Characteristics listed in this paragraph are found in the following source and location. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 68-84.

<sup>38</sup> While the research breaks down the categories even more, some can be grouped together in a generalized thought process for one turning away from the faith they were raised in. The research is based on what the parent-pastor feels caused their child to turn from the faith. The Barna Research Group, “Prodigal Pastor Kids: Fact or Fiction?”

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

Christian living, as well as overcoming the stigma from the secular world for being a pastor's child.<sup>40</sup> Expectations also include the hypocrisy of standards set upon the pastoral family that result in negative feedback from the autonomous evangelical church. The last category is a desire for independence, representing the medial range of faithless pastors' children.<sup>41</sup> All three groups can easily blend, but the main cause for a majority of young people's faithless lifestyle is found in one of the three attributes.

### Influence

When one looks at how societal norms have changed factors influencing young people today, they find a barrage of accepted perversion, drinking, drugs, and elitism based on revenge and deceit. Secular influences have always been available, and like most of history, sin and perversion of faith ebbs and flows in various levels of acceptance.

Parents are losing the influence they have with their children because of hectic work schedules society places on them, as well as scholastic schedules placed on children. The average full-time working parent spends about 17.5 hours a week influencing their child.<sup>42</sup> Taking the average 8.5 hours of sleep a day out of the equation, the child is influenced by others 128.1 hours a week. Influences can be from television, schoolteachers, friends, and accepted societal norms. Many outside influences do not hold the same values or moral standards most pastoral families hold today.

---

<sup>40</sup> The Barna Research Group, "Prodigal Pastor Kids: Fact or Fiction?"

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> US Bureau of Labor Statistics, *American Time Use Survey*, June 2013, accessed January 13, 2014.

While only 9% of pastors feel their child turned from Christian living because of influence, these numbers might be bigger than what pastors assess in their own family.<sup>43</sup> According to a 2012 survey of pastors' educational choices for their children, only 3% exclusively home school while 97% use a combination of public and private schools for their child's education.<sup>44</sup> The larger amount of students being educated outside of homeschool environments points to possibilities of heightened negative influences on children than what many parent-pastors believe. Even in private school environments, children are subject to issues of influence from teachers, students, and their friends' parents.

Influence in a child's life is not always negative though, children are also subjected to positive influences. Parents who develop a culture of love and respect for their children will leave a lasting impression in the child's life. On the contrary, those who wish to negatively influence others have often mastered the art of manipulation and can easily confuse children on what is good, bad, acceptable, or unacceptable. For this reason, it is important for parents to take time and train their child with core belief systems that serve as a default action when life stressors become overwhelming.

Unless parents shelter their child from the outside world as well as educational influences including participation in Sunday school, it is impossible to avoid negative influences in their child's life. While many Christian child developmental experts agree that negative influences cannot be avoided, they do not agree on theories that positive influences will always supersede deceptive manipulations children encounter in their life.

---

<sup>43</sup> Barna Research, "Prodigal Pastor Kids: Fact or Fiction?"

<sup>44</sup> National Association of Evangelicals, "Evangelicals Choose Public Schools," *Evangelical Leaders Survey*, August 2012, accessed February 6, 2014.

Kurt Burner and Stephen Stroope in their book, *It Starts at Home* assert that parents have the responsibility to teach their child about Christ, and how to avert deceptions in life. If a child goes astray, parents have failed in their ability to teach children how to detect false direction.<sup>45</sup> Much of this theory is based in “starting children off in the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.”<sup>46</sup> While this is a true statement, once children begin watching TV, playing with friends, or are educated outside their homes, they are influenced beyond most parental ability. Parents can teach their children about who is trustworthy, authoritative, and knowledgeable, but they cannot control what other people are teaching them.

In *Bringing Home the Prodigals*, Rob Parsons writes, “As much as we love them, as much as we want their good, as much as we would give all that we possess for their sakes, we cannot live their lives for them. Children make choices, and sometimes those choices are bad ones.”<sup>47</sup> Parents must avoid guilt and blame for decisions children make. When a child is influenced in inappropriate directions, it is not because parents have failed, nor is it because children have failed. Simply, it is because the child was influenced by a manipulative falsehood disguised as appropriate and harmless. Parents must do their due diligence to raise children with appropriate ethical standards, but ultimately children choose what influences will mold their character.

The two opposing views parallel each other in thought, but they are also linking agents between social influence and parental coping. The wayward child bridges the gap with personal decisions to individualize their character outside of their upbringing. The ways a pastor’s children are influenced does not always lead to salvation, ministerial calling, or even active

---

<sup>45</sup> Bruner and Stroope, *It Starts at Home*, 104-105.

<sup>46</sup> Proverbs 22:6.

<sup>47</sup> Parsons, *Bringing Home the Prodigals*, 41.

participation in church. This is not because pastors did not impress the need for spirituality on the child; it is because they were influenced in a way that secularism was more appealing. In some cases, the appeal to run is a combination of forced spirituality and freedom from a perceived restrictive Christian lifestyle.

Beginning with God's perfect dwelling place in Eden, people have been influenced by others. Pressures to be accepted, to be like others, and to prove a point can consume a pastor's child and make them vulnerable to unhealthy influences. Others with opposing values have had the ability to both capture and damage relationships with parents and God, since the beginning of time.

### **The First Parent**

When prodigal lifestyles begin to slowly seep into one's life, there is no direct intent to hurt or destroy others. As well, children have no intent on hurting themselves; often it is because they are curious. The action does not appear to be hurting the influencer, so they are easily pressured into the experience. External influences will always be a challenge for people regardless of the age. For Adam and Eve, influences from the serpent made the forbidden fruit irresistible.<sup>48</sup> The first couple fell to temptation and desire with curiosity of knowing what the forbidden fruit could and would do, despite God's specific direction.

When God's children ate from the tree against His direction, it did not disqualify Him as the perfect Father of all creation. One must understand that moral upbringing does not conquer all, and in some cases emotional pressures overrun morality. Adam and Eve had an intimate relationship with God; they were his creation crafted to care for his garden.<sup>49</sup> God is the

---

<sup>48</sup> Genesis 3.

<sup>49</sup> Genesis 1:27, 2:15, 22.

beginning of time, the perfection of all being, and the father of all living things.<sup>50</sup> Within His perfection, he gave Adam freedom to roam the garden.

In the shadows of Eden's perfection dwelt a crafty creation,<sup>51</sup> one with the intent to destroy relationships between God and his children. Just as Lucifer's intent was to be like God,<sup>52</sup> his desire was to destroy what God intended for His glory. At the encounter, an omnipresent God<sup>53</sup> and a jealous fallen angel<sup>54</sup> entered into God's perfect creation. With the enticement of enlightenment, power, and knowledge, the serpent defiled Eden, interrupting God's glory with sinful nature.

Adam and Eve were faced with a compelling argument that introduced sin into their lives. As a result, they became afraid, which led to hiding, lying, and ultimately shifting the responsibility of their decision elsewhere.<sup>55</sup> It is a similar struggle that children face every day from worldly influences. Satan did not stop with Adam and Eve when he led them into sin; today children are influenced to make bad decisions, and they become afraid of disappointing their parents. The danger comes when children no longer fear disappointing their parents, which results in heavily damaged relationships.

When sin entered God's creation, He could have wiped the slate clean and created a new being revoking free will, but He did not. Adam and Eve were punished, assumed forgiven, and destined to inhabit the world. Despite mistakes made, both were protected by God and restored

---

<sup>50</sup> Psalm 18:30, Deut. 32:4, John 1:1, 1 Cor. 8:6, Rev. 1:8.

<sup>51</sup> Genesis 3:1.

<sup>52</sup> Isaiah 14:12-15.

<sup>53</sup> Jeremiah 23:23,24.

<sup>54</sup> Revelation 12:7-9.

<sup>55</sup> Ken Jones, *A Prodigal Return: Reflections from a Grateful Heart* (Mustang: Tate Publishing & Enterprises, 2009), 158.

to His creation. God's creation could not be fully restored, sin had entered humanity, and they could no longer dwell in the perfection of the Lord, but were excommunicated from the garden, destined to labor and toil the rest of their days.<sup>56</sup>

Adam and Eve's sin did not negate God's ability to be the sustainer of all things, He was no less qualified because His children submitted to fleshly temptations, lust of the eyes, and pride of life.<sup>57</sup> Influence attempted to destroy man's relationship with God, fear of disappointment caused man to hide, and forgiveness restored the father's children in the midst of their punishment.

### **The Piper Family**

Today's influence is not the serpent enticing pastor's children with fruit of a forbidden tree; it is empty pleasures inlaid in societal norms. People become influenced with promises of fame and fortune. They give away a wholesome lifestyle of Christian living in the hope that worldly adaptation will influence their social progression. Ultimately, realizations of manipulated pressures of momentary excitement only lead to their eternal emptiness.

Abraham Piper was no different when outside influences lead him to a prodigal lifestyle in hopes of becoming a famous musician. Dr. John Piper, Abraham's father, is the former 33-year pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He gained theological notability with his book *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* in 1986, followed by dozens of published books, biographies, and poetry.<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>56</sup> Genesis 3:14-24.

<sup>57</sup> 1 Timothy 2:14. Elmer L. Towns, *Theology for Today* (Belmont: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2002), 496.

<sup>58</sup> John Piper, "About John Piper," *Desiring God Ministries*, accessed February 4, 2014.



Abraham saw no mistakes in the way he was raised; he simply was influenced by the idea of drinking all he could and “sleeping around.”<sup>59</sup> Temptations foreshadowed by pressures from others slowly consumed Abraham’s thoughts and soon he found himself in a world full of lust. While there was a great deal of influence for Abraham to use his musical talent for worship, outsiders were pulling him into “disco bars as a guitarist and singer, and just doing anything but destroying himself,” John Piper said in an interview with *Christianity Today*.<sup>60</sup>

Quandaries of being a pastor with an impulsive child weighed heavy on the elder Piper.<sup>61</sup> At one point, he went to the elders of the church and told them to pursue his son in an attempt to save him. They engaged his son for almost six months. During that time Piper offered to step down as the pastor, leave the church, or take a sabbatical. The elders, however, did not allow this, and studied the issue to ensure they were in line with biblical requirements for church leaders. Ultimately, John Piper chose to excommunicate his own son from Bethlehem Baptist Church.<sup>62</sup>

Truth sustains love, and deception is always revealed in the end. In the midst of his son’s banishment, Piper describes that he never stopped caring for Abraham and said, “We were praying like crazy that he wouldn’t get somebody pregnant, or marry the wrong person, or

---

<sup>59</sup> Abraham Piper, “Let Them Come Home,” *Decision Magazine*, August 2007, accessed February 22, 2014.

<sup>60</sup> Marlena Graves, “Prodigal Children: If it can Happen to John Piper, It Can Happen to You,” *Christianity Today*, June, 2012, accessed February 22, 2014.

<sup>61</sup> The detailed description regarding John Pipers experience is described in an interview conducted by the Desiring God Ministry team this paragraph serves as a summery of his experiece. John Piper, “Should a Pastor Continue In Ministry If One of His Children Proves to Be an Unbeliever?” *Ask Pastor John*, manuscript from [www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org), accessed February 22, 2014.

<sup>62</sup> Marlena Graves, “Prodigal Children: If it can Happen to John Piper, It Can Happen to You.”

whatever.”<sup>63</sup> When children are influenced by deception, they will find their way back to truth. Often times it is experiences of failure and emptiness that brings them back to Christ. In the midst of the parental pain, parent-pastors must draw on strength, still attempting to influence their child, showing Christ’s love to the faithless child without lofty expectations.

### Expectations

While influence is a contributor to some people’s wayward lifestyle, expectations represent the largest portion of prodigal pastors’ children. Every person has expectations for both themselves and others. Expectations are presuppositions people hold for themselves or others based on a series of assumptions or facts.

Those who turned from their Christian upbringing due to expectations represent 46% of faithless pastors’ children.<sup>64</sup> Two primary contributors to faithlessness are unreasonable expectations for children’s behavior, and vocational expectations of pastors from elders or congregations.<sup>65</sup> When children witness unrealistic expectations being placed on their parent by church members who do not follow the same code of ethics, they begin to see religion as hypocritical and want no part of what they perceive to be a confusing belief system.

There are two fundamental types of expectations all people face as they develop in life. Known expectations are those openly identified. When household rules are established, parents are giving known expectations to follow. It is important for parents to convey standards to their

---

<sup>63</sup> Christine A. Scheller, “Q & A: John Piper on Racism, Reconciliation, and Theology after Trayvon Martin’s Death: The Minnesota Pastor Addresses the Foundation for Responding to Questions on Race,” *Christianity Today*, March 2012, accessed February 22, 2014.

<sup>64</sup> Barna Research, “Prodigal Pastor Kids: Fact or Fiction?”

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

children at a young age in order to grow and meet household requirements.<sup>66</sup> Collectively, one's life is filled with expectations: spiritually, vocationally, socially, and familial. Through established presumptions, boundaries for self-conduct are characterized.

Second, clairvoyant expectations assume preconceived knowledge and should not require explanation.<sup>67</sup> When a child is very young, clairvoyant expectations justify unspoken needs such as changing a diaper, food, or warmth. As the child gets older, it is often desired justification for love and respect from parents. The child's sense of self-worth is found in parents knowing what they need without explanation. An abundance of ignored clairvoyant expectations diminishes feelings of self-worth, ultimately leading children to search for self-worth through other means.<sup>68</sup> Parents must try to eliminate as many clairvoyant expectations as possible through open channels of communication and solid trust relationships. Teaching children at an early age will allow an opportunity for growth so that they are more than capable of meeting familial standards in early adolescence.

Many parents ensure their children understand fundamental standards for life's challenges, but do not realize the expectations they place on their children through extreme standards of success. If a parent is inherently good at sports, academics, or vocation, the child often feels unspoken pressure to be superior in those areas as well. Conversely, if a parent has bad habits, others may expect the child to follow suit, which may often happen.

Others also place high expectations on children beyond a parent's desire. As youngsters age and gain more responsibilities, they are expected to do certain things and act certain ways. The Old Testament chronicle of Hezekiah and Manasseh is not the story of a pastor and his child,

---

<sup>66</sup> John Townsend, *Boundaries with Teens: When to Say Yes, How to Say No* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 30.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 145.

but it tells the story of a leader who found favor in God's eyes for his dedication in the midst of ridicule. Likewise, social and familial expectations drove Manasseh to abandon the godly example his father exhibited. Contemporary relationships are no different and while Franklin Graham is the notable heir to his father Billy Graham's evangelical crusade, at one time lofty expectations drove him away from faith in pursuit of making his own life outside the religious superpower's shadow.<sup>69</sup>

### **The King's Heir**

Hezekiah and Manasseh is not the first prodigal son story one might think of in the Old Testament.<sup>70</sup> It is, though, a shining example of a father who restored faith to a kingdom that was facing God's wrath for not following His commands. As well, it represents a young heir who fell to expectations from his enemies instead of expectations from a spiritually restored nation.

Following the death of Ahaz, Hezekiah found favor in the eyes of God, and he quickly began to rebuild the temple and reinstate the priests of the temple.<sup>71</sup> Meanwhile those in the Northern Kingdom instituted idolatrous, shameful lives ravaged by polytheism. While God lifted his hand of protection from Israel, it remained on Jerusalem. Hezekiah faithfully endured and ultimately overcame the Assyrian siege on Jerusalem when God destroyed 185,000 enemy troops at night causing the remaining troops to retreat.<sup>72</sup>

---

<sup>69</sup> David Van Biema and Richard Ostling, "In The Name of the Father (Cover Story)," *Time* 147, no. 20 (May 13, 1996), 66, accessed March 3, 2014.

<sup>70</sup> 2 Chronicles 29-33.

<sup>71</sup> 2 Chronicles 29:2, 3.

<sup>72</sup> 2 Kings 19:35.

In the last fifteen years of Hezekiah's life, he became mortally ill, and pleaded with God for healing.<sup>73</sup> God granted his prayers during that time and gave him fifteen more years. Polytheistic practices of the Assyrians were covering the land and many gave into social idolatrous expectations. Hezekiah did not give in, though, and continued to lead his country with centered and devout worship towards God.

Using the common Judean practice of co-regency, Manasseh would have taken the throne along with his father about five years after his father's illness.<sup>74</sup> Manasseh was witness to Hezekiah's arrogant self-reliance, and by the age of 12 was being mentored as king by his father. Manasseh would have witnessed the lament of Hezekiah during his illness. Processes of a faithful father turned prideful and then repent of his shortcomings would have shown Manasseh the love, protection, and power God has in the lives of his people.

Manasseh became the worst of all rulers, committing sins beyond what the Canaanites did when Israel possessed the land.<sup>75</sup> No historical record, biblical or archeological, reveals why Manasseh chose to turn from the faith of his father. Records only show what surrounding nations were doing to people in Jerusalem. The expectations of those who worshiped in the temple and those in surrounding areas were clearly different. While Jewish people anticipated Manasseh to be a ruler like his father, a majority of his kingdom had hopes for the rise of Judah, not just Jerusalem.

The heavier weight of an entire kingdom's suppositions, mixed with a young king's immaturity lead to an evil rule until those he entrusted took him captive and put him into

---

<sup>73</sup> Isaiah 38:2-5.

<sup>74</sup> Edwin Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 217.

<sup>75</sup> 2 Chronicles 33:2.

chains.<sup>76</sup> Only then did Manasseh seek “his God,” the God of his childhood whom he witnessed saving his father.<sup>77</sup> The evil king had repented and removed the idolatrous images and restored the outer walls.

While influence plays a role in Manasseh’s decisions, expectations of his father and the kingdom made him run from God and to his people. When he fell, Manasseh returned to the teachings of his father, and an all-loving God forgave him. The kingdom was not fully restored, but the evil king found glory in God’s grace.<sup>78</sup>

### **The Graham Family**

Unrealistic or clairvoyant expectations place unnecessary stressors on children, often provoking them to find escape in what they feel may be the root of an issue.<sup>79</sup> For a pastor’s children, congregants are often blamed for taking the love of their father away from them. Many pastors are notorious for giving more care to others than their own families. People in crisis often get the pastor’s immediate attention and own their families do not get the undivided attention of their father or mother until a family crisis occurs.

Franklin Graham is the son of popular evangelist Billy Graham. By the time Franklin reached adolescence, his father, Billy, had already achieved international notability. Having preached to millions of people and led thousands to relationship with God, Franklin and his four siblings were essentially raised by their mother, Ruth Bell Graham.<sup>80</sup>

---

<sup>76</sup> 2 Chronicles 33:11.

<sup>77</sup> 2 Chronicles 33:12.

<sup>78</sup> 2 Chronicles 33:17.

<sup>79</sup> Townsend, *Boundaries with Teens*, 145.

<sup>80</sup> Billy Graham, *Just as I Am* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 770.

Memoirs recollect Mrs. Graham's creativeness in disciplining the rebellious actions of Franklin Graham, described in an interview with CNN when he says, "My mother was going to insist that I got up in time to get to school at a proper time. So I started locking my door so she couldn't come in, and she started sliding firecrackers under the door."<sup>81</sup>

While the young Graham was a mischievous boy, many expected him to be the heir of Graham's crusades. Even from a young age, people sent the Graham family hundreds of messages all ready insisting inheritance of the Graham enterprise on the elder's first-born son.<sup>82</sup> These expectations carried on for most of Franklin's life, but, "almost as soon as he was able, [he] began denying his legacy, turning primogeniture into prodigality."<sup>83</sup>

There was no hiding the fact that young Graham was rebelling against the expectation of inheriting his father's ministry. By the time he reached adulthood drinking, smoking, and women were his pleasures. The young man who was expected to be successor of his father was now expected to be an embarrassment to the Graham family.

After years of rebellious living, Franklin found himself wanting, searching, and not being able to avoid God's call for his life.<sup>84</sup> The patriarch of the Graham family never gave up praying for his son, but never forced him to pretend he was the perfect child of the great evangelist. It was a phone call to Franklin that made him turn from his sinful desires. To this date, God uses Franklin Graham between two ministries, Samaritan's Purse, and he is also the successor to the Graham evangelistic dynasty.

---

<sup>81</sup> Paula Zahn, "Franklin Graham Profile: The Prodigal Son Comes Home," *CNN People in the News*, accessed March 3, 2014.

<sup>82</sup> Many of these public expectations are listed in the Time Magazine feature story. Van Biema and Ostling, "In The Name of the Father (Cover Story)," 66.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

### Desire for Independence

The last section is based on the adolescent desire for independence. This group represents 14% of youth who rebel against their upbringing.<sup>85</sup> Desire for independence is healthy in normal adolescent progression, as children get closer to adulthood. It becomes unhealthy when desires breed behavioral issues that damage families. When harmful desires enter a family, parents encounter an imploding emotional effect. If the behavior does not change, parents must make a decision to release their child, regardless of the behavior's damaging affects to the youth.<sup>86</sup> This can be difficult, but it might serve as the only way a wayward child learns how destructive their actions are to themselves and others.

Adolescents might have to be removed from the home because of their destructive behavior, but when their parents know the children's friends, they can get a good picture of what kind of life children will lead once they leave the home. For a pastor's children, faithful footsteps of parents are not always followed because of the perceived restrictive nature of their upbringing. Parents offer protection, and regardless the amount of freedom a child has in a home, they will always befriend others who appeal to their greater sense of independence. Children will choose friends who allow their identity to develop outside the confines of being a "pastor's kid." When children develop lasting friendships, they will naturally gravitate to "people who provide what they want: a sense of acceptance, a desire for freedom or excitement."<sup>87</sup>

When searching for acceptance by others, pastor's children will look for ways to dispel stigmas of being "boring" and "over righteous." As a result, they are easily susceptible to finding

---

<sup>85</sup> The Barna Research Group, "Prodigal Pastor Kids: Fact or Fiction?"

<sup>86</sup> This should not be done unless the child is an appropriate age to make decision for him or her self, and by no means encourages a parent to condone or enable the behavior. Releasing the young adult should be done before their behavior destroys or harms the family. White, *Parents in Pain*, 216.

<sup>87</sup> Fitzpatrick, Newheiser, and Hendrickson, *When Good Kids Make Bad Choices*, 73.



independence in what they feel breaks that stigma, often in extreme measure. As a result, children's emotional vulnerability makes them susceptible to unhealthy desires that are deemed appropriate by their peers.

Corruptive desires are emotions that entice children with the expected independence of establishing their own identity.<sup>88</sup> When forming their character, children can make destructive choices deemed by their peers as harmless adolescent activity. As a youngster's desire increases, actions that once fulfilled their fantasy of independence slowly progresses and imprison children through addictions. The child wants more sex, pornography, drugs, and alcohol; ultimately every numbing feeling that walking away from family values can create. Unknowingly, because they have learned to manage the addiction in their mind, they begin destroying valuable relationships. What once might have been a meaningful relationship with God or parents has now been replaced with a desire for an emotional or physical high of independence.

As the child gets older, their desire increases, and even before they get out of high school they are challenging their parents on what they can do for themselves and what new rules they can develop within the individuality they are aspiring. At no fault of parents, children who have an unhealthy desire for independence choose to discount wise counsel. When this happens, boundaries that once kept the child in line are blurred and their "wills are so set on disastrous courses that disaster alone will teach them."<sup>89</sup>

It is difficult when parents allow their children to travel a disastrous course, but in some cases, it is the only option. As a last option, parents have no less love for their child than if they were to coddle them through adulthood. With a whirlwind of emotion, parents release their child on a destructive path, but they have to remain silent and available for their child.

---

<sup>88</sup> White, *Parents in Pain*, 216.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

While it is hopeful that children return, this is not always the case. For some, freedom and independence will never reform children, and for others, short doses of independence will have the child searching for support their parents once gave them. No one knows what God is doing in his or her life during the destructive period, but can find assurance that God is still working in their life. Therefore, parental precepts of a child's return should not be discouraging should a child ever desire to return home.

### **The Prodigal Son**

Jesus tells "The Parable of the Lost Son"<sup>90</sup> which speaks of a father's love for his son despite the destructive path of his child. This is not only the reflection of God and His relationship with His creation, but also biblical reflections of hope and forgiveness for parent-pastors whose prodigal children have demanded independence. Actions of the characters mirror the emotional quandaries both child and parent have in a prodigal's journey. The celebration at the end shows the unfailing love of parents for their child.

The youngest son of two will speak plainly when he demands independence, and asks for his share of the estate.<sup>91</sup> He also wastes no time gathering his things and getting as far from home as he can.<sup>92</sup> His prodigal child did not want to leave because of parental wrongdoing; Scripture notes the high quality family servants were treated in comparison to his prodigal situation.<sup>93</sup> There is also nothing in the parable that shows the young boy was influenced by others or expected to be something that would cause him to leave home for a better life. The parable only indicates the son's desire was to take his portion and be independent.

---

<sup>90</sup> Luke 15:11-32.

<sup>91</sup> Luke 15:12.

<sup>92</sup> Luke 15:13a.

<sup>93</sup> Luke 15:17.

Prematurely, the father divided his property between his two sons.<sup>94</sup> There is no doubt he knew what his son would do once he was given his portion of the estate. One can only image emotions surrounding the father when he portioned an inheritance reserved for his son's marriage or after his death. As discouraging as it might have been, the father had to let his child go because he loves his son.

The child lives a wild life and begins to destroy his own quality of living in the process. Left with nothing, the young boy was forced to hire himself out as a servant.<sup>95</sup> When severe famine ravaged the country, the boy was a slave feeding the pigs. His starvation left him longing to steal food from the very animals he was charged with feeding. In the midst of self-destruction, he realized the need to return home if even as a slave to seek love and care from his father.<sup>96</sup>

It was essential for the father to let him go, so he might experience pain in life. Letting a child go, knowing they are on a destructive path is difficult. Many parents feel helpless sitting on the sideline waiting for their child to call for help. Children who leave home and move far away in the midst of destructive behavior place a higher level of difficulty on parents. Stressors of not knowing what the child is doing, or how they are doing, coupled with restricted communication can lay overwhelming emotional turmoil on parents.

Nothing is written about the squanderer's father during the prodigal time of his son. Nowhere does it talk about the emotional turmoil that might have taken place, or harassing thoughts of his son's well being. The only feeling is displayed in the father's response to the brother after the prodigal's return. The father says to his brother, "we had to celebrate and be

---

<sup>94</sup> Luke 15:12b.

<sup>95</sup> Luke 15:15.

<sup>96</sup> Luke 15:18-20.

glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.”<sup>97</sup> Strife and agony caused by his lost child left the father accepting that his son was dead. It was not the case; he realized what once was on a course to sure death resulted in renewal of life. If he had not let his son go, the boy would have never understood the value of his father’s house.

Grace and celebration of the father is based in principles that gave him future hope. The father did not celebrate because the child returned, but because he knew the child was not dead. As a parent-pastor, success is not based in how short of time seeds planted begin to grow, but how well seeds planted are taken care of so they do grow. Some seeds take more fertilizer to grow than others. For parent-pastors, it might be essential to allow childhood mistakes to teach him or her experientially, more than giving lectures and punishment.

### **The Modern Pastor’s Story**

Modern pastors with faithless children have their own story. Some faithless children walk away from church, Christian values, and families because they want to see what else is beyond the walls of a pastor’s home. While notable pastors face situations with their faithless child in the public eye, modern pastors all over are encountering similar issues on a local level.

If the child is influenced, expected, or desires independence, parents pay the price. While many see it as an uncommon issue with the pastoral family, this author has found it to be more common than many realize. In recent years, articles have begun to surface addressing the wayward behavior of pastors’ children. What was once considered a taboo issue is now being glamorized in society through television, social media, and print news. The world has gotten a hold of children raised with Christian value and sensationalized their desire for inappropriate independence.

---

<sup>97</sup> Luke 15:32.

While parent-pastors struggle with challenges their congregants face, they remain in constant battles to protect their children from a world set on persuading independence through immorality. Pastor's children in every culture, society, and region are facing the degradation of societal norms. Where pastors once saw Christian values as the prevailing moral code in society, many contemporary pastors now see as the minority thought process children face.<sup>98</sup>

As the morality of society changes, a parent-pastor's emotional and spiritual challenges increase. Not only are they experiencing young members of their church desiring escape, they are watching their own children plan an exit as soon as opportunity allows. This challenge not only poses a quandary for parent-pastors of faithless children, but also involves parent-pastors of faithful children. While those with faithless children struggle against their child's worldly desires, pastors everywhere should understand how to support their colleagues personally and vocationally.

Parent-pastors with faithless children face an unimaginable challenge others cannot comprehend. It is incomprehensible to think of those who would never know the freedom of Christ if pastors were influenced to give up when their children chose a faithless lifestyle. Some would say that God would have put someone else in their place. God did not though; he put pastors in their place for a reason. It is for that reason families, friends, colleagues, and congregants must learn how to encourage parent-pastors of faithless children, as opposed to discouraging their obedience to God's call.

---

<sup>98</sup> Trevin Wax, "5 Observations about Younger Southern Baptists," *The Gospel Coalition*, accessed May 13, 2014.

## CHAPTER II

### RESEARCH CONSTRUCTION: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY PROCESS

It is difficult to use quantitative data for the basis of this study. While quantitative research serves as a valid starting point to critically interact with emotional and spiritual issues, it is nearly impossible to reflect a populous' experiences, desires, and emotions through statistical and numerical data. Appropriate coping strategies are not discovered in the number of pastors who have experienced a faithless child, but in their stories of overcoming personal battles.

One of many qualitative study methods, phenomenological research attempts to gather perceptions or appearances from a human point of view.<sup>1</sup> Focusing on subjective reality, it expresses how people view themselves and the world around them within a particular experience or subject. In the case of this study, parent-pastors who have faithless children will be interviewed about their perceptions and experiences while parenting a wayward child. Additionally, parent-pastors with faithful children will be interviewed about their expectations and perceptions regarding colleagues with faithless children. Collectively, these experiences and perceptions develop an overall outcome to developing some of the most common practices parent-pastors can use to cope with spiritual and emotional turmoil resulting from faithless children.

Reflecting the experiences and feelings of parent-pastors with faithless children is a difficult task; while some pastors are unwilling to reveal their intimate experiences, others desire to share their stories. In this study, confidential communication is key to allowing interviewees freedom to tell their story anonymously. Additionally, care and attention is given to establishing

---

<sup>1</sup> Jerry W. Willis, *Foundations of Qualitative Research: Interpretive and Critical Approaches* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2007), 53.

parameters complimentary of true phenomenological research. In the following sections of this chapter, readers will understand in depth reasons this research style was used, processes of research, and hopeful outcomes. The study will focus on parent-pastors' stories as the basis for developing effective coping skills in caring for and overcoming personal issues surrounding faithless children.

### **What This Study Hopes to Produce**

In order to develop a valid study, the first step to establishing research processes is to determine what the study hopes to produce. There are two primary and two secondary intended outcomes for this research project. By developing an interview process that will directly address spiritual and emotional issues of parent-pastors with faithless children, candid stories will be revealed and the most common coping practices can be introduced giving parent-pastors hope and encouragement. Secondary outcomes are expected to reveal truths and assumptions from parents of faithful children that behavior is always the parent's fault, as well as the same from parents of faithless children that "everyone" looks down on them for their child's behavior.

Primarily, it is hoped this study will highlight these candid stories from parent-pastors facing overwhelming issues because of faithless children. By asking participants questions in a confidential format, channels of communication are open for them to answer honestly and without worry of retribution. It is hoped that each participant will reflect on his or her experiences with an open honesty conducive to validating the research process. These stories will portray the raw emotion and experiences of parent-pastors essential to generating effective coping strategies.

The second primary issue is to give hope and encouragement to those suffering from the effects of faithless children by presenting common coping practices that will help parent-pastors through spiritual and emotional trials associated with their child's behavior. This is the ultimate outcome of the entire thesis project. By extracting how other parent-pastors persevered, despite their child's behavior, these principles can be developed as possible coping skills for others who are facing similar situations. When parent-pastors of faithless children understand they are not alone in their experiences, and that other parents survived the crisis, they are given hope and encouragement for their own success over the situation. Simply, their success might be found in overcoming assumptions that have caused anxiety and hopelessness in the family trauma.

Because of the above-mentioned results, two secondary results should develop naturally. The first subordinate result is to expose whether parents of faithful children truly feel behavior is always the parent's fault, or if these thoughts are purely assumption. This project is designed to show that faithful parents who raise their child according to biblical standards will not always produce faithful children who live according to biblical standards. The research will question social theories that misguided parenting and dysfunctional Christian living is source to flawed adolescent behavior. For parent-pastors of faithless children, understanding this principle is paramount to future hope on domestic and vocational success.

Finally, another goal would be to explore truths and assumptions regarding parent-pastors of faithless children and their social perceptions associated with wayward children. It is thought by this author that a majority population of parent-pastors with faithless children feels socially outcast, while in fact only social minorities feel the same way. Due to traditional social norms, conservative and modern pastors understand social expectations they must fulfill. On the other



hand, social contemporaries understand influential worldviews that are stealing children away from traditional religious practices. This study questions parent-pastor's perceptions based in popular Christian worldview versus influences of secular worldview for their children. Revealing truths and assumptions based on perception, or misperception, gives parent-pastors confidence in their social functioning.

The best method to reflect the intended outcome is to use a phenomenological study method. By using this method, candid stories will be echoed in a collective summary of all participants' stories. While solutions can be developed from surveys, proven coping practices can only be derived from these stories, opinions, and assumptions. At no point is the intended outcome designed to be the development of statistics geared towards an overarching solution. It is intended to develop hope, confidence, and empowerment over a situation by understanding parent-pastors with faithless children and their struggles.

### **Why Use Phenomenological Data?**

A phenomenological study of pastors who have experienced faithless children will better reflect the true nature of difficulties parent-pastors face. When a study of this type is done, attention is not found in quantity of participants, but in willingness for participants to share their personal story. Honesty and openness of each person being interviewed is essential for successful research to take place. As parent-pastors share intimate details of their experiences and assumptions regarding the subject matter are made, justification is not found in analytical data but in the experiential nature of each interviewee's struggle.

Phenomenological data gives a true perspective from people who have encountered or formed a direct opinion regarding pastors' faithless children. Bypassing heavily constructed agendas or strict control measures enables focus toward experiential events. If agendas influenced the study, interviewees could be persuaded towards a preconceived outcome of a thesis. Guiding agendas can also create issues with participants that might not have existed before the interview process. Strict control measures can also limit participants from giving open, honest answers to each of the questions. Additionally, if other research techniques were utilized, an interviewee's in-depth responses and stories associated with the thesis would be constrained.

#### Advantages & Difficulties

There are no clear-cut advantages or disadvantages to using a phenomenological study method. Each difficulty is met with an equally balancing advantage. The balanced nature makes a study of this kind effective in relaying intended messages to the project thesis. Evaluating three common advantages and difficulties to phenomenological studies, one will understand the justification for using this study method to portray parent-pastor's spiritual and emotional issues and assumptions.

A successful investigation of this type only takes one participant, but in order to have a scholarly study, it is imperative that more subjects are recruited.<sup>2</sup> Since phenomenological research reflects situations unique to people's perception and emotions, one parent-pastor's input is sufficient to reveal a story or image regarding experiences with a faithless child. The negative

---

<sup>2</sup> Stan Lester, *An Introduction to Phenomenological Research* (Taunton UK: Stan Lester Developments, 1999), 3, accessed May 16, 2014.

impact of one participant can cause some people to reject a phenomenological study as invalid by discounting the lack of data from multiple samplings.

Interviewing one parent-pastor with a faithless child poses a great disadvantage to this thesis project. By choosing to interview multiple subjects, advantage and validation is given to issues presented in the thesis. Data presented in Chapter 1 suggest there are more parent-pastors who have experienced faithless children than one might assume, justifying the need to have a larger sampling of research participants. Stories, emotions, and spiritual impacts reflected from one participant cannot express the potential impact on the majority of a population. In a scholarly study such as this, gleaning information from a larger group brings to light the greater issues at hand and solidifies possible solutions for parent-pastors with similar experiences.

It can be uncomfortable for those who do not understand the challenge parent-pastors with faithless children face. When people groups have to face the issue, status quos of how congregations and other pastors handle the situation is interrupted. Organizations and leadership can become set in legalistic points of view, or have expectations for parent-pastors. By revealing alternate solutions to a sensitive issue such as this, others may be inspired to change their way of thinking. When the subject is relayed appropriately, positive insights dissolve issues by “cutting through taken-for-granted assumptions, prompting action, or challenging complacency.”<sup>3</sup>

Overall, providing the heartfelt nature of interviewing parent-pastors with faithless children and those who might associate with them, pastors and congregations are challenged to dispel possible assumptions, take action, and give attention to the issue for support and help.

---

<sup>3</sup> Lester, *An Introduction to Phenomenological Research*, 4.

Ignoring data produced from stories of parent-pastors degrades the study and disadvantages those who are searching for solutions to issues surrounding faithless children. When correctly employed, the testimonies of parent-pastors cultivate change, outweighing any potential difficulties mentioned above.

The phenomenological study approach has the ability to surface deep issues and assist in others hearing their silent calls for help. Those who are afraid of being identified, questioned, or criticized for their family situation can have comfort in knowing people will see their struggles as they are, but not who they are attached to. By approaching the study of parent-pastors with faithless children through this method, analytical data is avoided and personal accounts provide the backbone of developing solutions.

### **Establishing the Study**

The most difficult aspect of a phenomenological study is keeping the study pure by avoiding preconceived notions of research results. While a study of this type has already identified the issue and used analytical data to substantiate a need for further research, it is the participants' stories that provide possible solutions. It is important that solid parameters are set to keep personal opinion from polluting the subject by guiding or directing interviewees in a preferred direction for results. This researcher will consciously listen to each story without asking guiding questions or give input geared towards a preferred thesis. Therefore, as questions are generated, participants are recruited, and deductions are made, leeway will be given for open responses, tones, and body language of each subject.

In order to establish a valid study that can be defined as phenomenological, five steps will be taken. Locating participants, data-gathering, data-storing, explication of data, and a synopsis of research findings will define the parameters this author uses to generate a valid research method. Each area is characterized in detail under section headings below.

### Locating Research Participants

Interviewees were primarily recruited through snowball sampling methods of subject recruitment.<sup>4</sup> Pastors known to the researcher were contacted and invited to participate in the study. Once agreed, and a signed statement of disclosure was obtained, the interview took place either in-person or via electronic video conferencing media such as Face Time and Skype. Pastors were asked if they know any other pastors who might like to aid in the study. When a referral was given, those pastors were contacted and invited to participate. Each interview was conducted voluntarily and anonymous to create a confidential non-attributive environment.

Pastors interviewed were classified in one of 3 groups to develop appropriate perception and theory. All groups do not reflect a particular generation or subscribed theology, but represent a similar family dynamic appropriate for this study. First, a group of fifty autonomous evangelical parent-pastors who have/had faithless children ages fourteen and older represented the largest group. The value of answers from this group delineates the nucleus of the study. Pastors interviewed in this category reveal the true state of emotional and vocational struggles based on direct experience with the presented problem.

---

<sup>4</sup> Also known as chain referral sampling, participants use their social networks as a referral method for other people who could participate in the study. Family Health International, "Module 1: Qualitative Research Methods Overview," *Qualitative Research Methods: A Data Collector's Field Guide* (Boston: Northeastern University, 2012), 5, accessed May 20, 2014.

Twenty-five autonomous evangelical faith group parent-pastors who had faithful children ages fourteen and older encompass the next category. This collection of interviews is designed to develop perceptions of those who have minimal issues with their children, but are assumed to hold successful home and vocational positions. Pastors who participated from this group are designed to be peers of those in the previous group concerning denominational piety, moral value, and family development. Parent-pastors in this group could have indirect contact with those who have faithless children, or simply formulated opinion based on theological understanding.

The last group of twenty-five represent district-supervised liturgical or evangelical parent-pastors of both faithless and faithful children ages fourteen and older. Classification for this assembly of interviews is that each pastor has been ordained for ministry through a hierarchal system. Inherently, the district or denominational supervised pastor's call to ministry is the primary qualifier for their ability to minister the gospel. This group is designed to show the difference between autonomous and hierarchal churches and ways they handle pastoral leadership issues. While the autonomous pastor is responsible to the congregation for hiring, ministry direction, and leadership, district lead churches are foremost responsible to a superintendent for placement, conflict mediation, and oversight.

Developing three classifications of peer-reviewed interviewees allows for a comparative analysis based on experience, assumption, and vocation. Each area is essential to advancing a holistic approach to the research process. Pastors were asked five questions pertaining to their child's rebellion, ability to cope, and support networks while dealing with their child's behavior.

The summation of interview results will be annotated in the next chapter, this synopsis will reflect personal stories and opinions of those listed above.

### Data-gathering Methods

The keys to gathering effective data is understanding the world from the subject's point of view and unfold meanings from their experiences. In order to execute this effectively reflective notes are taken in addition to recorded interviews. These notes include hunches, impressions, feelings, and other data essential to telling complete stories of each subject.

While questions remained general in nature, conversations were unstructured and in-depth, giving way to the parent-pastor's experience and opinion. The interviews were conducted in a relaxed format, allowing parent-pastors an opportunity to share without a guided agenda by the researcher. Each question asked formed research results that will translate into an applicable solution to the parent-pastor's dilemma. The research is designed to gain information from parental perceptions about why their child rebelled, and how the parent triumphed over issues.

The first question asked was why parent-pastors felt their child rebelled against their Christian upbringing. This question was asked to glean an understanding of how pastors have reflected on the situation. This question allows pastors to reflect on external or internal issues that might have contributed to a child's rebellion. Pastors will have the opportunity to evaluate their style of spiritual parenting coupled with vocational demands to affect their child's perception of Christian values. Additionally, pastors can discuss social, academic, and cultural influences that developed outside home environments.

The next question was designed to understand the parent-pastor's experiences from colleagues, friends, families, and congregants. Pastors will simply be asked what their experiences were through the difficult times. Leaving this question open ended allows parent-pastors the opportunity to discuss experiences that lay heaviest in their minds. Those who move directly to emotional or spiritual issues saw experiential impact in that area greater than social or vocational. Likewise, other areas mentioned first will produce the same experiential impact classification. Participants will only be guided when they ask to specify a classification of experience. At that time, only the four categories listed above will be given as a general guideline.

Third, parent-pastors will be asked what impact they felt their rebellious child had on the church and family. While it would be natural for interviewees to give impacts in the previous question, this allows for a deeper review of their child's behavioral affects. Different from experience, impact dictates a result from actions. Experience relates to actions based on how other people interacted with distress, whereas impact is the emotional, spiritual, social, or physical reaction from various interactions.

Experience and impact has a great deal in a parent-pastor's hopes for support and care in the midst of distress. The next question participants will be asked is about their hopes for support, treatment, and care when dealing with their faithless child's behavior. When times of distress occur in anyone's life, there is an expectation for support from the various networks within someone's social circles. This question is aimed at finding those desires, and exploring if they were fulfilled. When parent-pastors have unfulfilled hopes for support, they can easily be let down, spiraling towards severe emotional and spiritual distress. By exploring this question,



pastors are forced to look beyond their wayward child's behavior and internalize the situation. This question will create a mood of self-evaluation fundamental to giving internal coping and conflict attention.

Finally, interviewees were asked about their triumph over the situation. If they are still in the midst of dealing with a faithless child, they were asked how they get through negative events to spiritually and emotionally ready themselves for worship each week. The questions preceding this one are designed to explore situations surrounding faithless children, but this question is specifically designed to bring possible solutions to light. By exploring coping mechanisms parent-pastors use to overcome their distress will allow this author to formulate effective coping skills for other pastors facing similar situations.

Queries used in this study were geared towards the majority population of research participants. Modifications to each question were made to fit the group being interviewed. Therefore, the three classifications of participants were asked questions based on their attachment to the subject. Parent-pastors with faithful children were asked the same questions geared towards their experiences, thoughts, and opinions on pastors with faithless children. District-supervised participants were asked questions corresponding to the behavior of their child, faithless or faithful.

As well, since confidentiality of participants is important, members will not be referenced by name when discussing interview results. State and a number corresponding with the number of participant from that state will identify parent-pastors. For example, the first pastor interviewed from Florida will be referred to as "Florida Pastor 1." A separate list will be maintained with identifier, name, church, faithful or faithless children, and denomination.

### Explication of the Data

Five phases characterize a phenomenological study. These characteristics allow for the explication of data versus “data analysis,” a term that discounts experiential stories of a subject. Explication of data allows for the “investigation of the constituents of a phenomenon while keeping the context of the whole.”<sup>5</sup> Explication of data attempts to clarify multiple interviews into various groups focused on the overall project thesis. As a result, research will center on gathering multiple stories and grouping them into common themes in order to address one situation.

In this case, parent-pastors’ stories with unique situations are classified into generalized responses such as, “job termination for child’s actions.” That group can focus on an overarching theme, “the parent-pastor’s experience.” This group serves as one of others zeroing in on the overall thesis for this research, parent-pastors of faithless children face life-debilitating spiritual, emotional, and vocational strife when dealing with the behavior issues of their faithless child.

By following the five phases of a phenomenological study, this researcher is able to ensure data is not skewed to reflect preconceived notions in the research process. Bracketing, delineating units of meaning, clustering of units for themes, summarizing and validating, and extracting general and unique themes characterize the summation of data used in the phenomenological study.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Richard H. Hycner, “Some Guidelines for the Phenomenological Analysis of Interview Data,” *Qualitative Research*, Vol. 3, pp. 143-164 (London: Sage, 1999), 161.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Groenewald, “A Phenomenological Research Design Illustrated,” *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 3 (1) (2004), accessed May 14, 2014.

## **Bracketing and Phenomenological Reduction**

One major difference between a standard quantitative or qualitative study is consistency of responses. When a study is completed, questions are asked and answers given generally fall into a particular group. On the other hand, phenomenological studies are extremely subjective. Listening to stories and interpreting their meaning leaves a great deal of room for story misrepresentation. Bracketing responses ensures there is no formal position taken for or against the interviewee's feelings or experiences.<sup>7</sup> Bracketing experiences of parent-pastors with or without faithless children will suspend the reality of how they are, or expect to be treated, and focus on perception. Despite correct or incorrect assumptions parent-pastors might have, it is a difficult task to relay assumptions into reality of belief without forming personal opinions towards their beliefs.

## **Delineating Units of Meaning**

Consciously or subconsciously, people who want to relay a point will naturally repeat it in conversation until they feel the recipient understands them. By delineating units of meaning, this author will consider literal content of participants by evaluating the number of times something was mentioned, and how it was stated. Non-verbal and Para-linguistic cues from participants can show expression that will stress meaning beyond verbal statements. What participants mean when they answer questions are often validated by ways they move or verbalize their answers.

---

<sup>7</sup> Groenewald, "A Phenomenological Research Design Illustrated," 17.

For example, nervous participants might continually look around and give little to no eye contact; others might fidget with their hands. In addition, parent-pastors who are giving answers that frustrate them, might sigh, or speak louder when they want to emphasize their answer. Together, these non-verbal actions can reveal powerful messages regarding participant's emotions and true feelings towards faithless children.

### **Clustering Units of Meaning to Form Themes**

When special meanings are identified during interviews, this researcher will note the meaning to evaluate positive or negative trends. By identifying similar contexts through the interview process, it will be easier to cluster responses and interview results. Creating themes from these nuances allows for focused development of solutions based on needs assessed from interview participants. Themes and meanings surrounding a particular interview question develop the overall story of pastor-parents with faithless children. This story must be grouped to give a true reflection of multiple parents' encounters.

### **Summarizing and Validating**

Summarizing information allows for evaluation of information, ensuring it has been correctly captured and modified if needed. The first step in summarizing information will be to transcribe interviews along with all additional notes into one document. Information is given back to participants for verification of information. Because personal notes are designed for use by this researcher, only observational and dictated notes will be given to interviewees. At that time, parent-pastors can modify their answers should they feel there was falsehoods in the

transcription, or they were unfairly portrayed. Once this happens for all participants, transcribed interviews and notes are considered validated and will be used in developing this thesis project.

### **Extracting General and Unique Themes**

It is expected that two types of themes will be produced from the research process. First, there will be general themes that will lay the foundation for the study. These themes are assumed or expected outcomes from interviews. Second are unique themes that were not expected from the interview process. These themes can present subject areas that have not been considered or evaluated before. Despite general and unique themes, it is essential to look for individual variations and common themes between the majorities of interviews.

Once the research has been completed, generalized and unique themes have been extracted; a synopsis of research will be developed. This allows all research notes and programs to be combined into one natural thought process. The goal is to transform multiple interviews into a coherent process towards a proposed solution to the problem. In this study, parent-pastors who participated will contribute to the consensus of research being performed. The synopsis is reflected in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER III

### RESEARCH FINDINGS: THE UNGUARDED ANSWERS

In natural parent-child relationships, adolescents develop their own character, and parents are usually there to pick them up when they fall. When parents have a wayward son or daughter, the faithless child's developmental desires can become dangerous, and parents are emotionally and spiritually overwhelmed with constant barrages of behavioral letdowns. Parents who continually see the admittance of failure in their child's eyes will usually begin experiencing reoccurring emotional and spiritual pain associated with the child's wrongdoing. While parents display unconditional love in creative ways, their strong external demeanor is weakened by the internal spiritual and emotional strife of watching their child constantly seek worldly pleasures.

For some, intimate details of personal struggle and anger over a faithless child have never been shared with anyone except their spouse. Others kept quiet with a slow fester of emotion until the issue was so overwhelming families imploded and their pastoral careers were severely damaged. As a result, issues become public and families are embarrassed in front of their congregations and social networks.

Pastors have the challenging task of being encouragers to everyone. In return, a high expectation of perfection socially, spiritually, and domestically is placed on them. Parent-pastors with wayward children are spiritually burdened and often feel emotionally lost. The summation of research expressed in this chapter reflects the visceral stories of parent-pastors with faithless children. Additionally, sincere perspectives of those with faithful children reveal perceptions and positions on matters regarding parent-pastors of faithless children. Answers from all groups show powerful theology, emotion, and compassion, ultimately redefining myths and assumptions for available support systems.

## **Findings**

The pastoral interview process took place over a period of 3 months. One hundred parent-pastors were interviewed between January and April 2014 for this project. The synopsis of the research findings below reflects the interviews conducted. After all areas were validated, personal notes were taken, and major themes were identified, this synopsis provides a logical order to the completed interviews.

Personal accounts for the large number of experiences can appear jumbled to the reader, and create confusion. In order to develop a successful research synopsis, this author methodically followed the appropriate steps in Chapter 2. Once generalized themes were acquired, evaluations were completed to relay multiple messages as one functional finding. This finding is used to develop the five most popular principles for parent-pastors to cope with their wayward child's behavior.

In order to introduce those principles, the circumstances surrounding child's behavior, as well as the parent-pastor's emotions, experiences and hopes were evaluated. Gathering historical information is important because it validates the popular methods for coping. By associating situations of the research participants to the reader's experiences, they are more apt to accept the solution and adapt it to their own coping abilities. Additionally, those with faithful children who may not understand what their fellow pastors in these situations are experiencing, may be more able to comprehend these issues and better assist their colleagues through their difficult trials.

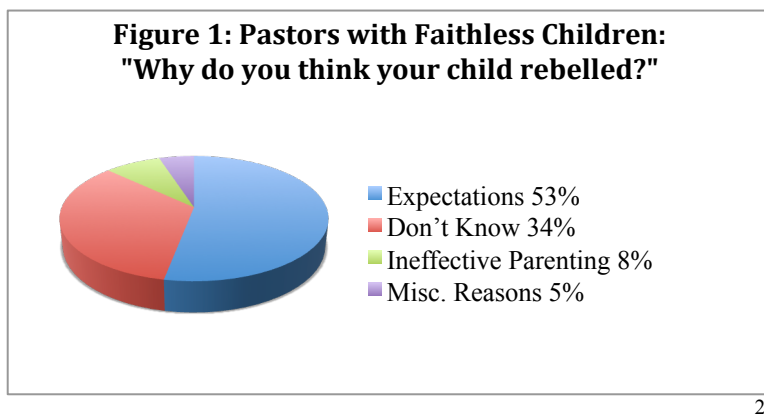
Through a total overview, each interview question was broken down into 3 groups, and a larger picture of intended outcomes will be gleaned. The culmination of the study resulted in the development of conclusive results used to determine the root cause of the parent-pastors' strife and turmoil.

## Why did the Child Rebel?

Chapter 1 describes results from a study performed by the Barna Group answering the question “Why the Pastor’s Child Rebelled” in detail.<sup>1</sup> Research for this project began before the release of the Barna study, and differs by breaking out various people groups that allows for focused responses based on situation and theology. Additionally, research for this project allows parent-pastors to elaborate on their story and share experiences as opposed to answering survey questions.

### Autonomous Pastors With Faithless Children

While pastors talked about high expectations both they and the church had for their children, some pastors simply did not know why their children rebelled. More so, the smallest group represented was those who admitted to ineffective parenting. Each one of these areas will give insight to parent-pastors’ self-realization regarding their feelings towards perceived contributions in their child’s rebellion.



Some form of expectation represented 53% of pastor’s interviewed, and served as the primary reason for their child’s misguided behavior. Differing from the Barna study, many

<sup>1</sup> The Barna Research Group, “Prodigal Pastor Kids: Fact or Fiction?”

<sup>2</sup> This chart represents parent-pastors of faithless children perceptions as to why their child rebelled against their Christian upbringing.



participants focused on expectations they had for children as opposed to what the church dictated, which was the primary response in Barna's research. Pastors who responded to this question reflected on high expectations for their child's behavior, and felt children were forced to act mature beyond their age.

In many cases, a pastor's children are subject to various situations where there was no option for them to act up or "out of hand" in the eyes of the parent-pastor. A Texas pastor said, "I even expected my child to act more mature in Sunday School Class, I wanted the church to think I was raising her with biblical insight."<sup>3</sup>

Research showed an assumed need for children to display certain characteristics towards church members as a reflection of the pastor's effectiveness in household leadership. As a result, pastors felt they could not afford their child the opportunity to run and play like the other children in the church setting. They admitted they felt that their child needed to project an image of maturity beyond their age, and biblical knowledge above other children in the church.

Some pastors quickly identified personal issues that pushed their child into a prodigal behavior, but 34% of those interviewed did not know why their child rebelled. When asked to evaluate their child development techniques, these parent-pastors said their child was raised, "using the most popular parenting tools available, and following them as close as they could."<sup>4</sup> Pastors who felt they did everything correct according to popular teaching were frustrated when the techniques did not work. Afterthought helped clarify that each child is unique and popular techniques are formed as a shell that can be slightly modified to fit the different characteristics of children's unique traits.

---

<sup>3</sup> Texas pastor 2, interviewed by author, Face Time interview, February 18, 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Ohio pastor 3, interviewed by author, Skype interview, February 17, 2014.

Avoidance of emotional struggles represented another group of those who did not know why their child left. In this case, parent-pastors were suppressing feelings towards the adolescent, and did not want to face the possibility that they could be the cause. Pastors who divulged their fear were hesitant in answering this question, but revealed overshadowing concerns. It was apparent they were still avoiding the subject, and possibly afraid of getting answers. One parent-pastor opened up by saying, “I can’t think of why my child rebelled, what if it was me that caused it, what if I am an ineffective parent; does that make me an ineffective pastor too? I’d rather just not know why and pray he comes back to the faith.”<sup>5</sup>

Employing high expectations and suppressing the thought of bad parenting are intimate self-realizations for parent-pastors. A small group of these parents was forthright in sharing the inability to be an effective parent.<sup>6</sup> For those who identified ineffective parenting as the catalyst to their child’s behavior stated various reasons including previous prodigal lifestyles, systematic deterrents, and not knowing what to do as a parent. Many of the parents in this group used programs and books to assist in their ideology, but found societal teachings contradicted many of the learned techniques.

A pastor from Florida commented, “They were teaching my child at school that if we disciplined by spanking, that was abuse and they needed to report it...It’s a catch twenty-two, have stress from the government because we disciplined, or stress from an undisciplined child...no wonder parents are stressed and kids are out of control.”<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Georgia pastor 5, interviewed by author, Face Time interview, February 18, 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Parental effectiveness represented 8% of autonomous pastors with faithless children interviewed.

<sup>7</sup> The pastor did not only refer to corporal punishment of the child, and commented on simply talking to the child, if not done correctly can be considered psychological abuse tying the hands of the pastor even more. Florida pastor 10, interviewed by author, in-person interview, January 8, 2014.

Other pastors attributed ineffective parenting to a previous prodigal lifestyle as the contributor to their child's wayward actions. Children were exposed to the parent's prodigal lifestyle early in their lives, before the parent-pastor came to faith and call. Parents felt early exposure to sinful behavior contributed to their child's understanding of right and wrong.

A Florida pastor speaks to this struggle when he said, "I was bad, I mean bathed in sin, my child saw most of it, he was born from sin, but God redeemed me, and called me. The problem is, how do I argue with my child when they say, 'you did it, so you can't judge me for doing it too.' For that, I don't know what to do."<sup>8</sup>

Not knowing how to handle a situation or reach a prodigal child is a struggle for many of parent-pastors with a prodigal past. Difficulties when raising their children manifest themselves when parents feel guilt over their past, and more so when children follow the action.

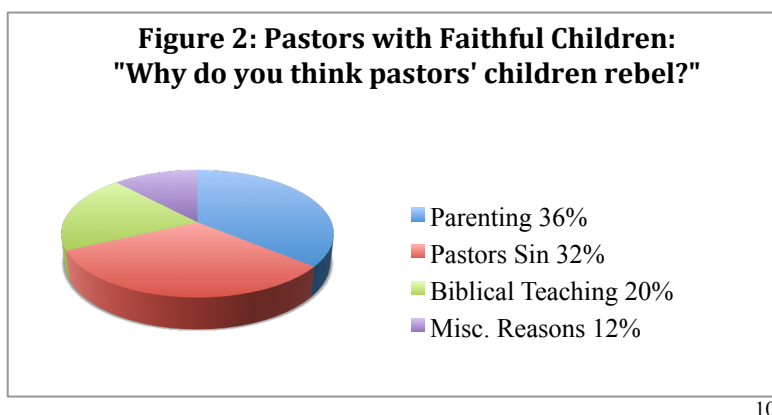
### **Autonomous Pastors With Faithful Children**

Autonomous pastors with faithful children were harsh in their judgment of why the child rebelled. Since they had successful parenting results, many of them did not understand how children could rebel if their inherent teaching was effective. Most parent-pastors felt much of the rebellion was a result of parenting style, lack of scriptural rearing, and parental personal sin issues.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Florida Pastor 7, Interviewed by author, in person, March 17, 2014.

<sup>9</sup> Parenting style represents 36%, personal sin issues represents 32%, and scriptural parenting represents 20% of autonomous pastors with faithful children interviewed.



When asked this question, one pastor summed up all of these explanations by saying,

“Pastors with prodigal children are ineffective themselves; they should focus more on parenting than on ministry, at that point their child needs to become their ministry. If that happens, maybe the child would get scriptural teaching and the sinful issue of not sharing the gospel would be forgiven and their child redeemed...it’s not the child’s fault, it is the parents’ fault for not teaching their child well enough.”<sup>11</sup>

### **District-supervised Pastors**

District-supervised liturgical and evangelical faith groups took a different theological stance to wayward children’s faithless behavior. The majority of pastors interviewed spoke of total depravity and pre-election.<sup>12</sup> Many of them had confidence children who were baptized and confirmed would come back to the faith because they were already chosen and were covered by grace. As well, they believe sin is an inherent part of one’s life, but God’s grace alleviates mankind’s sin as long as they have been baptized.

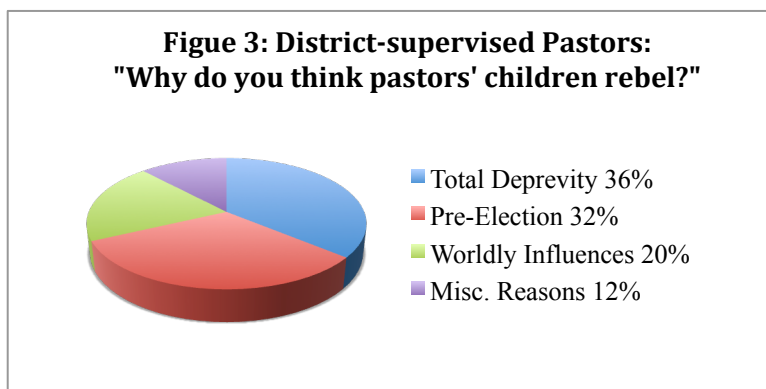
<sup>10</sup> This chart represents parent-pastors of faithful children perceptions as to why a pastor’s children rebel against their Christian upbringing.

<sup>11</sup> Georgia pastor 2, interviewed by author, Face Time interview, February 18, 2014.

<sup>12</sup> Total depravity represented 36% and pre-election represented 32% of district-supervised pastors interviewed.

One pastor from Delaware stated:

“Our children face struggles in this world, parents can’t expect their children to make mature decisions all the time, but that doesn’t mean they loose their faith, that means God’s grace is extended even further. The question is not why the child rebelled against their parent, but how can we as pastoral communities support our brothers and sisters ministering in the trenches with us?”<sup>13</sup>



14

Overall, an attitude of community seemed to be paramount with any pastoral issue that happened throughout the various districts. This researcher was informed that districts vary based on the superintendent or leader and what kind of tone they set for ministerial help. Caution was given as to the level of grace given to parent-pastors, and severity of situations affecting the pastor’s performance.

### What did the Pastor Experience?

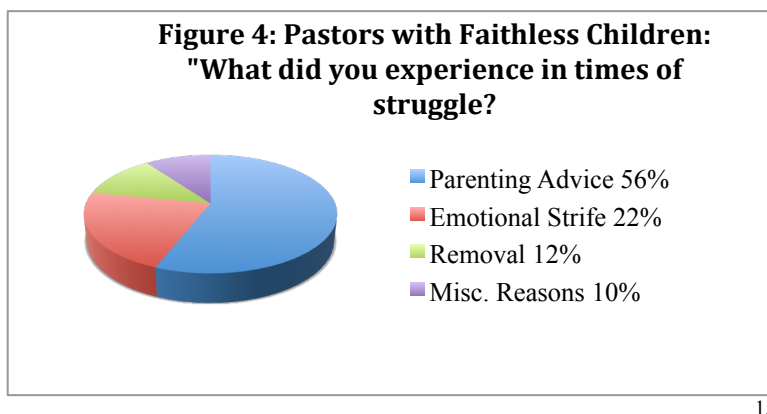
Pastors were asked about their personal experience during the child’s prodigal period. This question was left open ended to give parent-pastors freedom when answering. Those

<sup>13</sup> Delaware pastor 3, interviewed by author, in-person interview, March 31, 2014.

<sup>14</sup> This chart represents District-supervised parent-pastors of faithful and faithless children perceptions as to why pastor’s children rebel against their Christian upbringing.

interviewed spoke about personal emotional, congregational, and family experiences. The only time pastors were lead towards an answer was when participants had asked clarifying questions. At that point, one of the three previously mentioned categories were given. While pastors with faithless children spoke of how they experienced others, pastors with faithful children spoke of emotional experiences. Contradictory to autonomous pastors, most of the district-supervised leaders spoke of recovery programs, and how to help pastors if the issue were a result of addiction.

### Autonomous Pastors With Faithless Children



Pastors who opened themselves up to this question reported feeling like everyone was trying to give them parenting advice.<sup>16</sup> Many pastors felt that regardless of the emotional and physical turmoil their families were going through, there was always someone who wanted to tell them what they might be doing wrong and how it should be fixed, as opposed to showing empathy towards their situation.

<sup>15</sup> This chart represents Autonomous parent-pastors of faithless children experiences in light of their rebellious child's behavior.

<sup>16</sup> Parenting advice represented 56% of autonomous pastors with faithless children interviewed.

When someone feels guilty about an issue, even if they are not, erroneous perceptions can get in the way of objectively looking at a situation. A South Carolina pastor said, “when my child was going through this stage in life, I felt that anyone who even spoke of parenting, wanted to teach parenting classes, or anything dealing with how to raise a child was trying to discredit my parenting style...later I realized they needed the classes too. I was trying too hard to hide how bad everything really was with my own children.”<sup>17</sup>

A few pastors who experienced people trying to give them parenting advice were disillusioned by their perceptions of what people thought. A significant number interviewed, however, were approached by leaders in the church wanting to conduct private meetings with questions about the child’s behavior and home environment issues. A pastor in Maine said, “The head of deacons sat me down and asked if there were issues at home, and if I needed some help with techniques to raise my child...after the conversation, I didn’t just feel like an ineffective parent, but pastor too...that deacon really messed me up for a while.”<sup>18</sup> When church members who feel pastors should not be in leadership directly confront them, ministerial leaders are discouraged both vocationally and domestically. Some people genuinely want to help, and do not realize how much they are actually hurting parent-pastors when they intervene.

In addition to others giving parenting techniques, 12% of pastors interviewed divulged they were asked to step down from church leadership. None of the pastors was asked to resign their ordination, but was recommended to take a sabbatical until their child’s behavior improved or left the home. Without strong congregational backing, more than half of pastors asked to step down did so, and some left the ministry for a number of years until their children left the house.

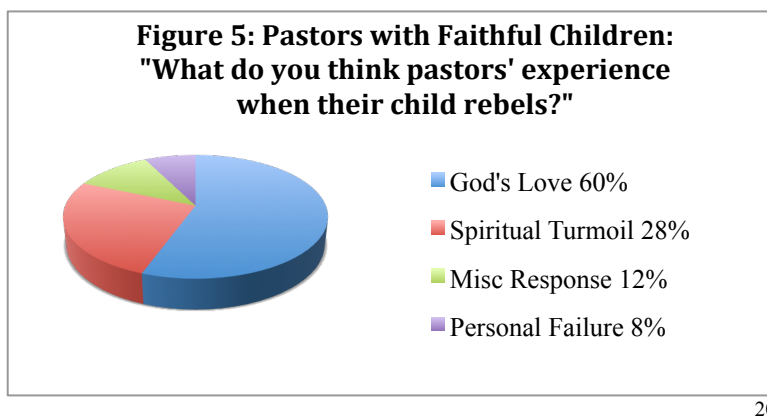
---

<sup>17</sup> South Carolina pastor 1, interview by author, in-person January 10, 2014.

<sup>18</sup> Maine pastor 1, interview by author, in-person February 22, 2014.

Despite the pastor's experience, it was observed that 100% indirectly described some level of emotional heaviness. This is hard to qualify in a statement because their emotional state was enhanced by their own assumptions and perceptions. While hiding his or her emotions, each pastor's internal conflict resulted in some level of emotional destruction. Some pastors openly attributed emotional strife as their primary experience, and felt emotions contributed to their domestic and vocational experiences.<sup>19</sup> Other pastors did not feel they had an adverse emotional reaction, but talked about emotionally stressful vocational issues. Pastors who identified vocational stressors as the catalyst for emotional strife felt personality conflicts, not family issues, created stress between church members and the pastor's family, resulting in their removal.

#### Autonomous Pastors With Faithful Children



20

Autonomous pastors with faithful children focused on what they thought the pastor might experience in the family situation. Rating the top responses, each pastor was compassionate to the situation while using some passive aggressive tones and body language. It was apparent they

<sup>19</sup> Emotional strife represented 22% of autonomous pastors with faithless children interviewed.

<sup>20</sup> This chart represents Autonomous parent-pastors of faithful children perception of what parent-pastors of faithless children should experience in light of their rebellious child's behavior.



were trying to be empathetic to their colleague's situation, but their para-linguistic actions did not reflect their statement. A minority of participants openly protested the pastor's situation, despite their understanding of pastoral calling.

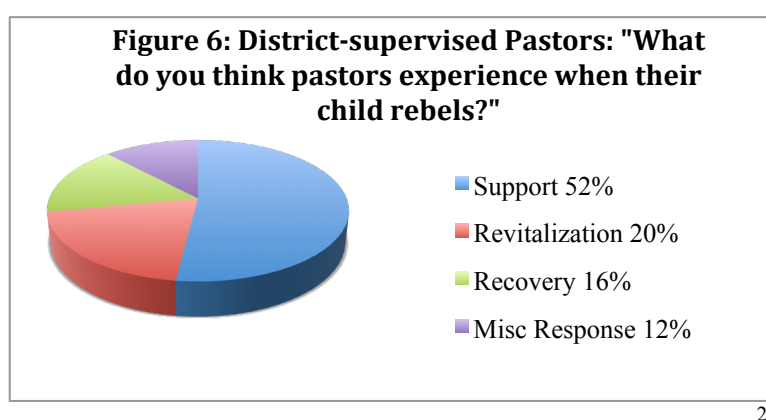
While trying to be positive, two of the common responses were predominately negative. One group focused on the parent-pastors' supposed spiritual turmoil because of failure from not leading their child to Christ. The group that represented 28% of those interviewed, felt parent-pastors whose vocation is to lead people to Christ and inspiring people to be soul winners should primarily be effective in the home. Some pastors suggested parents should be embarrassed in light of their vocational calling and household failure. This embarrassment, in their eyes, should result in vocational dysfunction that the parent-pastor needs assistance in overcoming.

Failure in Christian vocation and parental responsibility represents 8% of those interviewed. Pastors who spoke about this issue said unsuccessful parent-pastors should feel personal disappointment for falling short in the primary task of being the spiritual head of household. It was clear those who made this reference, justified Christian parenting success through the salvation of their children. Instead of seeing parent-pastors who struggle with their child's crisis of faith as a congregational example of forgiveness and perseverance, these pastors seemed to chalk it up to personal failure. If parent-pastors continually share the gospel with their child and not give up, they are showing the congregation how important it is to plant the seed and care for the crop regardless of how quickly it grows.

The final response was positive, and expressed 60% of those interviewed. These pastors hoped their brother or sister was feeling God's love through the congregation and local church leaders embracing them. A majority of them referred to a "one body" concept, if one part of the

body is suffering, then the whole body suffers.<sup>21</sup> The congregation has a responsibility to their pastor to ensure he or she is taken care of. Sometimes that means a time of healing appropriate to the parent-pastor's situation is needed; a time that should not be based on congregational expectation. Even though interviewees felt the issue required congregational support and pastoral healing, they also felt it did not happen enough when a pastor was hurting.

### District-supervised Pastors



District-supervised faith groups focused on supporting the pastor in whatever need arose. The top answer for this group was for the pastor to feel an embracing support from their faith community.<sup>23</sup> One pastor in North Carolina said, "Not only should the congregation help them, their local pastors should get together and ensure the hurting servant is healed and brought back to spiritual and emotional health. No pastor should feel like they have fallen or failed because there was no one there to help catch them."<sup>24</sup> The sense of community was once again reflected through responses from this group. Many of the pastors felt mainstream Protestant churches of

<sup>21</sup> 1 Corinthians 12.

<sup>22</sup> This chart represents district-supervised parent-pastors of faithful or faithless children perception of what parent-pastors of faithless children should experience in light of their rebellious child's behavior.

<sup>23</sup> Community Support represented 52% of district-supervised pastors interviewed.

<sup>24</sup> North Carolina Pastor 8, interviewed by author, Skype interview, February 20, 2014.

all denominations were competing against the wrong enemy. Instead of competing against other local pastors, “we should be supporting one another, against the true enemy: Satan!”<sup>25</sup> These pastors felt it took a community of healthy churches to reach the masses, and no singular healthy church could do all the work while exploiting those who were hurting.

The other two experiences of parent-pastors with faithless children are revitalization and recovery programs. These two events spoke to specific denominational programs designed to assist hurting pastors.<sup>26</sup> Discussion of revitalization retreats represented 20% of the answers, while recovery programs represented 16%.

Revitalization retreats are programs designed to recharge pastors from emotionally draining issues, and renew their faith. Many revitalization retreat programs are geared towards functional church issues and not family issues, but can still be beneficial to the parent-pastor in need of renewal. Recovery programs are primarily designed for pastors who have major sin issues in their life. If a church leader is having problems, experiencing one of these programs may allow pastors the opportunity for self-evaluation ensuring there is no sin or parenting issues hampering their child’s development. Some district leaders spoke about the denominationally run programs as the only support means to pastoral help as though national or regional supervisors in the next higher echelon could deal with issues, and not local district leadership.

### What Impact did it have on Church or Family?

When parent-pastors were asked about their experiences, many of them spoke about what other people did to/with them. When they were asked, “What impact did their child’s behavior

---

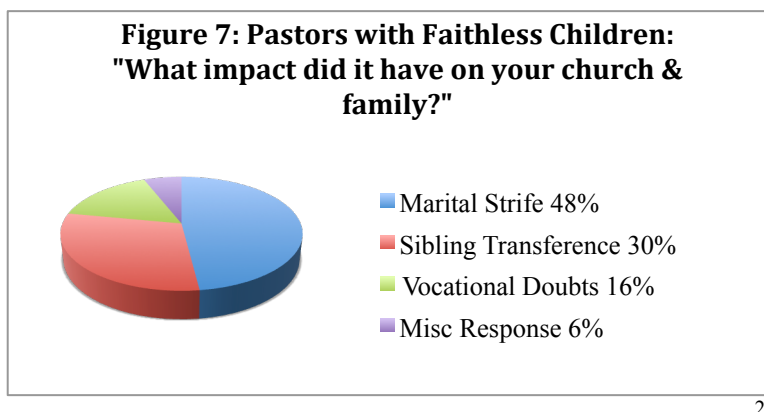
<sup>25</sup> Georgia pastor 2, interviewed by author, Face Time interview, February 18, 2014.

<sup>26</sup> While these programs are designed to help pastors recover from sinful behavior, most asserted the programs were an experience that taught how to improve one’s emotional state. An evaluation of various programs mentioned proved to assist with addictions to drugs, alcohol, pornography, or infidelity. There were no formal programs to assist pastors with the emotional/spiritual affects of prodigal children.

have on church or family?” The response was intriguing. It was assumed answers would target church and vocation ministry, but during this question, many parents tied impacts to personal emotion and unresolved conflict within social and vocational settings.

In the same respect, parent-pastors with faithful children spoke more of tangible impacts to the church and family. Likewise, district-supervised pastors spoke of vocational impact that can occur from the wayward child, but centered attention on the child rather than parent-pastor. There was a notable change in tone and body language when speaking of this issue. Where many pastors previously focused on parental dysfunction, a new level of empathy emerged when they began to look beyond the pulpit and think about the complexity of the family’s pain.

#### **Autonomous Pastors With Faithless Children**



Emotional issues emerged and served as the primary contributor to tangible impacts for parents with faithless children. Though one might speak of marital strife, or tension in the church body, all issues could be traced to feelings of anger, grief, and doubt. Initially, pastors did not want to speak about their emotional impacts, but as they talked their way through the question,

---

<sup>27</sup> This chart represents autonomous parent-pastors of faithless children and the impact of their child’s behavior on church and family relationships.

emotions surfaced. When parent-pastors began to share emotional strife, scars left by traumatic experiences were evident through non-verbal expression.

Common to this discussion were differing parental disciplinary techniques, which created marital strife.<sup>28</sup> Those being interviewed talked about how parenting cycles would flow against each other many times. In some cases, one parent was compassionate and the other was enraged. Depending on life stressors, parents who made every effort to be united were disconnected because of the stress. This emotional roller coaster allowed simple situations to explode in angry outbursts, while the other was trying to mediate and calm the situation. On the other hand, some parents felt consistent in their parenting standard, but rare inconsistencies created major impacts when dealing with a wayward child. The majority, however, spoke of regular inconsistencies in parenting style with rare experiences of cohesiveness. All participants disclosed feelings of anger and rage at some point for their child's behavior that ultimately interfered with their marriage relationships.

Related to marital strife, parent-pastors with more than one child in the household disclosed stricter standards for other siblings.<sup>29</sup> One pastor from Colorado said, "We made some unrealistic rules for our other children because we were so mad at [him], I look back and realize it wasn't fair to the other kids, but we were so angry and embarrassed at [his] actions we wanted to prevent it happening to us again."<sup>30</sup> These rules not only transferred feelings of frustration and anger on other children, it placed an undue stress on siblings causing a greater amount of resentment.

---

<sup>28</sup> Marital strife represented 48% of autonomous pastors with faithless children interviewed.

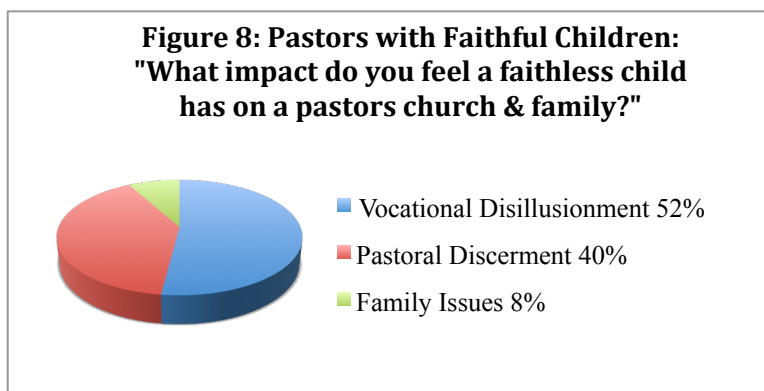
<sup>29</sup> Sibling transference represented 30% of autonomous pastors with faithless children interviewed.

<sup>30</sup> Colorado pastor 2, interviewed by author, Face Time interview, March 3, 2014.

A few pastors who were interviewed spoke about the vocational impact from the child's behavior. One pastor recollected his child telling key people in the church they needed to reevaluate his father's Christian standards and stop associating with his father because his dad was a hypocrite and abused him when others were not looking.<sup>31</sup> Later the child admitted to saying negative things about his father to get him in trouble because of a disciplinary action that his father had imposed, and the child felt he did not deserve. However, with some congregants, the damage was already done.

Vocational doubts represent the lowest category with 16% stating the issue had a profound impact on their lives. Participants told stories about local colleagues informing them that pastors who cannot lead their families could not lead a church. Some who were scripturally convicted by others were told they were no longer qualified to be a pastor because of their child. Not researching the issue on their own they listened to the elders, took Titus 1:6 literally, and disqualified themselves for their child's unbelief.

### **Autonomous Pastors With Faithful Children**



32

<sup>31</sup> Florida pastor 9, interviewed by author, Skype interview, February 5, 2014.

<sup>32</sup> This chart represents autonomous parent-pastors of faithful children and the assumed impact of faithless children's behavior on church and family relationships.

Autonomous pastors with faithful children revealed two major viewpoints. Pastors saw vocational disillusionment and pastoral discernment as the greatest impacts as they focused on God's family versus the pastor's immediate family.<sup>33</sup> The lowest common response dealt with family issues and only represented 8% of the answers given. Pastors who replied with familial concerns did not question the pastor's call, but his or her ability to effectively guide a congregation through difficult situations when they were overwhelmed with their own personal issues. They were compassionate to the needs of the congregation and coping levels required of pastors who have a high level of responsibility.

Vocational disillusionment encompasses the pastor's ability to effectively lead a church under the intense stress of family situations. Many participants showed concern for the pastor's stress level and stated that God can provide the peace needed to get through the situation. Others implicated that pastors with intense personal issues at home could not discern God's direction for the church. Even if pastors surrendered their family issues to God, situations still occurred, and would continue to serve as ministry "distractors." Pastors facing family crisis can easily lose concentration on pastoral duties, and are often required to focus their crisis ministry towards their family.

When parent-pastors are forced to focus personal ministry towards their own faithless child, valuable time is taken away from assisting with other's needs. Depending on the severity of the conflict, this can create an apathetic attitude regarding vocational responsibilities. When unpleasant situations become overwhelming at home, pastors who are supposed to care for others can become complacent and have little to no empathy for their parishioners. A Georgia pastor who replaced a pastor with a faithless child said, "I heard story after story about how they felt the

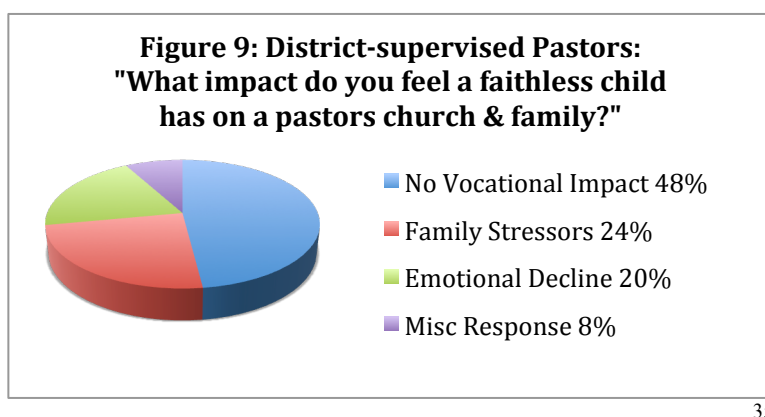
---

<sup>33</sup> Vocational disillusionment represented 52% and pastoral discernment represented 40% of autonomous pastors with faithful children interviewed.

pastor didn't really care about them, it always seemed he was fighting an internal battle over his family and the church."<sup>34</sup>

On the contrary, others talked about leaders with faithless children having enhanced ability to counsel families experiencing the same situation. They felt as long as parent-pastors with faithless children did not become passive to others' needs, it made the pastor seem more approachable and relatable to other parents in the church. Parent-pastors of faithful children who held this view showed a slight level of experiential envy towards these leaders. While this group is lumped into the pastoral discernment section, it does not present a negative impact to the church as some would think. The opposing thoughts created a notable balance in the pastoral interview process; most conservative pastors saw it as a hindrance while contemporary pastors felt it enhanced the pastor's ability because they could relate to families going through similar difficulties.

### District-supervised Pastors



35

<sup>34</sup> Georgia pastor 2, interviewed by author, in person interview, January 10, 2014.

<sup>35</sup> This chart represents district-supervised parent-pastors of faithful and faithless children and the assumed impact of faithless children's behavior on church and family relationships.



A large majority of district-supervised pastors felt there should be no impact on the church as a whole.<sup>36</sup> Collectively, they felt pastors are not perfect and for churches to expect perfection is completely unreasonable. Some felt that a child's behavior in the secular workplace would not affect the job performance of employees, and therefore churches should look at the pastor's performance the same way. It was noted by multiple pastors that "separation of church and family" was a recent trend change for churches, and hard for some of the traditionalist to understand. A Delaware pastor said, "even ten years ago when you got a pastor you got the family, our denomination now looks at it from the viewpoint that the family is the pastor's responsibility and not the congregation's."<sup>37</sup>

In most cases, the focus was on the pastor as vocation, but some spoke about the impacts it could have on the family. They felt being the pastor of a church was a stressful job; by adding family issues there is greater stress that could lead to severe emotional, and possibly physical, damage.<sup>38</sup> When a pastor feels their livelihood is in danger, but knows they are operating within God's call for their life, doors for many self-medicating issues can be opened. Many interviewees with wayward children disclosed some level of addiction due to family and church stressors.

Emotional decline of pastors represented 20% of those interviewed. Self-medicating habits were primary to emotional decline. When the pastor became emotionally ill, they were not effective in the home or church. Many of them developed some level of addiction because it made them feel they were in control. While some battled with pornography and drugs, the primary struggle was with food and work. Emotional decline can be directly tied to spiritual,

---

<sup>36</sup> No impact represented 48% of district-supervised pastors interviewed.

<sup>37</sup> Delaware pastor 3, interviewed by author, in person interview, March 31, 2014.

<sup>38</sup> Family stressors represented 24% of district-supervised pastors interviewed.

physical, and social issues mentioned by other pastors. Since many pastors suppress their emotional problems and hide the effects of coping, most people do not know how intense the situation is. Pastors felt they hid their problems well, but also recognized they were not emotionally stable enough to address family problems due to domestic and vocational traumatic experiences.

### What Were the Pastor's Hopes?

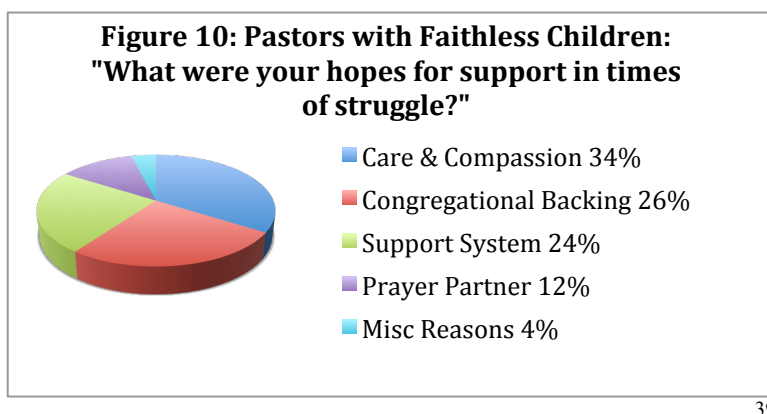
Emotional aspects cannot be avoided when asked about hopes for empowerment and support. This interview questions revealed that autonomous pastors were sensitive to problems and discussed emotional experiences for the hopes and prayers of their child, family, and congregation. Those who had never raised a prodigal child could not fathom what it was like to mentor a son or daughter through a prodigal period. They were sensitive to the matter and offered valuable opinion for parent-pastors with faithless children, but just could not relate.

Evaluating these answers revealed sensitive sides to every pastor interviewed. None of them focused on self-regret, dysfunction of family environments, or any other concern. Conversational tones made a drastic change towards compassion and support for pastors. Those with faithless children expressed hope for support, while others revealed their desire to support a hurting brother or sister in Christ. Initial perceptions of intolerance towards family controversies seemed to disappear.

### **Autonomous Pastors With Faithless Children**

When parent-pastors with faithless children were interviewed, they expressed a strong desire for others' support. While they felt surrounded by people seeking to help, very few asked what they could do to help. As a result, they experienced disunion when assistance was needed.

Pastors who were hurting felt there was no one they could turn to who would fully understand their situation. Most of the pastors who desired a solid support network felt they had an open line of communication with other pastors, leaders, or family members, but also felt they could not trust these networks with intimate family details. The lack of trust was rooted in fear of the influence these people had over each pastor's life.



39

A trusted agent for any pastor is paramount to coping with ministry and family stressors regardless of the issue. Unfortunately, many pastors do not have a person to confide in when things are difficult. Pastors struggled to balance feelings of constantly being watched, with the desire for parts of their lives, especially the uncomfortable ones, to remain private. When problems were publicized, some pastors became embarrassed, others simply did not feel it is the congregation's issue to be involved in, but none felt people were prepared to come alongside them for support.

There were four significant areas identified in this study regarding the pastor's personal hopes for encouragement. Even though the conversation led to a parent-pastor's desire for

---

<sup>39</sup> This chart represents autonomous parent-pastors of faithless children and their hopes for support in overcoming the stressors of a faithless child.

children to renew or refine their faith, concentration was on the parent's desire for unity in coping with their wayward child.

Many pastors wanted to talk about their position, but did not feel others would be sensitive to the situation. As a result, the majority of pastors yearned for care and compassion, and represent 34% of those interviewed. Some desires were never fulfilled because parent-pastors never sought help due to their self-discouraging behavior. When they thought about seeking help, they were intimidated by what others would say or do. Another set of interviewees gathered courage to seek encouragement and were met with cold, harsh responses. Pastors associated with this answer had an overwhelming desire to experience empathetic approaches from others, but felt their desires were met with constant disappointment.

Secondly, 26% of those interviewed expressed a desire for congregational support. Though many pastors did not talk with their congregation regarding their child, they wished they could trust them enough to share their issues. Some of the pastors revealed that vocational expectations from the congregation made them feel as if they were not allowed to have issues, and they should be completely above reproach. Because of the congregation's expectations, they just did not feel comfortable sharing any familial shortcomings, especially with the leadership.

A solid family support system was the third common hope for pastors.<sup>40</sup> This category had various approaches to the family support system. First, parent-pastors hoped for greater unity with their spouse. They never seemed to agree on concerns and/or punishments with the child. There were times where the family system broke down because of dissension in the house. One pastor described in detail that Saturday night behavior issues would carry to the next morning.

---

<sup>40</sup> Solid family support systems represented 24% of autonomous pastors with faithless children interviewed.

His stress would, “carry into the pulpit on Sunday, and was so bad [his] wife would stay home from church because [they] couldn’t agree on how to deal with the child.”<sup>41</sup>

Extended family support was another desire for pastors. Feelings of failure were described when pastors talked about this issue. In the midst of stress, their parents would talk about how bad they were, or chastise them for what they believed was lenient parenting. Pastors felt like extended family did not understand how hard it was to raise a child in today’s social climate. When they were looking for encouragement from extended family, pastors felt as if they got lectures and reprimands for what they were doing wrong, and no encouragement for what they were doing correctly.

A fourth area was identified with significant results and warrants mention. When interviewed, 12% of pastors hoped for a prayer partner with whom they could be vulnerable. While many of the pastors had people they were praying with, they felt vulnerability was not an option. Asking for prayer over the family or the child, but only in general terms, was the norm for prayer sessions. Pastors were starved for someone who would come alongside them that was not family, extending grace and forgiveness as a prayer partner and encourager. This is different from the first hope of care and compassion from others because of the specific mention for an individual with whom they could share their struggles.

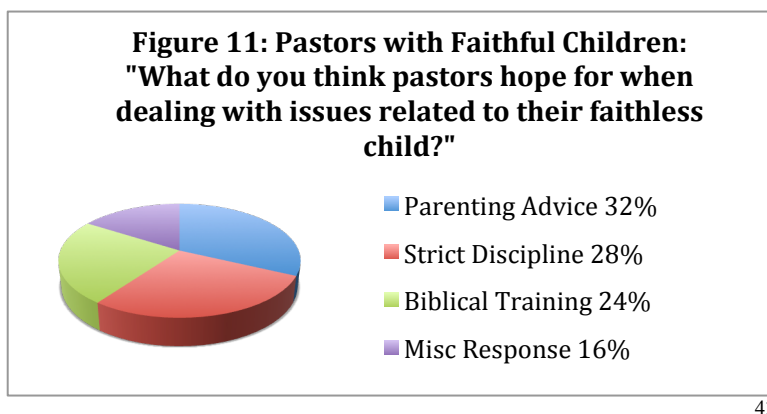
### **Autonomous Pastors With Faithful Children**

When pastors of faithful children were asked about the hopes for their colleagues, almost every person spoke of personal desires for the hurting pastor to seek help from others. One pastor said, “I would hope pastors with family problems would seek the resources that can help them

---

<sup>41</sup> Florida pastor 8, interviewed by author, Skype interview, February 18, 2014.

get through the turmoil prodigal children can cause.”<sup>42</sup> Though pastors wanted to help, they also made many assumptions towards the parental routine that was already in place. Notably, only a few of the pastors interviewed asked about the family dynamic and what practices were currently instituted in the home before giving their answers.



Pastors were passionate about helping others by giving them advice for better child development.<sup>44</sup> Those who gave this answer said even though parents were hurting, it did not mean their family was about to fall apart; they felt taking advantage of parenting programs would strengthen the unity between parents, and help give them tools to overcome stressors caused by faithless children. They spoke about parenting programs as though they were referring to marriage enrichment weekends. It was assumed by these participants there were parental dysfunctions and if parenting programs were attended early enough, many of the issues would be resolved before they even started.

<sup>42</sup> Alabama pastor 3, interviewed by author, Face Time interview, February 12, 2014.

<sup>43</sup> This chart represents autonomous parent-pastors of faithful children and their hopes for parent-pastors of faithless children's ability to cope with and overcome their child's behavior.

<sup>44</sup> Pastors in this category represented 32% autonomous pastors with faithful children.

Overcoming stress from a wayward adolescent also means having a strict discipline regimen.<sup>45</sup> Parent-pastors who answered this question were adamant about holding the child accountable for their actions. They felt if children were held accountable, the wayward behavior would take care of itself. These pastors represent 28% of those interviewed, and focused on helping the parent develop a consistent disciplinary program in the house. Pastors felt that dysfunction with a child is based in the parent's lack of discipline. The conversation was not geared towards capital punishment, but concentrated on punishment reflecting the behavior. They felt if rules were enforced through discipline, the child would have a clear understanding for behavioral boundaries within the home. It was apparent assumptions were made about disciplinary environments in the home. Participants in this group were not concerned with what parents were currently doing and felt if their discipline were effective, the child would not have extreme behavioral issues. Consequently, this group without full knowledge of the home situation criticized parents.

Very close to discipline regimens in the house was hope for solid biblical teaching in respect to sin and salvation. There was a 4% difference between this answer and discipline, representing 24% of interviewees. Hope that parent-pastors were teaching Christian principles in the home as much as they did in the local church was the focal point. Their desire was geared towards inspiring parent-pastors to institute a plan for family prayer, devotionals, and other spiritual activities in order to expose children to religious principles as much as possible. They felt by doing this, the child would naturally become faithful because they were raised on biblical parenting processes.<sup>46</sup>

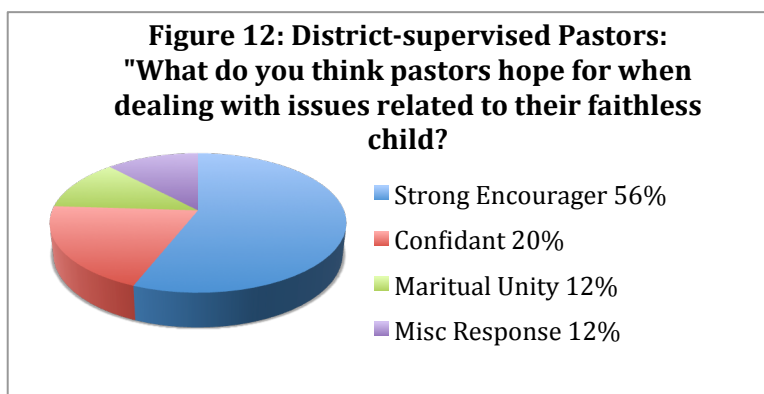
---

<sup>45</sup> Proverbs 13:24.

<sup>46</sup> Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and Proverbs 22:6.

### District-supervised Pastors

Answers given for district-supervised pastors were similar to the autonomous pastor, regarding a desire for strong encouragers, confidants, and marital unity. District-supervised pastors not only hoped to have a strong encourager they could be uplifted by, but also hoped they would be a strong encourager to others. This group represented 56% of those interviewed. They felt a person who would back them and given them positive encouragement would strengthen them during difficult problems. Ideally, the person would know the issue, and look at positive aspects.



47

Similar to the encourager, 20% simply wanted a confidant. This was characterized as a trusted agent pastors could share the family secret with, and know it would not come back on them if matters became tough. Much the like the encourager, the confidant would be able to give positive feedback to parent-pastors. Differing from the encourager would be realistic feedback that might not always be positive. For many, confidants are those who always give an objective opinion to situations, and the pastor knows all feedback comes with their best interest is in mind.

---

<sup>47</sup> This chart represents district-supervised parent-pastors of faithful and faithless children and their hopes for parent-pastors of faithless children's ability to cope with and overcome their child's behavior.



While those who looked for encouragers only wanted positive input, confidants had more value because they served as a mentor through situations.

Most of the pastors felt their spouses were not partners to whom they could unload their emotional stressors. These feelings did not generate from trust, but from the level of involvement in the situation. Though 12% of them hoped for marital unity, they felt their spouse was too close to the situation, and were facing the same stressors that they experienced. The marital unity they hoped for was making tough decisions when it came to dealing with family and church. While district-supervised pastors affirmed vocational responsibility belonged to the parent-pastor, the spouse was a vital part of decisions within church settings. The way couples coped with issues was based on how they utilized external resources and consolidated those inputs for a unified household.

### How Did the Pastor Get Through the Issue?

The outcome of this research was to develop useful coping skills for pastors who are facing emotional and spiritual stressors of wayward children. In order to develop an appropriate response to the issue, background stories have to be understood. After talking with parent-pastors about hopes, expectations, and situations, research comes to an apex of hope and comfort by finding out how pastors have handled their adverse conditions.

Autonomous pastors with or without faithless children seemed to be on the same page. Some pastors gave similar answers, and some of the myths those with faithless children were dispelled by the compassion of other pastors. This question brought “love your neighbor”<sup>48</sup> as a coping and support concept to the forefront of caring for one another. Many pastors showed an even greater level of empathy and were willing to assist others. Those desiring to support their

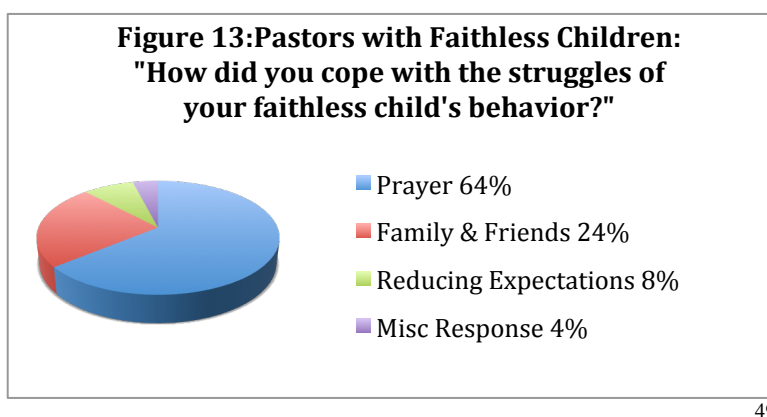
---

<sup>48</sup> Mark 12:31.

colleagues felt parent-pastors with faithless children were not open about their issues. In the same vein, district led pastors seemed to focus on relationship and help for their colleagues, but were not as concerned about the child as they were about pastors themselves.

### **Autonomous Pastors With Faithless Children**

Interviewees realized there were a number of instances where a word of encouragement, quick prayer, or reducing expectations for their child enabled their optimism through the toughest of issues. Whenever they experienced an uplifting action from others, somehow they knew everything was going to be all right. They also felt God’s hand was still covering them and protecting their child.



For parent-pastors of faithless children, “God moments,” as many called it, are what got them through situations. When these short interactions with others happened, “it was like the Holy Spirit knew what was needed at just the right moment.”<sup>50</sup> Accounts of pastors who spoke of “God moments” are reflected below. While these moments are powerful sources for coping with dilemmas, they are experiences as opposed to actions of the hurting parent. Therefore, “God

<sup>49</sup> This chart represents autonomous parent-pastors of faithless children and the ways they were able to cope with the stressors caused by their child’s behavior.

<sup>50</sup> Ohio pastor 3, interviewed by author, in-person interview, February 17, 2014.

moments” represent the overarching theme of how the Holy Spirit empowered the parent, and their stories describe the mediums in which these moments occurred.

One of the greatest responses to the issue of a wayward child, or even dealing with church conflict, is to give obstacles to God. In fact, 64% of those interviewed quickly responded with one of two words, “prayer,” and “surrender.” When asked to expand on their remedy, many said there were two things they consistently prayed for “wisdom and protection.” Most parent-pastors asked for wisdom when handling those who would come against their ministry, and family. These pastors sought God’s wisdom in responding to people, dealing with their family, and disciplining their child’s behavior. The second area they would pray over is protection for their child. As much as their parental instincts wanted to reach out and protect, they knew God was the only one who could truly protect them. One parent said, “I had to pray, it was the only thing that made me feel like she was ok...There’s nothing like knowing you handed a difficult issue to a God who replaces your stress over a situation with wisdom to deal with it.”<sup>51</sup>

While prayer is the most powerful weapon against difficult circumstances, some parents talked about crying out to God for the strength to get through it, relieve their burdens, and teach their child a lesson. These parents spoke of raw emotions revealed to God, stating anxiety and stress was so overwhelming they did not know what to do, but literally cry to God for help. They also acknowledged that God already knew their pain, but through their weakness, calling out to Him was their only option for comfort.

In many cases, prayers occurred in a community with a solid support network. Parent-pastors spoke of small groups, or cell groups they felt comfortable with sharing these issues. Study participants found that talking with people who were not involved in the situation were a

---

<sup>51</sup> Tennessee pastor 1, interviewed by author, Skype interview, February 22, 2014.

helpful avenue to coping. Those interviewed spoke about family and friends who supported them during difficult times.<sup>52</sup> While a good number of pastors identified their parent as an effective sounding board, others identified a neighbor or close schoolmate as their primary support network. Some of the pastors felt their parents gave them sound advice, but also, their friends were able to calm them down, and help them think rationally through irrational situations.

Irrational thought in situations is sometimes based in senseless expectations of parents for spirituality and character. Interviewees talked about the high expectations they placed on their child in the first question, but 8% of them said by reducing their expectations for a wayward child, it helped them cope with conflicts better. It might seem like reducing expectations would be an inappropriate way to cope with problems, but reduction in expectations does not equal reduction in standards. Pastors explained unrealistic expectations imprisoned children and squeezed their individuality, leading to rebellion; slightly reducing expectations freed the child to walk an appropriate path while developing the uniqueness of their character.

Additionally, those who reduced their expectations did not feel high levels of stress when children did not meet their standards. Not foregoing discipline, pastors felt a calm presence when they did not expect perfection, but held their child accountable for unmet measures. Pastors who gave this answer maintained boundaries in the home, and when the child made mistakes, there were consequences. Punishment was dealt with in a rational manner that warranted respect for children's individuality along with parental authority.

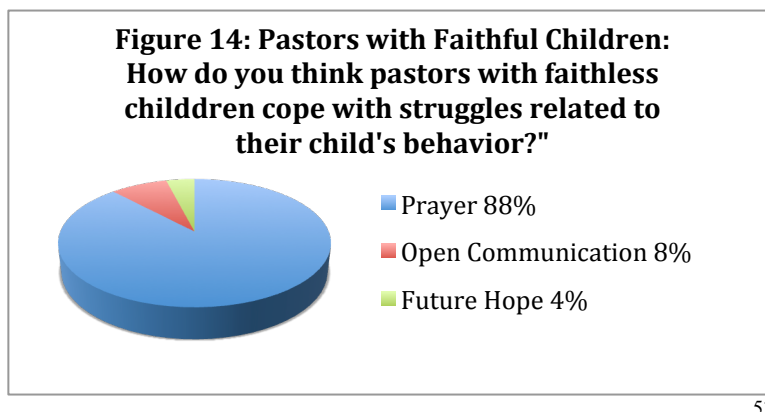
In other situations, a reduction of expectations was seen as a very negative approach to coping with issues. Parents who felt they placed too many expectations on their child, causing them to go astray, also felt things would be worse if they did not hold such high standards for

---

<sup>52</sup> Family and friends represented 24% of autonomous pastors with faithless children interviewed.

their child. Overall, reduced expectations proved to be successful for some and negative for others.

### Autonomous Pastors With Faithful Children



53

Autonomous pastors with faithful children gave similar answers concerning coping skills for parent-pastors with wayward children. Since they had never experienced a faithless child in their household, the only reference point they could use was counseling experiences with others who had wayward children. As with all counseling, most felt they could not help parent-pastors unless they wanted to talk about the issue and seek help. If they were open to talking about the situation, it opened doors to provide assistance. At minimum, pastors felt parents of the faithless would be able to receive specific prayer over the situation if they were willing to talk about it.

Prayer was the top answer for parents of faithful children.<sup>54</sup> Church leaders wanted opportunities to pray over faithless children, but also wanted to be able to encourage their colleagues through difficult emotional situations. More common than not, participants talked about praying with pastors for various needs while dealing with faithless children. They also

<sup>53</sup> This chart represents autonomous parent-pastors of faithful children and the ways they feel parents of faithless children might cope with the stressors caused by their child's behavior.

<sup>54</sup> Prayer represented 88% of the answers given for parent-pastors of faithful children.

wanted to pray God would bring the child back to His glory. When prayer was discussed, the target was for children more than for parents. It was obvious many pastors did not completely understand the unique stressors of parent-pastors versus traditional parents with prodigal children.

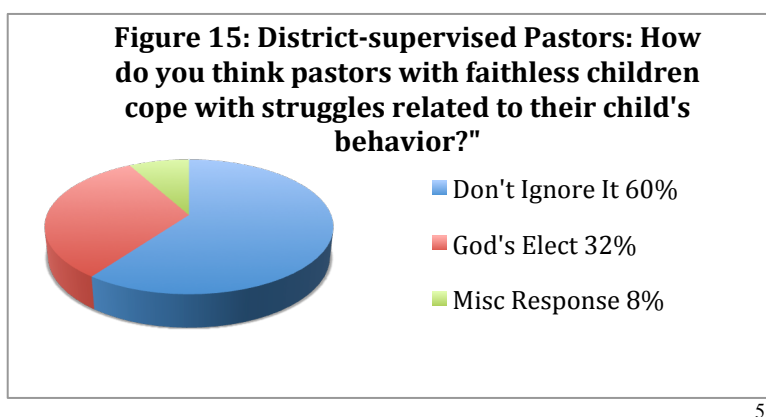
Clear misunderstandings from pastors who have never experienced a faithless child in their home handicapped their abilities to provide effective support. Many felt that it was impossible to know the stressors unless someone told them. Open communication with colleagues represented 8% of interviewees. First, pastors felt it was unreasonable for others to expect help, or for them to make assumptions about the kind of help needed if they were never told about the situation. Second, there was no way to know what experiences are like if parent-pastors of faithless children do not talk about them. Pastors want to encourage their colleagues and advance the kingdom, but cannot because they are not being informed of what they can do to help. Most followed up their statement with desires for parents of wayward children to be honest, forthright, and open when it came to needing encouragement.

When others knew about their associate's situation, they considered future hope as the greatest contributor to the well being of the child. This response was broad but encapsulated 4% of the answers. Parent-pastors who had the confidence of raising their child with the right value system felt more comfortable with the situation. Future hope means regardless of severity, when times are difficult they will always revert to the basic systems engrained in their childhood. There is hope children will fall back on God because He has not left the child's side, regardless of how much they try to ignore Him. Pastors say future hope will empower parents because it takes a great amount of faith for them to feel God has all things under control and in His time

will bring the child back to His glory. When a parent has future hope for the recovery of the child, they can have confidence in the ultimate outcome, not the momentary event.

### **District-supervised Pastors**

Responses for district-supervised pastors were straightforward; there were two answers representing 92% of those interviewed. Pastors believed it was difficult to determine what the family needed when there was no clear definition of the family dynamics. Participants with faithless children spoke to the dynamics of their situation and found the best coping strategy was to be open about the issue. While some parent-pastors of faithful children reaffirmed this thought, the majority focused on “God’s elect” as the best way to cope with the issue.



Ignoring a dilemma will not make it go away, and the same goes for parent-pastors who have a prodigal child. Among those interviewed, 60% felt overlooking the obstacle was the worst thing one could do. Avoiding situations does not make them better, and only worsens outcomes as time passes. When parent-pastors who struggle with this issue seek assistance early, they are able to build plans of action and support networks strengthening their natural internal coping capabilities.

---

<sup>55</sup> This chart represents district-supervised parent-pastors of faithful and faithless children and the ways they feel parents of faithless children might cope with the stressors caused by their child’s behavior.

Additionally, cognitive theological approaches were developed from some of the other interviewees. Similar to future hope, 32% of district-supervised pastors felt the concept of God's elect helped cope with stressors. When children misbehave, the inherent sin nature has taken over, but it does not change how God administers grace. They felt stressors over children were not found in the child's behavior because they fell under the umbrella of God's grace. Lacking grace towards their children caused most of the stress parent-pastors experienced. Pastors who spoke about grace felt parents would cope better if they exhibited God's grace towards children as long as it was in line with appropriate discipline standards. While this does not mean the parent bypasses obstacles, it does mean parents should allow grace and mercy to abound in their child's life as well as their own.

### **Conclusive Results**

Autonomous evangelical pastors with faithless children were self-critical in their perspective of why the child rebelled, but many of them were lost on what their expectations for support were. Most of them felt abandoned regarding solutions on problems because they were worried about how others would react based on congregant and colleague's receptivity to their child's behavior. This being the case, most pastors failed to look for support. While they found solace in their spouse, they did not reveal many of their struggles because they felt their spouse was too close to the issue as well. When external advice was involuntarily received because of publicized issues, support networks were not sensitive to their dilemma. As pastors used external avenues of support, they felt more comfortable in the situation and had an easier time coping with the emotional aspects of the situation.

Evangelical pastors with faithful children were harsh in their belief of why the child rebelled, but were compassionate to their colleague's situation. They felt if a brother was hurting,



they should be able to help. While parent-pastors with faithless children questioned their calling in ministry, those with faithful children were mixed in their opinion on the issue. Traditional pastors felt parent-pastors of the faithless were no longer qualified while contemporary pastors saw no concerns with the calling. Issues of generational sin, and ineffective parenting were foremost during interviews, but thoughts of supporting the pastor were prevalent. Prayer and a listening ear were primary to assisting in coping with issues, but pastors felt obstacles were not brought to their attention enough for them to effectively help their colleagues.

District or denominational supervised churches had a stronger family approach to difficulties. Pastors in this group portrayed images of community as opposed to competitions with other colleagues. They concentrated on reformation policies and building up the pastor, regardless of the situation. District supervisors focused on coming alongside pastors to educate churches on supporting their spiritual leader. It was stressed that support and degree of action is strongly based on the district superintendent. Some districts are very strict, but as long as the issue was not affecting the pastor's ability to preach, lead, or support the congregation, little to no punitive action was thought of for pastors. Coping issues fixated on theological basis of forgiveness and grace, and asserted that parents needed to reflect God more in times of frustration.

There were no formal questions asked about pastors' counseling styles, but evaluation of counseling techniques proved two distinct styles. The pastors who displayed a low tolerance in their view towards parent-pastors with faithless children seemed to subscribe to nouthetic principles of counseling.<sup>56</sup> On the other hand, an integrative counseling approach seemed to be

---

<sup>56</sup> "Nouthetic counseling consists of lovingly confronting people out of deep concern in order to help them make those changes that God requires. These changes are done in 3 ideas; confrontation, concern, and change." It often point out people's sin issues in order to institute change. Jay Adams, "What is Nouthetic Counseling," *Institute for Nouthetic Studies*, accessed 25 August 2014.

prevalent in parent-pastors who were more understanding to the situation. This means those with low tolerance wanted to talk about parental, generational, and vocational sin issues, while others talked about emotional, physical, and spiritual growth.

In all cases, assumptions were made about reasons, emotions, and support networks. A pastor with faithless children assumed there was no assistance available from his or her colleagues, and were abandoned to resolve conflicts on their own. Pastors with faithful children assumed a rebellious child is the parent's fault, and saw little or no need to support them. In the interview, however, parents on both sides realized their assumptions were not based in majority thinking, but represented the minority population.

Finally, the interview process showed that harsh assumptions were made on both sides of the pastoral spectrum, but in the end those with the ability to help wanted to, and those who needed help desperately wanted it. It was found that colleagues of parent-pastors were not the primary issue, but congregants who have lofty expectations for their pastor. Some of those interviewed felt pressures from local church leaders, but when a majority of pastors talked about their issue, many of the stories they told were about the harsh actions of their own church eldership.

It would then be concluded that pastoral echelons of the church should change their assumptions about how to get or offer assistance in their times of need. Congregational aspects of churches must change how they view their pastor. They should look at how God is growing the church through the pastor's gifted leadership, and come alongside parent-pastors to support them in the midst of familial struggle.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDING A SOLUTION: FIVE STRENGTHS OF COPING

While researching this project, one consistent input from others for overcoming faithless children was to either correct the child's behavior or correct the parent's behavior. This is an appropriate solution to issues of rebellious children, but for parent-pastors in crisis, behavior modification is more than simple adjustments. Many publications acknowledge the hurt and pain of parents, but offer little advice to assist them in coping with personal issues resulting from their child's behavior. No matter how conservative parents become, faithless children always find a means to fulfill their wayward desires. The damage this causes requires one to develop coping skills for personal issues as well as provide support to other hurting family members. Without encouragement from others, parent-pastors have a difficult time developing family dynamics of unity essential to moving through this period in their lives.<sup>1</sup>

Each person experiences crisis at an individual level, and therefore treatment for one may not be an applicable treatment for others. It is vitally important that pastors, therapists, or support persons understand an individual's crisis, and not make generalized assumptions of experiences and treatment methods. No matter where needs lay, the goal of encouraging parent-pastors in crisis is to unify them with family and friends by giving them realistic strengthening techniques.

Finding encouragement when dealing with faithless children can be a lonely task but one that should not be addressed alone. Research evidenced strong desires for support, as well as giving support. In order to use crises as opportunities for growth parent-pastors have to find and utilize support networks that understand the unique situations they face.

---

<sup>1</sup> Jack Balswick and Judith Balswick, *The Family: A Christian Perspective on the Contemporary Home* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 47.

The five strengthening techniques listed below culminate the research conducted. These general guidelines develop parent-pastors' understanding of how to build strength in areas that might cause distress. Implementing strengthening techniques will assist in developing coping skills that help overcome various crises. Therefore, this chapter represents overarching principles for strengthening techniques that have helped others reach peace in the midst of their situation.

### **Principle 1: Spiritual Strength**

Spiritual encouragement serves as the primary source of revitalization in a parent-pastor's life. Normally, pastors are focused on spiritual aspects of others' lives through their ministries, and spend time in personal prayer and devotion. When spiritual coping skills are interrupted by faithless children parent-pastors are easily discouraged spiritually. Many times, prayer, devotion, and other recommended spiritual avenues used as a source of comfort become cliché. When prayers are not answered, it is easy to question whether spiritual devotion is worth the effort.

In order for someone to be spiritually encouraged in the midst of family crisis, he or she has to take a step back and refocus his or her priorities. Understanding the effects of spiritual differentiation and a solid prayer life can change views towards spiritual decline in a parent-pastor's life. It is this author's belief that parent-pastors in crisis need to be instructed on how to have a fulfilling spiritual life within their own crisis, as much as they stress the same importance in others' spiritual lives.

### **Spiritual Differentiation**

The foundational aspect to creating peace of mind in any crisis is developing spiritual differentiation within one's support network.<sup>2</sup> Spiritual differentiation allows people to unite

---

<sup>2</sup> Balswick and Balswick, *The Family*, 149.

spiritually while maintaining their personal relationship with God. It serves as a balance between corporate and individual spirituality. As faithful lifestyles grow individually, communication with others regarding God's involvement in their lives becomes the essential factor for integrated spiritual support. When they begin to feel comfortable sharing God's empowered triumphs and setbacks, spiritual support networks can celebrate with, or support one another's emotional needs.

Key to fostering spiritual differentiation is balanced development of individual and collective spiritual practices. If spiritual support networks hyper-focus on supporting each other's spiritual wellbeing they display characteristics of spiritual enmeshment.<sup>3</sup> When groups become spiritually enmeshed, they are bonded through a common spirituality at the cost of individual spiritual relationships. As a result, one person's spiritual crisis could collapse the entire network's spirituality.

Most groups' function on the other extreme, instead of being co-dependent on other's faith, they experience spiritual disengagement.<sup>4</sup> When this happens, either individuals focus on their personal spiritual relationship, or they completely walk away from their faith. This decreases a family's ability to support each other and draw on spiritual resources that can enrich their experiences with God. Therefore, the primary way to overcome spiritual crisis is to find spiritual balance on an individual and familial level.

True balance of spiritual well-being is for one to have a personal relationship with God, and people in their life who allow for support and accountability when needed. Personal relationship comes through practices that bring comfort and help parent-pastors draw closer to

---

<sup>3</sup> Balswick and Balswick, *The Family*, 149.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

God. When parent-pastors have confidence in their balanced spiritual life, they are able to regain hope in God's power over their situation.

### Prayer

Through the interview process pastors with faithful children desired to pray with and for those who have faithless children. In the same respect, pastors with faithless children felt spiritually discouraged and wanted someone to pray with them, without fear of retribution. Both parties wanted individual and corporate prayer, which can be paramount in developing a positive outlook on one's ability to cope with stressful situations.

As discussed, corporate spiritual relationships enhance individual spiritual relationships. Therefore, it is essential for individuals to have a personal relationship with God. Relationship comes from two main sources, reading scripture and prayer. Spiritual growth takes place as one reads and applies the Bible to their life. Open communication with God is the fundamental aspect to dealing with crisis in one's life.<sup>5</sup> When focusing on prayer life, it is not only imperative the person talks to God as most prayers are, but to talk *with* God. The difference is not in the words spoken to God, but the heart *listening* to God.<sup>6</sup> When pastoral families are discouraged, they find it easy to say a quick prayer, but more difficult to listen for God's direction and answers. The prayer life of a person in crisis is immensely strengthened when, after asking, "Why is this happening?" they stop to hear the answer.

Prayer has unique characteristics that separate it from other faith practices. People around the world pray to, and for many things, and often lay their hope in empty rituals. Christians who pray can have both hope and confidence in a fulfilling practice to God who hears and answers.

---

<sup>5</sup> Jeff Lucas, *Will your Prodigal Come Home* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 88.

<sup>6</sup> Alice Smith, *Spiritual Intimacy with God: Moving Joyfully into the Deeper Life* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 2008), 87.

Christ describes prayer's characteristics in the Lord's Prayer,<sup>7</sup> but in the midst of crisis, three unique characteristics stand out.<sup>8</sup> Praying from the heart, understanding God's resources, and desires for good are essential to praying for God's glory over tribulation.

In a time when it is easier to do works for God than develop a heartfelt relationship with God, parent-pastors of faithless children disclosed an "autopilot" feeling towards life.<sup>9</sup> Parent-pastors in crisis face many issues and often pour their hearts out to fixing issues with a wayward child. God calls everyone to draw near to him with a sincere heart because He has promised to be faithful.<sup>10</sup> When parent-pastors pour out their hearts to God, he is faithful to hear their cries, prayers, and petitions. The outpouring of one's emotions to God acknowledges the surrender of the situation and dependence on God's, not the world's, resources.

Having confidence in God's resources gives one opportunity to surrender as well. It is easy for parents to hear and see the limited resources society has to offer. What a Christian household might define as faithless, inappropriate behavior might not be defined as delinquent behavior to society. One cannot call law enforcement because their 18-year-old child is having pre-marital sex or cohabitating. This displays societal limits to resources in getting support for wayward behavior. When one realizes that society is limited and God is unlimited, they gain confidence in seeking what cannot immeasurably be asked for or imagined from the one who can give it.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 6:9-13.

<sup>8</sup> Charles Stanley, "Principles for Effective Prayer," *In Touch Ministries*, accessed June 26, 2014.

<sup>9</sup> Information disclosed from asking the question "What did you experience as a result of your wayward child's behavior?"

<sup>10</sup> Hebrews 10:22, 23.

<sup>11</sup> Ephesians 3:16-21.

It was established that parent-pastors desire the best for their children, and want to provide for them in every aspect of life. Just because a child is misbehaving, does not mean the child no longer deserves their parent's best. Parents of delinquents desire for good in the lives of their children, regardless of how much stress it might cause. In the same respect, God does not desire for evil in the life of a child either. His interests in faithless children cause Him to leave the entire flock and search for the one.<sup>12</sup> Confidence that God will constantly search for one's lost child gives hope to parent-pastors because they know God is still working in everyone's life despite family crisis. Since God desires people in pain to surrender and pour their hearts out to Him, when it happens, the Holy Spirit gives peace in stressful situations.

Praying "good" for people does not mean it is inappropriate to pray for God's discipline on their faithless children. While it might not seem like "good" at the time, part of surrender is allowing God to give wisdom in disciplinary processes, but also allowing God to discipline their child. It might not be pleasant at the time it happens, but it can produce a "harvest of righteousness and peace."<sup>13</sup> While some might feel ashamed to ask God's discipline to fall on their child, it might be the only resource available in the midst of a sinful lifestyle.

Praying with persistence is important in prayerful processes. Jesus instructs his disciples in the "Parable of the Persistent Widow" that "they should always pray and not give up."<sup>14</sup> Persistent prayer does not call God to give oil to the squeakiest wheel, but allows God to see one's consistent heart for issues. When parent-pastors do not feel like God is answering their prayers, it is easy for them to stop praying. When this happens, they are giving up on God, or their child, or even themselves. Those who feel like God is not working through their prayers

---

<sup>12</sup> Luke 15:3-7.

<sup>13</sup> Hebrews 12:10-11.

<sup>14</sup> Luke 18:1-8.



might not be able to see what He is doing in their faithless child's heart when no one else is looking. For Franklin Graham it was a phone call, for Abraham Piper, it was a scripture verse, for the faithless child, God's boundless resources are being used to search and bring them back to His glory.

One's spirituality is very intimate, even to the point that people feel more comfortable sharing their emotions than their spiritual relationships. Spiritual encouragement comes to those who seek God and surrender their trials and worries to him. Parent pastors disclosed their own crisis of faith, but everyone is assured that when they cry out to God, He delivers them.<sup>15</sup>

### **Principle 2: Marital Strength**

The interview process also disclosed a great deal of marital disunion.<sup>16</sup> It was discovered that couples disagreed on parenting style and experienced alternating stress levels from their child's behavior. Some felt their spouse was too close to the situation to entrust with their emotions, and created disunity from lack of communicating emotion and circumstance. All these factors culminated one overarching issue; lack of marital unity.

People become confused, thinking lack of unity in one area of marriage automatically results in complete marital disunion. It is important for parents in crisis to understand that couples are not facing weak marriages; they are facing weakness in some areas of their marriage. Relationships become so overwhelmed by weak areas in marriage; they fail to capitalize on marital strong suites. When someone wants to build leg muscles, they do not work out their arms. In the same respect, parent-pastors do not need to work on all areas of marriage, they need to address weaknesses.

---

<sup>15</sup> Psalm 107:28-30.

<sup>16</sup> Information disclosed from asking the question "What did you experience as a result of your wayward child's behavior?" and "What did you hope for in light of your wayward child's behavior?"

When couples address marital weakness, they capitalize on the strong areas as they focus on strengthening the weaker ones. Relationships will always face opposition, but a couples' unified tolerance level determines how much they can endure together. The closer a couple is the more stress they can handle because they are able to carry weight together.

When parents understand how to carry life's weight together, they become a parenting team. This team creates systems of checks and balances that will hold faithless children accountable for their behavior. Parents who are not unified cannot expect to lead their children in unity. Becoming a parenting team does not mean they will always agree on "style," but they work together to accomplish a singular goal.

### Carrying the Weight

Marriage celebrates the unique qualities of individuals coming together to form one flesh and one family.<sup>17</sup> Creating an environment of marital bliss is not always developing a perfect life with no issues or obstacles. When couples develop marital unity, it takes work to understand concepts of oneness in a relationship. Additionally, unity is found in the completeness of the marriage relationship.

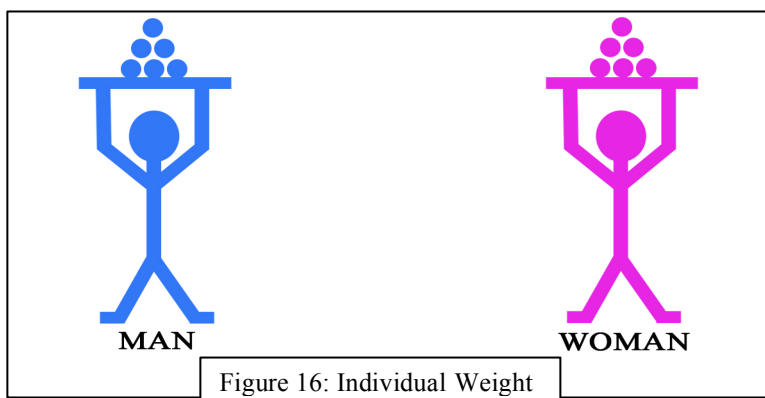
Each member in a relationship has individual stressors that cause him or her to feel life's weight on their shoulders. In addition to individual stressors, couples have united stressors that add additional needs to balance life events. Depending on how close couples are will also depend on the amount of stress their relationship can hold before all the weight comes tumbling down. Understanding the delicate distribution of relationship stressors will help couples withstand the heaviest weights of relationship strife in family and marriage relationships.

---

<sup>17</sup> Genesis 2:24.

## Carrying Individual Weight

During the interview process for this research study, parent-pastors admitted to withholding information from their spouse because they did not want to stress them or cause them to carry additional weight.<sup>18</sup> When couples are simply carrying individual weight, they are neglecting life's weight in the relationship. Each member divides weight as “theirs and mine,” causing a separation between marital cooperation.



19

While it is simple to carry individual weight because there is no question about who is responsible for different actions in the marriage, it is nearly impossible to develop a unified marriage relationship because it can also designate who is to blame for mistakes. Couples cannot manage hectic schedules, parenting, financial obligations, and other life stressors that should be addressed as a team by simply choosing whose role or responsibility it might be to take on assigned burdens in the relationship.

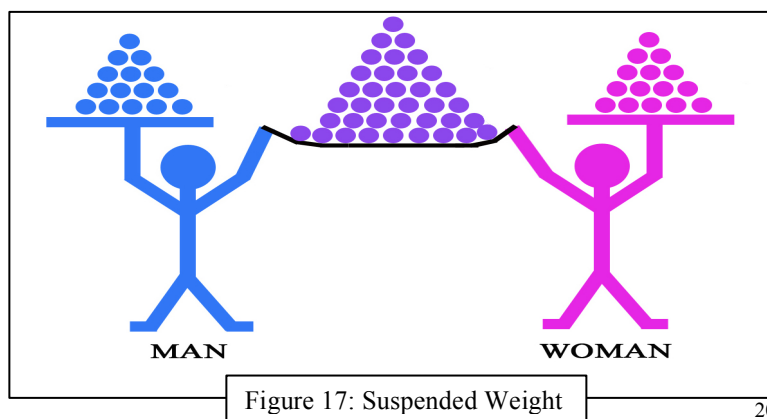
<sup>18</sup> Information disclosed from asking the question “How did you get through difficult situations with your wayward child?”

<sup>19</sup> Individual weight is easy to carry, but does not unite a couple in their efforts to overcome crisis.

### Suspending the Weight vs. Carrying Together

While couples try to maintain their individual weight and share marital responsibilities, they bypass the concept of oneness in marriage, and attempt to handle their own weight and life's weight with divided thought processes. Couples who do this generally hold secrets they do not want their spouse discovering. When couples have disunion in marriages and attempt to balance relationship weight and individual weight together, the “platform” of marriage begins to flex.

Suspending life's weight in relationships is difficult. Each member of the relationship is trying to “suspend” relationship weight with little to no support from the other person. Because there is no center support system, the platform is weakened.

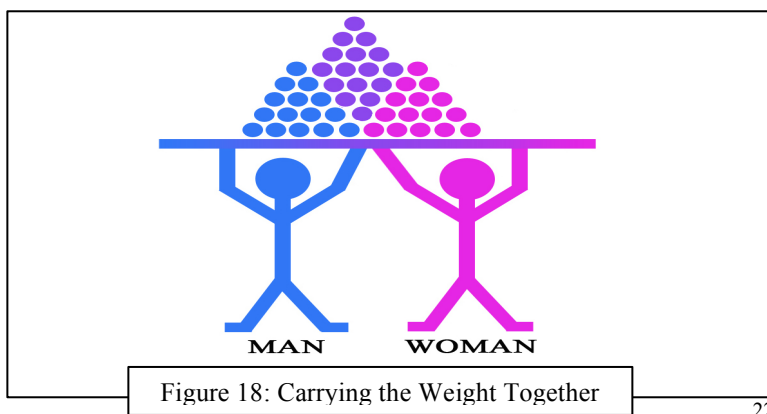


The “platform” begins to flex when more weight is added. Ultimately, individual and family systems break down and eventually everything falls apart. Instead of evaluating the relationship early and developing coping skills to handle weak areas in the marriage, couples choose to avoid help and eventually fall apart. When this happens, couples must decide to pick

<sup>20</sup> Suspending life's weight while balancing individual weight continues to separate couples and weakens the platform used to hold weight.

up what pieces they can, and try to rebuild by managing the weight together, or end the relationship in divorce.

It might seem very difficult to pick up the pieces because so much damage has been done in the relationship, but marriages can recover from a multitude of transgressions that seem impossible to recover. Many times couples choose to walk away from issues and do not desire to rebuild as one unified front, which is demonstrated by statistical data on divorce.<sup>21</sup> The difficult task of rebuilding marriage relationships is found in one's understanding of carrying life's weight together.



22

When a couple works together to suspend both relationship and individual weight, they have to be close to each other. Their closeness does not allow for flex, but co-support of life's stressors. Husbands and wives must be able to “expect stability and consistency from each other.”<sup>23</sup> Stability and consistency is not one's ability to carry their share of the load, but to have

<sup>21</sup> Ron Deal and David Olson, *The Remarriage Checkup: Tools to Help Your Marriage Last A Lifetime* (Bloomington: Bethany House Publishers, 2011), 40.

<sup>22</sup> A couple that is able to carry the weight together shares in responsibilities to each other's individual weight, and collective weight.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

an understanding of when to share the load, and when to place a greater amount load on them because of varying emotional stressors members in the relationship are experiencing.

Balancing weight and developing strength in unity of marriage is key to overcoming crisis caused by faithless children. Parent-pastors who try to carry issues without sharing them with their spouse fail to achieve oneness in marriage. God called couples to become one flesh, and in this author's opinion the only way to become one flesh is to become one emotionally as well. When couples internalize emotions, they are preserving individuality in marriage.

### How to Unite

Since marriage is blending two unique cultures and habits in unity, it can be like fitting mismatched items together. With a little modification, many mismatched items will fit together. In some cases, neither person wants to make modifications necessary to make issues work. When couples are able to adjust, unity is achievable. Four areas that help couples unite are through God, language, communication, and passion. Just as man was created with three parts, relationships must appeal to the inherit nature of God's creation.<sup>24</sup>

Marital unity's foundation is based in spiritual relationship. Experiencing God's power through spiritual intimacy is the bonding agent that keeps couples together. Spiritual intimacy is seeking "to restore to us as a couple what was lost at the fall."<sup>25</sup> This means couples must confront every aspect of their lives including shameful actions. When couples experience God, they experience oneness because there are no secrets to what spiritual battles or feelings either person might be experiencing. In order to restore one's marriage to the holiness God intended,

---

<sup>24</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:23; Hebrews 4:12; 1 Corinthians 3:14; and 1 Corinthians 14:14.

<sup>25</sup> David Stoop and Jan Stoop, *The Complete Marriage Book: Collected Wisdom from Leading Marriage Experts* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 2002), 306.

they must institute spiritual practices such as worship, prayer, confession, and devotionals in their lives together.

Gary Chapman has popularized *The Five Love Languages*; a concept that asserts the importance of knowing how couples show love to each other.<sup>26</sup> Those who learn to speak their spouse's language will naturally unite. Knowing what that language is serves a greater purpose. In the midst of crisis, husbands and wives must know they are loved by one another. Creating an environment that makes an effort to speak a spouse's language diffuses feelings of neglect and loneliness, ultimately clearing pathways to further communication and intimacy.

Verbal communication is the only way people might know what is going on with another. Even babies communicate verbally through cries and whines. Parents know what different cries mean because they have made a connection with their child. Verbal communication allows couples opportunities to share emotion, experiences, failures, and successes. Effective communication occurs when couples turn toward, rather than away from each other.<sup>27</sup> The largest dysfunction to communication is hearing, but not listening to the other person's needs. Turning toward one's partner means they stop other activities and take time to engage in communication with their spouse. Open channels of verbal communication display both partners' concern for addressing issues surrounding the relationship. It is impossible to know what is going on in a relationship if emotions and experiences are not verbally expressed.

Crisis can remove desires for physical passion quickly in marriage relationships. If one person finds passion through emotional enrichment, stressors caused by crisis can easily replace physically passionate desires. In the midst of stress, it is important for couples to remember that

---

<sup>26</sup> Gary Chapman, *The 5 Love Languages: The Secret to Love that Lasts* (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 2010), 15.

<sup>27</sup> John M. Gottman, *The Marriage Clinic: A Scientifically Based Marital Therapy* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 163, 164.

sexual intercourse in marriage is a powerful form of non-verbal communication. Sex is “an incredibly intimate form of communication, enabling us to say things that our words cannot about our spiritual oneness.”<sup>28</sup> Overcoming emotional stress to enjoy physical passion might be difficult in emotionally driven situations, but is an essential aspect for couples to physically express oneness, and often covers gaps where verbal communication falls short.

Speaking one another’s languages spiritually, verbally, and physically is paramount to uniting marriages. When parent-pastors face marital crisis, it is usually because they have a communication breakdown in one of the three areas listed above. Overcoming any crisis alone leaves husbands or wives out of a valuable support role in God’s intended marriage relationship.

### Becoming a Parenting Team

Parent-pastors who are not united with their spouse cannot expect to become an effective parenting team. Some parent-pastors felt their children took pride in disrupting the parental team. These parents noticed that when their faithless child felt parents were divided, they could take greater advantage of situations. Parents felt when they were focused on arguments; they were not focused on actual issues regarding their child’s misbehavior. Becoming a parenting team means parents work together to accomplish a goal of being caretakers for their children. The role of caretaker includes three main functions: guardian, manager, and source.<sup>29</sup>

Parent-pastors who feel they have not been successful caretakers because their children are not living the life principles they taught must understand the role of a caretaker versus master. Parents who are caretakers develop principles that enhance a child’s ability to live. On the other hand, a master forces actions that demean children and cause them to take advantage of

---

<sup>28</sup> Stoop and Stoop, *The Complete Marriage Book*, 120.

<sup>29</sup> Henry Cloud and John Townsend, *Boundaries with Kids: How Healthy Choices Grow Healthy Children* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 18.



freedom when chances arise. Parent-pastors who serve as part of a parenting team do not lord over their children, but teach them principles to which they might or might not adapt.

Children who choose not to adapt the principles taught during upbringing are not synonymous with parents who never taught them. Mothers and fathers who work together to teach inherent principles that encourage children to be productive members of society are what make an effective parenting team. By doing this parents who have provided a safe environment for their child to learn and gain wisdom have been good guardians.<sup>30</sup> While discipline is difficult, parents who have been consistent when giving discipline and ensured appropriate growth takes place have been successful managers.<sup>31</sup> Finally, while children think there is something better to life, those who have been a source of good things for their children, allowing them to grow in independence, have served as outstanding caretakers for their household.<sup>32</sup>

Marital unity is a collective effort gleaned in many concepts. Despite the parent-pastors who felt they should handle issues on their own, or hide issues to relieve undue spousal stress, parenting faithless children cannot happen without marital unification. Unity happens when individual and relational weight is carried together. As well, couples must unite in spiritual, emotional, and physical intimacy; all of which is based in solid verbal and non-verbal communication. Finally, parenting is a team effort designed to be caretakers of children until they are old enough to make decisions for themselves. Most of all, effective parenting is found in how well parent-pastors and spouses cared for their children, not in how well their child incorporated principles in their independent character.

---

<sup>30</sup> Cloud and Townsend, *Boundaries with Kids*, 19.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 20.

### Principle 3: Emotional Strength

According to interviews, parent-pastors suppressed their emotions when dealing with faithless children. Many pastors felt by exposing their actual feelings to their children, they would be showing weakness that could be taken advantage of in crisis situations. Parent-pastors felt abandoned by their children when they rejected Christian developmental principles. Contradictory to their feelings, parent-pastors buried these feelings, causing multiple emotional outbursts and the inappropriate handling of disciplinary situations.

When parent-pastors experience a lasting bond with their children, emotional unity and attachment takes place. Those who feel rejected by their child will have an adverse emotional reaction to their child's repudiation. Feelings like anger, anxiety, and guilt are primary emotional reactions for parents trying to cope with attachment issues.<sup>33</sup> Most commonly, emotional affects from major family changes are based in detachment issues parent-pastors experience when wayward children break away from norms created while growing up.

Hughes defines attachment as the relationship a child has with their parent, and not relationships parents have with their child.<sup>34</sup> This author believes attachment is a mutual bond between both, and when involuntarily broken, can be equally damaging. Parents make their homes a safe place for children to return when they suffer major crisis, and are vested emotionally in children from a very young age. In the story of the prodigal son, the father remained the safe place and when life became overwhelming, the child returned. Just as parents provide a safe haven for children, *they* must also find places to feel safe. The challenge is to find safety in a home that has been disrupted by their faithless child.

---

<sup>33</sup> Tim Clinton and Gary Sibcy, *Attachments: Why You Love, Feel, and Act the Way You Do* (Nashville: Integrity Publishers, 2002), 50.

<sup>34</sup> Daniel Hughes, *Attachment-Focused Family Therapy* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009), 25.

When families face an emotional crisis, it is imperative that parent-pastors cater to familial needs. Being able to quickly defuse emotional crises as well as finding emotional strength will help them overcome issues. Defusing emotional crises will allow parent-pastors to evaluate situations with an objective point of view, and not seek irrational measures to take care of situations. Likewise, a positive perspective on emotional strength is important. This understanding empowers parent-pastors to share emotions in a healthy manner as a show of strength instead of weakness. Both aspects will encourage parents to overcome situations for effective communication of their concerns with faithless children.

### Strength in Emotion

Searching and sharing root emotions will help parent-pastors understand why they react in certain ways to situations. Emotional coping is not a deterrent from feeling emotions, or an attempt to discredit the emotional stress one has. Expressing emotion is an essential aspect to children understanding how severely their actions are affecting their family. Parent-pastors who hide their emotions fail to truthfully represent themselves. When transgressors see the emotional pain they have caused others, it should produce feelings of remorse. When parent-pastors feel it is necessary to appear strong in every situation, children miss a vital part of encouraging remorse.

A common reaction to crisis is anger. Parents easily get upset and display bouts of anger that can appear to show strength and force. Studies show that “anger helps conceal feelings of fear, inadequacy, and self-doubt by turning them into external conflict. It can also keep at bay states of depression, and emotional pain.”<sup>35</sup> When parent-pastors are angry, they are not

---

<sup>35</sup> Leon F. Seltzer, “The Paradox of Anger: Strength or Weakness,” *Psychology Today*, accessed July 1, 2014.

displaying strength; they are masking emotional pain and personal fears. Those who want to become strong have to make emotional changes that go against anger, and begin expressing their true emotions of hurt, dissatisfaction, or feelings of rejection. At that point, they are no longer masking issues, but coming to terms with their emotional pain.

The most productive way to overcome anger is to avoid feeling an obligation of retaliation when faced with issues. Many outbursts are filed with hurtful emotions because someone defied a parent's position of authority. When parent-pastors want to avoid anger, they should display primary qualities such as "patience, tolerance, forbearance, fortitude, acceptance, and forgiveness."<sup>36</sup> These are not only virtues, but also "strengths, signifying the kind of self-control requisite to discovering inner peace, tranquility, and sense of well-being."<sup>37</sup>

Those who compare the above list of suggested secular qualities to overcoming anger with scriptural fruits of the Spirit<sup>38</sup> might find a great deal of similarity. Both secular psychology and biblical fruits are close in comparison. When parent-pastors who have the Holy Spirit living in them depend on their spiritual strength to overcome crisis, they develop both secular qualities and spiritual fruits that cause them to depend on God's wisdom versus their own emotion. This thought directly connects a need for strong spiritual foundations as a powerful antidote to emotional distress.

Using the Holy Spirit as a guide in crisis does not always happen. As Paul describes in Romans, "we know the law is spiritual, but I am made out of flesh, sold into sin's power."<sup>39</sup> Through emotional struggles, one battles between fleshly emotional reactions and spiritual Godly

---

<sup>36</sup> Seltzer, "The Paradox of Anger: Strength or Weakness."

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Galatians 5:22, 23.

<sup>39</sup> Romans 7:14.

desires. In crisis, it is easy to allow fleshly emotional reactions overcome desires of showing God's love to misbehaved children. Taking time to evaluate emotions before reacting is essential to defusing emotional crisis.

### Six Steps to Defusing Emotional Crisis

It is healthy and ideal to ensure parent-pastors create a safe place in the home for their families to share emotional crisis. This will create an atmosphere of unity and support when crisis presents itself.<sup>40</sup> When emotional crisis is suppressed among household members, there is no release and tensions mount. Using a six-step process to defuse emotional crisis can assist those facing turmoil by helping them come to terms with their emotions. This helps them reach a goal of building and displaying true emotional strength in stressful situations.<sup>41</sup>

First, primary feelings must be identified.<sup>42</sup> Multiple emotions affect parent-pastors and their families, but anger generally manifests itself as the primary feeling that causes a chain reaction to all other feelings. For example, parent-pastors might become easily irritated or angry with congregants and family members because they are personally dealing with feelings of guilt. Anger serves as a visible emotion, but is not their primary emotion in this case. Feelings of guilt for perceived notions they have failed at raising their faithless child is a hidden emotion that is displayed through anger. Parent-pastors must be willing to explore and share their emotions beyond emotional reaction. They must be willing to ask why reactions and attitudes happen when they do, and what caused it. This helps them identify primary feelings and not simply address surface emotions they might be experiencing.

---

<sup>40</sup> Clinton and Sibcy, *Attachments*, 194.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

Second, pastors need to connect primary emotions with triggering situations.<sup>43</sup> Faithless children are not sources of emotional strife, the child's actions are. Some parents are consumed with connecting emotions to children and not actions. When this happens parents tend to avoid confrontation by ignoring both issues and their children. It is important for parent-pastors to realize presenting emotions are based in children's behavior. For example, if anger comes from children becoming oppositional, children are not the issue, oppositional behavior is. This behavior is accounted for, but at the same time, children must be encouraged with positivity. Therefore, as parent-pastors evaluate their emotional impact from wayward children, they must appropriately connect crisis to specific actions and not specific people. Parents must be confident in value systems ingrained in faithless children, and realize they have a good child, but their good child can make a lot of bad decisions.

Knowing good children will make bad decisions assists in the next step, which is to target negative thinking.<sup>44</sup> Parent-pastors must be keenly aware of their thoughts in various situations. Irrational thought processes trigger anxiety, panic attacks, and anger. If parent-pastors are able to cognitively process their thoughts and triggers for negative emotional reactions, they will be able to override negative emotions. Once triggers are realized, one can apply principles that fill their minds with truth, righteousness, love, and whatever is admirable.<sup>45</sup> These things will help parent-pastors overcome specific instances of stress through dependence in their faith.

Complimentary to understanding issues, finding root causes, and changing thought patterns, parent-pastors are empowered to behave differently.<sup>46</sup> This does not mean one discards

---

<sup>43</sup> Clinton and Sibcy, *Attachments*, 209.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 210.

<sup>45</sup> Philippians 4:8.

<sup>46</sup> Clinton and Sibcy, *Attachments*, 211.

the true emotional impacts they might experience, but they initiate positive behavior until it becomes an emotional habit. When parent-pastors institute positive behaviors, positivity overcomes crisis events and issues they emotionally face. Emotional boundaries are also conquered because conscious actions reflect actual feelings, not angry outbursts masking suppressed emotional decline. Behaving differently liberates people from suppression because they must come to terms with emotions and issues in order to act differently.

Building problem solving scenarios is the fifth step to overcoming emotional issues.<sup>47</sup> There is no doubt, overarching stressors for parent-pastors is behavioral issues with a faithless child, but disposing of faithless children cannot be the primary solution to problems. Each crisis must be addressed with specificity that warrants achievable goals within a parent's resources and ability. In order to achieve an ultimate goal of family unity, parental crisis needs to be solved with realistic short-term goals. These desired changes could be as simple as coming to terms with a wayward child's behavior or overcoming denial.

When parent-pastors know they have to face an issue with their child, the most productive way to institute the change is through an "if, then" thought processes. Focus on the problem, "if I feel sad, then I will call my friend." As one develops a game plan to overcoming their hurt, they begin to feel comfortable because there is a cognitive action to a distressful situation. This helps prevent overreaction to situations and develops a sense of hope because plans are in place for parents to address their own emotional strife. Once parental emotional strife is addressed, they are able to handle issues with their children in a calm manner.

---

<sup>47</sup> Clinton and Sibcy, *Attachments*, 213.

The final step for parent-pastors in emotional crisis is to plug into healthy relationships.<sup>48</sup> A healthy relationship means that parents in crisis feel they are being supported through issues without repercussion. Surrounding one's self with people or social groups can lead to healthy relationships. Depending on how severe a parent's crisis is, social interaction can also lead to social crisis. If one develops social anxieties because of others' misperceptions, they must address their anxiety issues before fostering social respite.

#### **Principle 4: Social Strength**

A majority of pastors revealed the desire to have an encourager or confidant with whom they could share their crisis.<sup>49</sup> As well, they did not feel their spouse would fulfill this role well enough for them. Developing good social strength not only includes overcoming social anxieties, but finding a quality confidant. When one finds someone they can confide in, appropriate boundaries must be maintained when sharing stressors.

Strong relationships where one is willing to take risks in order to grow are ideal. In risk-taking relationships parent-pastors are not afraid to share their struggles with someone. Though family openness is important, relationships generated outside the home should foster an environment that does not make major impacts on other family members. People should not confide in others of opposite gender, unless they are professional counselors, nor should they speak negatively about other family members to endorse their perspective as superior. Close friends, pastors, and extended family are avenues for forming healthy relationships. It is imperative that parent-pastors do not consider everyone they meet as a confidant. In the midst of their crisis, it is common for people to experience release with good friends, and sometimes seek

---

<sup>48</sup> Clinton and Sibey, *Attachments*, 215.

<sup>49</sup> Information disclosed from asking the question "What were your hopes for support in crisis situations?"



the same release as they talk with other people. Therefore, parent-pastors overwhelmed by their child's behavior must only confide in a select few quality friends as they face problems.

### Finding a Confidant

It is difficult to find someone outside the household one can place ultimate trust in. Many parent-pastors interviewed talked about trust issues because of feedback they received from others.<sup>50</sup> This hesitation caused them to suppress desires for close relationships despite their desperate desire to talk with someone about situations. As well, pastors confided in those who they felt appeared trustworthy, and were betrayed. Discussions revealed that many parent-pastors taught their congregations about accountability partners and confidants, but never extended their personal relationships past spiritual accountability.

The establishment of accountability is given in Scripture as responsibility to restore people “with a gentle spirit, watching out for yourselves so you also won’t be tempted.”<sup>51</sup> Those looking for confidants and encouragers should be looking for people with gentle spirits. It is easy to be tempted by others who seem to have lives that are more enjoyable. This author counsels many people who are persuaded into sinful desires by some of their closest friends as a way to cope with crisis. When parent-pastors are searching for someone they can be accountable to, or share their emotions with, seven characteristics define who can fulfill the role of friend, mentor, and confidant.<sup>52</sup>

First, parents want to see a godly person who can display Holy Spirit-based wisdom. Godly confidants will avoid personal opinion, which is often based in emotion, and take time to

---

<sup>50</sup> Information disclosed from asking the question “What did you experience as a result of your child’s behavior?” and “What impact did your child’s behavior have on your life vocationally and domestically?”

<sup>51</sup> Galatians 6:1.

<sup>52</sup> Charles Stanley, “A Partner for Accountability,” *The Christian Post*, September 2012, accessed July 1, 2014.

seek God's wisdom when giving advice. Personal opinion is based on knowledge and secular worldview. Advice given from a secular viewpoint can stray people from focusing on God's solutions. Many times the world suggests easily addictive behaviors to abate the stress of a crisis. These behaviors might cause people to forget about situations temporarily, but do nothing to fix them. A confidant who bases their advice and standard for living in God's wisdom will always search for answers through prayer or scripture. While secular society believes this represents Christian cliché, wisdom-based advice is usually the only option that offers lasting solutions. Finding a Godly person to confide in helps parent-pastors keep their eyes focused on steadfast spiritual dependence as opposed to continual focus on worldly coping strategies.

The second characteristic is to be trustworthy. When parent-pastors are looking for confidants, they want to know family secrets are not going to be told to others. For some confidants, they want to lift other's crisis in corporate prayer, or simply use prayer as an excuse to tell everyone's business. Even in the innocent act of announcing prayer requests with names and situations, those who were thought to be trustworthy end up slandering those who trusted them. Trustworthy people are those who can keep a secret regardless of the environment.<sup>53</sup> It is difficult for some to have knowledge of a hurting brother or sister's crisis, finding someone who will hold that knowledge with love and compassion for their accountability partner's continued emotional safety is just as difficult. Parent-pastors must find someone who not only stays quiet in public forums, but lays aside desires to share in prayer forums, understanding the best intentions are those that know being confided in is a sacred trust not to be broken.<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>53</sup> Proverbs 11:13.

<sup>54</sup> This author is not implying that issues should not be prayed for, but can be given as an "unspoken," or lifted in times of personal reflection and meditation. The only time this confidentiality should be broken is when someone is going to, or have, hurt themselves or others. At that time confidants should inform appropriate resources of the intent.

One characteristic that sets apart friends from others is their ability to allow one to be themselves. An accepting person will befriend another regardless of struggles, accomplishments, or failures. When one accepts others, they are not only becoming a good companion, but also bringing praise to God.<sup>55</sup> The acceptance of parent-pastors with faithless children takes a true friend and confidant. This person is focused on being there no matter what happens to support, and does not withhold their friendship based on perfection but extends a deeper relationships based on imperfection. This brings praise because it reflects God's acceptance of others without partiality.<sup>56</sup>

The fourth characteristic to look for is courage. They do not have to be daring and fear nothing, but someone who does not fear telling the truth, even when it might hurt. A courageous confidant will tell parent-pastors what they need to hear in order to keep them out of trouble. They do not fear others because they know "there is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known."<sup>57</sup> Considering that everything will come out eventually, courageous confidants advise through Godliness in order to sharpen parent-pastors,<sup>58</sup> ensuring they do not stray from their ministerial calling.

The next quality is to have relationship with a forgiving person. While no one is perfect, forgiveness understands both people in a relationship will make mistakes and accepts that fault. This characteristic allows "the offender be forgiven and the relationship be reconciled."<sup>59</sup> Forgiveness reflects Christ to parent-pastors who are hurting by showing how God forgives

---

<sup>55</sup> Romans 15:7.

<sup>56</sup> Romans 2:11.

<sup>57</sup> Matthew 10:26-28.

<sup>58</sup> Proverbs 27:17.

<sup>59</sup> Gary Chapman and Jennifer Thomas, *The Five Languages of Apology: How to Experience Healing in All Your Relationships* (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 2006), 137.

them.<sup>60</sup> Many who were interviewed felt a lot of regret and guilt for their child's behavior, and they need a confidant who will not simply be forgiving, but guide them to reconciliation with their own emotions.

The final two characteristics one should look for in a confidant are easily blended. Edification and encouragement almost go hand in hand when looking for the right person. A popular answer for those interviewed was someone who would encourage them through difficult situations.<sup>61</sup> Someone who is edifying is not overly critical and does not make others feel worthless. They think about things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and admirable in situations and bring it to the forefront of the relationship.<sup>62</sup> By doing this, they become encouragers who take joy in building people up and not placing judgment on them. Encouragers understand the importance of living with, but also as Christ. Because of this, they are building one another up in the name of Christ.<sup>63</sup>

Parent-pastors who are able to find people with the qualities listed above will have more fulfilling relationships. Additionally, they are able to face situations with more confidence because much of their social input is from those who want to lift them up in the love of Christ. Social confidence does not come from the quantity of friends one might have in a crisis, but the quality of a few trusted agents.

### Overcoming Social Phobias

The distinction between healthy relationships and social interaction must be made, while it is good to have a few people to confide in, it is equally healthy to maintain appropriate social

---

<sup>60</sup> Ephesians 4:32.

<sup>61</sup> Information disclosed from asking the question "What were your hopes for support in crisis situations?"

<sup>62</sup> Philippians 4:8.

<sup>63</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:10,11.

relationships. In the midst of crisis, social phobias can develop when parent-pastors withdraw to suppress or hide their emotional turmoil. It is important for parent-pastors to follow three ideals for surmounting social isolation. First, understand that people will talk, but true friends will support them through issues.<sup>64</sup> Second, implement relaxation techniques to overcome anxieties.<sup>65</sup> Last, social intervention is not only about individual relationship with God, but relationship with a community of believers.<sup>66</sup>

There is no escaping the gossip of other people even though gossip is discouraged throughout the Bible.<sup>67</sup> People, some with good intention, will talk about others' misfortunes. The only way to overcome anxiety of being a target for slander is to look beyond the few who are spreading rumors, and focus on those who honestly want to help. Interviews disclosed gossip as one of the primary assumptions for parent-pastors and their colleagues. Only a minority of those with faithful children looked down on parent-pastors with faithless children. The majority wanted to help. Shifting focus from the minority and on the majority will help those with social anxieties feel comfortable in various settings. Parent-pastors can become so consumed with their own hurt that they fail to see helping agents ready and willing to assist at a moments notice. As parents cultivate relationships, they must determine how involved socially they will become in light of their current family situation.

If social phobias develop because of a faithless child's behavior, one can use relaxation techniques to subside anxieties. Breathing exercises, refocusing attention, and meditation serve

---

<sup>64</sup> Margie M. Lewis and Gregg Lewis, *The Hurting Parent: Help for Parents of Prodigals*, Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 58.

<sup>65</sup> Author Unknown, "Social Phobia; Scientists at Iowa State University Target Social Phobia," *China Weekly News*, 612, accessed December 6, 2011.

<sup>66</sup> Dan Kimball, *They Like Jesus But Not the Church: Insights from Emerging Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 91.

<sup>67</sup> Proverbs 11:13, 20:19; Romans 1:29; 1 Timothy 5:13.

as effective means of relaxation. When parent-pastors are expecting uncomfortable social encounters, they can prepare mentally and refocus their attention to positive aspects of encounters. Meditation in prayer is highly effective when refocusing attention as well. This helps parent-pastors clear their minds and focus on God's peace, grace, and mercy as well as build faith that God will protect them in every situation.

Those who parent-pastors are called to provide ministry to serve as one major population which social interactions take place. As pastors with faithless children face congregational social anxieties, they must be reminded that an individual relationship with God does not replace relationships with communities of faith. It is important for pastors to remain active in their faith communities. While it is easy to shy away from faith-based activities, other than pastoral responsibility, parent-pastors must remain approachable and socially active in order to be effective in church growth. When supportive relationships are built within communities of faith, pastors are not only getting social support, but also spiritual and emotional enhancement. This can help reduce stress and other issues that arise from the lack of social interactions.

### **Principle 5: Ministry Strength**

It is a delicate balance between family and church. God has blessed and called parent-pastors to be spiritual leaders in both arenas. The demands for care and love from either of them can create a spiritual and emotional pull on pastors that others outside ministry cannot comprehend. If autonomous spiritual leaders fail in providing care for their congregation, they are not pleased with his or her shepherding. When this happens, the flock finds another shepherd that meets their needs. As a family leader, if parent-pastors fail in providing care and leadership, the household is missing their spiritual head. Ultimately this leaves families lost in the mixture of

souls desperately searching for spiritual care from parent-pastors who are trying to balance both activities.

Ministerial and family leadership pose a quandary for pastors. It is rare to find one who says balancing domestic and vocational life is easy. When a parent-pastor's child turns from faith, elders begin questioning abilities to guide the congregation in light of a perceived failure to lead his or her own family.<sup>68</sup> The congregant's defense is simple; instead of supporting autonomous pastoral families, they use scriptures listing elder qualifications to disqualify their shepherd's service.

Through assay of 1 Tim 3:4-5 and Titus 1:6, parent-pastors can be armed with theory and theology behind this popular argument. In no way should these Scriptures be discounted in pastoral qualifications, but also must be used in appropriate context to encourage pastoral ministry. Failure to deviate from appropriate use and context of this Scripture would be failure to allow God to do His work through His called agent of ministry.

#### 1 Timothy 3:4-5

In context, Paul is giving instruction to those who want to oversee ministry, but do not have the Christian qualities and ability to guide or teach others. Paul was clarifying qualifications for overseers and deacons to ensure false teachers who maintained worldly lifestyles were not appointed in desired leadership positions.<sup>69</sup> When he gets to verse 4 and 5 he directs required qualifications towards families. It is important to understand these standards because managing

---

<sup>68</sup> Information disclosed from asking the question "What did you experience as a result of your child's behavior?"

<sup>69</sup> Gordon Fee, "1 & 2 Timothy, Titus," *Understanding the Bible Commentary Series* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1988), 75.

one's household is directly related to how they will treat the church.<sup>70</sup> It is assumed that an overseer who is not able to keep their household in order will not be able to keep the church in order.

Key to this argument is the word “obey,”<sup>71</sup> translated in Greek is the word *hypotagē*, which means “obedience, submission or subjection.”<sup>72</sup> It is a compound word consisting of *hypo* and *tassō*. *Hypo* is a preposition meaning “under in space, status, or authority.”<sup>73</sup> The word *tassō* is a verb meaning “to appoint, determine, arrange or establish.”<sup>74</sup> One can then conclude that *hypotagē* in this context requires children to fall under their parent's divinely established authority.

Divinely established authority is not the same type of authority that takes away freedom of choice as a prison guard might have authority over convicts. This authority is one that gives freedom and oversight to children who are required to obey their parents.<sup>75</sup> It demands an authority that generates respect, proper actions, and a level of curtesy that is above reproach. The reference to behavior among pastor's children is reflective of their expectations for behavior of a congregation. It would be assumed that if pastors allow their child to live in sin while doing nothing about it, pastors would bestow similar courtesies to their congregations. If that were the case, pastors who allow this behavior would not be qualified for ministry because those who believe this would not refute sin as God does, regardless of grace. It is impossible for pastors to

---

<sup>70</sup> Knute Larson, Ed. Max Anders, “1 Timothy” *Holman New Testament Commentary* (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2011), 185.

<sup>71</sup> 1 Timothy 3:4a.

<sup>72</sup> James Strong, Re. John R. Kohlenberger III and James A. Swanson, *The Strongest Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, No. 2592 (Grand Rapids, Zondervan: 2001), 1651.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., No. 5259, 1650.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., No. 5021, 1647.

<sup>75</sup> Colossians 3:1.



prevent congregants from sinning just as one cannot convert them by force. They must share the Gospel, and teach against sin allowing the Holy Spirit convict and prompt.

A majority of pastors interviewed for this study felt their child was obedient to them in church and home environments. It was when children were outside those settings they became disobedient to their parent's standards. While it can be argued that an obedient child would do what is right whether their parent was watching or not, such a standard would take away the freedom God gives His children. As children of God who promise a life of obedience to Him, all come short, and all are extended grace. For others to have an expectation that pastoral children will be perfectly obedient to an earthly father or heavenly father completely discounts a fallen world's need for Christ's redemption.

#### Titus 1:6

Between the two verses, Titus 1:6 creates the greatest amount of conflict for parent-pastors with faithless children. Many pastors are not capable of arguing the word "believe" in text. When some read this word, it can become confusing or misleading. The Greek word *pistos* as used in this passage means "faithful, trustworthy, reliable, believing: faithful."<sup>76</sup> It is used in this passage as an adjective describing a noun. In a simple word study, one can understand "believe" in one of two contexts. First, it can be used in reference to the Gospel as in the closely related word *pistis*, meaning faithfulness "referring to the Christian system of belief and lifestyle."<sup>77</sup> Secondly, it can mean belief in obedience to someone or something as in the word

---

<sup>76</sup> Strong, Re. Kohlenberger III and Swanson, *The Strongest Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, No. 4103, 1636.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 4102, 1636.

*pisteuō*, which means to “put one’s faith in, trust, with an implication that actions based on that trust may follow.”<sup>78</sup>

In English translation, it seems clear that a qualified pastor’s child should be a professed Christian. Clarity becomes blurred when one performs a word study, and raises questions as to what children have to believe. Arguments for Paul’s instruction that children must believe include belief in many different things.<sup>79</sup> Options for this instruction include the Gospel, parents, need for obedience, or church processes, none of which are clearly defined in this passage. In order to glean the correct meaning, one must look at the passage in context, then cross-reference similar verses.

When used in context and compared, “believe,” describes a child’s faithful obedience as opposed to salvation. When Paul writes both Timothy and Titus to give pastoral instruction and prevent false teachers, he is telling them an elder’s child must be obedient to his father’s instruction. A child’s obedience to their parent is evident when they follow guidelines established in their family, but obedience cannot be forced on children by making them follow Christ or remain in the faith.

Those who demand parent-pastors have children who have come to salvation insist on an unreasonable standard. Just as congregants only come to Christ through prompting of the Holy Spirit, pastors and their families do the same. Parent-pastors, just as everyone else, have a duty and responsibility to their children for sharing the message of salvation. When children become convicted of their actions, they may ultimately find Christ and are saved. Those who challenge

---

<sup>78</sup> Strong, Re. Kohlenberger III and Swanson, *The Strongest Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, No. 4100, 1636.

<sup>79</sup> Larson, “1 Timothy,” 186.

pastors on their scriptural call to ministry must evaluate their understanding of pastoral call and Spiritual Gifting.

### Pastoral Calling

When Paul wrote this passage, many people were claiming a call to ministry, some of which were not truly gifted with that spiritual ability. Paul was giving guidelines for churches to ensure they were following those who were called by God into ministry. Today, some feel that pastors who are called to ministry should have a sampling of every spiritual gift. When this author looked at advertisements for senior pastors, they first named the aforementioned Bible verses, and added additional spiritual gifts they wanted in their pastor.

Parent-pastors who are truly called to ministry will have an astounding desire to preach and share the Gospel with others.<sup>80</sup> This desire is divinely based, and backed by a family of faithful believers who have examined one's life from "call to salvation to the call to the ministry."<sup>81</sup> When a pastor, with or without children, has been evaluated for ministry, their call has been put through a test; those who should have a high level of discernment have looked into their call, and confirmed it. Others who have based one aspect of a pastor's life as justification for removal fail to examine what God has already placed on them.

While salvation is important to share with children, it cannot be demanded or forced upon them. Pastor-parents who demand salvation of their children will only create a false faith. When the opportunity arises, children will embark on their own spiritual journey searching for answers versus imposed piety. An independent spiritual journey opens children to false teaching about a compassionate god who allows them to do whatever feels right instead of what is right.

---

<sup>80</sup> Albert Mohler, "Has God Called You? Discerning the Call to Preach," *Crosswalk.com* (February 14, 2008), accessed July 6, 2014.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

Parent-pastors who struggle with weakness in any of these areas can find strength and growth as they become encouraged in God's promise. Faithless children will consistently push thresholds creating painful, and sometimes unbearable, circumstances for their families. It is important for parent-pastors to remember that strength comes from unity. Family, spouses, friends, and most importantly spiritual unity are essential support networks for families. Balancing any of these support networks effectively is burdensome when stressors become overwhelming. Parent-pastors are not asked to balance, but to build solid foundations that encourage them to overcome.

Parent-pastors who are fearful of rejection by others have lifted their faith in God. While aggressors might not be operating in God's love, the majority of people desire to show God's love in all they do and say. Those with faithless children should be praying that God puts those with an ability to support, not judge, in their paths. When some endure pain, they are miserable, but when they seek help for their pain, they are given what is needed to heal. Parent-pastors who are in pain should seek help in these five areas in order for God to give them what is needed to heal from their challenging circumstances.

## CHAPTER V

### IMPLEMENTING AND SUMMARY

Developing coping skills is a primary technique used by counselors to provide spiritual and emotional healing. Teaching people about principles to overcoming crisis is a vital part of counseling processes. Solution-focused biblical counseling directs people to find the root of their problem and begin developing appropriate spiritually based measures that will surmount their situation.<sup>1</sup> Those facing crisis from faithless children might be familiar with the five strengths listed in Chapter 4, but it could be very difficult to implement them as they deal with their own crisis.

The summary of this thesis project displays a succinct review of information provided in previous chapters. Each area leads parent-pastors through a process of understanding various points of view from colleagues. Once a complete understanding is developed, parent-pastors of faithless and faithful children will be encouraged to make changes in their lives that are designed to overcome bias identified in this research project.

#### **Implementing Coping Skills**

Those who are overwhelmed by crisis are more than likely blinded by their circumstances, and have difficulty implementing coping mechanisms they might teach others on a regular basis. Becoming cognitively aware of their situations, parent-pastors can initiate methods for change in attitude, behavior, and spirituality. Simply having knowledge of strengthening skills is not enough; parent-pastors have to be willing to implement these skills by recognizing their need for change.

---

<sup>1</sup> Charles A. Kollar, *Solution-Focused Pastoral Counseling: An Effective Short-Term Approach for Getting People Back on Track* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 44.

For some, recognizing the need for change cannot be done individually, and will require others' honest intervention. As difficult as it can be when this happens, a deep self-evaluation should be done to determine if change is needed. Parent-pastors should ask themselves if the effects of their faithless child's behavior are damaging them domestically or vocationally. If they realize damage is taking place in any area, they would have to determine if relationships are valuable enough to put effort into fixing.

Parent-pastors who want to implement strengthening principles can use 3 simple techniques. Doing the hard work is the most important because those who are not willing to do hard work to make change would give up too easily in any other technique. While doing hard work is most important, believing, submitting, and trusting is very difficult as parent-pastors have to relinquish their pride and control in order to allow God's work to be done. Finally, as with many situations, attitude is everything. Overcoming misconceptions and negative influences is based in how one looks at situations. With these 3 principles, excuses are defused and people who are overshadowed by crisis become empowered to strengthen areas of coping weakness.

### Do the Hard Work

It is natural for helping agents such as parent-pastors to focus on others' crises. When this happens caregivers will often overlook their own crises. It is important that parent-pastors give attention to their child's crisis of faith, but more importantly, it is their own life crisis that degrades relationships. It is paramount that parent-pastors experiencing emotional and spiritual pain find ways to make change in their lives, even if changing takes hard work.

People who do not like change are comfortable with where they are, but sometimes it is because change can be painful, time consuming, and labor intensive. Parent-pastors who identify issues will only change when the pain of staying the same is greater than the pain of making

changes. While comfortable now, crisis could rapidly escalate when surrounding issues get out of hand. Therefore, it is better to weather issues by being proactive than waiting until they are overwhelming.

In order to institute change that can overcome a challenging situation, people have to create plans of action that will help them cognitively address their crises. When creating a plan of action, one must ensure they are modifying their outlook on the situation. Instituting a plan of action serves as a quick “guide” for those who are in crisis. As instances increase stress levels, parent-pastors are able to refer to, or automatically act without feeling a loss of control.

The overall plan should establish boundaries and guidelines for how one’s function minimizes negative impacts. This plan must establish ultimate authority of parent-pastors for making decisions that affect their family’s well being. When developing a plan, the first step is to write down guidelines. Once boundaries are established and written, it serves as a personal binding promise.

Three primary aspects should be addressed as personal boundaries are established. The problem, expectations, and consequences are essential to establishing functional procedures for one’s life.<sup>2</sup> When parent-pastors write out these aspects, it forces them to logically think through situations, and develop ideas for change. Once they are written, an individual has acknowledged their issues, personal expectations, and consequences for how they will react.

Being specific about the problem helps them understand which of the coping areas in Chapter 4 should be addressed. Generalizations in this case such as, “my child drives me crazy,” does not get to the root of a situation. Once root problems are identified, parent-pastors can establish expectations for themselves. It is important to “own” issues and not blame others for

---

<sup>2</sup> Henry Cloud and John Townsend, *Boundaries with Kids: How Healthy Choices Grow Healthy Children* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 167.

one's personal problems. The same crisis a parent-pastor is experiencing is not the same crisis faithless children are experiencing.

Telling a child "it is expected you will meet curfew so I will not be stressed" is irrelevant to implementing personal strengthening techniques or regretful behavior on a child's part. Instead, stating the problem and expectation would look like this, "my child does not meet curfew and it causes worry, I need to express my disappointment to them in a calm manner." Looking at this implementation of emotional strength, a parent-pastor identified the issue (unmet curfew causes worry) and personal expectation (express disappointment in a calm manner).<sup>3</sup>

Finally, establish consequences when individual expectations are not met. Not all consequences are designed to be negative. Consequences are developed to change one's way of thinking or actions. If parent-pastors get angry in a situation, they need to consider how they will deal with the anger, or provide restitution for their outburst. The ultimate goal of developing a game plan is to develop a thought process that institute change and strengthens relationships.

When developing plans of action, parent-pastors should pay close attention to "the lies and misbeliefs which have victimized" them.<sup>4</sup> As revealed in interviews for this project, parent-pastors had many "misbeliefs" that caused them to feel victimized by their child's behavior. Logically thinking through stressors and transitioning attitudes from a victim-based thought back to a sense of control over one's personal struggles is paramount to successful strengthening techniques. Though transitions like this are difficult, those who choose to put work into it will be successful at implementing progressive steps to a positive well-being.

---

<sup>3</sup> This does not introduce a lack of standard within the home, but only deals with implementing strengthening techniques for parent-pastors as individuals. Expectations and consequences should be established for faithless children as well, but outside developing personal plans of action.

<sup>4</sup> William Buckus and Marie Chapian, *Telling Yourself the Truth: Finding Your Way Out of Depression, Anxiety, Fear, Anger, and Other Common Problems by Applying the Principles of Misbelief Therapy* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2000), 23.



### Believe, Submit, and Trust

Fixing any problem in the midst of pain and crisis requires a lot of effort, especially when those who cause issues are not responding to repair attempts. While parent-pastors are searching for ways to bring their faithless child back, they must also take care of themselves. This care means they might have to submit to certain situations, and to their child's behavior. Submission takes a great deal of trust that God will bring the appropriate people into everyone's life. Most of all, parent-pastors of faithless children must believe their child's upbringing will eventually supersede worldly desires, and God is working in their child's life despite circumstances.

There are so many beliefs in crises, some are presuppositions, and others are disastrous truths. When disastrous truth or presuppositions supersede positive experiences, it is easy to assume everything that happens will be traumatic. In order to integrate strengthening principles, parent-pastors must change their beliefs during crisis. A majority of those interviewed were conned into believing they would be ostracized from the church because of their wayward child. In fact, only a minority of outspoken people who had issues voiced a need for removal.<sup>5</sup> Parent-pastors had experienced so much rejection they believed no one wanted to support them in their family turmoil. Those with faithless children have to change what they believe about available support systems. By changing one's belief in a situation, God is given control, and parent-pastors are able to submit to God's sovereignty instead of reacting to worldly pressures for ministry.

Submission is, "a case of true leadership, not of the *drivership* that so often prevails."<sup>6</sup> Driving an issue means one must have control of every event that occurs. When someone drives a sequence of events, they tend to micromanage issues and fail to have confidence in those

---

<sup>5</sup> Information disclosed from asking the question "What did you experience as a result of your child's behavior?"

<sup>6</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1988), 190.

around them. Spiritually, submission allows people to be leaders because they have given the driving force to God who is able to grow and develop them through adverse circumstances.<sup>7</sup>

Parent-pastors who wish to lead in their homes and churches have to take their hands off every situation and allow God to move in the lives of those who have created conflict. When parent-pastors face opposition from others, they must allow their personal integrity and faith to speak louder than their child's actions. This can be discouraging and difficult because often the child's actions may seem to speak louder than one's integrity. Parent-pastors are encouraged through God's Spirit, because living honorably will reveal one's good works, inspiring others to glorify God.<sup>8</sup>

Submitting to God's plan also includes allowing Him to place the appropriate people in a parent-pastor's life as well as their faithless child. In His sovereignty, God is placing and preparing people to provide encouragement to everyone facing a crisis. For parent-pastors, God has someone who can encourage and provide encouragement. This person will be recognized as able to help because of their depth of experience and Christlikeness.<sup>9</sup> In the same respect, God has prepared someone relatable to children facing a crisis of faith.

In order to submit to something, you must believe; and one must believe and submit in order to trust. It is difficult to trust in God's promises if parent-pastors have lost faith in God's all-encompassing power. When one trusts, they are able to form relationships that foster dependence on others, and take risks that could end in the loss of something entrusted to others.<sup>10</sup> If parent-pastors are to implement strengthening techniques to overcome their personal crisis

---

<sup>7</sup> James 1:2-4.

<sup>8</sup> 1 Peter 2:12.

<sup>9</sup> Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 190.

<sup>10</sup> "Trust," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2011), accessed July 8, 2014.

they have to depend on others and take the risks necessary to build support networks that will carry them through emotional and spiritual pain.

Trusting in God's promises is anchored in one's belief that He is faithful to those who love and are called into fellowship with Christ.<sup>11</sup> Parent-pastors' past experiences will sway their trust in God's promises. Some will have very positive experiences that give them hope for future fulfillment of His promise. On the other hand, those with negative memories will focus on events that damaged their opinion of God's promises.<sup>12</sup>

When parent-pastors' negative experiences have surpassed positive experiences, they will be overcome with negativity. Some have convinced themselves that God is to blame for negative situations because they have laid their trust in Him, only to experience what seemed like disaster. Adjusting one's viewpoint of God and what He allows versus what He does is important. God might allow trials to occur in His people's lives, but He does provide the means necessary to overcome and bring them through.<sup>13</sup> Changing the viewpoint allows one to see how God has provided through the trials, not that God allowed them to happen. The positive outlook revives trust in God's promise of faithfulness to his people.

Completely trusting in others is founded in one's ability to take risks. "Social Strength" in Chapter 4 of this project reveals characteristics one should look for when searching for a confidant. Finding someone who can be trusted with family secrets is difficult, but not impossible. Parent-pastors who are searching for someone they can trust must realize that trust is

---

<sup>11</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:9.

<sup>12</sup> Tim Clinton and Joshua Straub, *God Attachment: Why You Believe, Act, and Feel the way You Do About God* (New York: Howard Books, 2010), 73.

<sup>13</sup> James 1:2-4.

an emotion, not a decision.<sup>14</sup> When people invest themselves in others, trust becomes a naturally developed emotion. If parent-pastors have been betrayed in the past, it takes a longer time to develop trust. This does not mean parent-pastors should shut people out; they should do the work necessary to heal within themselves so they are able to build trust relationships with others.

Developing trust in God's promises and others does not mean one enters a relationship with reckless abandonment; it is ok to enter into trust relationships with caution. For some, it might feel like God has left them in a time of need, just like others who have betrayed them. Regardless of their feelings of betrayal, trust is developed from reconciliation. It is not always necessary to receive an apology to have a forgiving heart. When people reconcile wrongs that have been committed, sometimes initiating an attitude of forgiveness lets people know they have done something wrong. As well, it frees those who hold on to situations so they are able to develop relationships without the stigmas of past transgressions.

Together, belief, submission, and trust work in tandem to help parent-pastors open new channels of communication with God and others. Doors of opportunity open constantly, but those who hold on to negative events and grudges have a tendency to shut the doors on their own, or simply look at opportunities with the fear of repeating past experiences. Working together, these 3 attributes will give parent-pastors courageous attitudes destined to change their outlook on stressful events.

### Attitude is Everything

Many research participants had negative attitudes regarding others, congregations, and their faithless children during the interview process. Negative attitudes prevented them from

---

<sup>14</sup> Gary Chapman and Jennifer Thomas, *The Five Languages of Apology: How to Experience Healing in All Your Relationships* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 148.

seeing positive aspects of their situation. Additionally, their thought processes were irrational because too many assumptions were being made about what they expected people's reaction would be in a call for support. This was negatively affecting their interactions with others. Changing one's attitude is important for implementation of strengthening principles because only a positive attitude will give the appropriate encouragement necessary to "stay the course" when applying techniques.

Parent-pastors who change their perception towards other's ignorance regarding the trials of a faithless child can reverse negative attitudes. Often people only know what they are told, and then fill in blanks with their own opinions and assumptions. Everyone's formation of thought process is based in his or her own experiences. Those who are told misbehavior is acceptable would look down on parent-pastors who have a Christian standard for living. On the other hand, those with a strict Christian upbringing would look down on parent-pastors because their child is not living up to their Christian standard. Society's ignorance of appropriate Christian based boundaries contributes to the development of irrational expectations for parent-pastors, proving a need for better education of their unique situation.

There is a big difference between ignorance and stupidity in this case. These two words might seem synonymous in nature, but represent different aspects. While ignorance represents a lack of knowledge for something, stupidity is foolishness or a lack of keen insight.<sup>15</sup> Despite frustration from people who infuse negativity into parent-pastors crisis, a majority operates on ignorance. They do not know what it is like to be parent-pastors with faithless children, and they do not understand the amount of crisis and hurt situations like this create.

---

<sup>15</sup> "Ignorance," and "stupidity," Dictionary.com, accessed July 7, 2014.

Ignorance is not only an issue for social networks, but within church congregations as well. Positive attitudes towards congregants can be adapted by helping them understand irrational expectations for church leadership. When churches expect perfection from their pastor's family, they are setting an irrational standard. It is appropriate for churches to be selective to ensure a pastor who has major sin issues in his or her household does not become their spiritual leader, but careful attention must be given to lofty expectations. Congregations must understand their pastor and his or her families have the same inherent sin nature and have a need for God's mercy and grace just like their congregations.

The most difficult change is one's attitude towards their faithless child. If parents accept their faithless child as perfect, they are lying to themselves.<sup>16</sup> Parent-pastors have to accept their child for what they are, a soul lost in disarray in desperate need of Christ's love. Parent-pastors, who represent faith and Christianity, are in the most influential position of a child's life as the representation of that love.

Though anger was a primary emotion for parent-pastors who were interviewed in dealing with their faithless children; their children's impression is that Christians are hypocritical towards their faith.<sup>17</sup> Most children felt that while God can become angry with their actions, He is primarily a God of forgiveness. Modern children have taken the viewpoint of many district-supervised parent-pastors; as a child of God they will always be forgiven, despite their level of faithful practices. God's dissatisfaction will lead to God's mercy and forgiveness, and their faithless lifestyle is less profane than being a hypocritical Christian.

---

<sup>16</sup> Margie M. Lewis and Gregg Lewis, *Parents in Pain: Help for Parents of Prodigals*, Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 52.

<sup>17</sup> Dan Kimball, *They Love Jesus But Not The Church: Insights from Emerging Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 56.

Paramount to changing one's attitude is changing their understanding of crises. When parent-pastors who face the effects of faithless children remove irrational thoughts and replace them with truth, they can successfully implement change in themselves and those around them.<sup>18</sup> Implementation is about knowing strengthening techniques used to overcome crisis, and being able to implement them with the best attitude possible.

### **Summary**

Overall, this author's thesis was matched by the research performed. Creating a study that displayed many misconceptions and a need to inform pastors of techniques that would encourage them was successful. While the interview process was not designed to develop congregational justification for their actions, the architecture of the study reflects stories and opinions from parent-pastors experiencing crisis, which also complemented published data.

In order to establish an understanding from the parent-pastor's point of view, one must be able to define the issue, research needs, and develop solutions. In this case, issues were defined using published data. Researching needs employed a phenomenological approach, and was completed using interviews from parent-pastors of both faithful and faithless children. Finally, solutions were developed using all data collected from interviews and published materials. These solutions were designed to strengthen parent-pastors when they were feeling weak in various areas of their lives. The completed project has reached an intended outcome to understand a parent-pastor's pain and presumptions about those with faithless children and develop solutions worthy of implementation in crises.

---

<sup>18</sup> Buckus and Chapian, *Telling Yourself the Truth*, 16.

### The Issue

When evaluating issues presented in this project, one must reflect on the sensitive issue parent-pastors face when dealing with faithless children. They reach crisis in their own lives within four areas while their child might be facing other crisis on their own. Because parent-pastors love and care for their children, the focus falls on faithless children instead of their own crisis. When this happens, parents can often slip into destructive habits domestically and vocationally. Understanding their child's crisis will also help alleviate some of the stress and assist in giving a roadmap to recovery. Finally, parent-pastors are inspired to understand attributes that are customary to rebellious children. This understanding helps parent-pastors initiate a series of self-reflective actions that contribute to an overall need for help.

Crisis reaches four aspects of parent-pastors' lives. Social, spiritual, emotional, and physical crisis will change the way parent-pastors experience others while they are under extreme stress. While some pastors experience issues in one area, those who are severely damaged by their child's behavior could experience turmoil in all four aspects of their lives. Research showed that all four areas were linked when dealing with issues, and often one area of decline would influence others in a chain reaction.

Church populations felt that all faithless children were the same, prodigals in desperate need of salvation. Ultimately, this created crisis for parent-pastors because they felt if their children were not saved, they were ineffective in their ministerial calling. It was found when this thought carried over from personal spirituality to congregational leadership, pastors became apathetic to congregational needs. What many failed to realize is that not all faithless children are prodigals, but some fall into other classifications.



Faithless children are broken down into 3 classifications.<sup>19</sup> The most popular classification was actually the least populated -- being prodigals. These young people completely turned their backs on religion, God, or any level of Christian faith. The other two classifications were those who still held onto some level of spirituality. Nomads are determined to be those who walk away from organized religion but still consider themselves Christians. Exiles are those who hold to Christian beliefs but are easily tempted with worldly desires. Together these 3 classifications make a majority of the faithless pastor's child population.

Rebellious children display various attributes of temptation as they transition into a wayward lifestyle. It was discovered that faithless pastor's children are swayed away from their inherent upbringing through influences, expectations, and desires for independence. Those who were influenced towards a wayward lifestyle found temptation from outside sources that appealed to the child's character. Television, schoolteachers, friends, and societal norms all contributed to damaging outside influences for children.

Additionally, expectations for pastor's children presented another deterrent. While published data showed expectations from the congregation for children as primary, congregational hypocrisy towards their parent-pastor influenced many adolescents' viewpoint on Christian standards. The phenomenological study found parent-pastors also had unrealistic expectations for their children. When this happened, many young adults turned away from the church because they viewed religious expectation and hypocrisy as directly correlating to a Christian lifestyle.

---

<sup>19</sup> David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians are Leaving Church and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 55.

## The Research

Published data served as a good starting point for the development of the thesis. It was resolved by this author that additional research should be completed. Once this determination was made, a phenomenological study process best fit the desired outcome. Parameters of research were established and interview processes took place. This research was designed to enhance published data, versus explore contradictions to previous studies.

The phenomenological process allowed unguarded, confidential interviews to take place. While a majority of published data used quantitative research, phenomenological research used qualitative data gathered from a five-question interview process. One hundred parent-pastors were questioned and placed into 3 categories based on their child's status (faithful or faithless), and denominational preference (autonomous church or district lead).

The first group represented the majority of those interviewed. Fifty autonomous parent-pastors with faithless children were interviewed and asked five questions designed to explore their emotions, experiences, and coping strengths through the crisis. This group revealed surprising assumptions that there was no support available when they faced traumatic events. More so, they felt a great deal of guilt when it came to appropriately raising their child. A majority of these parent-pastors had negative experiences with their congregations and felt pastoral colleagues would give them similar responses.

Because of their negative experiences, many of them did not seek support from other pastors. Much of their coping was internal prayer, while the remaining 1/3 of their coping was from other sources. Interestingly enough these negative experiences carried over to trust issues with spouses and other possibly effective support networks.

The second group presented an exact opposite representation of participants. This group was comprised on twenty-five autonomous parent-pastors with faithful children. Many experienced normal adolescent behavior issues, but did not feel their child completely walked away from faithful living at any period. Instead of asking questions about emotions and experiences, this group was questioned on their thoughts, assumptions, and expectations regarding parent-pastors with faithless children.

The study produced an unexpected outcome in comparison to assumptions made by those with faithless children. Though parent-pastors with faithful children made a great deal of negative assumptions regarding circumstances surrounding wayward children, they were compassionate to the parent-pastor's needs for support. Many parent-pastors of faithful children had little to no experience counseling other pastors and only used events from their congregants as a counseling standard. The two primary coping expectations from this group were prayer, and open communication. These pastors had a desire to pray with and for parent-pastors with faithless children, but did not know how. They felt if communication and trust were better, it would be easier to provide effective support.

Finally, another group of twenty-five district-supervised parent-pastors with either faithful or faithless children were interviewed. This group was designated to show the difference in pastoral theology regarding family matters. While autonomous churches focused on pastor and their families, district-supervised churches were focused on pastoral calling, allowing parent-pastors opportunities to address issues on their own before getting involved. Districts felt pastors were called, not necessarily entire families. It might be a family's job to support their parent-pastor, but not a requirement for service.

Pastors in this category took God's election and original sin as reasoning for wayward children. This theory allowed interviewees to believe troubled children were in a crisis of faith and would soon return to their upbringing because God had already destined them to faithful living. Their primary coping expectation was giving attention to crises. Suppression and ignoring the situation can only make it worse in their eyes. As a result, pastors were encouraged to seek support as soon as possible so they could overcome traumatic issues that would affect their pastoral leadership.

Collectively, traditional pastors had little tolerance for issues with faithless children, and contemporary pastors felt it enhanced one's ability to minister from personal experience versus assumption. Additionally, a traditionalist took a nouthetic approach to counseling whereas contemporary pastors took an integrative approach. Finally, all had erroneous assumptions and interpretations of situations surrounding parent-pastors with faithless children, and availability for support.

### The Solution

Based on printed material and interview results, a need for possible solutions was determined. While some pastors gave pinpointed coping skills, others could not explain how they overcome their situations. It was decided by this author that pinpointed coping skills would not reflect effective strategies for parent-pastors to overcome their issues. Instead, strengthening techniques were developed to build and encourage them to face issues with confidence.

The five principles of strength in crisis are: spiritual, marital, emotional, social, and ministerial. Each of these areas has a great affect on how parent-pastors interact with others. When parent-pastors are feeling discouraged or weakened in certain areas, they are able to

overcome issues by using simple techniques they already know, but might not know how to employ for themselves as much as they do when coaching others to use them.

Spiritual strength is foundational to overcoming any of life's turmoil. Corporate spirituality and individual spirituality are important. This balance is called spiritual differentiation, and is designed to make one aware of how they have developed spiritual support networks. It was determined that when too much dependence on social spirituality while foregoing individual prayer fosters easy collapse when others in the group face spiritual crisis. Likewise, individuals who bypass social spirituality will become withdrawn spiritually and fail to establish support networks that can help in times of need.

Paramount to spirituality is one's prayer life. Many parent-pastors facing crisis would cry out to God for help, but after that, failed to listen for God's answer; most simply stated they talked *to* God versus talking *with* God. This principle developed 3 unique characteristics of prayer for those facing turmoil in life. Praying from the heart, understanding God's resources, and praying for good can assist parent-pastors in their spiritual-strengthening techniques. Spiritual strengths help lay the foundation in which all other strengths are developed.

Parent-pastors discussed marital disunion as an issue when addressing faithless children. Developing marital strength encourages parent-pastors to work in unison and gain empowerment as a parenting team, providing intimate support that is lacking elsewhere. Carrying the weight of marital relationships will help prevent parent-pastors from having a total breakdown in every aspect of their life. If they try to balance relationship and personal weight on their own, they will become overwhelmed and eventually collapse spiritually and emotionally.

Spiritual and emotional unity in a marriage relationship is important. This strength is based in communication techniques. Simple verbal communication is not always the best way for

couples to deal with emotionally charged situations. A unified couple that knows how to communicate with each other spiritually, verbally, and physically will enhance the marital front and help overcome crisis. In interviews, couples had focused so much attention on their wayward child that their love relationships were declining. Guiding one through marital unity will reconnect those relationships and provide intimate support throughout crisis.

The third strengthening principle is to become emotionally strong. It was determined that anger is not a display of strength and authority, but a display of weakness. Those who were easily angered felt a loss of control over situations, but did not know what they could do to overcome outbursts. Understanding the importance of sharing root emotions helped guide parent-pastors through a process that can institute truth, and increased situational awareness to both parents and faithless children.

This strength also introduced readers to 6 steps for defusing emotional crises. When household tensions develop and overwhelm parent-pastors, it is important for them to develop ways to defuse additional family turmoil. This process leads one through identifying emotional issues by taking ownership of their feelings, and helps develop problem-solving scenarios that will assist in building healthy relationships. Healthy relationships will assist parent-pastors in overcoming social anxieties and lead to strong social networks essential to developing spiritual and emotional support systems.

Social strength was important to develop confidants and overcoming social phobias. Confidants served as a person whom parent-pastors could trust at any time in any situation. Those who had trust issues were encouraged to find someone they could connect with on a personal level. This was also a primary desire for parent-pastors with faithless children. Though many of them desired someone, and taught their people to find accountability partners, they did

not know what they should be looking for as they searched for someone who would develop a new sense of confidence in them.

As well, many faced social phobias that debilitated their ability to effectively interact in social settings. Each of them knew that ministry success was based in being approachable, but some were so overwhelmed and discouraged by others that they had withdrawn socially. It was determined that overcoming social anxieties not only enhanced support networks for parent-pastors, but also gave them greater confidence in their ministerial duties.

The last strengthening method was ministry strength. A majority of parent-pastors with faithless children had negative experiences with churches that demanded their children be faithful followers of Christ in order to remain “qualified” for ministry. Through an exegetical approach to passages in 1 Timothy and Titus, it was determined that children must be obedient to their parents, but not faithful believers in order for pastors to remain qualified in ministry. One could determine that faithless children are not obedient children; however, salvation is not a parental mandate, but a prompting of the Holy Spirit. Parents cannot be held accountable for their children’s decisions to follow Christ, but will be held accountable for their attempts in leading children to Christ.

It was concluded in the research project that pastors with faithful children desperately wanted to support those with faithless children. Unfortunately, they did not know how because they did not understand the unique situation their colleagues were in. It was also concluded that parent-pastors with faithless children were living in their own painful isolation. They were hurting, discouraged, and downtrodden because of the way people were treating them. As well, they were suffering from their own misconceptions about the availability of support. It was also found that pastoral colleagues were not primary sources of their despair, but congregants who

acted in ignorance. Pastors who claimed they successfully implemented coping skills throughout their ordeals were confident that regardless of how bad things got, they survived because God carried them through and gave them wisdom.

### **Change is Possible**

No one can implement change unless change is desired, and no one can want to change unless they know change is needed. Often people think that situations will get fixed if others change because they do not own their situation; they look for blame on others. Parent-pastors interviewed felt if their attention was focused on how they were dealing with other's issues, many crises that were blown out of proportion would have been averted.

It is not easy dealing with faithless children. Yet again, another Saturday night was spent correcting their wayward child's behavior. The parent-pastor wanted to end the conversation as quickly as possible because the sermon needed final preparation, and he wanted a good night's rest before taking the pulpit come morning. His wife did not agree, and felt the situation needed to be discussed immediately. Running sermon notes through his mind, he only half-heartedly listened to a conversation that took place too often. The struggle was just becoming too much.

This parent-pastor began to search for ways to mentor his child, with no avail. It was to the point he went to others and asked if they could help. Unfortunately, the only help people wanted to give were books about parenting, or criticism about spending time with his children. His church, family, and social relationships were declining rapidly, and if something was not done quickly, he would be alone, removed from ministry, divorced, and isolated from society. Finally, instead of crying out to God, He prayed for help and waited. It did not seem like he had an answer from God for weeks, he prayed and waited; still no answer.



Finally, he realized the answer was not going to come in a Damascus road experience, but in changing the way he prayed. In addition to praying that God would change his son, he began praying that God would change his heart. Soon, he realized that he had to surrender himself to God before he could surrender his son. Slowly but surely, God began to bless this pastor, and ultimately family, ministry, and social settings began to thrive.

Total change only comes from what God does in a parent-pastor's life. Parent-pastors with faithless children must remember it is just as important to surrender oneself to God as much as they do to their child. Change might be a decision, but God is the change maker. When parent-pastors are discouraged and feel short of God's grace and mercy, they must remember that change is possible; this author knows from experience because the story above is his story. As one who still struggles with a faithless child, he has hope that God will change the child, after all...God changed him.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adams, Jay. "What is Nouthetic Counseling," *Institute for Nouthetic Studies*. Accessed 25 August, 2014.
- American Psychiatric Association. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. TR Arlington: American Psychiatric Association, 2000.
- Author Unknown. "Social Phobia: Scientists at Iowa State University Target Social Phobia," *China Weekly News*. Accessed December 6, 2011.
- Balswick, Jack and Judith Balswick. *The Family: A Christian Perspective on the Contemporary Home*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007.
- Barna Research Group. "Five Myths About Young Adult Church Dropouts," *The Barna Update*, November 2011. Accessed 21 November 2011.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Prodigal Pastors Kid: Fact or Fiction?" *The Barna Update*, November 2013. Accessed November 10, 2013.
- Benner, David G. *Strategic Pastoral Counseling: A Short-Term Structured Model*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003.
- Bloor, David. 2007. "Epistemic Grace." *Common Knowledge* 13, no. 2/3: 250-280. *Humanities International Complete*. Accessed November 28, 2011.
- Bruner, Kurt and Steve Stroope. *It Starts at Home: A Practical Guide to Nurturing Lifelong Faith*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2010.
- Buckus, William and Marie Chapian. *Telling Yourself the Truth: Finding Your Way Out of Depression, Anxiety, Fear, Anger, and Other Common Problems by Applying the Principles of Misbelief Therapy*. Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2000.
- Casas, Danny, Jr. *Through the Eyes of a Prodigal: Hope for Parents and Leaders with Wayward Children*. Bloomington: WestBow Press, 2012.
- Chapman, Gary. *The 5 Love Languages: The Secret to Love That Lasts*. Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 2010.
- Chapman, Gary and Jennifer Thomas. *Five Love Languages of Apology: How to Experience Healing in All Your Relationships*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006.
- Clinton, Tim, Archibald Hart, and George Ohlschlanger. *Caring for People God's Way: Personal and Emotional Issues, Addictions, Grief, and Trauma*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2005.

- Clinton, Tim and Gary Sibcy. *Attachments: Why You Love, Feel, and Act the Way You Do*. Nashville: Integrity Publishers, 2002.
- Clinton, Tim and Joshua Straub. *God Attachment: Why You Believe, Act, and Feel the Way You Do About God*. New York: Howard Books, 2010.
- Cloud, Henry and John Townsend. *Boundaries with Kids: How Healthy Choices Grow Healthy Children*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998.
- Crabb, Larry. *Connecting: Healing for Ourselves and Our Relationships*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2005.
- Croft, Brian and Cara Croft. *The Pastor's Family: Shepherding Your Family Through the Challenges of Pastoral Ministry*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013.
- Cullian, Alice R. *Sorting It Out: Discerning God's Call to Ministry*. Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1999.
- Deal, Ron and David Olson. *The Remarriage Checkup: Tools to Help Your Marriage Last A Lifetime*. Bloomington: Bethany House Publishers, 2011.
- Dobson, James. *The New Strong-Willed Child: Birth Through Adolescence*, Rev. ed. Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishers, 2004.
- Dobson, Lorna. *Caring for Your Pastor: Helping Your Pastor Serve with Joy*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2001.
- Evans, Roderick L. *The Call to Serve: An Examination of the Deacon and Servant's Ministry in the Church*. Camden: Abundant Truth Publishing, 2010.
- Family Health International. "Module 1: Qualitative Research Methods Overview," *Qualitative Research Methods: A Data Collector's Field Guide*. Boston: Northeastern University, 2012. Accessed May 201, 2014.
- Fee, Gordon D. "1 & 2 Timothy, Titus," *Understanding the Bible Commentary Series*. Edited By W. Ward Gasque, Robert L. Hubbard Jr., and Robert K. Johnston. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1988.
- Fitzpatrick, Elyse, Jim Newheiser, and Laura Hendrickson. *When Good Kids Make Bad Choices: Help and Hope for Hurting Parents*. Eugene: Harvest House Publishing, 2005.
- Frost, Michael. *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian World*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006.

- Gottman, John M. *The Marriage Clinic: A Scientifically Based Marital Therapy*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999.
- Graham, Billy. *Just as I Am*. New York: HarperCollins, 2007.
- Graham, Ruth Bell. *Prodigals and Those Who Love Them: Words of Encouragement for Those Who Wait*. Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2008.
- Graves, Marlena. "Prodigal Children: If it can Happen to John Piper, It Can Happen to You," *Christianity Today*, June 2012. Accessed February 22, 2014.
- Groenwald, Thomas. "A Phenomenological Research Design Illustrated," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 3 (1) (2004). Accessed May 14, 2014.
- Hall, Douglas John. *God & Human Suffering: An Exercise in the Theology of the Cross*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986.
- Hart, Archibald. *The Anxiety Cure*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Press, 1999.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Stress and Your Child: The Hidden Reason Why Your Child May Be Moody, Resentful, or Insecure*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Press, 1992.
- Hart, Betsy. *It Takes a Parent: How the Culture of Pushover Parenting Is Hurting Our Kids*. New York: The Berkley Publishing Group, 2005.
- Hathcoat, Ken. *When God Disappoints Pastors*. Independent Publishing, 2013.
- Hawkins, O.S. *Moral Earthquakes and Secret Faults: Protecting Yourself from Minor Moral Lapses That Lead to Major Disaster*. Nashville: Broadman Holman, 1996.
- Hawkins, Ron. 2011a. *The Possession of the Soul for Spiritual Formation in Ourselves and Others*. Lecture, Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA. May 25, 2011.
- Hawkins, Ron and Tim Clinton. *Quick-Reference Guide to Biblical Counseling*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009.
- Hughes, Daniel. *Attachment Focused Family Therapy*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009.
- Hughes, Robert D. *Satan's Whispers: Breaking the Lies That Bind*. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992.
- Hycner, Richard H. "Some Guidelines for the Phenomenological Analysis of Interview Data," *Qualitative Research*, Vol.3, pp 143-164. London: Sage, 1999. Accessed May 15, 2014.

- Jeremiah, David. *Life Wide Open: Unleashing the Power of a Passionate Life*. Nashville: Integrity Publishers, 2003.
- Johnson, Sue. *Hold Me Tight: Seven Conversations for a Lifetime of Love*. New York: Hachette Book Group, 2008.
- . “About Us: What is EFT,” *The International Centre for Excellence in Emotionally Focused Therapy*. Accessed January 20, 2014.
- Jones, Ken. *A Prodigal Return: Reflections from a Grateful Heart*. Mustang: Tate Publishing & Enterprises, 2009.
- Kinnaman, David. *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church and Rethinking Faith*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011.
- Kimball, Dan. *They Like Jesus But Not the Church: Insights from Emerging Generations*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007.
- Kollar, Charles Allen. *Solution-Focused Pastoral Counseling: An Effective Short-Term Approach for Getting People Back on Track*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997.
- Land, Richard. *For Faith & Family: Changing America by Strengthening the Family*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002.
- Larson, Knute. “1 Timothy,” *Holman New Testament Commentary*. Edited by Max Anders. Nashville: Holman Reference, 2011.
- Leahy, Robert. *The Worry Cure: Seven Steps to Stop Worry from Stopping You*. New York: Harmony Books, 2005.
- Leman, Kevin. *Have a New Kid by Friday: How to Change Your Child’s Attitude, Behavior & Character in 5 Days*. Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2008.
- Lester, Stan. *An Introduction to Phenomenological Research*. Taunton UK: Stan Lester Developments, 1999. Accessed May 16, 2014.
- Lewis, Margie M. and Gregg Lewis. *The Hurting Parent: Help for Parents of Prodigal Sons and Daughters*. Rev. ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010.
- Lewis, Robert. *Raising a Modern-Day Knight: A Father’s Role in Guiding His Son to Authentic Manhood*. Carol Stream: Tyndale, 2007.
- Lucas, Jeff. *Will Your Prodigal Come Home*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011.
- MacArthur, John. *Our Sufficiency in Christ: Three Deadly Influences That Undermine Your Spiritual Life*. Dallas: Word Publishing, 1991.

- McDowell, Josh and B. Hostetler. *Right From Wrong: What You Need to Know to Help Youth Make Right Choices*. Dallas: Word Publishing, 1994.
- McNeill, Donald Pl, D. Morrison, and H.J. Nouwen. *Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 2008.
- Mohler, Albert. "Has God Called You? Discerning the Call to Preach," Crosswalk.com. Accessed July 6, 2014.
- National Association of Evangelicals. "Evangelicals Choose Public Schools," *Evangelical Leaders Survey* (August 2012). Accessed February 6, 2014.
- Neff, Blake J. *A Pastor's Guide to Interpersonal Communication: The Other Six Days*. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Omartian, Stormie. *The Power of a Praying Parent*. Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 1995.
- Ortberg, John. *The Me I Want to Be: Becoming God's Best Version of You*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010.
- Parsons, Rob. *Bringing Home the Prodigals*. Colorado Springs: Authentic Publishing, 2007.
- Peterson, Eugene H. *Eat This Book: A Conversation In The Art of Spiritual Reading*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2006.
- Piper, Abraham. "Let Them Come Home," *Decision Magazine*, August 2007. Accessed February 22, 2014.
- Piper, John. *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*. Sisters: Multnomah Publishers, 2003.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Should a Pastor Continue In Ministry If One of His Children Proves to Be an Unbeliever?" *Ask Pastor John*, Manuscript. Accessed February 22, 2014.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "About John Piper," *Desiring God Ministries*. Accessed February 4, 2014.
- Philpott, Kent. *How to Care for Your Pastor: A Guide for Small Churches*. Colorado Springs: Evangelical Press, 2007.
- Rainer, Thom S. and Art Rainer. *Raising Dad: What Fathers & Sons Learn From Each Other*. Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2007.
- Richardson, Ronald W. *Becoming a Healthier Pastor: Family Systems Theory and the Pastors Own Family*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004.

- Rivadeneira, Caryn D. "Married, with Prodigals." *Marriage Partnership* 17, No. 2 (Summer 2000, 2000), 38. Accessed November 28, 2013.
- Rienow, Rob. *When They Turn Away: Drawing Your Adult Child Back to Christ*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2011.
- Roberts, Wes. *Support Your Local Pastor: Practical Ways to Encourage Your Minister*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1995.
- Rogers, Adrian. *Believe in Miracles but Trust in Jesus*. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1997.
- Scazzero, Peter. *The Emotionally Healthy Church: A Strategy For Discipleship That Actually Changes Lives*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010.
- Scalise, Eric T. 2011. *Burnout, Stress & Compassion Fatigue: Managing Yourself*. Lecture, Liberty University. May 24, 2011.
- Scheller, Christine A. "Q & A: John Piper on Racism, Reconciliation, and Theology after Travon Martin's Death: The Minnesota Pastor Addresses the Foundation for Responding to Questions on Race," *Christianity Today*, March 2012. Accessed February 22, 2014.
- Seltzer, Leon F. "The Paradox of Anger: Strength or Weakness," *Psychology Today*. Accessed July 1, 2014.
- Shelley, Marshall. *The Healthy Hectic Home: Raising a Family in the Midst of Ministry*. Dallas: Word Publishing, 1988.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Well-Intentioned Dragons: Ministering to Problem People in the Church*. Waco: Word Books Publisher, 1985.
- Smith, Alice. *Spiritual Intimacy with God: Moving Joyfully into the Deeper Life*. Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 2008.
- Stanley, Charles. "Principles for Effective Prayer," *In Touch Ministries*. Accessed June 26, 2014.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "A Partner for Accountability," *The Christian Post*, September 2012. Accessed July 1, 2014.
- Stoop, David. *Forgiving the Unforgivable*. Ventura: Regal Books, 2003.
- Stoop, David and Jan Stoop. *The Complete Marriage Book: Collected Wisdom from Leading Marriage Experts*. Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 2002.
- Strong, James. *The Strongest Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. Edited by John R. Kohlenberger and James A. Swanson. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001.

- Swenson, Richard A. 2004. *Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves to Overloaded Lives*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.
- Terre, Lisa. "Risk and Resilience in Coping with Chronic Life Stress," *American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine* 5, no. 6: 494-496, November 2011. Accessed November 30, 2011.
- Thompson, Janet. *Praying for Your Prodigal Daughter: Hope, Help & Encouragement for Hurting Parents*. New York: Howard Books, 2008.
- Thiele, Edwin. *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983.
- Towns, Elmer L. *Theology for Today*. Belmont: Wadsworth Group, 2002.
- Townsend, John. *Beyond Boundaries: Learning to Trust Again in Relationships*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Boundaries with Teens: When to Say Yes, How to Say No*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007.
- US Bureau of Labor Statistics. *American Time Use Survey*, June 2013. Accessed January 13, 2014.
- Van Biema, David, and Richard Ostling. "In The Name of the Father (Cover Story)," *Time* 147, no. 20, May 13, 1996. Accessed March 3, 2014.
- Waite, Linda and Maggie Gallagher. *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People are Happier, Healthier and Better Off Financially*. New York: Random House, 2000.
- Wax, Trvin. "5 Observations about Younger Southern Baptists," *The Gospel Coalition*. Accessed May 13, 2014.
- Wiersbe, Warren W. *Be Compassionate: Let the World Know that Jesus Cares, A New Testament Study of Luke 1-13*. Colorado Springs: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1988.
- Willard, Dallas. *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*. San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1988.
- Willis, Jerry W. *Foundations of Qualitative Research: Interpretive and Critical Approaches*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2007.
- White, John. *Parents in Pain: Overcoming the Hurt and Frustration of Problem Children*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1979.
- Zahn, Paula. "Franklin Graham Profile: The Prodigal Son Comes Home," *CNN People in the News*, 1992. Accessed March 3, 2014.



## IRB APPROVAL

**LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.**  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

January 6, 2014

Ryan K. Ayers

IRB Approval 1749.010614: The Pastor's Faithless Child: Five Principles of Encouragement for Parent-Pastors

Dear Ryan,

We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Please retain this letter for your records. Also, if you are conducting research as part of the requirements for a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation, this approval letter should be included as an appendix to your completed thesis or dissertation.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

**Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.**  
*Professor, IRB Chair*  
**Counseling**

**(434) 592-4054**

**LIBERTY**  
UNIVERSITY.

*Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971*