A PHENOMENOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF A CALLING

WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR PASTORAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

by

Thomas R. Connors

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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APPROVED BY:

James Arnold Fyock, EdD, Committee Chair

Joshua Strunk, EdD, Committee Member

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of calling for seasoned pastors. Guiding the research were four related sub-questions: (a) How do seasoned pastors describe their initial experiences of calling? (b) How do they describe the ways in which they have critically reflected on their experiences of calling ? (c) How do seasoned pastors describe their subsequent actions that have resulted from their calling? (d) How do seasoned pastors describe the development of their calling? A purposeful sampling of 11 pastors who have for six or more years functioned as a full-time pastor were engaged in this phenomenological research. Mezirow's (1991) theory of transformative learning and Loder's (1989) theistic educational philosophy were used to frame the research. The data acquired from semi-structured interviews, field notes, and a focus group were recorded and transcribed by a voice recognition transcription service. A summary analysis and the transcribed interviews were sent to each pastor-participant as a member check to ensure accuracy. Guiding the collection and analysis of the data were the phenomenological research methods of Moustakas (1994), the developmental phases of transformative learning, and Peircean semiotics. Findings of this research revealed that pastors have a highly semiotic epistemology in the perception of their calling. Results also confirmed the developmental nature of a pastoral-calling as found in transformative learning theories. Finally, this study contributes to the calling literature and pedagogical theories for pastoral training programs, religious education, and vocational counselors. It also can be used as a resource for those who are seeking a holistic understanding of what it means to be called as a pastor.

Keywords: calling, holistic, pastoral calling, pastoral training, phenomenology, theistic epistemology, psychology of religion, vocational guidance

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Dedication

This research and work are dedicated to the men and women who have courageously said yes, to the call of God upon their lives to be pastors. May the narratives of sacrifice, labor, and devotion of their calling be further appreciated by the explorations found in this work.

Acknowledgments

This journey could not have been made without the support and encouragement of a few significant people. My dissertation chair, Dr. Fyock, was a faithful source of optimism and wisdom. His faith perspective permeated all the counsel he gave to me during the doctoral process. I also wish to acknowledge my brother John Connors whose life is an inspiring example of what it means to be called as a pastor. His support and belief in me, enabled me to go the distance with joy. I also have to thank my wife Kristie for all her loving encouragement to pursue my dream. Without her steady affirmations my dream would have remained only a wish. Finally, I recognize that without the kind intentions of God and His Son, the Lord Jesus, the opportunity and success of this journey would not have been possible. Great is His faithfulness. Morning by morning new mercies I discover.

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Before Christian Era (B.C.E.)

Brief Calling Scale (BCS)

Christian Era (C.E.)

Cognitive Dissonance (CD)

Convictional Knowing (CK)

English Standard Version (ESV)

Church Growth Movement (CGM)

Phenomenal Reduction (PR)

Transformative Logic/Transformative Learning (TL)

Terror Management Theory (TMT)

Transcendental Phenomenology (TP)

Transformative Learning Theory (TLT)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The calling of pastors is an anomaly and outlier in the calling literature. This is surprising given the epic nature calling has for pastors. The connection between a pastor's experience of calling and ministerial efficacy is confirmed by several studies (Bloom, 2017; Flourishing, 2013; Joynt, 2017; Joynt & Dreyer, 2013; Strunk, 2015; Strunk, Milacci & Zabloski, 2017). Additionally, seminarians and pastors overwhelmingly cite a theistic calling for their pursuit of vocational ministry (Lincoln, 2011; Lose et al., 2015). Ironically, in a vocation where calling is most often attributed, very few qualitative studies on calling have been done with experienced pastors (Dik & Domene, 2015; McKenna et al., 2015). Accordingly, this study aims to explore the significance and experiences of calling among seasoned pastors.

In this chapter, the phenomenon of calling will be examined by first looking at its background within the historical, social, and theoretical contexts of calling. Exploring the contexts of this phenomenon will present a broader understanding of the complexity of the subject. This complexity is highlighted and understood by other vocational researchers who have acknowledged that calling research is in its early stages of development (Duffy & Dik, 2013; McKenna et al., 2015).

Following the contextual survey, the vested interest and experience I have in pastoral calling will be shared. As a former church planter, pastor of several churches, and one who has questioned his calling as a pastor, I have developed some philosophical and epistemic positions which will be discussed and examined under the "Situation to Self" heading. My experiences, however, will be bracketed and minimized to ascertain the essences of pastoral calling through the narratives of calling through other pastors. Lastly, the pedagogical, theoretical, and

empirical significance of this research will be examined for pastors and pastoral training pedagogy, vocational guidance counselors, and those wanting to have a holistic understanding of calling.

Background

The historical, social, and theoretical context of calling provide a necessary backdrop for understanding the lived experiences of calling for pastors. These contexts demonstrate the impact and interplay culture has had on the definition and application of a calling. Consequently, calling research, of necessity, must examine the sociological and prevailing zeitgeist of culture to better understand the meaning a calling may have for pastors today. In addition, the changing contexts of calling over time have also contributed to the multiple definitions that are presently given to the concept of a call (Duffy & Dik, 2013). Thus, by considering the historical, social, and theoretical background of calling, the complexity, challenge, and significance calling has for pastors can be better understood, and arguably, undergird the present need for calling research among pastors.

Historical Context

When tracing the development and history of calling, researchers frequently cite four historic time periods in which the construct of calling has changed in its meaning (Nel & Scholtz, 2016; Placher, 2005). These include the early church period (30–500 C.E.), Middle Age period (500–1500 C.E.), Reformation and post-Reformation period (1500–1800 C.E.), and the modern era (1800 C.E.–present). This historical overview, however, overlooks the foundational Jewish background of calling from which the Christian church inherited its understanding and identity as a called people. Accordingly, it is necessary first to address this foundational phase in the development and history of calling.

The Jewish period (2000 B.C.E.–30 C.E.). The watershed of calling can be traced to Judaism. In the Jewish faith, the experience and concept of calling is highly emphasized. Predating Christianity, the story of Judaism begins with Abraham, who is the father of the Hebrew nation (Isaiah 51:1–2; Wilson, 1989). The narrative of Abraham begins with a calling to leave his homeland and go to a land where God will bless and make him into a great nation (Genesis 12:1–3). Abraham obeys and spends the remainder of his life pursuing this call. Significantly, 400 years later, the next major movement in Judaism is a reiteration of Abraham's call. Moses is called to lead the Jewish nation out of Egypt to the land promised to Abraham (Exodus 2–3). Unlike Abraham, Moses at first struggles with God's call and needs various confirmations before he complies. His eventual obedience, however, brings deliverance to an enslaved nation.

There are many more calling narratives found in Judaism, but these two major patriarchs highlight and bring attention to the calling ethos of the Jewish faith. The Jewish identity of being a called and chosen people was etched into the nation's psyche over a span of 2000 years by the frequent repetition of its prophetic-leadership (1 Kings 8:53; 2 Samuel 7:23–24; Amos 3:1–2; Deuteronomy 7:6–8; 14:2; Psalm 105:8–15).

The roots of Christianity are planted in the soil of the Jewish faith. The Jewish identity as a called people was passed on to the young Christian movement but with two significant differences: the idea of calling became universalized and no longer was tied to one nation; and secondly, the perception of calling became influenced by the cultural setting. These two differences are traced through four historic periods that lead to the present-day challenge of understanding a call (Placher, 2005).

Early church period (30–500 C.E.). In its infancy, Christianity was believed to be a

sect of the Jewish faith (Josephus, trans. 1987). Jesus and the early disciples were all Jews who often quoted the Jewish scriptures in their teaching. Found in their teachings were frequent allusions to the calling of God. Christians were taught that they "were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:9, English Standard Version [ESV]), and that, "each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him and to which God has called him" (1 Corinthians 7:18a); and that they were "to be all the more diligent to confirm [their] calling" (2 Peter 1:10a). In fact, the early Christian culture was so steeped in the construct of calling that the name "church" given to these early Christians is taken from the Greek word *ekklesia*, which literally translated is the *called-out ones* (Brown, 1978). Thus, a calling was not perceived as something only for clergy, but each Christian was believed to have a calling from God (Guinness, 2003). The self-identity as a called people empowered these early Christians to endure persecution and eventually transform Roman society.

Middle Ages period (500–1500 C.E.). The conversion of the Roman emperor Constantine in 325 C.E. marked a significant turn in the social status of Christianity. The persecuted Christians were no longer seen as a blight in Roman society but rather the new accepted norm. Consequently, the concept of calling seemed to have lost its universal meaning and appeal to the common Christian and began to be understood as a religious vocation. During the Middle Ages and next 1000 years, calling was mostly associated with being a nun, monk, friar, or priest (Placher, 2005).

The Reformation and post-Reformation period (1500–1800 C.E.). The first real change to this understanding of a calling came during the Reformation period through the theology of Martin Luther and John Calvin. The two reformers broadened the understanding of calling beyond the work of the clergy to include all stations and duties in life (Guinness, 2003).

Daily activities and chores were considered part of God's calling when done with the right

attitude and heart (Placher, 2005). Although the Reformation significantly helped to restore the

concept of calling to its original concept, it was the Puritans who established calling in

association with one's job (Coil, 2016).

The Puritans emphasized all of life was a sacred trust that each person was responsible to

nurture and preserve. One's gifts and talents were to be valued and developed to the glory of

God (Guinness, 2003). The prominent 17th century Puritan pastor, Robert Baxter, gave

instructions concerning the vocational call:

> Choose that employment or calling in which you may be most serviceable to God.
>
> Choose not that in which you may be most rich or honorable in the world; but that in
>
> which you may do the most good, and best escape sinning. (as cited in Ryken, 1990, p.
>
> 27)

Baxter understood employment as a calling in which a person should seek work that is useful to

God, does the most good, and avoids the occasion or temptation of sin. Work was not just a

means of employment but a holy calling. Coupled with this calling were the ideas of excelling

and being good stewards of God's gifts. Such vocational teaching produced a strong work ethic

among the Protestant faithful, which later was labeled by Max Weber (1930) as the Protestant

work ethic.

Modern period to present (1800–present). As the religious concept of calling was

expanding in its definition, it also waned in its theistic distinction. The pragmatic work ethic of

stewardship and productivity remained intact but without the God-orientation noted in Baxter.

Consequently, the secularization of calling, combined with the concurrent growth of the human

sciences, has led to a prevailing non-theistic construct of calling among researchers (Myers,

2014; White, Entwistle, & Eck, 2016).

In sum, the historical development of calling can be traced to the early formation of the Jewish people through Abraham's call. It was further expanded in its meaning and application through the early Christian church wherein each believer was said to be called (Romans 8:30) and have a calling from God (2 Peter 1:10). With the conversion of the fourth century emperor Constantine, a theistic calling became more associated with the clergy. The concept of calling was amended once more by the teaching of the Reformers and Puritans. These two groups returned to the early church's emphasis that every believer has a calling. This was done, however, with a significant difference: calling became largely associated with one's employment or vocation. The association of work and calling has continued through the modern and post-modern period. The greatest and most noticeable difference, however, is the absence of a theistic calling source (Schweitzer & Knudson, 2014). This leads to the present social context of calling that is currently directing calling research in academia.

Social and Cultural Context

The pursuit and perception of a call is influenced by the culture in which it occurs (Myers, 2014; Placher, 2005). This is no less true for a pastor experiencing a call within contemporary society (White et al., 2016). Presently, this study examines two prevailing cultural assumptions that appear to be directing and informing the current research on calling and its impact on pastoral calling.

Positivism. Charles Darwin's contemporary, Augustus Comte, is considered the father of positivism and the social sciences. Comte believed that through empirical examination of data, positive conclusions about life could be found. His philosophical position as a materialist left no room for spiritual or metaphysical realities. Historically, positivism found its expression

through quantitative research which became the authoritative standard in determining what is true, trustworthy, or objectively scientific (Ary, Jacobs, Irvine, & Walker, 2013). Consequently, a pastor with a non-empirical and theistic epistemology would have difficulty with Comte's worldview. Yet, in large measure, this is the world in which pastors seek to affirm and understand their call. Pastors who have a historic Christian faith embrace a worldview which has spiritual and metaphysical constructs that govern their judgments and their sense of calling (Bloom, 2017; Flourishing, 2013; Loder, 1989; Lose et al., 2015; Luhrmann, 2012). Philosophical and theoretical constructs that have a metaphysical epistemology are principally absent from current calling research (Schweitzer & Knudson, 2014). Hence, a phenomenological study of calling that includes a metaphysical epistemology will provide an alternative to the prevailing empirical epistemology of contemporary culture.

Pragmatism. A second worldview that is strongly shaping the current perspective of calling is pragmatism. Pragmatism places a high value on efficiency and "what works" (Creswell, 2013, p. 27). Its focus is on outcomes and not the process: "Truth is what works at the time" (Creswell, 2013, p. 27). The philosophy of pragmatism has its origin in the United States and is often attributed to the educational reformers Dewey, James, and Pierce (Biesta & Burbules, 2003). The ubiquitous presence of pragmatism is found in institutions, businesses, education and any group activity where the focus is primarily on results and productivity. Educators have criticized this dominant focus in adult education as the "cult of efficiency" (Collins, 2004). In the 1980s, the influence of pragmatism found its way into the church through the Church Growth Movement (CGM; Wagner, 1998). This has bearing on the participants of this study whose lives and calling are connected to the church.

Charles McGavran (1990) is credited with being the father of the CGM (Towns &

McIntosh, 2004). McGavran (1990) embraced the use of sociological concepts in reaching

people groups with the message of Christ (Watson & Scalen, 2008). In addition, McGavran

(1990) and Peter Wagner (1998) of Fuller Seminary were pragmatists in their missiology and

proposed that successful corporate models of marketing and organization could be used in the

making of converts. Wholesale incorporation of this pragmatist strategy, however, associates a

pastor's call to the growth model of corporate America where success is equated with numbers

(Watson & Scalen, 2008). Consequently, pastors who adopt the CGM framework and who serve

in a small church are vulnerable to a self-identity of failure in their calling as pastors. CGM is

not as popular today as in the 1980s through early 2000s, but the effects and tacit rule of

pragmatism can still be seen in the many popular books on church growth which is a part of the

social milieu of the American church.

Theoretical and Philosophical Context

The theoretical and philosophical context of calling research is closely aligned to its

social context, that is, the cultural values of a society grow from the philosophical assumptions

within it. Presently, calling research is heavily influenced by the theoretical and philosophical

constructs of psychology, vocational guidance, and organizational management (Duffy & Dik,

2013; Myers, 2014). Markedly absent are theistic frameworks by which to understand the nature

and process of calling (Schweitzer & Knudson, 2014). The following are examples and

extensions of the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of calling found in research today.

Calling and vocation. Current calling research is largely focused on vocational and

career development (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Duffy et al., 2012; Hernandez, Foley, &

Beitin, 2011). These studies explore the "connections between calling and various psychological

and occupational factors" (Domene, 2015, p. 315). The above studies also reveal that "calling is

most often defined as a highly meaningful career that is used to help others in some fashion"

(Duffy & Dik, 2013, p. 429). Equating a career search with calling, however, can reduce a call

to "a kind of spiritualized career assessment that we give ourselves divine license to pursue"

(White et al., 2016, p. 120). This criticism of a career search is not meant to undercut its

importance but to preserve the distinction between a career search and a theistic vocational call.

Calling and well-being. In addition to career and vocational development, calling

research has focused on the experience of well-being and living the call. Since 2007,

approximately 40 studies have researched the association of well-being with living the call

(Duffy & Dik, 2013; O'Neal, 2017). Some categories listed under well-being are the following:

meaning and purpose (Duffy, Bott, Allan, Torrey, & Dik, 2012); a sense of fulfillment and

satisfaction (Hirschi, 2012); and career engagement and efficacy (Domene, 2012; Duffy, Foley,

et al., 2012). These studies note that a marked increase of well-being occurs when a calling is

sensed and lived out (O'Neal, 2017).

Source and definition of calling. The conceptual development and research of calling

has left in its wake a multiplicity of definitions so that there is no consensus of a calling

definition (Duffy & Dik, 2013; McKenna et al., 2015):

> Although two components of a calling (meaning plus serving others) are commonly
>
> agreed upon by scholars and most research participants, a core part of the definition, how
>
> individuals find a calling, represents perhaps the most controversial issue within the
>
> calling literature. (Duffy, Allan, Bott, & Dik, 2014, p. 564)

Myers (2014) further observed that scholars have yet to agree on a single theory or robust

measure of calling. Yet, despite the multiplicity of views and approaches in calling research,

after reviewing the literature, Duffy et al. (2014) identified three prevailing views on the source

of one's calling: external summons, destiny, and perfect fit.

External summons. Calling has been experienced as an external summons which can be described as a compelling need or theistic calling (Dik, Eldridge, Steger, & Duffy, 2012). The call is to a task that is external to oneself. This contrasts with calling constructs that identify a personal passion or ability as the source of one's call (though those factors may also be present). The experience of an external summons can be framed as being drawn by something beyond myself to pursue my current line of work (Dik et al., 2012). In this respect, calling as an external summons is also said to be transcendent (McKenna et al., 2015). Research that examined the source of calling among Christian business leaders and seminarians overwhelmingly have God as the transcendent source of their calling (Hernandez et al., 2011; Lose et al., 2015; McKenna et al., 2015). The theistic calling framework, however, is not a widely held view of those who have expressed a sense of call. Some researchers, in fact, consider theistic calling as irrelevant in contemporary culture: "Many management scholars have dismissed or marginalized the religious aspect of calling as irrelevant, despite its long history, and asserted that calling is now a secular construct" (Myers, 2014, p. 19). The theistic source for calling, however, may be more prevalent than researchers realize. A test-measure will only show that which is being measured (Loder, 1989). If calling researchers do not list God as a possible source for calling (and most do not; Myers, 2014), then theistic influence will not be seen in test results and the possibility of a sampling bias can be present. This in fact may well be the case.

In a broad sampling of religious and philosophical books on calling, Myers (2014) observed that 30 books on the subject were written between 1990–2012 (pp. 22–23). Notable among those listed was Rick Warren's (2002) *Purpose Driven Life* which sold a record breaking 30 million copies. The extraordinary response to a book that is overtly connected to a theistic

calling demonstrates that the "religious aspect of calling" (Myers, 2014, p. 19) is still very relevant in contemporary society.

Perfect fit. As a source for calling, perfect fit was found to be the most common source cited for calling (Duffy, et al., 2014; Myers, 2014). When interests, values, and skills are well-matched with a vocation, individuals have understood this as a calling. This form of calling is often preceded by self-exploration which identifies the passion and abilities of the called individual (Duffy, et al., 2014).

Destiny. As a source of calling, destiny has a variety of expressions. An individual's call may be an inner voice or a strong intuitive feeling of what one should do (Duffy, et al., 2014). It could also be associated with a strong internal motivation to a vocation (Hall & Chandler, 2005). A common feature to this calling source is "there is one career that someone is meant to do" (Duffy, et al., 2014, p. 565).

In sum, the current philosophical frameworks of positivism and pragmatism impact this present study by the cultural expectations they create (Mezirow, 1991). Arguably, if the cultural expectation of calling is secular or merely humanistic, tension or conflict would likely occur in those who have a theistic understanding of their call. The identification of cultural constructs of calling, therefore, may help to illumine and discern the experiences of conflict pastors have in their calling in the present culture. Specifically, a closer look at this phenomenon may reveal the struggle and cognitive dissonance that frequently accompany a pastor's calling (Expastor, 2016; Joynt, 2017). Finally, a theistic epistemology of calling which affirms non-empirical convictional experiences will provide an alternative to the current positivistic theories in understanding this critical phenomenon.

Situation to Self

The researcher came to this study with existing philosophical frameworks, experiences, and cultural expectations that have influenced the exploration of this phenomenon of calling (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). This present study employed a transcendental phenomenological methodology to present an unbiased record of "how the participants experienced the phenomenon" (Eddles-Hirsh, 2015, p. 252). The researcher's influence, however, cannot be eliminated, but steps can be taken to minimize its intrusion into the data. As such, a first step can be the identification of the researcher's position and experience in connection to that being researched (Patton, 2002).

My background and vocation are deeply vested in this present study. Professionally, I have been active as an ordained pastor for 35 years. During that time, I have been the lead pastor of three churches spanning 15 years, an associate pastor for four years, and the pastor of a church plant for nine years. My beliefs and expectations associated with my study are deep and life orienting (Mezirow, 1991). I have personally struggled with my calling and for a season left the ministry altogether (Joynt, 2017). More recently, I have recognized a change or development in my sense of call leading me away from being a senior pastor to a more academic environment and ministry. The theories of Mezirow's transformative learning (1991) and Loder's transformational logic (1981), resonate with the experiences I have had in my personal search of calling, hence, my choice of their theories in guiding my research.

As a Christian, my framework is embedded in a theistic epistemology that encompasses the seen and unseen world as referenced by the Bible. The visible world demonstrates a designed and patterned order to the universe which infers there is a designer (Romans 1:20; Psalms 19:1–4). Knowledge that comes through the observance of nature is called by

theologians natural or general revelation (Berkhof, 1979). This patterned order also extends itself into the raw fabric of what it means to be human (Loder, 1981). Hence, when assessing myself or the experiences of others, I assume there to be a design or reason behind each experience whether I can understand it or not. In this way my assumptions are positivistic.

Knowledge that has its source outside the empirical and physical world is deemed as special revelation by Christian theologians (Berkhof, 1979). Its non-empirical origin requires faith to be received and valued (Evans, 1998). Faith rationally posits God to be the ultimate of all variables, that when not included, the sum of life will be inaccurately assessed which leads to false conclusions of human nature, society, and what it means to live well. Thus, a traditional Christian epistemology emphasizes the importance of a theistic center to all learning. In this regard, personal or experiential knowledge of God (i.e., special revelation) cannot be ascertained through human reasoning alone but requires the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:11–14; Edwards, 2001; Loder, 1989). The importance of including this construct in the study with pastors is crucial. Historically, the epistemic source of calling for pastors has often come through signs, visions, dreams, or revelations:

> The experience of a calling necessitates a mythic sensibility that our contemporary paradigms of knowing have all but erased. However, the arena of religious vocation is one in which the notion of a calling and of a purposeful engagement with the "unseen" retains significance. (Haney-Loehlein, McKenna, Robie, Austin, & Ecker, 2015, p. 64)

In sum, I approached this study expecting to find patterned essences of calling through the individual descriptions made by seasoned pastors. I also believe that there may be non-empirical or mythic experiences that have a theistic origin but cannot be empirically proven. These two epistemic sources operating together create a framework for me whereby I function as

a theistic positivist. I see the world as a designed but open universe because of the Designer (Gill, 1999).

Problem Statement

Pastoral calling is an outlier in calling research although it is of epic importance to pastors. The exodus of pastors from ministry and the diminishing numbers of pastoral candidates are inextricably tied to the sense and strength of calling (Barna Group, 2017; Joynt 2017; Strunk, 2015). Though much has been written on the emotional and spiritual challenges of pastoral ministry, surprisingly, there have been no phenomenological studies of calling with seasoned pastors. In fact, theistic callings in general are absent from the literature (Myers, 2014). This is the case even though the epic importance of calling to pastors has been acknowledged historically (Placher, 2005), theologically (Acts 13:2; Matthew 4:19,20; Piper, 2013), psychologically (O'Neal, 2017), and existentially (1 Corinthians 1:1; Cafferata, 2017; Coil, 2016; Galatians 1:15; O'Neal, 2017; Romans 1:1). Further, the prevailing zeitgeist of culture stands in contrast to the theistic foundation of calling for pastors. The current humanistic culture which embraces pragmatic and positivistic philosophies is unsupportive of the theistic experiences of calling which can be experienced through dreams, signs, and revelations (Haney-Loehlein et al., 2015). Thus, it was the intention of this study to further the research on calling by exploring the significance and experience of calling in seasoned pastors.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of seasoned pastors in their search and sense of call to the ministry. The participants of this study were gathered from a pool of theologically conservative pastors who hold to an orthodox faith as found in the Apostle's Creed (see Appendix A) and reside in central California. Data for this

research were mostly gathered at the church or venue of service where the pastor serves. The experience of calling for vocational pastors is defined as a summons from God to communicate His purposes to others by words, actions, and personhood (Duffy & Dik, 2013; McKenna et al., 2015). The theories guiding this study have been selected from several disciplines that include natural and revelation theology (Berkhof, 1979), Mezirow's (1991) theory of transformative learning (TLT), and Loder's (1981) theistic-educational theory of transformational logic (TL). Based on previous and recent research in calling literature, these theories appear most aligned with the experience of calling in pastors (Coil, 2016; Domene, 2012; Duffy & Dik, 2013; Joynt, 2017; Young, 2013). A theoretical construct that is embedded in theology is pertinent and helpful in explaining the epistemological theism of pastors. TLT examines the path that leads to a transformative paradigm shift that closely follows the description of those who have been called to vocational ministry. Often pastors have described a transformative paradigm shift after experiencing their call (Placher, 2005). In this regard, Loder's (1989) transformational logic is strikingly similar to Mezirow (1978a). However, the theistic interpretation of transformative learning that Loder offers is a component necessary for pastors who understand their calling as a divine summons (Joynt, 2017).

Significance of the Study

The findings of this research offer pedagogical contributions to the fields of (a) psychology of religion, (b) transformative learning and andragogy, (c) career and vocational guidance, (d) and pastoral pedagogy. The potential empirical, theoretical, and practical contributions to these fields are considered and explored through these various disciplines.

The psychology of religion is "the study of religious behavior, thought, and feeling" (Lowenthal, 2000, p. 13). By examining the experiences of calling in pastors the significant

psychological dynamics associated with their calling such as identity (Cafferata, 2017), meaning (Heintzelman, Trent, & King, 2013), and well-being (Parker & Martin, 2011) will be better understood.

This study also contributes to Mezirow's (1991) theory of TLT. The inclusion of a theistic understanding to transformative adult learning expands Mezirow's theory in its application to include those who have a theistic epistemology and cosmology. Additionally, the intuitive and affective aspects of transformative learning are explicated in comparison to the strong cognitive approach of Mezirow (Grabove, 1997).

A further contribution of this research is directed at the field of vocational/career guidance. The prevailing calling and vocational literature is focused on skills, interests, or a sense of destiny as sources for calling (Duffy et al., 2014). Noticeably absent is vocational calling research with a theological approach. Research that adds a theistic component to the vocational calling literature will help to fill that void. Consequently, the results of this study may be used by those who interact with faith-based callings such as vocational career counselors, pastoral formation programs and institutions, and college-age students seeking a career path.

Lastly, the ambiguity and lack of pedagogy on calling in pastoral formation directly impacts the efficacy of their vocation as pastors (Joynt, 2017; Joynt & Dreyer, 2013; Strunk, 2015). In connection to this, the inner semiotic/epistemic dynamics of calling are examined. Those with a theistic calling have traditionally interpreted their calling through events and various experiences that were understood to be signs of their calling. A theistic worldview is deeply embedded in a semiotic epistemology (Klaver, 2011; Luhrmann, 2012; Schweitzer & Knudson, 2014). This research explores the various cognitive and affective processes of calling signs that pastors experience when deciphering their call, thus, making this research highly

useful in pastoral pedagogy and theistic vocational guidance. Noted groups to benefit from this research include practical theology professors, religious/ministry training institutions, Christian colleges and universities, pastoral seminar leaders, denominational leaders, vocational counselors, faith-intervention programs, and pastors.

In summary, a panoramic view of a pastor's calling which is inclusive of its psychological, theological, and vocational dimensions will equip a person training for ministry to approach that calling in a holistic manner. Those who may benefit from this pedagogical contribution include pastoral formation programs and institutions, practical theology educators and programs, psychology of religion educators, and pastors who are looking for a holistic understanding of God's calling.

Research Questions

The central research question guiding this study is as follows: What is the experience of calling for seasoned pastors? This question is further addressed with four sub-questions:

1. How do seasoned pastors describe their initial experience in their search and sense of calling?

As described by Mezirow (1991) and Loder (1981), the process of transformation begins with a disorientating dilemma. Its onset can be circumstantial, as in a life-threatening car accident (e.g., Loder, 1989); or existential, as in a loss of meaning and purpose in life (Mezirow, 1990). The dilemma activates "the process of making a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of an experience, which guides subsequent understanding, appreciation and action" (Mezirow, 1990, p. 1). The above research question is explicitly directed at the context (e.g., social, cognitive, affective, spiritual, behavioral) and process which initiated the sense and search of call.

2. How do seasoned pastors critically reflect on their search and sense of call?

Transformative learning is processed through critical reflection (Mezirow, 1993). This second process is defined by Loder (1989) as scanning. Mezirow (1991) makes a distinction between reflection and critical reflection. Reflection that is not critical can simply be a reminisce of an automobile you had in college, whereas critical reflection is a "discursive rationality-arriving at agreement on meaning through discourse by giving and assessing reasons, critically assessing arguments and assumptions, examining evidence and seeking to validate beliefs and interpretations consensually" (Mezirow, 1993, p. 389). The discursive-rationality and the consensual interpretations mentioned in the above definition address the social-communicative aspect of critical reflection. Critical thinking that is transformative takes place within an individual but in a social context which allows individuals to correct or adjust their perception (Mezirow, 2000). In relation to calling, the individual (self) and social (with others) processes are two different aspects of critical reflection that guided this research. This question probes the affective, cognitive, and social dynamics of calling.

3. How do seasoned pastors describe their subsequent actions that have resulted from their calling?

This question opens the discussion to the new roles, actions, and re-orientation mentioned in this study's third stage of transformative learning. The dilemma, followed by critical reflection, has led to the acceptance of a new paradigm which results in tangible actions (Mezirow, 1991). Loder (1989) describes this stage of action and decision making in two parts: (a) a breakthrough insight felt with intuitive force; and (b) the release and redirection of the psychic energy bound up with the original conflict (p. 208). Concrete and circumstantial

decisions, behavior, and ambitions resulting from the call of the pastor are considered in this question.

4. How do experienced pastors describe the development of their calling?

In an earlier study it was found that those who were full-time pastors and who left the ministry cited reasons for their departure such as timing, maturity, congregational conflict, and outside vocational interests (Joynt, 2017). This may be indicative of a lifecycle or maturation process that often accompanies phenomena (Fowler & Nipkow, 1991; Mantle, 2010). Fowler and Nipkow (1991) has called attention to faith development and its correspondence to the human cycle of maturation. Likewise, Kohlberg (1971) posited various levels of growth in moral development that are connected to the human cycle of growth and maturation. In calling change and development, Duffy and Dik (2013) have also acknowledged that "calling is an ongoing process rather than something to be discovered once" (p. 431) and proposed that callings often change over time. Loder (1989) parallels this final stage with the ongoing process of interpretation and evolution of the TLT. This last question explores the perceived and experienced changes of calling in the veteran pastor.

Definitions

1. *Calling* – In present research the term *calling* has a variety of definitions (Dik et al., 2012; Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011; Duffy & Sedlacek, 2010). Some define it as a vocation in which a person finds meaning and purpose (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009). For the purposes of this study, however, calling is defined as the experiences or processes through which individuals come to an awareness that God is invoking them to a particular mission.

2. *Convictional Knowing* – Convictional knowing is a term used by Loder (1981) to describe transformational learning that is embedded with strong beliefs which are affectively and motivationally charged (Cole, Culum, & Scwaab, 2008).

3. *Identity* – An identity is a set of meanings attached to roles individuals occupy in the social structure, groups they identify with and belong to, and unique ways in which they see themselves (Stets & Serpe, 2013).

4. *Search for Calling* – a seeking and striving toward finding one's purpose in life (O'Neal, 2017; Steger, 2012a).

5. *Sense of Calling* – The subjective and intuitive awareness of your purpose in life (Dik & Duffy, 2009; O'Neal, 2017).

6. *Spiritus Creator* – Spiritus Creator is the name given to the Holy Spirit by Martin Luther and repeated by James Loder (1981, p. 213). Whereas Mezirow (1991) explains transformative learning solely as a human and social experience, Loder adds to the human dimension the activity of the Holy Spirit. Loder (1981) states that transformation "begins with Christ's initiative borne in upon the personality by His Spirit and brought through conflict into faith and worship, of which theology is an integral part" (p. 213).

7. *Seasoned pastor* – The category and concept of seasoned pastor used for this study was adopted from a prior phenomenological study of long-seasoned pastors (Strunk, 2015). Strunk understood longevity to be a significant indicator of a pastor's resiliency and competence (p. 24). As such, this study extends the research on seasoned pastors to also include their experiences of calling. Also, with Strunk (2015) and Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie (2013), this study understands "tenure" to be a period of six years as the spiritual leader at a single location of ministry.

8. *Transformative learning* (TL) – Mezirow (1990) defines TL as "the process of making a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of an experience, which guides subsequent understanding, appreciation, and action" (p. 1).

9. *Vocation* – "A vocation is an approach to a particular life role that is oriented toward demonstrating or deriving a sense of purpose or meaningfulness and that holds others-oriented values and goals as primary sources of motivation" (Dik & Duffy, 2009, p. 428). Additionally, a pastoral vocation in this study denotes someone dedicated to pastoral work as a full-time career.

Summary

In this chapter the experience and importance of calling to pastors were examined. In establishing the context of the study, the historical, social, and theoretical background of the research problem was considered. The background was shown to have a significant influence in the current understanding and research of calling. It was found, that, in the last decade interest in vocational calling has greatly increased, resulting in the increase of calling research. The research, however, is overwhelmingly quantitative and outside the pastoral vocation. Thus, the absence of research and the significance of calling to pastors formed the basis of the problem and purpose statements, and the interpretive framework of this research has been guided by the theoretical constructs of theology (Berkhof, 1979), transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991; Loder, 1989), and the phenomenological methodology of Moustakas (1994) to better understand the calling experience of seasoned pastors.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Despite the pivotal nature of calling for a pastor (Lose et al., 2015), the human sciences have surprisingly produced few studies in this area (McKenna et al., 2015). Consequently, this literature review is an eclectic task that is informed from a variety of disciplines. Firstly, guiding this review are theoretical constructs taken from the fields of theology and transformative learning. Following the theoretical literature is the "Related Literature" section in which the psychological constructs of well-being, self-identity, and meaning are assessed as they relate to calling. These constructs have a large role in vocational callings and the literature underscores its pertinence to those who are called to be pastors (Bloom, 2017). Following this, an essential review of the epistemic perspectives of calling for pastors is examined. The theistic experiences of a pastor's calling are by nature non-empirical and interpreted through a variety of subjective semiotic inferences such as embodiment, revelation, events, and synchronicity. As such, a semiotic epistemology of a pastor's calling is developed and synthesized from the various sources of literature reviewed. Thus, a synthesis of the theoretical and related literature is pursued in the development of a holistic epistemology for understanding the lived experiences of calling for seasoned pastors.

Theoretical Frameworks

Theologian and educator James Loder remarked (1981), "There's nothing more practical than a good theory" (p. 204). Theories enable a researcher to arrange a set of concepts and experiences to define and explain some phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). They also provide a framework by which phenomena can be organized and arranged so that a plausible relationship between a concept and data can be understood (Silverman, 2000). Thus, adopting Loder's

(1981) interdisciplinary approach to Christian education, this study approaches a pastor's calling through the lens of theology and human sciences. Specifically, the theoretical frameworks of this research are the epistemological frameworks of theology, Mezirow's (1991) theory of transformative learning (TLT), and the theistic educational philosophy of Loder's (1989) transformational logic. These theoretical frameworks were selected for their ontological pertinence to pastors whose calling is interpreted from a theistic and experiential base.

Theological Frameworks of Calling

The source of a call has traditionally been linked to religion and the external summons of a deity (Placher, 2005). Surprisingly, however, theologically based conceptualizations of calling have been scarce in academic research (McKenna et al., 2015 Myers, 2014). Consequently, several theological constructs must be explored as they pertain to calling research. First, the theological construct of common grace is explored as a viable means of understanding a pastor's call from the perspective of the human sciences. Second, the theological construct of pastoral calling as a vocation is examined. Each of these themes have several sub-themes to be considered as well.

The theology of common grace. The constructs of common grace are embedded in the doctrines of natural theology and biblical anthropology (Mouw, 2002). These doctrines affirm the activity and work of God in all of nature and human beings. Loder (1989) applied this activity to the experience of learning that is common in every field of learning. The overarching activity and beneficence of God in creation can been understood as common grace. Reformed theologian Louis Berkhof (1953) explained the influence of common grace in this way:

> [Common grace] curbs the destructive power of sin, maintains in a measure the moral
> order of the universe, thus making an orderly life possible, distributes in varying degrees

gifts and talents among men, promotes the development of science and art, and showers

untold blessings upon the children of men. (p. 434)

The far reach of common grace that Berkhof (1953) describes, however, is not a position

with which all theologians are comfortable. Mouw (2002) expressed this discomfort, stating that

the "question of commonness [i.e., of grace] actually looms fairly large in theological discussion

these days" (p. 58). It is not the beneficent goodness of God that is questioned; rather, it is the

commonness of the grace-experience for believers and unbelievers that is strongly debated. In

fact, on this particular issue a denominational split occurred within the Christian Reformed

Church which led to the formation of the Protestant Reformed Church (Mouw, 2002). These

theological concerns may appear to be a trifle and related to a small percentage of Christians;

however, the guard against universalism is strong among conservative Christians.

In Christian groups where the depravity of humans is overstressed, the *imago Dei* can be

overlooked (Genesis 1:26; James 3:9), and distrust among neighbors can increase (Hempel,

Matthews, & Bartkowski, 2012). When the broad definition of common grace is received,

however, it offers a framework through which human experience and culture (Christian or

otherwise) can be connected to the activity of God (Berkhof, 1979; McKenna et al., 2015;

Myers, 2014). Common grace recognizes that every good gift, regardless of the recipients,

comes from God (James 1:17; Van Til, 1947).

This last statement has relevance in understanding the construct of calling. Common

grace affirms every human has a measure of grace woven into his or her humanity that may

express itself as a talent, ability, disposition or vocational call. Theologically, common grace

teaches that God is close and active in all humans for ultimate good (Acts 17:26–27). Part of this

activity is the deep learning which is transformative:

God created humankind in such a way that all learning comes as a gift to be received. Deep learning is an experience of divine grace, whether common grace (how God created the world and providentially cares for humankind) or special grace (how God's Spirit works in persons' lives to draw them to know him through Christ). (Young, 2013, p. 325)

The gift of deep transformative learning is traced to God's common and special grace. The distinction between common and special grace is commonly made by theologians to differentiate the special grace of God through Jesus Christ in salvation for believers and the universal grace of God that is beneficent and experienced by all humanity (Berkhof, 1953; Mouw, 2002). According to Young (2013) and Loder (1981), transformative learning can be experienced through either means. The ability to differentiate special grace from common grace, however, is not easily achieved. Mouw (2002) confessed that after 40 years of studying the differences of common and special grace, he is "convinced that there is such a thing as common grace, but I am not very clear about what it is" (p. 148). He admitted that the operations of grace, common or special, are "shrouded in mystery" (Mouw, 2002, p. 151) in a way that is similar to the activity of the Holy Spirit. He observed that the presence of mystery does not mean a passive resignation to the unknowable; rather, because of the importance of the issue, an attempt should be made to clarify the issues to avoid confusion. The confusion Mouw referred to is the application and extent of common grace in light of the theological construct of human depravity.

Those within the Christian faith who show apprehension to a robust understanding of common grace cite biblical passages which underscore human depravity, such as Jeremiah 17:9, Romans 3:23, 1 Corinthians 2:14, and Ephesians 2:1–3. These passages emphatically teach the hopeless and unrighteous nature of the human condition. James Denney, the Scottish

Presbyterian reformer of the early 20th century, described the totality of human depravity in this way:

> There is no part of man's nature which is unaffected by it. I repeat what I said before, that man's nature is all of a piece, and that what affects it at all affects it altogether. When the conscience is violated by disobedience to the will of God, the moral understanding is darkened, and the will is enfeebled. We are not constructed in water-tight compartments, one of which might be ruined while the others remained intact; what touches us for harm, with a corrupting, depraving touch, at a single point, has effects throughout our nature none the less real that they may be for a time beneath consciousness. The depravity which sin has produced in human nature extends to the whole of it. There is no part of man's nature which is unaffected by it. Man's nature is all of a piece, and what affects it at all affects it altogether. (Denney, 1895, p. 83)

Denney's view on depravity would be accepted among some conservative Christians. For example, those of the Reformed tradition who hold to the *Heidelberg Catechism* ask the question, "Are we then so corrupt that we are wholly incapable of doing any good, and inclined to all wickedness? Indeed, we are; except we are born again by the Spirit of God" (Heidelberg Catechism, 1563/2018, question 8). When placed alongside the claims of common grace, one can readily see the conflict of beliefs between these two positions. In fairness, however, it must be said that many Christians who are of the Reformed tradition do not hold to this position and believe common grace can potentially be found in every facet of human experience apart from regeneration (Berkhof, 1953; Mouw, 2002). The epistemic significance of these differences, though, could have significance to the interpretive construct for the conservative pastors used for this research. If the depravity of humans is as Denney (1895) described, then the cognitive

processes of reasoning of those outside the faith cannot be trusted. If the Heidelberg Catechism is dogmatically followed, only those who are regenerated by the Holy Spirit have the potential for truth and beneficence. This belief places a pastor or Christian scholar in a position that disallows the insights of researchers unless they are "born again" (John 3:1–8).

While the importance of the above discussion may not carry value for a non-theistic paradigm of calling, for those whose callings are theistic-centered and biblically oriented, the discussion has great pedagogical relevance. For instance, does the transformative learning of special grace through Jesus Christ have the same processes of critical reflection and transformation as those who are non-theistic? And if so, how is this experienced? This and other epistemic questions of calling can be further explored by looking at the tenets of natural theology.

Natural theology. Theology is the systematic organization of doctrines, beliefs, and traditions about God (Berkhof, 1979). Natural theology is the study of God through and by the content of nature. This is in contrast to biblical theology which draws its knowledge of God strictly from the Bible. The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* explains natural theology as the process of "using the cognitive faculties that are natural to human beings—reason, sense-perception, introspection—to investigate religious or theological matters" (Chignell & Pereboom, 2017, para. 1). In contrast to biblical theology, "it avoids appeals to special non-natural faculties (ESP, telepathy, mystical experience) or supernatural sources of information such as sacred texts, revealed theology, creedal authorities, direct supernatural communication" (Chignell & Pereboom, 2017, para. 2). Natural theology seeks to adhere to the same criteria of rational investigation as other philosophical and scientific pursuits. It is also subject to the same methods of evaluation and critique as other empirical sciences (Chignell & Pereboom, 2017).

Natural theology (or natural law; Budziszewski, 1997), has historically been used by Christian apologists to persuade the skeptic or atheist. Some well-known examples of this from the philosophical branch of natural theology would be Aquinas (Lisska, 1996), Lewis (2001), and Keller (2009). Theological constructs that approach natural theology from an empirical and scientific perspective are considered arguments from intelligent design (De Cruz & De Smedt, 2017). This branch of natural theology also has its advocates such as Collins (2006) and Dembski (1998).

The epistemic construct of both philosophical and empirical branches of natural theology affirms that the language (Psalm 19: 1–4), purposes (Acts 17:24–28), and attributes of God (Romans 1:19, 20) can be perceived through empirical observations of nature. This has special relevance for theistic researchers in the fields of social science and psychology. Theistic researchers in these fields have commonly integrated the epistemic constructs of natural theology within their research. Citing the common grace of God, they note the commonality of experiences and processes that exist between those with or without faith (Fowler & Nipkow, 1991; Loder, 1989). This can have interpretive significance when exploring the calling framework of pastors. If rigorous and thorough research has repeatedly found a pattern or experience that is thematically consistent, a theistic calling can find guidance through the epistemic contributions of natural theology. The endorsement of natural theology is further seen in the book of Proverbs located in the wisdom literature of the Bible.

Natural law and wisdom literature. The wisdom literature of the Bible consists of five canonical books: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon. These books are also called the poetical books of the Bible. Similar to poetry, analogy and metaphor are frequently used in these books to describe God and His ways. For the purposes of this study the

specific constructs and underlying assumptions of Proverbs will be considered as they relate to the epistemic foundations of a pastor's calling.

In Proverbs, natural theology is presented as theistic laws that guide and predict the outcome of various behaviors (Budziszewski, 1997). These laws are not arbitrary or impersonal, but they are God ordained and part of the created world. Natural law theory conceives the world as an orderly and objective source of wisdom that conveys moral obligations to human beings (Budziszewski, 1997; van Drunen, 2013). It is in the observed patterns found within human behavior and society that wisdom can be acquired. Reviewed in this light, van Drunen (2013) draws attention to four natural laws found in the wisdom literature of Proverbs.

The first and foundational law upon which the other laws are founded is that God is the author and creator of all that exists (van Drunen, 2013). Perdue (1994) observes that for the various authors of Proverbs, "creation theology and its correlative affirmation, providence, were at the center of the sages' understanding of God, the world, and humanity" (p. 20). The heavens, seas, earth, and humans are all a part of God's masterful work (Proverbs 3:19–20; 8:22–31). Additionally, this work of creation extends beyond the material world and is present in the social, political, and moral world as well. Consequently, because the world is created by God it is meaningful, orderly, and morally instructive (van Drunen, 2013). Wisdom and understanding are embedded in the created structural patterns of the world. Significantly, this cosmological construct forms the basis for Loder's (1981) interdisciplinary approach to Christian education.

A second law is the moral order of the universe. Life, in its great array of circumstances and experiences, is not arbitrary but consists of obligations and behavior, that when followed, prosperity in all sectors of life will occur (van Drunen, 2013, p. 163). Sayings such as "Poor is he who works with a negligent hand, but the hand of the diligent makes rich" (Proverbs 10:4) or

"The fear of the Lord prolongs life, but the years of the wicked will be shortened" (Proverbs 10:27) are found not in moral precepts alone but in the observation of long-term results. It was observed by the sage of Proverbs,

> I passed by the field of a sluggard, by the vineyard of a man lacking sense, and behold, it was all overgrown with thorns; the ground was covered with nettles, and its stone wall was broken down. *Then I saw and considered it; I looked and received instruction* [emphasis added]. A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man. (Proverbs 24:30–34)

God's wisdom came through the thoughtful reflection of another's experience. There is moral order to the world that can be ascertained by the careful observation of its patterns. Some Bible scholars also note that Jesus Christ often spoke in the wisdom tradition of a sage (Witherington, 2000). An example of the Lord's sagacity is found in His observation of the moral order of God found in nature:

> Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. (Matthew 6:26–29)

Nature was an inspired book from which Jesus gleaned understanding from God about the human condition. In research, a human corollary to Jesus's observation is found in the calling and career literature of vocational science. This is explored in-depth later, but suffice to say,

well-being and calling have also been found to be related through the careful observations of qualitative and quantitative research.

A third natural law that van Drunen (2013) observed is the cross-cultural and international element of wisdom. He observed that in Proverbs "there is genuine wisdom beyond the borders of Israel [which] suggests biblical support for a view that looks to natural law as a basis for seeking common consent and cooperation across cultural divides" (p. 163). For example, he observed that the sayings of chapters 30 and 31 of Proverbs have their source outside Israel (p. 161). These two chapters are respectively attributed to Agur and Lemuel. Van Drunen (2013) conjectured that "there is no Old Testament record of any Israelite bearing either the name Agur or Lemuel, and scholars have noted a number of Aramaisms in 31:1–9, suggesting a foreign origin" (p. 162). He further observed, "The prophets Jeremiah and Obadiah acknowledge that wisdom resides among the Edomites" (Jeremiah 49:7; Obadiah 1; van Drunen, 2013, p. 162). In making a case for a natural law which is international, van Drunen (2013) concluded that the wisdom of this third natural law provided a biblical base of commonality and correspondence with those outside the community of God's people. As such, this could also apply to the insights of calling research found outside the theological confines of a theistic epistemology.

Fourthly, the moral world order also provides a practical guideline by which a successful life could be experienced. Proverbs offers a cause and effect practical wisdom that in some ways is akin to empirical and correlational research. Van Drunen (2013) states, "In Proverbs sound moral conclusions are often recognized through their eminent practical usefulness. Doing good things tends to promote good ends, while doing evil things tends to hinder attainment of those ends" (p. 164). Thus, an honest examination of cause and effect could be an effective guideline

to obtaining wisdom. In wisdom's tradition that would include the "fear of God" which is the starting place of all wisdom and knowledge (Proverbs 1:7).

In sum, natural theology and natural laws offer a biblical and empirical base by which the gaining of wisdom and insight to human behavior can be applied to calling research. The doctrine of total depravity was balanced with the doctrine of common grace which teaches that the beneficence of God reaches into all humans regardless of their moral state (Matthew 5:45). Hence, non-theistic researchers can be gifted by God in supplying insight into the calling experiences of pastors. Finally, the findings of rigorous empirical research can be useful as a guide and interpretation of the moral order of God's created world, thereby providing a systemic account of calling for a pastor. Thus, natural theology is a suitable framework by which to research a pastor's calling.

Biblical theology of calling. The shift to the non-empirical biblical theology of calling constructs is necessary in light of the participants of this research (Creswell, 2013). The worldview and epistemology of pastors are largely derived through the precepts and examples found in the Bible. For this research to ignore the biblical constructs of calling as commonly understood by pastors would bypass the operative perspectives that are central to their calling. With this in mind, a general biblical framework of calling is explored, followed by the calling-theology of vocational pastors.

The general call of God's people. The importance of calling in biblical theology is stressed by scripture (1 Corinthians 7:17–24; Romans 8:30; 1 Peter 2:9–10) and theologians:

> Calling is a central and dynamic theme that becomes a metaphor for the life of faith itself. To limit the word, as some insist, to a few texts and to a particular stage in salvation is to miss the forest for the trees. (Guinness, 2003, p. 30)

The theology of calling is not an adjunct doctrine for the Christian church and its leaders. As

noted earlier, the early Christians' self-identity of being a called-people was inherited from the

Jewish nation; these early Christians were frequently reminded by prophetic leadership of the

privilege and responsibilities of their calling (1 Kings 8:53; 2 Samuel 7:23–24; Amos 3:1–2;

Deuteronomy 7:6–8; 14:2; Psalm 105:8–15). Parallel to the Old Testament leadership, the New

Testament apostolic leaders exhorted Christians to consider their calling (1 Corinthians 1:26–31),

to walk in a way that was worthy of their calling (Ephesians 4:1), and to pursue the prize of

God's upward call in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:14). In synthesizing these and other scriptures

on calling, it could be said that the primary construct for calling in the New Testament is the call

to Christ Himself through the agency of the Holy Spirit:

> Our primary calling as followers of Christ is by him, to him, and for him. First and
>
> foremost, we are called to Someone (God), not to something such as motherhood,
>
> politics, or teaching; or to somewhere, such as the inner city or Outer Mongolia.
>
> (Guinness, 2003, p. 31)

Guinness (2003) distinguished the primary call from the secondary calls such as careers,

duties, or organizations. He emphasized that "we must also make sure that the primary calling

leads without fail to the secondary calling. The church's failure to meet these challenges has led

to the two grand distortions that have crippled the truth of calling" (p. 31). The grand distortions

to which he referred are the reductionist constructs that limit calling to vocational pastors or

priests (the Catholic distortion); or by equating all careers to a calling (the Protestant distortion).

If either emphasis is construed to be the primary definition of calling, a harmful imbalance

occurs. Likewise, it could be said that a theology of calling which only considers the empirical

nature of calling such as natural abilities, circumstances, or resources, can also result in a truncated view of God's calling. Burning bushes are still stopping the curious and called of God.

Calling as vocational ministry. Guinness (2003) offered insight into the historical and theological understanding of calling in the New Testament, but he did not expand on the vocational call to ministry nor the means by which that calling occurs. Most often God's general call is said to occur through the preaching of the gospel (2 Thessalonians 2:14). But what of the individual and personal call to full-time vocational ministry, such as Paul, who significantly and repeatedly identified his calling as an apostle (Romans 1:1,5; 1 Corinthians 1:1; Galatians 1:1)? Two primary theological views of vocational ministry and calling are found below.

Nel and Scholtz (2016) approached vocational ministry as a career similar to any other career. They reasoned, "Is there anything special" (p. 1) about those who are called to a vocational ministry? After a historical survey of Reformed vocational theology, they answered their own question: "What is special about the calling to full-time congregational ministry is healthy secularization" (p. 6). When explaining their position, Nel and Scholtz claimed,

> It is indeed very special to be entrusted with the job or profession to equip the seekers of the kingdom, wherever they are and in (and through) whatever they do (cf. Matt 6:33). It is, however, also just a work, a job, a profession. (p. 7)

Nel and Scholtz (2016) and other scholars (Gibbs, 2005; Gibbs & Coffey, 2001) share the understanding that full-time vocational ministry is the same as any other profession that has accountability and requires training, skill, and competence (Nel & Scholtz, 2016, p. 6). This is what is meant by the secularization of the ministry. It is not a compromising of calling but an equalizer of calling. The rationale behind their reasoning is rooted in the Reformed tradition which posits all work is to be a calling in that "whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as

working for the Lord, not for men" (Colossians 3:23, New International Version). Additionally, by secularizing the concept of full-time congregational ministry, the church would be placing a "pastor on the level where we expect competency in the same way we expect qualified competency of any other Christian to be qualified and competent in their professions" (Nel & Scholtz, 2016, p. 6). A last reason for the secularization of vocational ministry mentioned by Nel and Scholtz is that by differentiating pastors as the called-ones who do the work of the ministry, the mission of the church is subrogated. The church does the work of the ministry and it is the work of vocational pastors to equip the church to do that work. It is not the pastor's "work to take over the work of God's people" (Nel & Scholtz, 2016, p. 5).

Hence, according to the Reformed position as understood by Nel and Scholtz (2016) and others (Gibbs, 2005; Gibbs & Coffey, 2001), there is nothing special in a full-time vocational calling that cannot also be found in any other career. Further, this position is redolent to the Puritan position of Baxter, who exhorted every Christian to understand his or her work as a calling (Ryken, 1990). Perhaps, the equalizing of calling has some merit by bringing recognition to those in the Body of Christ who by society's standards are inferior (1 Corinthians 12:21–26). This approach may also rightly encourage the identity of calling for all Christians and not just vocational pastors (1 Peter 2:9–10). The secularization of ministry by Nel and Scholtz, however, may be overstated.

John Piper (2013), who is also of a Reformed tradition, understands the calling of a vocational pastor in a different light. In his book, *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals: A Plea to Pastors for Radical Ministry*, Piper (2013) also reasoned about the nature of a pastor's calling. In stark contrast to the secularization of ministers as professionals by Nel and Scholtz (2016), Piper (2013) asked, "Is there professional praying? Professional trusting in God's promises?

Professional weeping over souls? Professional musing on the depths of revelation? Professional

rejoicing in the truth? Professional praising God's name?" (p. ix). He went on to assert,

> We pastors are being killed by the professionalizing of the pastoral ministry. The
>
> mentality of the professional is not the mentality of the prophet. It is not the mentality of
>
> the slave of Christ. Professionalism has nothing to do with the essence and heart of the
>
> Christian ministry. The more professional we long to be, the more spiritual death we will
>
> leave in our wake. For there is no professional childlikeness (Matthew 18:3); there is no
>
> professional tenderheartedness (Ephesians 4:32); there is no professional panting after
>
> God (Ps. 42:1). (Piper, 2013, p. 1)

Piper (2013) reasoned that vocational ministry is unlike any other profession because "the

aims of our ministry are eternal and spiritual, the pastor's agenda is set by God and not the

world, and professionalism seeks to please humans and not God" (pp. 2–3). Piper, a Jonathon

Edwards scholar to whom he credits much of his theological positions (Piper & Taylor, 2004),

represents a radical theocentric understanding of vocational ministry. The demands and calling

to vocational ministry set it apart from other professions in that one may be called upon to die for

the sake of the Caller (Placher, 2005).

The theological tension between these two perspectives of a pastor's call can perhaps be

reduced by listening to the actual calling experiences and perspectives of those who are called to

be vocational pastors. Too often a theological (or scientific) premise can overlook and ignore the

experiences of those most affected by it and thereby lose a great deal of insight. As it turns out,

research has shown that pastors often feel this tension and struggle to reconcile their theistic

calling within an institutionalized setting (Grey, 2012). In particular, it has been noted that

ministers are "susceptible to role stress, because a minister must attempt to balance the

frequently conflicting expectations of their congregations, denominational superiors, and family members, while attempting to stay true to their religious calling" (Faucett, Corwyn, & Poling, 2012, p. 6). Thus, the expectations and roles within the institution can conflict with a pastor's perceived calling from God. By way of analogy, the conflict would be similar to an employee receiving orders from middle-management that are in contradiction to senior-management. The position of Piper (2013) leans to disregarding middle-management, whereas Nel and Scholtz (2016) would emphasize middle-management as authoritative. Depending on the context, an argument could be made for either position. The point is that regardless of one's theology of vocational calling of ministers, tension between the calling-perspectives of pastors and the church they serve will likely be experienced. By understanding the theology of calling, both pastor and churches can help to avert misunderstandings that can undermine their unity of service.

In sum, the theoretical constructs of pastoral calling encompass a broad range of theological material. The theological constructs of common grace and natural theology were selected to provide a theological base for social-science research in the exploration of a theistic calling. It was also observed that a pastor's call was understood differently by certain traditions within the Christian church. Some regard vocational ministry as a career that is similar to other careers, while others see the call of a pastor as a special calling that is vocationally set apart. The non-empirical nature of calling for pastors, which was briefly examined, pointed to an imaginative leap of faith which was insolubly connected to a theistic epistemology and cosmology. The epistemological nature of a theistic calling is further explored later in the Related Literature section under the heading "Epistemic Considerations of Pastoral Calling." In

the next section, the theoretical constructs of transformational learning are explored and then related to the experiences of calling for pastors.

Transformational Learning Theory

It can be argued that the experience of transformation has been studied throughout history. As a formal discipline of study, however, transformational learning theory (TLT) is relatively new. Since its inception 40 years ago, there have been modifications, criticisms, and refinement of this adult learning theory. In the course of time, however, the broad principles of TLT have been tested and tried in a great many ways, and TLT has now taken its place alongside other acknowledged theories of learning (Dirkx, 2012).

TLT's relevance to a pastoral calling is observed in the transformative impact a calling has upon a pastor. Studies have shown the transformational influence of calling for pastors in the way they construct meaning (Jones, 2010), self-identity (Willimon, 2002), and purpose in life (Adams & Bloom, 2017). These transformative elements are acknowledged in a general definition of calling by two leading researchers in the field:

> [Calling is] a transcendent summons, experienced as originating beyond the self, to approach a particular life role in a manner oriented toward demonstrating or deriving a sense of purpose or meaningfulness and that holds other-oriented values and goals as primary sources of motivation. (Dik & Duffy 2009, p. 429)

According to this definition, values, purpose or meaningfulness, orientation, goals, pro-social behavior, motivation, a particular life role, and transcendence are found in the experience of calling. These profound intrinsic and extrinsic life-changing characteristics as per definition are not overstated but reinforced by dozens of studies that have been done in the last ten years (Adams & Bloom, 2017; Duffy & Dik, 2013; O'Neal, 2017). The transformative power of a

calling can also be illustrated in the biblical examples of Abraham (Genesis 12:1–3), Moses

(Exodus 3:1–22), Gideon (Judges 6:11–22), Samuel (1 Samuel 3:1–21), Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1–13),

Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:4–13), Amos (Amos 7:14–15), Nehemiah (Nehemiah 1:1–4), and the first

Apostles (Matthew 4:18–22; Mark 1:16–20; Luke 5:1–11; John 1:35–51). Each of these

individuals was dramatically changed by his calling experience. The association of calling with

transformational learning underscores the fitness, applicability, and relevance of TLT for the

research of calling among pastors. Its established position as a learning theory in the making of

new-meanings and perspectives (Taylor & Cranton, 2012) supports a researcher's intuition that

TLT has theoretical constructs which show "potential relevance for Christian pastors and

educators" (Young, 2013, p. 322).

Mezirow's contribution. Jack Mezirow (1978a) is considered the architect of TLT

(Cranton & Taylor, 2012; Tisdell, 2012). Knowles (1977), however, laid the groundwork for

TLT by demonstrating the pedagogical particularities associated with adult learning. By the

mid-1970s, Mezirow (1991) began to develop a theory of adult education using a qualitative

grounded theory methodology during a period in which quantitative research dominated

educational research (Dickinson & Rusnell, 1971). The combination of an emergent adult

learning theory and the socio-historical context of feminism provided a fertile environment for a

grounded theory of transformational learning. Baumgartner (2012) accurately summarized the

context and nexus of TLT formation:

> By the mid-1970s, the work of liberal feminists and the women's liberation movement
>
> had been in the media for some time (Davis, 1999). Women's re-entry programs had
>
> sprung up across the nation. Discussions in these re-entry programs prompted "a critical

appraisal of sex stereotypes" (Mezirow, 1978a, p. 8), which led women to "new vistas of

self-realization" (p. 8). This process would later be called transformational learning.

(p. 100)

It seems appropriate that TLT was developed during a pivotal period in which societal

transformation was occurring. The feminist movement initiated a self-realization movement

among women which resulted in large numbers of women pursuing higher education and higher

earning careers which had largely been the domain of males (Davis, 1999). Mezirow (1978a)

was deeply involved in the movement and conducted a major study that entailed 314 women's

re-entry programs in 1,172 two-year colleges affiliated with the American Association of

Community and Junior Colleges. From the gathered and analyzed data, "twenty women who

attended consciousness raising groups and over fifty alumnae were interviewed to secure

evidence on the development of participants after the re-entry experience" (Baumgartner, 2012,

p. 101).

The interviews revealed that the deep structures of the participant's self-identity were

largely shaped by the expectations placed on them by culture, family, and religion. When these

structures were identified, assessed, and challenged, new meaning-perspectives were developed

among the women who participated in the study. Mezirow (1978a) noted, "By recognizing the

social, economic, political, psychological and religious assumptions that shape these structures

. . . we can reconstruct our personal frame of reference" (p. 7).

The reconstruction of the personal meanings placed on identity, values, or goals is

transformational learning. Mezirow (1978a) identified that the experience of transformative

learning has 10 non-sequential steps to the process:

(1) a disorienting dilemma; (2) self-examination; (3) a critical assessment of sex role

assumptions; (4) a sense of alienation from taken-for-granted social roles and

expectations; (5) relating one's discontent to a current public issue; (6) exploring options

for new ways of living; (7) building competence and self-confidence in new roles; (8)

planning a course of action and acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's

plans; (9) provisional efforts to try new roles; and (10), a reintegration into society on the

basis of conditions dictated by the new perspective. (Mezirow, 1978a, p. 12)

Mezirow's (1978a, 1978b) initial theory was further developed and followed by

Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning (1991) which is considered by some as the "first

comprehensive presentation of transformative learning" (Tisdell, 2012, p. 5). In an article written

a year earlier which focused on the practical strategies of TLT, however, Mezirow had already

defined TLT "as the process of making a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of an

experience, which guides subsequent understanding, appreciation, and action" (Mezirow &

Associates, 1990, p. 1). Mezirow (2000) later clarified that the steps to transformative learning

are not rigidly imposed or predictably linear but can occur in different sequences (Calleja, 2014).

Other transformative learning practitioners have also refined transformative learning by the

reduction of Mezirow's (1978a) 10 steps. For example, Cranton (2006), McLaughlin (2014),

and Merriam (2004) consolidated Mezirow's (1978a) 10-step process into four steps, and Taylor

(1997) reduced the transformative learning process to six steps. The evolving and malleable

nature of TLT is seen in other ways as well.

The rational-cognitive emphasis in transformative learning without addressing other

sources of knowing has been a criticism of Mezirow (Cranton & Taylor, 2012). For instance,

other TLT theorists have noted that intuition, affective learning, feelings, and whole person

learning are as important as the cognitive role in transformational learning (Cranton & Taylor, 2012; Fleischer, 2006; Taylor & Cranton, 2012). Boyd and Myers (1988), drawing from Jungian depth psychology, posited that grief can also be a powerful agent in transformative learning. Still other researchers have affirmed a theistic and spiritual perspective in transformative learning (Fleischer, 2006; McLaughlin, 2014; Young, 2013). Thus, rather than making the cognitive approach the focal point of transformation, the eclectic and imaginative use of TLT by other scholars illustrates the importance of a learner-centered approach to TLT which embraces diversity of experience.

Research literature that underscores transformation through new perspectives has also demonstrated the diversity of means by which those transformations occur. Consequently, a holistic-approach that listens to the whole person appears to be the most efficacious means by which TLT is to be applied. This does not weaken TLT as a learning theory but broadens its parameters to be inclusive of the myriad ways people experience transformation. For instance, a study which examined the transformative experiences associated with HIV-positive individuals (Courtenay, Merriam, & Reeves, 1998), concluded that the participants' transformative changes far exceeded mere changes of perspective through critical reflection. The study revealed that the participants created new meaning perspectives categorized more by altruism and empathy than anything else. In the analysis of these findings, Courtenay et al. (1998) concluded that, similar to other studies, the participants' transformation was characterized by spirituality, transpersonal development, and compassion for others. Inherent in these and other transformational learning experiences, however, are the broad principles of TLT which have philosophical assumptions which are constructionist, humanistic, and critical social theoretic (Cranton & Taylor, 2012).

As credible and tested as these assumptions may be, TLT as a theory is incomplete when studying the experience of calling among pastors. Pastors have an epistemic filter that is strongly theistic in understanding their call (Burns et al., 2013). Mezirow (1991), on the other hand, has been criticized "for being too rationalistic, ignoring the role of imagination and the subconscious in perspective transformation, and denying the spiritual dimension of deep learning" (Young, 2013, p. 322). Thus, the need to undergird TLT with a theological epistemic construct that is transformational is imperative. The theological and transformational constructs of transformational logic (TL) by Loder (1989) are utilized to this end.

Transformational logic. James Loder (1989) began teaching Christian education at Princeton in 1962. He eventually earned the Philosophy Chair of Christian Education in 1987 and continued to teach at Princeton until his sudden death in 2001 (Kurian & Lamport, 2015). Before his tenure as professor of Christian education at Princeton, Loder (1989) was trained in philosophy and psychology at Harvard. His education and interests at Harvard were diverse and provided him with the background for the integrative approach he brought to Christian education. This is reflected in his *Transformation in Christian Education*: "My hypothesis is that the theme of transformation provides a major step in constructing a systematic, interdisciplinary (as opposed to a multidisciplinary) foundation for Christian education" (Loder, 1981, p. 205).

Loder (1981) did not believe that Christian education was dissimilar to other forms of learning. Similar to Dewey, Piaget, and Polanyi, Loder (1981) believed that there are parallel patterns to all learning:

Certain elementary structures or patterned processes underlie and give shape to our general experience, they assert that whether one analyzes culture, society or personality

these patterns will inevitably appear though in different manifest form depending upon

which order of reality is in question. (p. 204)

In other words, embedded in humans are learning structures that process information in a manner

that is similar in its substructure but manifestly different according to each discipline. Loder

(1989) asserted that the common substructural process to all learning is transformation:

The knowing event may occur in contexts as seemingly alien as puzzle solving, scientific

discovery, poetry writing, psychotherapy, and religious conversion. Such expressions of

transformation vary at the surface, but the deep, underlying pattern remains the same. It

is innate to want completion of transformational logic wherever it appears, just as we

want completion of any recognizable sentence or any narrative form. (p. 37)

Thus, transformation, as understood by Loder (1989), refers to any transformation where the

"hidden orders of coherence and meaning emerge to replace or alter the axioms of [a] given

frame and reorder its elements accordingly" (p. 229). The hidden order of coherence may be

discovered in physics, theology, or cabinetry; regardless of the discipline, the five-fold process of

transformational logic is present in each. As an example of this process, Loder (1981) used the

experience of Archimedes' discovery of hydrostatics (p. 208).

Loder's logic of transformation. Archimedes was asked by King Hiero II of Syracuse

(third century B.C.E.) to determine if a crown commissioned by the king was pure gold or

alloyed with lesser quality metals. Archimedes was vexed and puzzled in finding a solution to

the problem. Upon seeing water displaced from the tub when taking a bath, Archimedes

discovered hydrostatics and the solution to the king's request and shouted "Eureka!" Later,

Archimedes tested his theorem and found the crown was indeed compromised with cheaper

alloys. Thus, using Archimedes example as a prototype, Loder (1981) identified five common

elements to transformational learning: (a) a conflict borne with persistence; (b) interlude and

scanning; (c) insight felt with intuitive force; (d) release and redirection of the psychic energy

bound up with the original conflict; (e) and interpretation which tests the insight for coherence

with the terms of the conflict and for correspondence with the public context of the original

conflict (Loder, 1989, p. 208). Whether it be hydrostatics or theology, these steps will

predictably occur in the process of discovery. And though there are different phases of the

learning process, they are connected and held together by the innate motivation to find resolve in

a vested conflict: "The sense of the coherence of the structure consists in this: once the conflict is

entered and energy invested in it, the psyche seeks resolution and is deeply reluctant to give up

the conflict until a resolution is found" (p. 209). This innate urge to resolve is redolent of the

motivational theory of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957).

Cognitive dissonance posits that perspectival contradictions within a person create angst

and discomfort which motivate an individual to resolve the dissonance. The dissonance can be

resolved by a change of beliefs, actions, or perception of actions (Hall, 1998). Both Loder (1981)

and Festinger (1957) have observed the motivating force of an unresolved dilemma within an

individual. If a general distinction can be made between the two, it would be one of emphasis

and not of kind. Loder's (1989) motivation for resolve is analogous to the physical presence of

thirst or hunger, whereas the motivational drive of cognitive dissonance seems to derive from a

sense of guilt over contradictory values and behavior. In both theories, however, it is the unrest

associated with incompleteness that urges the individual to find inner congruence.

As a Christian education professor, Loder (1989) integrated his educational theory with

his pneumatology or theology of the Holy Spirit. He cited the agency for transformation as "the

Holy Spirit, conjoined with providence, [who] engages people in transformational learning"

(Young, 2013, p. 336). Loder (1981) posited that in Christian education the Spiritus Creator breaks into the deep structural patterns of our psyche and brings transforming insights by which we create meaning and experience change. The dilemma mentioned by Mezirow (1978a) which initiates transformational learning is identified by Loder (1989) as the Spirit who convicts and brings a disturbance to complacent souls (p. 219). It is also the same Spirit of Christ that brings insights and resolve to the questions of conflict that he initiated. In so doing, the Holy Spirit is said to bring a convictional knowledge (CK) that transforms an individual. There are several characteristics of CK employed by Loder (1989) which require further explaining.

The term conviction used by Loder (1989) is a judiciary metaphor to describe an experience which is convincing, incontestable, and part of a permanent record as in a court of law (p. 222). Extended further, conviction also implies three additional aspects: a convicted individual, someone who convicts, and a relationship between the two. When someone has a convictional experience, all three implications of conviction are condensed into a single moment which establishes a relationship between the convicted to the one who convicts (p. 229). The five-step process mentioned earlier along with the associated dynamics of conviction are described by Loder (1989) as "transformational logic" (p. 229). It must be said, however, its logic is not embraced by all.

Loder (1989) observed that many profound convictional experiences of reality go unexamined or get dismissed entirely because they counter the human science assumptions of empiricism and inductive reasoning as test measures for reality (p. 16). Convictional experiences are not considered normative because they disclose a reality that is of a distinctive different order. Accordingly, convictional experiences "are essentially beyond naturalistic study and should be recognized and accepted as such" (p. 17). That is, the convictional knowing

experience "discloses reality and calls for new interpretations" (p. 14) because it transcends the domain of empirical research. Therefore, the assumptions of empirical science are not designed to address matters of a moral or metaphysical nature. Ironically, those who question convictional experiences on the basis of science, neglect or are unaware of the science which validates the "health-producing effects of these experiences" (p. 17).

Loder (1989) was careful to say, however, that in the common course of daily living, empiricism with its cause/effect equation is how life is lived and processed. Convictional moments of knowing are threshold experiences (Meyer & Land, 2005) which occur at the extremities of experience. "Most of life is surely not lived in constant encounter with its boundaries, and, if we meet God in times of extremity, that surely does not limit the Divine Presence to that dimension of human life" (Loder, 1989, p. 18). The convictional experience is but a very brief moment in comparison to other life experiences; however, its brief splash is felt long after in the rippling effects it has on other life experiences. Loder (1989) believed that it is because we encounter the Divine at the extremity in a convictional experience, that "God's presence can be discovered at the center of life all the more vividly, all the more precisely" (p. 18). As an example, Loder (1989) recalls the well-known Damascus Road conversion of Saul found in the New Testament.

An example of convictional-knowing: Saul of Taursus. While on a road leading to the city to Damascus, Saul had a surprising spiritual encounter with the risen Christ that transformed his life's course and vocation (Acts 9:1–19). It is a surprising encounter in that Saul had been fixated on his ambition to destroy the Christian faith when he was called by the risen Christ to defend the very faith he had attempted to destroy. This calling experience became the epicenter of Saul's identity which he frequently referred to as a transformational event and which became

the basis of his faith (Acts 22:2–16), character (Galatians 1:11–24), and vocation (1Timothy

1:12–16). Several observations by Loder (1989) are made of Saul's experience.

Firstly, Saul's convictional encounter with Christ could only be understood by Saul even

though others were present during the experience. Consequently, "no one making observations

from an objective viewpoint . . . could know what was really happening to him" (Loder, 1989, p.

22). This fact reinforced Loder's position on the interpretive limitations of convictional

encounters by human sciences which are strictly positivistic and reductionist. Connected to this

is a second observation that "God alone can finally validate the claim that God has spoken"

(Loder, 1989, p. 23). Others may confirm the validity of our convictional experiences as Ananias

did with a supranatural vision of Saul's location and condition (Acts 9:10–17), but the ultimate

persuasion of its validity rests with God interacting and convincing the individual. In this

respect, Saul was convinced God had spoken to him not because his experience was confirmed

by a leader or delegate of the church; rather, it was the revelational (i.e., convictional) and

miraculous activity of God transcending space and time that worked through Ananias to

convince Saul. Apart from any human coordination, the amazing synchronicity of Ananias's

detailed vision with Saul's experience testified to the divine origin of Saul's experience.

Thirdly, Loder (1989) observed, "Whenever Saul's moment of transformation is

described it is not the moment but the transformation that is stressed" (p. 23). Saul (whose Greek

surname, Paul, is mostly used in the New Testament) did not see his transformation as abnormal

or the exception. Rather, transformation was the expected result when Christ initiates a

convictional experience. In fact, Loder understood transformation as the norm of a convictional

experience: "Transformation does not finally validate experiences of Christ, but one cannot

know Christ apart from transformation. Transformational logic, then, provides a proximate norm

for the ultimate claims of a convictional experience" (Loder, 1989, p. 24). Thus, the Damascus Road experience offered to Loder (1989) a theistic example of a convictional experience in which the pattern of transformational logic can be seen.

Transformational logic was presented as a five-stage process, which, similar to Mezirow (1978a) and Festinger (1957), begins with a disturbance and conflict which prompts an individual to find resolve. In transformational logic, the individual stays engaged in scanning for possible solutions on a conscious or subconscious level being motivated by the intrinsic nature of humans to find solutions, conclusions, and resolution to vexing problems. A convictional experience occurs when a new perspective synthesizes the problematic, fragmented, and disjointed perspectives of an individual to a solution. The convictional experience, in turn, releases energy that was present in the tension of an unresolved issue. Lastly, the individual returns to assess the new perspective of the convictional experience by reflecting on its internal congruence and its application. The above five-step process reflects the transformational logic found in Loder's (1989) epistemic approach to transformative learning. In Christian education, the task of the educator is to recognize the sequential structure by which transformative learning takes place and to intentionally "foster forms of learning by which one comes to participate in the ongoing transformational Spirit of Christ" (Loder, 1981, p. 217), the result of which can be "conversion (one particular transforming moment), sanctification (a succession of deep learning and growth experiences), and perhaps even revival (the impact that a surge of vitality in a few has on other members of a group)" (Young, 2013, p. 336).

In summary, the theological constructs of calling and transformational learning theories of Mezirow (1978a, 1991) and Loder (1981, 1989), provide a bifocal framework by which this research seeks to understand the experiences of a call among seasoned pastors. As noted, the

processes by which individuals think and create meaning are similar in all fields of learning. The theological component added by Loder (1989) is important to pastors and provides the theoretical framework for the descriptions of a call made by the seasoned pastor-participants of this research. Finally, to practically illustrate the compatibility of TLT with this research, two representative studies will follow.

In the first example, a qualitative study was conducted to examine the conceptual compatibility of TLT with a campus-wide spiritual renewal which took place at Wheaton College in 1995 (McLaughlin, 2014). It was found that the constructs of TLT were applicable in identifying the profound spiritual experiences of the students and faculty at this Midwest Christian college. McLaughlin (2014) observed that "the findings confirmed a strong compatibility between TLT and these accounts of Christian spiritual renewal at Wheaton College in 1995, making what occurred look like a laboratory for transformative learning" (p. 6). He further stated that "the theme of Christian spiritual renewal intersects well with the theme of transformative learning found currently in educational circles" (p. 21). When assessing data gathered from dozens of interviews, audio recordings, and written archival accounts of the renewal, McLaughlin (2014) used a quadrant version of Mezirow's (1991) 10-phase process of TLT. Other researchers have also found it useful to consolidate Mezirow's 10-phase process into fewer steps (Cranton, 2006; Glisczinski, 2007; Herbers, 1998; Merriam, 2004). McLaughlin (2014) divided his quadrant into experience, critical reflection, rational dialogue, and action as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Quadrants of Transformative Learning Applied to Spiritual Renewal Conceptualizations

Transformative Learning Quadrants	Spiritual Renewal Conceptualizations
1. Experience	"God's active presence initiated, motivated, and empowered the revival's transformative learning."
2. Critical Reflection	"Christian renewal participants had their hearts, expectations, and understanding meaningfully stirred by Bible teachings and church history examples."
3. Rational Dialogue	"Unexpected levels of vulnerability in confession became contagious in a safe relational context."
4. Action	"Unexpected levels of vulnerability in confession became contagious in a safe relational context."

Note. Table contents adapted from McLaughlin (2014), p. 231, Table 5.2.

Several innovative applications of Mezirow's (1978a) TLT can be observed. Of note, McLaughlin (2014) associates the public confessions that occurred during the revival with the rationale dialogue quadrant (p. 6). He observed that "the confession-oriented interaction was not limited to a few relationships but rippled out wide" (p. 244) and that its "emphasis was identified with and supported by leaders at various levels" (p. 244). This particular application is significant for several reasons. Firstly, the quadrant of rational dialogue was not limited to a conversation or dialogue but was imaginatively applied as confession in a context that included others. And secondly, the act of confession to another person (or persons) was found to be a dynamic part of the transformation process which led to vulnerability and openness for spiritual renewal.

The imaginative application of TLT as seen above is encouraged and acknowledged by various proponents of TLT (Schapiro, Wasserman, & Gallegos, 2012; Taylor et al., 2012). In a

literature review of 15 TLT studies conducted between 2002–2010, McLaughlin (2014) found

that TLT is rapidly expanding in its application. The strong cognitive-based approach of TLT

initially put forward by Mezirow (1978a) is expanding to include culture, emotions, and

spirituality in the experience of transformative learning (McLaughlin, 2014, p. 89). Also noted

by McLaughlin, "In studies that already overlap between the domains of transformative learning

theory and renewal of spiritual life in American students, both Mezirow's incremental and

epochal transformation are supported" (p. 89). The observation of different time elements to the

transformational learning process is significant. In a revivalist setting, spiritual transformations

are mostly epochal and profoundly condensed. Yet for many others, transformation is

incremental and occurs over a period of time. This too, has implications for those who feel

called to pastor and have not had a Damascus Road experience such as the Apostle Paul (Acts

9:1–19).

The second study, *Deep change: How the Transformational Learning Theories of*

Mezirow and Loder Apply to Pastoral Ministry (Young, 2013), consisted of open semi-structured

interviews with nine pastors who reflected on the transformative processes of their congregants.

The researcher proposed, "The purpose of this research is to describe transformational learning

from the perspective of practical theology, based on pastors' observations of transformational

learning in their ministries" (p. 322). In evaluating the transformational learning of the

participants, the study used a modified Loder (1981) five-step process, whereas the former study

(McLaughlin, 2014) employed a condensed version of Mezirow's (1978a) 10-step process.

Young's (2013) choice of Loder's (1981) theoretical framework in place of Mezirow's (1978a)

seems to be connected to Loder's explicit Christian epistemology which attributes all

transformation and learning to the Holy Spirit. Additionally, Young (2013) modified the

categories and transformational language used by Loder (1981) to broaden TL's application:

> The term phase rather than step is used to describe the learning progression, to
>
> underscore that the process is not rigid. Also, the term learner is used to designate the
>
> person undergoing transformational learning, and teacher is used to designate the person
>
> who is fostering that learning. These individuals could be, respectively, students and
>
> educators or pastors and congregants. Finally, deep learning, a more evocative and less
>
> technical description of transformational learning, is used in a number of instances.
>
> (Young, 2013, p. 329; see Table 2)

Table 2

Young's (2013) Modification of Loder's Five-Step Process of Transformational Learning

Loder's Categories	Young's Modification of Loder
Step 1: Conflict	Phase 1: The Disorienting Dilemma
Step 2: Scanning	Phase 2: The Journey of Desperate Hope
Step 3: Convictional Experience	Phase 3: The Transforming Moment
Step 4: Release of Energy	Phase 4: The Surge of Vitality
Step 5: Interpretation	Phase 5: Growth

These differences are somewhat minor, but they illustrate the malleability of TLT for the

researcher of transformative learning. The adaptive nature of TLT is observed in both studies.

Young (2013) worked with pastors to see if congruence existed between TLT and the spiritual

transformations they observed in their churches. McLaughlin (2014) researched a campus-wide

spiritual transformation and identified the same principles of transformation at work. Both

studies demonstrate that the TLT constructs and transformative theories of Loder (1981) and Mezirow (1978a) have an effective theoretical grid for processing the experiences of a pastoral call.

Related Literature

Two leading scholars on calling research, Duffy and Dik (2013), have observed that 2007 was the tipping point for research in calling literature. Before that year, only a handful of studies were available. Since that time, however, there has been a renaissance of research on the concept of calling. Duffy and Dik (2013) have broadly expressed the nature of calling research since 2007:

> Research on the concept has burgeoned, resulting in a corpus of findings across a range of subdisciplines within psychology (and related fields such as organizational behavior and management) that inform how calling relates to proximal work and well-being variables. (p. 428)

Though calling research has burgeoned, it is in its early development and appears to be organized in a way similar to a scatter plot. However, by identifying the dot clusters of the plot, the salient themes of calling can be singled out. Accordingly, the prominent psychological subdisciplines to be examined that appear most closely aligned within a pastor's callings in calling research are well-being, self-identity, and the search for meaning.

Psychological Dimensions of a Pastor's Calling

As suggested earlier, the theological constructs of common grace and natural theology provide a theistic base for human science research in understanding the psychological constructs of calling. A sampling of human science literature in the fields of well-being, self-identity, and meaning are reviewed so that increased awareness of a pastoral calling may be gained.

Well-being. Much of the empirical research on calling has observed the correlation between the experience of well-being and the presence of a call (O'Neal, 2017). Some characteristics of well-being that have been associated with a calling are meaning and purpose (Duffy et al., 2012), a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction (Hirschi, 2012), and career engagement and efficacy (Domene, 2012; Duffy et al., 2012; Hirschi, 2012). These studies also note that a marked increase of well-being occurs when a calling is sensed and lived out (O'Neal, 2017). In researching 40 studies on calling made between 2007–2014, O'Neal (2017) identified seven core qualities associated with the experience of well-being:

> Well-being – a state of happiness, contentment, satisfaction, flourishing, and thriving that
> is (1) subjective well-being in the form of a high life satisfaction and positive feelings,
> (2) supportive and enriching relationships, (3) interest and engagement in daily activities,
> (4) meaning and purpose in life, (5) a sense of mastery and accomplishment, (6) feelings
> of control and autonomy, and (7) optimism. (p. 16)

The absence or presence of well-being can be indicative of the strength or weakness of a pastor's calling. Thus, the above attributes may be a helpful tool in the evaluation of a calling. However, conspicuously absent from well-being research are the adversarial experiences that pastors encounter in a lived calling. With that said, a few lone voices have drawn attention to a darker side of a calling.

Those with a strong sense of calling have been known to experience a work–life imbalance by disregarding financial realities (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009) or by giving priority to the call over personal relationships (Ponton & Sauerheber, 2015). Interestingly, this intensive following of a call aligns itself with Christ's calling to discipleship and is the experience of many pastors.

Christ described His disciples as "sheep in the midst of wolves" (Matthew 10:16) and warned them that "all men will hate you because of me" (Matthew 10:22a). Contrary to the experiences of well-being, a theistic calling can have frequent obstacles and difficulties. There can be enemies and antagonists that falsely accuse, oppose, or misunderstand one's calling. Martin Luther King, Jr., experienced jail, violence, and deep prejudice in the pursuit of his calling for civil rights among African Americans. These unfavorable social realities taught and experienced by Jesus Christ are the set of expectations he gave to his disciples. Further, his calling to self-denial meant that everything (e.g., wealth, possessions, one's home, and even one's life) was secondary to being his disciple (Luke 14:26). Alongside Jesus's promises of provision to his disciples was the unvarnished teaching of the cross which his disciples were to take up daily in following him (Mark 8:34). The call to such a life of self-denial is so radical and comprehensive that Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1995) said, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die" (p. 89).

The theistic calling of Christ stands in stark contrast to the appeal and characteristics of well-being found in research (O'Neal, 2017). Much of Christ's calling entails suffering, sacrifice, and hostile enemies. This is not to undermine the positive affective states associated with well-being, for those are often experienced by pastors as well. Rather, the cost of following Christ's call is emphasized to illustrate and contrast the potential dissonance of a pastor's calling experience when compared to that of other callings. The experience of well-being and calling as a state of "happiness, contentment, satisfaction, flourishing, and thriving" which espouses a high level of "positive feelings, a sense of mastery and accomplishment, and feelings of control and autonomy" (O'Neal, 2017, p. 16) cannot be said of pastors who are struggling with finances, church board politics, and a dwindling and unresponsive congregation. This is the calling

dissonance that many pastors experience: the conflict of the ministry does not line up with the well-being measures of our culture. Is it possible that the calling of God as understood by pastors is an outlier in calling research? Or is it, as described by sociologist Donald Kraybill, "the kingdom of God points to an inverted, upside-down way of life that challenges the prevailing social order" (Kraybill & Sine, 2003, p. 7)? Can it be that the absence of theistic research on calling is connected to the eccentricity of a call that does not easily fit the patterns or values of society? And if so, how does that affect the conversation and research on theistic calling? In response to these questions, several considerations can be made.

First, the lexicon for a theistic calling is distinct from mainstream calling research (Myers, 2014). Terms such as scripture, witness, signs, faith, revelation, church, and Holy Spirit bear significant meaning for those with a theocentric calling. For an explication of theistic calling, a grappling with and exposition of these and other religious terms are necessary for calling research that is inclusive for pastors. Once these terms are unpacked, corollary construals can then be applied.

Second, in several ways already noted, the axiology of a Christocentric calling is distinct from the prevailing constructs of society and research and should be acknowledged as such. The drive to integrate faith and research is actively pursued in Christian colleges and universities. As a research community, Christian academia rightly acknowledges the common ground that good science provides for research. However, when theistic distinctives and contrasts surface, measures that address such things as well-being and efficacy may be ineffective or even misleading in their results. For example, if the seven characteristics of well-being mentioned above were used as a measure for the efficacy of a call, the highly influential reformer of the Great Awakening, Jonathan Edwards, would be considered a failure because of his removal as

pastor by the church he served. A pastor's value of success is measured by the standards of Christ's call which may not be the same as the congregation's. By noting the axiological corollaries and distinctives of a pastor's calling with other callings, calling dissonance may be decreased and clarification can be gained in the calling expectations of a pastor.

Another consideration is the measure of well-being itself. When examining the characteristics of well-being, whose definition is being used? And how is well-being experienced by different people? Although certain universal themes of well-being can be elicited such as peace, purpose, and passion, there are distinctions in the experience of these universal themes that are significant. For example, meaningfulness is a common trait of both, a pursued calling and well-being. Myers (2014) has pointed out, however, that "*sacred meaning* [original italics], as opposed to meaningfulness, may account for why sacred calling yielded both tangible and intangible benefits to organizations and society" (p. 67). As such, the benefit of meaning was not intrinsically tied to work but to a theistic source. The sense of the sacred in their calling was the source of meaning which brought benefit to others. This distinction may help to answer the riddle why some pastors can work in extreme aversive conditions and yet experience a modicum of peace. Further research may explore how well-being and the sense of the sacred calling are sustained during such times.

In summary, a Christocentric construal of calling contrasts with societal norms and aspects of mainstream research which use measures of well-being and efficacy in accessing a call. By acknowledging the corollaries and distinctives of a pastor's call from other calls, however, calling dissonance and confusion can be reduced for those with a theistic calling. This also is in accordance with Christ's teachings which counseled to consider the cost before deciding to follow his calling (Luke 14:25–33). Further, the experience of sacred meaning in

contrast to mere meaningfulness in calling as suggested by Myers (2014), was shown to be a tangible benefit of sacred calling which can lead to well-being. Consequently, the source of one's calling is a primary construct in determining how and what is experienced in a call. In these ways, the distinctives of a pastor's theistic call will be different from that of other vocations. Pastors' self-identity is another example of their distinctiveness of calling.

Self-Identity. Identity is comprised of an individual's values, beliefs, and expectations (Horton, Bayerl, & Jacobs, 2014). In a theistic calling, a new identity is formed as seen in the disciple Peter (Grey, 2012; Matthew 4:19). Former roles, commitments, and expectations are loosed for the adoption of a new identity that is forged by the call. Research has shown that different types and levels of identity have been found in various contexts such as workplace, teams, ethnic traditions, religious groups, and professional organizations (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008; Myers, 2014). In these various contexts, the impact of identity has also been demonstrated in workplace outcomes, motivation, attitudes, behavior, and performance (Riketta, 2005; Van Knippenberg, 2000). This is especially true of pastors whose identities are deeply embedded in their vocation. In fact, research has indicated that a pastor's identity is more deeply integrated into his or her calling than many other callings, and therefore, is of greater significance when compared to others. For example, in the many different callings that have been researched, varying levels of commitment and identity can be discerned. Some callings are simply understood as a meaningful and productive career that is accompanied by enthusiasm. This view is found in a recent handbook of callings: "Most definitions of calling are now focused in general on the individual experience of work as deeply meaningful and engaging, intrinsically motivating, and having an impact on the wider world" (Wrzesniewski, 2015, p. 4). On this level, the individual is found to be gifted, competent, and experiences a sense of well-being and job

satisfaction. There is also a sense that the world is a better place because of their work. This calling level is mostly career centered and has definite benefits but does not necessarily encompass an individual's self-identity and values.

On a deeper level, a calling which is a passionate pursuit is more fully integrated in the identity and values of the individual (Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011). This level of calling may define calling "as a consuming, meaningful passion people experience toward a domain" (Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011, p. 1003). After a review of calling literature, Dobrow and Tosti-Kharas (2011) distilled calling essences of passionate interest into the four domains of business, art, music, and management (p. 1105). This calling may be expressed through any number of careers because it transcends the workplace and is integrated into an individual's life purpose. As deep and integrated as this level of calling may be, there is yet a deeper level which is more comprehensive. This third level includes the other two but extends further and comprehends an individual's cosmology, epistemology, and teleological references. It is also the level where the calling of a pastor is often found.

A pastor's calling has been described as a "deep structured professional identity" (Horton et al., 2014, p. 7) which "fundamentally shapes one's self-definition. Being a pastor is not just a job, or an occupation, or even a profession, but a 'calling' that involves commitment to pastoral vows and to God" (Cafferata, 2017, p. 314). Consequently, the deep comprehensive level of calling for pastors can especially make them vulnerable to identity issues as noted by Adams and Bloom (2017): "Pastors especially experience identity demands and threats in the form of negative criticism, as well as overtly aggressive or passive-aggressive behavior from parishioners that often subvert their leadership" (p. 255). Though others can impact our calling-identity, a pastoral calling can also atrophy through lack of nurture.

The unnurtured call and identity. The identity of a call can be weakened through neglect. Much pastoral work is according to necessity, especially in smaller churches where resources are limited: a mailbox needs to be repaired, a Sunday school teacher needs a substitute, the sound system is in need of fine-tuning, and the list can easily be lengthened. A pastor's calling and identity can be blurred if too much activity is done extraneous to one's calling (Levoy, 1997). For a calling-identity to be robustly alive it must be fed and nurtured. This requires a calling to be understood not as a terminus event but as a sustainable reality that can change negatively through neglect or positively through reinforcement and nurture. In a study funded by the Lilly Endowment program for the study of American religion, the objective was to understand why some pastors leave the ministry. According to the researchers, the most important finding of the study was summed by someone who had left the ministry:

> This may be the most important thing we need to tell you, but it also is the most difficult. Our ministry began with a call — for some mystical, for others an awareness formed by time and circumstances. We felt we were affirmed, encouraged, educated, and empowered by the church and its institutions. We were not, however, led into times of evaluating and understanding our call. We did not realize that our call should not only be validated and reaffirmed, but also continually redefined. It was what it was, a trophy on the shelf, and that seemed good enough for us, our families, and the church. (Ross, 2007, p. 1)

Representing those who exited the ministry, this former pastor believed it was the inattention and neglect of calling-affirmation that was the most important thing that could be said to the researchers about leaving the ministry. Intentionality of calling-nurture to validate and continuously redefine one's calling was necessary. The initial calling experience may have been

powerful as a Damascus Road calling (Acts 9:1–14), but if left unexplored, unexamined, and undeveloped, it will be similar to a trophy on a shelf that recalls former days of glory. A closer look at identity formation through various social science constructs may help to understand a few ways calling is nurtured.

   Pastors, social theory of identity, and the church. The development of self-identity is multifaceted and discussed by theologians, philosophers, psychologists, social scientists and other disciplines. Self-identity has been seen as a catalyst for violence in the world (e.g., religious extremists) as well as a uniting force which brings families and social groups together (e.g., ethnicities, unions, etc.). These examples attribute identity engagement largely to the groups and society in which an individual lives. The group-connectedness of "a person's identity . . . is like a pattern drawn on a tightly stretched parchment. Touch just one part of it, just one allegiance, and the whole person will react, the whole drum will sound" (Maalouf, 2001, p. 26).

   The calling of pastors has largely occurred in the context of a church or religious gathering where expectations and roles are placed upon the pastor (Grey, 2012). According to social identity theory, "the pastoral identity, or all the meaning the pastor associates with the role, is socially constructed" (Cafferata, 2017, p. 313). The theistic framework of a pastor's calling, however, may also decisively shape the pastor's self-identity (e.g., Loder, 1989; Apostle Paul, Acts 9:1–19). Thus, given this context, the potential for conflictive role expectations is easily surmised. Stories of standoffs between church boards and pastoral leadership in following what each believe to be God's will are legendary. Interestingly, as common and difficult as this conflict has been acknowledged, Grey (2012) observed that there have not been many studies on the functionality of a pastoral calling in an organization:

A careful examination of published journal articles over the last forty years (1970 to

2011), based upon a search of the EBSCO "Religion and Philosophy Collection" and

ATLAS databases, reveals a deficit of research concerning how "calling" functions from

an organizational perspective in the formation of particular kinds of subjectivities, and

how this "calling" creates particular kinds of relationships with the organization. (p. 45)

The pursuit of calling for pastors is largely lived in the context of an institution, that is, the

church. A clear and mutual understanding of the pastor's calling-identity can facilitate a

smoother and more efficient working relationship between a pastor and the church organization.

Examining the salience of a pastor's self-identity is a means to further clarify that understanding.

The social science construct of salience in identity theory "has been understood as the

probability that an identity will be activated in a situation" (Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 332). As

such, salience is connected to probable situations which activate a person to assume a specific

identity or role. For example, a high salience may be present for a pastor in performing a

wedding ceremony or making a hospital visit to a parishioner. It is understood that "more salient

identities are those that have a greater likelihood of being brought into situations either through

verbal or behavioral action" (Stets & Serpe, 2013, p. 5). It has been found "that contexts in

which identity demands are high can be among the most destructive to pastors' well-being"

(Adams & Bloom, 2017, p. 26). Consequently, when pastoral roles are relentlessly assumed by

the pastor or projected by the congregation onto the pastor, it is an unhealthy situation. Human

beings seem to flourish where there is a balance between role and person identity:

While role identities need to be maintained, person identities also need to be maintained.

An individual cannot simply be guided by role identities and have person identities

unaffected by them. Overall, people need to balance the demands of role identities with the demands of person identities. (Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 229)

Though the above is acknowledged, identity ambiguity occurs when a pastor's self-identity is the same as the role identity. Accordingly, a different approach may have to be taken to divide asunder the two identities. One approach may be for pastors to affirm the humanity of their identity. This acknowledges the physical and emotional limitations of their identity as humans. Though it may appear as a truism and trite, pastors forget or choose to ignore the humanity of their being (Cordeiro, 2010). A pastor's calling ethos of sacrificial giving can easily eclipse his or her aspect of self-identity. But a healthy and realistic incorporation of the human aspect of self-identity can give clarity to a pastor who is experiencing confusion and high identity salience.

Developing a strong identity and calling. The link between identity and calling was further observed in the study *Becoming a Pastor*, which was part of a larger project, *Flourishing in Ministry* (Flourishing, 2013) undertaken by the University of Notre Dame and the Mendoza School of Business. In *Becoming a Pastor*, the study collected data from over 200 pastors spanning 10 denominations regarding how they were called to the ministry. The results from the data showed a positive connection between a strong identity and one's calling:

Answering a call to ministry seems to involve a fundamental transformation of a person's core identity. Indeed, many pastors describe this process as living as the person God made them to be, a rich and evocative way of describing this process of "becoming." One major goal of this research initiative is to understand how individuals form a strong, positive pastoral identity and how that identity shapes their life in ministry. (Flourishing, 2013, p. 32)

The formation of a strong positive identity impacts a pastor's life in ministry. As a corollary to this study, a separate five-year study (2008–2013) that included nearly 1000 pastors in eight denominations was made to determine those characteristics that belong to a strong identity. The research found that a positive identity was comprised of five characteristics: a developed understanding of the meaning of life, well-defined core commitments, a clear understanding of one's strengths and weaknesses, and belief that one's activities are consonant with those core commitments. (Adams & Bloom, 2017). These qualities helped anchor pastors to their calling. According to social identity theory, the qualities that lead to a strong identity are also hindered or gained through the relationships people keep.

Relationships, identity, and calling. An indirect way that calling gets undermined is found in the fierce individualism of our culture. In the church, the individualistic image of a calling perhaps can be traced to biblical stories of calling such as Moses, Isaiah, or Paul who are portrayed as lone individuals who heard and discoursed with God when they received their call. Standing silently in the background of each narrative, however, is a community that shaped and impacted their callings. Moses had a godly family and the Elders with whom he consulted (Exodus 3–4); Isaiah had his family and the priestly community (Isaiah 8:1–3,18); and Paul had the other Apostles and the church (Acts 13:1–3; 15:22–26).

Calling without community negatively impacts the called. This was observed in an interdenominational well-being study on pastors. The study revealed that a lack of community and peer relationships was connected to feelings of ostracism, rejection, and low confidence (Flourishing, 2013). With regard to calling, however, the researchers found that pastors were especially vulnerable by the absence of community. They found that pastors without a supportive community "cannot develop either a deep sense of vocation or the strong, positive

identity that seems to be essential to both excellent practice and well-being as a professional"
(Flourishing, 2013, p. 41). The data and findings of the research consistently found that without
community, a deep sense of calling or identity cannot be sustained. The researchers of
Flourishing (2013) identified four relationships that impacted pastors in their experience of well-
being and calling: (1) family and personal friends, (2) the congregation, (3) formal and informal
leaders within their denomination, and (4) other pastors within their denomination (p. 24).

Of first significance are the family and friends of a pastor. As a group, they yield great
influence in the formation and sustaining of a positive calling-identity. As such, the comments
and judgments of those who know the weaknesses, strengths, and journey of a pastor have great
import. This finding is significant for those who believe to have a calling but whose spouses,
family, or friends are unsupportive. Studies have shown clergy marriages flourish most when a
pastor has the support of his or her spouse. Equally, the likelihood of conflict increases when a
spouse is unsupportive (Cafferata, 2017; Flourishing, 2013; Lifeway Research, 2016). In a
recent survey of 734 former pastors that spanned five different denominations, 21% said their
spouse was not enthusiastic about their life in ministry together (Lifeway Research, 2016, p. 48).
This statistic can be interpreted in several ways, but one can surmise that the lack of enthusiasm
could be interpreted as a lack of support even though the reason may lie elsewhere. Friends,
family, and spouses may or may not show enthusiasm toward a pastor's call; one thing is clear,
however: their influence can create doubt or assurance in a pastor's calling-identity.

A second group of people that has considerable impact on a pastor's perception of calling
is the congregation. Church conflict, contrariness of members, and unrealistic expectations from
the church can weaken a pastor's sense of calling. A study that examined church closures and
their impact on pastors found that a pastor's sense of calling-identity was often challenged by the

failed expectations of growth or revitalization (Cafferata, 2017). In pursuing their call, pastors

expect churches to grow and flourish under their ministry. When the opposite occurs, calling-

dissonance can occur and create angst in a pastor. Additionally, Cafferata (2017) observed that

pastors are deeply impacted by the respect and reception of the congregation. Consequently, the

high value and importance of a congregation's support makes a pastor vulnerable to criticism.

Conversely, positive feedback may be felt more deeply than most other vocations as well.

The denominational or organizational leaders can also have a part in strengthening a

pastor's calling-identity, especially when a church is failing. It was found that when churches

decline or plateau, many pastors experienced shame, calling-doubt, and a sense of responsibility

for the church's spiritual condition (Cafferata, 2017). In such cases, denominational and

executive leaders, rather than congregations, were found to be more impactful in their supportive

roles (Cafferata, 2017). This may be related to a workplace dynamic in which professionals feel

affirmed in their work when respect is given by those who are considered experts or

accomplished in their fields (van Quaquebeke & Eckloff, 2010). Respect, according to the

dignity model developed by Donna Hicks in collaboration with Archbishop Desmond Tutu, is

understood as acceptance of identity, inclusion, safety, acknowledgment, recognition, fairness,

benefit of the doubt, understanding, independence, and accountability (Hicks, 2013). When

respect is expressed in this manner by denominational or executive leadership to a pastor of a

spiritually stagnant church, the experience of shame, depression, identity tension, and doubt are

significantly reduced (Cafferata, 2017).

Lastly, other pastors can be a significant source of reinforcement for calling-identity.

Having strong, positive friendships with other pastors who understand the experiences and

challenges of the ministry can help to minimize the sense of isolation that can occur with those in

pastoral leadership. Though this last group may not seem very influential in shaping and sustaining a calling-identity, research has demonstrated otherwise: "The degree to which a pastor experiences a sense of belongingness—community, fidelity, and mutuality—with other pastors appears to be one of the most important determinants of that pastor's flourishing" (Flourishing, 2013, p. 37). Sectional minister meetings, ministerial conferences and seminars, and informal connections with other pastors have a significant role in strengthening a pastor's calling identity. Such gatherings with other ministers nurture a sense of esprit de corps which may help a pastor to connect with the mission and purpose of the call.

In sum, social identity theory recognizes the human web of relationships that influence and shape a pastor's calling-identity. The four people groups of family, church, denominational leaders, and fellow pastors span the professional and personal spectrum of a pastor's life. Each relationship impacts a pastor's calling-identity differently, but all are significant in either their contribution or undermining of that calling. Because pastors cite God as the source of their calling, the role others play in sustaining that call may go unrecognized or unacknowledged. The research done with pastors largely agreed with social identity theory that identity formation takes place in the context of community (Flourishing, 2013). Consequently, a pastor whose theology discounts the essential role of others in calling-identity may be more vulnerable to calling-doubts than those with a robust understanding of their need for others. A strong theological understanding of the interdependency of the people of God as the church (Ephesians 4:1–16) and body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12) can help to counter the belief of calling-autonomy and deepen that sense of vocation felt by pastors.

The search for meaning. Another psychological dimension of calling that frequently surfaces in the calling literature is the experience of meaning (Duffy & Dik, 2013; O'Neal,

2017). In fact, the experience of meaning has been considered a "core aspect of calling"
(Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011, p. 1007). Research has also shown an interrelation between the
construals of purpose, meaning, and calling: "Those with a calling understand their purpose for
being, and those whose life is meaningful feel a strong sense of significance and purpose"
(O'Neal, 2017, p. 41). The pastoral vocation is experienced as a called vocation (Placher, 2005);
hence, pastors often experience a high level of meaning in their lives (Flourishing, 2013). How
pastors interface their calling with meaning is the focus of this section.

The experience of meaning has been discussed philosophically and theologically for
millennia and is associated with the experience of well-being (Duffy et al., 2012). Since Viktor
Frankl's (1985) seminal work *Man's Search for Meaning*, however, meaning has been
extensively researched in the fields of psychology and social science (King, Heintzelman, &
Ward, 2016). This is especially noted in theories of learning which emphasize the cognitive
processes of learning such as constructivist learning theory, social learning theory, and
transformative learning theory. Each of these cognitive approaches to learning stresses how an
individual makes meaning from new information and experience. Consequently, if meaning is a
core aspect of calling (Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011), it is not coincidental that transformative
learning theory works well in explaining a pastor's calling. Mezirow understood
transformational learning as the creation of new meanings to make sense of an experience
(Mezirow & Associates, 1990). He further mentions that "normally, when we learn something,
we attribute an old meaning to a new experience. . . . In transformative learning, however, we
reinterpret an old experience (or a new one) from a new set of expectations" (Mezirow, 1991, p.
11). Additional research into the literature on meaning may help to further unpack the
relationship of meaning to a pastor's search and sense of calling.

Meaning as coherence, purpose, and significance. In researching the construct of meaning, a multiplicity of definitions can be found. Crescioni and Baumeister (2013) proposed a four-basic need model of meaning that included purpose, values, a sense of efficacy, and self-worth. Others have narrowed it to comprehension, purpose, and mattering (Heintzelman & King, 2014). Steger (2012b) reduced meaning's definition further to focus on comprehension and purpose. Others have defined meaning as purpose, significance, and value while noting "deficits in presence of meaning may inspire an active search for meaning" (Abeyta & Routledge, 2018, p. 7). In these diverse definitions of meaning, however, overlapping characteristics surface, such as mattering, comprehension, and coherence. After an overview of the meaning literature, George and Park (2016b) defined "MIL [meaning in life] as the extent to which one's life is experienced as making sense, as being directed and motivated by valued goals, and as mattering in the world" (p. 205). This last definition of meaning, though expressed at times in different words, has been gaining acceptance by researchers as a measure for evaluating the presence of meaning (George & Park, 2016b). For this study, these meaning characteristics in a pastoral calling are condensed and expressed as coherence, purpose, and significance (Martela & Steger, 2016).

Coherence and meaning. Meaning researchers have interchanged coherence with comprehension, understanding, congruence, cognitive consistency, and making sense (George & Park, 2016a). These aspects of coherence can be found in a dictionary definition for cohere: "to be combined or united in a logical and effective way" ("Cohere," n.d.). A meaningful experience is a cohesive (unifying) experience which has order (logical) and makes sense (effective; Courtenay et al., 1998; George & Park, 2016b). Conversely, that which is incoherent is fragmented, confusing, does not make sense, and is not meaningful in a positive way. As a

unifying experience, a meaningful event effectively unites divergent cognitive and affective

conditions of a person into a meaningful whole. It is "the notion that life may be experienced as

meaningful when it contains connections, reliable associations, or coherence" (Heintzelman et

al., 2013). When coherence is experienced as meaning, there is a coming together of loose ends,

unresolved dilemmas find solutions, and behavior/belief incongruities get harmonized. A

pastoral calling has meaning when faith expectations coincide with experience. Experiences that

are contrary to pastoral expectations (e.g., unanswered prayer, declining attendance, church

splits) can erode the sense of calling and meaningful ministry. For example, research has shown

pastors often serve a church expecting growth or revival through their leadership. When that

does not occur, their sense of calling can be impacted:

> An expansive literature presumes that pastors hope to grow or revitalize vulnerable
>
> congregations (Ammerman et al. 1998; Bass 2007; Dudley and Ammerman 2002; Gaede
>
> 2001; Nixon 2006; Schwartz and Schalk 1998; Steinke 2001). Structural theory suggests
>
> that a failed church in the face of an expectation of growth (whether by the pastor,
>
> congregation, or judicatory) can be a "sense-breaking" event for clergy. (Cafferata, 2017,
>
> p. 313)

The lack of church growth does not make sense to a called pastor. It is incoherent or not

understandable. Specifically, a pastor's sense of calling-identity can be broken by the

incongruence of a calling-belief and the lack of church growth. Subsequently, associative

feelings of meaninglessness can also question the value of prayer, sacrifice, and hard work that

were made on behalf of a failing and unresponsive church.

Much of the calling-incongruence pastors experience is related to the understanding they

bring to their role as a pastor. This understanding can be rooted in the social or congregational

expectations that a pastor accepts, as noted in social identity theory, or its source can be connected to the theological beliefs of a pastor. Certain theologies emphasize the miraculous, non-empirical, and transcendental activities of God (Luhrmann, 2012; Smith, 2010). This also was modeled and taught by Jesus who explicitly encouraged faith, prayer, and miraculous experience (John 14:12; Mark 11:24). The incongruence of experience with faith-expectations may incur cognitive dissonance and, in some instances, an existential crisis (Davis & Hicks, 2013). When this occurs, Davis and Hicks (2013) speculated that three potential responses may bring resolve: a leap of faith; a reconstruction of meaning sources; and lastly, the empty acceptance of a belief that says life is meaningless. Since pastors would rarely accept the last option, the first two will be discussed.

The leap of faith alternative is endorsed by Kierkegaard, who argued "that a leap of faith is required in order to fully accept Christianity and to escape feelings of existential anxiety (Kierkegaard, 1843/1980)" (Davis & Hicks, 2013, p. 168). This approach does not rely upon well-reasoned arguments, empirical data, or rational justification in the maintenance of faith (p. 168). Kierkegaard (1846/1941), however, did reasonably argue why faith must not rest on empiricism. In his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Kierkegaard (1846/1941) understood the limitations of a faith that was dependent on rationalistic argumentation. In summarizing Kierkegaard's (1846/1941) thoughts on this, Blanshard (1973) commented, "Once admit that a dogma or a moral prescription is to be accepted not on faith or revelation but on rational evidence, and no position you ever take will be safe" (p. 5). Thus, if faith solely rested on proofs and science as its epistemic source, faith would remain only as strong as a particular scientific or rational position were upheld. The epistemic value of knowledge that is intuitive and revelational is also underscored by Loder's (1989) theory of transformational logic.

Transformational logic consists of new understandings which bring meaning and coherence to events and experiences that appear contradictory or disjointed. Thus, the "hidden orders of coherence and meaning emerge to replace or alter the axioms of [a] given frame and reorder its elements accordingly" (Loder, 1989, p. 229). The hidden order of coherence is both revealed and created by the Holy Spirit. Things that do not make sense can become comprehensible and purposeful by a convictional experience of knowing, as seen in the example of Simon and Cleopas.

While journeying to Emmaus, they could not reconcile their messianic expectations with a crucified Jesus (Luke 24:13–25). The presence of a new understanding, mediated through Christ and the scriptures, brought congruence between experience and expectation. Their experience of understanding gave them the ability to connect the dots that were otherwise disconnected (Dewey, 1910/1997; Young, 2013). Understanding brings coherence to otherwise incoherent experiences. Understanding is knowledge that can perceive associations in experiences or events which on the surface seem random or contradictory. Such also was the case with the Apostle Paul when seeking to make sense of his "thorn in the flesh" (2 Corinthians 12:7–10). When understanding was given to Paul about his unremitting affliction, he was enabled to accept his suffering with new purposeful meaning and reconcile his experience with his expectations (Barclay, 1975).

In sum, the relation of coherence and meaning can impact the way a pastor interprets his or her calling. As such, it was found that making sense of one's experience was critical for the presence of meaning to occur. Conversely, it was suggested that the absence of coherence can undermine and weaken the sense of calling for a pastor. It was also argued that the theistic calling for a pastor requires purposeful faith, which though not empirically based, may

meaningfully connect disparate experiences and expectations with understanding found through the Holy Spirit and scripture. In addition to coherence, meaning is often experienced as purpose.

Purpose and meaning. Calling is inclusive of purpose. In the literature, purpose has been used interchangeably with meaning. However, "despite this array of ideas and a lack of precision in terminology, scholars do not consider meaning and purpose to be equivalent" (Steger, 2012b, p, 382). Purpose has also been used synonymously with calling: "A significant source of meaning derives from a greater sense of fulfilling one's calling, or purpose in work" (Haney-Loehlein et al., 2015, p. 16). Though calling, purpose, and meaning have been used interchangeably, they have differing nuances. Calling has components of transcendence and destiny (Duffy et al., 2014), meaning is a subjective experience with its focus on significance and sense making (Crescioni & Baumeister, 2013), and purpose concerns itself with goals and direction in life (King et al., 2016). As defined and applied to pastors, a calling that is meaningful has direction and goals. Accordingly, pastors' seeking direction in their calling are in quest for a deeper sense of meaning in their ministry. This quest is not necessarily an indicator of an unhealthy or failing ministry. Frankl observed, "What man actually needs is not a tensionless state but rather the striving and struggling for a worthwhile goal, freely chosen task" (Frankl, 1985, p. 105). The making of goals is a form of purposive behavior. It can "consist of anything that an individual desires to get, do, be, experience, or create" (Feldman, 2013, p. 142). Other scholars have shown that the failure or success in reaching one's goals can also have a strong affective impact (Snyder, 2002). Thus, the absence or lack of purpose in one's calling can serve as a motivating force to pursue excellence and clarity to one's calling (Frankl, 1985).

Integrated in the quest for purpose and goal making is the underlying construct of hope. "Hope is the cognitive process through which individuals pursue goals, it is at the heart of all of

these conceptualizations of meaning in life" (Feldman, 2013, p. 145). Hope is a time-related construct that is future oriented (Romans 8:24,25). It does not provide the details of goal-making, but it can provide motivation to pursue the process. The absence of hopefulness has been linked to spiritual sickness. "Hope deferred makes the heart sick" (Proverbs 13:12a). Conversely, "but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life" (Proverbs 13:12b).

Hopefulness is also an evaluative process. The cognitive aspect of hopefulness weighs possibilities, costs, and rewards of the goal hoped for (Snyder, 2002). Hopefulness increases when the odds of fulfillment increase. As costs of reaching one's goals increase, however, the aversion to risk taking in the pursuit of goals also increases. The relation of goal making, hope, and calling are an integral part of a pastor's calling. As spiritual leaders in the church, pastors have been expected to be examples of faith and hope in making goals that bring direction to the church. These expectations, which can be instrumental in shaping a call, may influence a pastor to take risks that demonstrate faith but are not grounded in other spiritual disciplines such as wisdom, preparation, and foresight. Hence, the quest for purpose is pursued in tension with other causal realities.

As reviewed, purpose in ministry interacts with a pastor's experiences of calling and meaning. When a pastor is directionless and without concrete goals, the literature indicates the absence of meaning and the erosion of calling are being experienced. Frankl (1985) observed that the formation of goal-making itself can bring a sense of meaning and worth. This sense of worth or significance is explored next.

Meaning and significance.   The experience of meaning is a value-laden experience. Significance is a value-laden word which denotes worth, importance, and usefulness. As such, the search for meaning has been defined as "people's efforts and intentions to find sources of

purpose, significance, and value" (Abeyta & Routledge, 2018, p. 6). In the search for meaning, a pastor may ask, "Will my ministry have any lasting benefit for those I have labored over in prayer, counseling, teaching, and preaching?" These are questions of significance and by no means uncommon among pastors. Pastoral exemplars, such as the Apostle Paul, likewise experienced angst and questioned the lasting significance of his labors among the churches of Galatia (Galatians 2:2; 4:11). Regardless of the many calls to faithfulness, the search for significance is a basic need that is part of human nature (Frankl, 1985; Greenberg & Arndt, 2011). The idea that humans need significance to thrive has been discussed by existential psychologists and philosophers such as Kierkegaard (1846/1941), James (1901/1994), and Camus (1955). Some scholars have defined significance in the more colloquial word *mattering* (Batthyany & Russo-Netzer, 2014; George & Park, 2016a). As such, significance is synonymous with mattering:

> Mattering refers to the degree to which individuals feel that their existence is of significance, importance, and value in the world (Becker, 1973; King et al., 2006). To experience mattering is to feel that one's life has some profound and lasting importance (Baumeister, 1991). To experience a low sense of mattering is to feel that one's existence carries little significance and that one's nonexistence would make no impact on the world. (George & Park, 2016b, p. 212)

Becker (1973) also understood the human quest to find significance as a coping mechanism in response to the awareness of human mortality. The awareness of impending death is an anxiety-provoking experience that is humanly ubiquitous and unceasing. Humans innately resist the idea that their lives are no more than that of an insect or animal and have no special significance. We are born with "the inclination to see our lives as mattering in the 'eyes of the

cosmos;' that there is some value to our lives in the universe; that we are not just another living organism and that our existence means something more" (George & Park, 2016a, p. 42). This quest for significance is expressed through many of the goals and activities of those who are religious or secular.

Emerging from Becker's (1973) motivational assessment of human behavior is terror management theory (TMT; Greenberg & Arndt, 2011). TMT develops Becker's (1973) philosophical position by identifying the worldviews and mental constructs that reinforce human significance in the light of mortality (Kesebir & Pyszczynski, 2014). Over 400 studies in 16 different countries have verified the propositions of TMT (Greenberg & Arndt, 2011; Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1986). These studies strongly support the anthropological reality that to be human is to search for significance. As pastors search for significance in their calling, several considerations surface from the literature. Topping the list is the significance of a pastor's calling.

Extensive research of seminarians indicates the overwhelming reason for attending seminary and pursuing vocational ministry was their sense of calling (Lincoln, 2011 Lose et al., 2015). Similarly, a pastor's calling is the epicenter from which other experiences emanate and are evaluated, such as longevity in ministry (Joynt, 2017; Strunk, 2015), self-identity (Adams & Bloom, 2017; Cafferata, 2017 Guinness, 2003), well-being (Duffy & Dik, 2013; O'Neal, 2017), and career engagement and efficacy (Domene, 2012; Duffy et al., 2012). As research suggests, the value and meaning of a pastor's theistic calling is the most significant variable of their vocation. Hence, a pastor's search and experience of significance is largely filtered and interpreted through the grid of his or her calling.

Pastors also experience meaning through the efficacy of their calling. Congregational responsiveness to a pastor's leadership such as increased church attendance, transformed lives, and reconciled marriages has been interpreted by pastors as confirmations of their calling. As one researcher noted, "In order to be satisfied with the work they do, pastors need to know that their work is achieving results" (Zondag, 2004, p. 256). Likewise, church decline and unresponsiveness to a pastor's leadership has incurred doubt and questions of a calling (Cafferata, 2017).

Related to calling-efficacy is the experience of pastoral burnout. Burnout has been described as "a prolonged and occupational-specific form of strain whose effects are not experienced by the worker alone but also by the recipients they provide care for" (Parker & Martin, 2011, p. 657). As such, burnout has been linked to:\ "emotional exhaustion, depersonalization (cynicism) directed toward clients and/or recipients, and feelings of a lack of personal accomplishment at work" (Parker & Martin, 2011, p. 657). The last condition of burnout which described feelings of vocational futility is especially pertinent to the absence of calling signification. For pastors, job satisfaction is correlated with the fulfillment of their calling which has identifiable results. In the words of Myers (2014), it brings the experience of "sacred meaning" (p. 67) as opposed to plain meaningfulness. Words of exhortation or encouragement to remain faithful with no regard for results may be said with genuine concern but they do not bring vocational satisfaction. Pastors understand their calling in dynamic constructs of bringing about change and transformation to others (Cafferata, 2017; Strunk et al., 2017). Consequently, when no changes are perceived, self-doubts about one's pastoral call are likely to emerge. This individual perception, which can be subjectively unbalanced, may be

somewhat assuaged by understanding calling to be a community construct. In fact, the addition

of other voices to the conviction of pastoral calling is essential for longevity:

> Fidelity to the pastoral call is one of the themes of effective long-seasoned pastoral
>
> ministry, it is vital that pastors have a distinct conviction regarding their calling. This is
>
> both a personal and group issue in that no one can tell another how to understand their
>
> experience of faith, and yet until the call is affirmed by others it is intuitive at best and
>
> not something that will hold up under intense scrutiny. (Strunk et al., 2017, p. 546)

Though the above may be true and others may give comfort in the midst of ambiguity, calling

uncertainties will yet remain (Burns et al., 2013, p. 65). The search for calling-signification

through fruitful ministry is relentless and represents an ongoing struggle pastors face.

A final consideration on the search for meaning with pastors is the inner witness of the

Holy Spirit as a source for calling-significance (Pitt, 2012). The Holy Spirit's inner witness (or

testimony) in a pastor's call is observed to be experienced through the reading of the Bible,

prayer, revelation, embodied awareness, and symbolic events or occurrences (McLaughlin,

2014). As such, this last source of calling-significance has strong semiotic inferences to the

experience of meaning. Consequently, "a more symbolic approach to religious contents would

positively associate with the search for meaning dimension, since both of them are related to

openness and flexibility" (Martos, Thege, & Steger, 2010, p. 864). The epistemic significance of

a symbolic approach to meaning has such large implications that a separate heading is required

for its explication. Before moving on, however, a brief summary of the psychological

dimensions of a pastoral calling may be helpful.

The psychological dimensions of well-being, self-identity, and meaning were reviewed in

connection to pastoral calling. It was posited that each of these subjective dimensions greatly

impacted the experience and interpretation of a pastor's calling. And though there are many studies on the psychological experiences of clergy, scant research has reviewed these experiences in connection to the epicenter of their life's work, that is, their calling. The phenomenology of a pastor's calling is deeply associated with the various psychological conditions of a calling experience. Further phenomenological research could explore other psychological domains that impact pastoral calling such as developmental (other learning theories, lifespan development, and language); social and personality (emotion, motivation, gender, and culture); and embodied dimensions (neuroscience and sensation) of calling for pastors. The extrapolation of the psychological literature in this study has partially revealed the complexity, challenges, and interdisciplinary nature of a pastor's calling. In addition, when approached philosophically, the epistemic dimension of a pastor's calling is also seen to be central to the processing and interpretation of that calling.

Epistemic Considerations for a Pastoral Calling

The unresolved question of calling-source is an epistemic problem that has been noted as the "most controversial issue within the calling literature" (Duffy et al., 2014, p. 564). It is also a problem with which pastors wrestle (Joynt, 2017). Vocational career researchers have largely associated calling with one's abilities and values (Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2012; Duffy & Dik, 2013). Thus, interest and value inventories are frequently used as instruments for identifying a person's calling. Other researchers cite a more affective source for calling which has been described as a "sense of destiny and more general feelings of being driven or pushed by some unknown force" (Hunter, Dik, & Banning, 2010, p. 178). For example, a study that asked college students about their source of calling found that most students referred to an inner voice or sense of rightness that best described the source of their calling (Hunter et al., 2010). A last

source for knowing one's calling can be described as an external summons. This view of calling "frames the [calling] construct as an approach to one's work or career that an individual perceives as arising from a transcendent summons, such as God, a higher power, a family legacy, or the needs of society" (Duffy et al., 2014, p. 564). The transcendent summons of God has been overwhelmingly chosen by pastors and seminarians as the epistemic source of calling (Civish, 2013; Lincoln, 2011; Lose et al., 2015). But how does a pastor perceive a calling that emanates from an invisible God? Are there assumptive guidelines for hearing God that enable pastors to discern their thoughts from God's call? These are questions that pastors will wrestle with for their entire calling (Burns et al., 2013). Much of the challenge is found in the nature of the call which requires faith to accept.

Though reason and science may assist faith, faith requires an individual to embrace that which is invisible and cannot be empirically proven (Loder, 1989). The only biblical text that gives a definition of faith has observed this incorporeal nature of faith: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, *the conviction of things not seen*" (Hebrews 11:1, emphasis mine). An anthropologist's understanding of faith is explained in this way:

> Faith asks people to consider that the evidence of their senses is wrong. In various ways, in varying degrees, faith asks that people believe their minds are not always private; that persons are not always visible; that invisible presences should alter their emotions and direct their behavior; that reality is good and justice triumphant. (Luhrmann, 2012, p. xii)

These observations about faith are not only found among skeptics but among those who are considered to be pillars of the faith (Lewis, 2002; Yancey, 2002). In fact, the long history of faith literature has many explicit accounts and autobiographies of those who struggled mightily to reconcile their beliefs with their thoughts. Such faith struggles are especially noted in the

Judeo/Christian prayer book, the Book of Psalms (e.g., Psalms 73 and 74), where frequently

God's activities are questioned (e.g., "O Lord how long?" [Psalm 6:3]; "Why do You hide in

times of trouble?" [Psalm 10:1]; "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" [Psalm 22:1]).

Likewise, notable spiritual leaders such as John Wesley and Augustine struggled with doubt and

their calling to ministry (Abraham, 2010). From these examples in history and scriptures, it can

be assumed that the presence of faith and calling does not exclude the presence of questions. In

matters of a theistic call, however, the epistemic question of source is epic.

At the outset, it should be mentioned that scant or incidental research has been done on

the epistemology of a pastor's call. In calling literature, the prevailing assumption is that all

pastors have a theistic source of calling (Cafferata, 2017; Schweitzer & Knudson, 2014).

Missing, however, is qualitative research that explores the epistemology of that call (Dik &

Domene, 2015; McKenna et al., 2015). Thematic inferences gleaned from various qualitative

studies of pastors or seminarians that mention calling, however, point to a semiotic approach to

their knowing (Civish, 2013). This is further explored by interfacing a pastor's call with a

semiotic epistemology.

Semiotics. In a Christian ontology, semiotics is unavoidable. As an invisible entity, God

is known through intermediary means which serve as signs (Luhrmann, 2012). The scriptures

that evangelical pastors reference in their ontology is a book that teaches God communicates His

purposes through signs such as miracles, dreams, visions, experiences, words, and events (Acts

2:17–20; John 20:30; Schweitzer & Knudson, 2014).

The word semiotics is derived from the Greek term *semeion*, which occurs 77 times in the

New Testament and is used in several ways: to distinguish a person or thing from others (e.g.,

Luke 2:42; John 2:11); an unusual occurrence, transcending the common course of nature (e.g.,

miracles; John 20:30); and of signs portending remarkable events soon to happen (Thayer, 1996).

In one incident, Jesus even reproved religious leaders for their incompetence in understanding

the signs of contemporary society: "You know how to interpret the weather signs in the sky, but

you don't know how to interpret the signs of the times" (Matthew 16:3b). Further, the Gospel of

John was organized according to the signs of Jesus's ministry:

> Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in
>
> this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of
>
> God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:30–31)

John chose specific signs to show Jesus was the Christ (i.e., the Messiah) so as to persuade his

readers to faith. The choice of signs as a conveyance of God's purposes was the particular

method of communication chosen by the gospel writer.

This excursion into a biblical exegesis of signs is not meant to espouse a theology of

signs and wonders but to demonstrate the epistemic framework of evangelical pastors who

adhere to the Bible as the final authority in interpreting human experience. Pastors and

spiritually-minded individuals are semiotic in their epistemology (Civish, 2013; Schweitzer &

Knudson, 2014). Therefore, a semiotic approach to a pastor's calling can serve as a

hermeneutical guideline to understanding the epistemological assumptions of that calling.

In the briefest of descriptions, semiotics is the study of signs and symbols in the making

of meaning (Chandler, 2002). Its origin as a discipline of study is largely attributed to American

philosopher C. S. Peirce (1839–1914) and the French linguist F. de Saussure (1857–1913)

(Klaver, 2011). Peirce's semiotics incorporate a triadic construct of meaning which includes a

"sign-vehicle, object, and interpretant" (Robinson, 2010, p. 18; see Figure 2). Broadly

understood, the sign-vehicle can be an event, experience, image, sound, act, object, or word

(Chandler, 2002; Klaver, 2011). It is, however, merely a vehicle that "does not signify anything in itself, but is able to signify something" (Robinson, 2010, p. 18). The sign-object of Peirce's triad refers to the interpretation given to the sign-vehicle; that is, it is the referent of the sign. The object, in turn, is dependent and determined by the interpretant. For Peirce, the semiotic triad of sign-vehicle, object and interpretant was irreducible and necessary to fully understand the full operational nature of a sign. Thus, a sign cannot exist if one of the three elements is missing (Chandler, 2002). For example, the presence of a distant swirl of smoke may be a sign-vehicle for fire, but without an interpretant, it is simply smoke. Similarly, if there is an interpretant (i.e., interpreter) seeing the fire close-up without the vehicle-sign of smoke, then there is no sign. In such cases, no interpretation is necessary, and the fire is understood in its literal sense.

This example broadly illustrates the triadic construct of Peircean semiotic theory which will be used in this research as an explicative tool (see Figure 1). In its application to pastors, for instance, it can be construed that if a weak wisp of smoke was likened to the sign-vehicle of a pastor's calling, then the object (i.e., the sense of calling) would suffer doubt. In such a case, the certainty of the smoke as a sign may later be questioned: Is it possible that the swirl of smoke was merely a wispy cloud? The subjective semiotic nature of a pastor's calling, hence, requires further exploration. In this study, the semiotic inferences of a pastor's calling are examined in its internal and external constructs. Internal sign-vehicles found in the embodiment of conviction, passion, God's presence, dreams/visions, and epiphanies are explored. Following that, the external sign-vehicles of synchronicities, prophetic utterances, words spoken, miracles, and significant others are reviewed as calling-significations.

SIGN-VEHICLE (non-empirical signifier)

- **INTERNAL**
  - Epiphanies/Revelations
  - Embodiment/Affect
  - Dreams and Visions
  - Passion/Moral Convictions
- **EXTERNAL**
  - Synchronicities
  - Unusual/Rare Occurances
  - Prophetic Words
  - Miracles/Signs/Wonders
  - Significant Others

INTERPRETANT (calling conditions)

- Semiotic Openess
- Intuitive
- Prayerful, Devout, and Godly
- Transitioning/Conflict

Pastor's Calling

OBJECT (concept and experience signified)

- God's Calling to be a pastor

Figure 1. Peircean triadic semiotics of a pastoral calling.

   Internal signification as embodiment. In a study that examined the experience of conversion from a semiotic perspective, Klaver (2011) observed that various domains of signification are active. She stated, "It is necessary to approach conversion processes from a perspective that takes into account distinct domains of signification, like language, material forms, the body, and other mediating practices" (p. 95). Klaver observed, among other things, that the sensory data of the body were necessary signifiers in understanding conversion. Consequently, a conversion hermeneutic that is exclusively cognitive can easily overlook or minimize the body as a signifier in the conversion experience. The same could be said of a pastor's calling. Pastors and spiritual leaders have variously described their calling as a feeling of conviction (Loder, 1989); urgency (Spurgeon, 1875/2010); love (Lloyd-Jones, 2012); peace (Murray, 2003); warmth (Abraham, 2010); and a flush or tingling on the skin (Pitt, 2012). Arguably, a calling epistemology that ignores the affective domain of experience will surely be incomplete. In this regard Smith (2010) has contended that "an overly rationalist conception of human persons . . . will not be primed to appreciate the nature of a spirituality that is more

affective and embodied" (Kindle loc., 270). Bodily experiences which involve the five senses are "not only [a] means of apprehending physical phenomena, but also avenues for the transmission of cultural values" (Classen, 1997, p. 401). In phenomenology, anthropology, psychology, and other human sciences, embodiment is a key concept in the transmission of values. The *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* has described embodiment from this perspective:

> The subjective experience of one's own body is different from the objective or scientific picture of a body in physiological terms. The specific ways we experience ourselves as embodied thus become prime data for theorizing about knowledge and experience. (Blackburn, 2016, para. 3)

Bodily sensations are vaults of data that contain information from which insight and knowledge about experiences can be retrieved. This is also true of spiritual transformations where "affective intensities felt through these embodiments were understood to affirm religious belief and sensibilities" (Williams, 2016, p. 51). In essence, affective intensities functioned as signs that were interpreted as faith affirmations.

The semiotic functionality of affections, however, is not embraced by all. Smith (2010) has observed that in academia "to move the discussion beyond the borders of logic, grammar, history—all which emphasize analysis and the cognitive domain—to the affective domain is treated as an illegitimate child" (Kindle loc., 670). An example of this is found in the landmark book, *Decision Making and the Will of God: A Biblical Alternative to the Traditional View* (Friessen, 2004).

Friessen (2004) observed that the traditional way Christians have been taught to discern God's will, through signs, inner peace, fleeces, and epiphanies, has led to confusion and a subjectivity that is not biblical. When commenting on inner impressions, Friessen (2004)

declared that "inner impressions are not a form of revelation. So, the Bible does not invest inner impressions with authority to function as indicators of divine guidance" (p. 131). In contrast to a subjective and traditional method taught in discerning God's will, Friessen (2004) calls the *way of wisdom.* The way of wisdom posits that normative (i.e., moral) divine guidance comes only from scripture and sound judgments (i.e., reasoning) based on scripture (Passantino, n.d.). God wants His children to be decision makers who are guided by the truths of scripture without having to focus on inner subjective experiences which can bring confusion or deception to the seeker.

The way of wisdom aligns well with natural and biblical theology as presented earlier and certainly has value for the seeker who is not clear about which direction to take. However, its truncated epistemology does not account for the spectrum of knowing that humans experience, such as intuition, conviction, and embodied perceptions of joy, peace, and God Himself. For example, when the Apostle Paul wanted the Galatian church to recognize the deadening effects of legalism, he asked them to self-reflect on their affective state to prove the wrongness of their doctrine. He asked, "Where is that sense of blessing you once had?" (Galatians 4:15). Again, in the same letter, the Apostle mentioned that "God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" (Galatians 4:6). Also, most of the fruit of the Spirit are affective expressions of the heart (5:22–23), which are meant to be an assessment measure of the Galatians' spirituality. Thus, the avoidance and dismissal of the affective state in understanding the will of God is itself unbiblical.

Perhaps the paucity of theological affective research may be related to this criticism. If that is the case, this present research will possibly lend credibility to embodied experiences of calling. With that said, questions arise, such as the following: What embodied experiences have

semiotic significance for a pastor's calling? What knowledge about calling can be gathered through the affective intensities of a pastor's experience? One common embodied experience among pastors is the conviction of a calling (McMillan, 2014).

Pastors and other spiritual leaders have described feelings of conviction upon receiving their calling (Loder, 1989). The experience of a calling-conviction is a cognition that is embedded with deep affect and strong belief about one's purpose. Researchers have shown the effect of a moral conviction can have a powerful influence in the beliefs, attitudes, and actions of an individual or group (Skitka & Wisneski, 2011). Additionally, the affective nature of a convictional experience has been associated with strength, confidence, and certitude (King et al., 2006). Equally, when conviction is associated with wrong-doing, that same certitude can be applied to one's conscience and experienced as guilt. That is, the individual is strongly convinced of his or her wrong-doing (Loder, 1989). In either case, whether it be positive or negative affect, certitude is attached to a moral belief in a convictional experience. Consequently, the certainty of a moral conviction can convert a subjective feeling into an objective reality:

> Part of what distinguishes moral convictions from otherwise strong but nonmoral attitudes appears to be that moral convictions are experienced as facts about the world. People seem to be intuitive cognitivists who experience moral judgments much like scientific judgments: Good and bad are experienced as objective characteristics of phenomena and not just as verbal labels that people attach to feelings. (Skitka, Bauman, & Sargis, 2005, p. 896)

Pastors with a strong sense of calling understand their convictions as reality. The spiritual realities of their convictions are as real to them as the empirical world of the scientist. Similar to

the great social reformers, calling-convictions can motivate a pastor to counter the prevailing

empirical realities of a society or culture.

In literature that interacts with social constructionism, convictional experience is

overwhelmingly attributed to cultural and familial influences (Classen, 1997; Mezirow, 1991).

In the development of a pastor's calling-conviction, this also has bearing. In a study that recently

interviewed 900 Protestant senior pastors, it was found that 85% attended church as children,

84% considered their childhood church environment as healthy, and 74% were involved in youth

ministry as a teen (Barna Group, 2017). Assuming church attendance was influenced by parental

or family decision making, this study indicates that a strong majority of calling-convictions for

pastors were influenced by their early church and family environment. These results, however,

can be misleading if a calling-conviction is only attributed to cultural and family influences.

Pastors claim God as their primary source of calling and human influence as a secondary means

to their convictions. This may seem inconsequential, but most research does not note this

distinction which is of significance to pastors (Loder, 1989; Myers, 2014). The social sciences

have not emphasized or extensively researched a theistic source for calling-convictions

(McKenna et al., 2015; Myers, 2014). This, however, is the central epistemic question for

pastors: How do they assess their convictional experience as being from God and not merely a

social (e.g., church, mentors, friends) or familial influenced conscience? The interviewing

process of this qualitative study addresses these questions.

Another form of embodiment that can function as a sign for a pastor's calling is personal

passion. Passion has been defined as "a strong feeling of enthusiasm or excitement for

something or about doing something" ("Passion," n.d.). Pastors have often claimed a strong

passion for their calling (Flourishing, 2013). In fact, the renown 19th century preacher, C. H.

Spurgeon (1875/2010), has said, "*Do not enter the ministry if you can help it*" (p. 26, italics original). When addressing students and pastoral candidates, Spurgeon (1875/2010) further admonished:

> The first sign of the heavenly calling is *an intense, all absorbing desire for the work*. In order to [have] a true call to the ministry there must be an irresistible, overwhelming craving and raging thirst for telling to others what God has done to our own souls. (p. 26, italics original)

Spurgeon (1875/2010) observed passion to have a semiotic function in the calling of pastors. He claimed the first sign of a pastoral calling was an intense desire to do the work of ministry. In another place, he likened passion in one's calling to having "fire in the bones" (Spurgeon, 1875/2010, p. 27). The experience and connection of passion to calling is found among other callings as well (Dobrow & Heller, 2015). Dobrow and Tosti-Kharas (2012), in a longitudinal study of musicians, defined calling as "a consuming, meaningful passion people experience toward a domain" (p. 1003). An additional significance to those in ministry, however, is the semiotic inference that passion possesses. For Spurgeon (1875/2010), the passionate and overwhelming craving to speak to others for God was a necessary sign-vehicle for calling. Spurgeon (1875/2010), though, also recognized the potential of mistaking personal desire for a call, and thus, along with passion, three other indicators were necessary for a call to be confirmed: proven experience, ability to teach, and congregational affirmation of one's call. By mentioning these calling criteria, Spurgeon aligned with other calling constructs that emphasize a naturalistic approach. Talent, ability, and desire are also common components of non-theistic calling constructs (Duffy & Dik, 2013).

Another common form of embodiment that accompanies a pastoral calling is described as a sense of God's presence. The sensing of God's presence has been understood by pastors (and other spiritually-oriented callings) as a sign of God's will or affirmation (Luhrmann, 2012; Weldy, 2014). Interestingly, though frequently mentioned in literature, the sense or presence of God is rarely defined in research. For example, in a study that developed a test measure for clergy well-being, the chief variables used were the Presence and Power of God in Daily Life and Presence and Power of God in Ministry (Proeschold-Bell, Yang, Toth, Rivers, & Carder, 2014). Neither variable, however, was defined in the study. Upon inquiring about this omission, the author noted that the main researcher pilot tested the variables and found "these terms seem to be commonly used and understood among UMC clergy"; however, she acknowledged that the study did not "unpack what it means to experience the presence and power of God in the journal article" (R. J. Proeschold-Bell, personal communication, May 30, 2018). This example appears to be more the rule than the exception in presence of God literature. Because of the epistemic importance of this experience in a pastor's calling, some attention should be given to its meaning.

For the evangelical pastor the presence of God can have numerous meanings such as God's omnipresence, the protection and provision of God, and a place where God's blessing is experienced (Beyer, 1997). In *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, it is observed that "the most common Hebrew term for 'presence' is panim, which is also translated 'face' implying a close and personal encounter with the Lord. The Greek word prosopon has the same semantic range" (Beyer, 1997). When pastors experience the life changing presence of God, they are referring to an embodied, yet spiritual, face-to-face encounter with God. This presence has been variously described as an experience of love, peace, transcendence, freedom,

and hopefulness (Edwards, 1746; Singh, 1922). Additionally, these religious affections are not simply understood as human emotions but are construed as signs emanating from the presence of God (Pitt, 2012). As such, the manifestation of God's presence impacts the affective state of the minister and is understood as a sign of God's presence. In fact, it is not uncommon during the ordination process of certain denominations for pastoral candidates to be asked to give an account of their God-encounter in their call (Pitt, 2012). Candidates that have had no God-encounter in their calling have occasionally been discouraged from vocational ministry (Chambers, 1935/1963; Pitt, 2012). The embodied God-encounter in a calling seems especially important within the Pentecostal and charismatic traditions.

Among Pentecostals, the embodied experience of God's presence is highly valued in the initiation and continuance of one's call to the ministry. In a qualitative study that researched the call to ministry in Black Pentecostalism, Pitt (2012) noted that the presence of God is often felt "as a flush or tingling of the skin or as a kind of head rush. Often this moment was accompanied by outbursts of glossolalia (or 'tongues') or involuntary muscular tics ministers referred to as a 'quickening'" (p. 130). One clergy he interviewed explained it this way:

> God, how can I explain it? I can feel the presence of the Lord and I can feel the change within me and how the Word of God is just coming up, as the scripture says, "out of your belly shall flow rivers of living water". I know it's God because of the things that are happening, how the Word of God is coming and coming, and then it's just overflowing. I can tell that the Spirit of God is just taking over and I'm operating under the anointing. (Pitt, 2012, p. 131)

The epistemic importance of feeling the presence is also embraced by the Pentecostal scholar Smith (2010). He observed that "implicit in the practices of Pentecostalism are both a

philosophical anthropology and an epistemology that resist the slimmed-down reductionism of modern cognitivism" (Smith, 2010, p. 59). He further posited that "Pentecostal spirituality fosters a more expansive, affective understanding of what counts as knowledge and a richer understanding of how we know" (Smith, 2010, p. 59). The value of Smith's (2010) Pentecostal epistemology can be applied where feelings and sensory data are present during spiritual activities when the presence of God is experienced during prayer, Bible reading, meditation, counseling, worship, and acts of compassion (Immink, 2016). Its value may further be applicable to experiences that are affectively rich but cognitively poor, such as the Emmaus Road duo whose hearts (i.e., affections) were stirred but their minds were undiscerning (Luke 24:13–35). Similarly, Jesus's felt experience of power leaving his body (though he did not know on whom and what effect it had) can be understood as affective insight (Luke 8:45–46). Accordingly, though the presence of God may be inexplicable at times, its presence can be an affective sign to those who encounter it. This can also be said of those who have had epiphanies in their calling as pastors.

An epiphany is a sudden insight that alters one's views with substantial new meaning. Words used to describe this phenomenon have been "revelation, moment of illumination, knowledge of thought without a reason, immediate cognition, and intuitive understanding" (Chilton, 2015, p, 17). Other researchers have colloquially expressed it as the "aha moment" which brings a breakthrough insight (Ovington, Saliba, Moran, Goldring, & MacDonald, 2015). Researchers commonly note vexation or struggle is frequently experienced prior to an epiphany (Chilton, 2015; Loder, 1989; Ovington et al., 2015). Loder (1989), in transformational learning theory, specifically draws attention to the emotive-celebratory experience that occurs during an epiphany. This element of surprise is also commonly associated with an epiphany. Crowther

and Schmidt (2015) observed that for some, the primary emotion in an epiphany is surprise and even "shocked amazement" (p. 56).

The impact of a revelation or an epiphany "can inexplicably transform lives in an instant. It is a moment that changes a person so deeply that he or she is no longer the same. How this process occurs is not well understood, but when it happens, the results can be enduring and significant" (Chilton, 2015, p. 15). Notable reformers from history such as Augustine, Joan of Arc, Martin Luther, John Wesley, and Florence Nightingale have all cited an epiphany as the catalyst for their calling. More recently, Bill Wilson, after four hospitalized attempts at sobriety, had a vision that said, "You are a free man"; from that day forward, he stopped drinking and later founded Alcoholics Anonymous (Chilton, 2015).

In summary, the affect of God's presence was an important internal sign or indicator of calling affirmation. Likewise, passion and moral conviction were found to be embodied signs that strengthened a pastor's confidence of a theistic calling. Epiphanies were also significantly instrumental among those who had a theistic calling. Embodied experiences as signs of calling are felt and found in the affections. Consequently, an epistemic theology of the affections can inform pastoral pedagogy in seminaries and pastor training centers. In connection to this, the analysis and recommendation of Miller-McLemore (2014) seems appropriate:

> Despite growing interest in practices, "thinking" remains our customary way of understanding theology. Meanwhile, feeling remains under-analyzed. If the tide has changed in both the natural and social sciences with regard to the study of affect, now seems like a ripe time for more analysis in religion and theology. (p. 702)

External signs of calling. Other significations that may or may not be felt are found to be more external to the called. The search for external signs is well attested among the religious

and spiritual seekers. The Muslims exhort followers: "Say: 'Praise be to God. He will show you His signs and you will recognize them. Your Lord is not heedless of anything you do" (Saffarzadeh, 2006, Quran 27:93). In the Judeo-Christian tradition, Gideon uses a wool fleece as a sign of assurance for an upcoming battle (Judges 6:36–40). And from the east, the books of I Ching and Astrology offer cryptic counsel based on signs found in either randomly tossed coin arrangements or in the signs of the Zodiac (Silverman, 1971). When individuals search for signs, it is mostly the non-embodied external type in contrast to the affective signs of embodiment. As such, "calls are not just inner experiences – passions, dreams, and symptoms – but also outer" (Levoy, 1997, p. 99). The outer or external signs can be found in events, synchronicities, and the supernatural as explained below.

In semiotic theory, events that are meaningful and coincidental but have no apparent causal connection with one another can be interpreted as a sign (Jung, 1973). Levoy (1997) observed that callings "come to us from the world and the events in our lives" (p. 99). Whether it be cosmic events impacting populations or events that have meaning for one person, each can be the sign-vehicle through which a calling is developed and heard. For example, after an extended period of being ill, Jung (1989) realized his illness was in some way connected to his attitude toward his calling and destiny. He observed that "it was only after the illness that I understood how important it is to affirm one's own destiny. In this way we forge an ego that does not break down when incomprehensible things happen" (Jung, 1989, p. 297). Jung was primed to understand his illness in this semiotic sense because of the sense of destiny or calling he had carried from youth. In reflection of this, he observed:

> From the beginning I had a sense of destiny, as though my life was assigned to me by fate
> and had to be fulfilled. This gave me an inner security, and, though I could never prove it

to myself, it proved itself to me. I did not have this certainty, it had me. Nobody could rob me of the conviction that it was enjoined upon me to do what God wanted and not what I wanted. (Jung, 1989, p. 48)

Similarly, the biblical patriarch Joseph was primed to understand his brothers' rejection, his enslavement, and his prison experience to be events orchestrated by God as a means of calling fulfillment. In the case of Joseph, his sense of destiny was given to him as a youth through a series of dreams God had given to him (Genesis 37:5–11). Thus, when addressing his brothers and their crime against him 30 years earlier, he stated: "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today" (Genesis 50:20). Joseph's response to his brothers represented to Myers (2014) a matured awareness of calling that sustained Joseph through incredible injustices and setbacks. His sense of destiny and calling had forged "an ego that does not break down when incomprehensible things happen" (Jung, 1989, p. 297). For Myers (2014), Joseph is "a model of calling and vocation in the truest sense" (p. 221).

Thankfully, however, not all semiotic events are accompanied with pain. Some semiotic events have wonder, surprise, and even joy found in them (Luhrmann, 2012). It is not a coincidence that the words *signs and wonders* are often found as a couplet in the Bible (e.g., Acts 2:19; 4:30; 5:12; 6:8; 7:36; 14:3; 15:12). Accordingly, McNeal (1991) has observed that "whereas a sign appeals to the understanding, a wonder appeals to the imagination" (para. 5). Signs can generate wonder and curiosity which provide affective motivation for acts of learning and discovery. This connection has also been made by Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, and Descartes, who in different words, assert that wonder is a primary instrument of learning (Deckard, 2008). In the experience of calling, wonder-evoking signs have catalyzed individuals to redirect their

lives and make drastic changes. As in the example of Moses, the initial wonder of a burning bush led to a calling that defied a world empire and liberated an entire nation of slaves (Exodus 3–15).

The signs and wonders of Israel and the Church have a psychological counterpart in the concept of synchronicity expounded by Carl Jung (1989). Jung (1989) developed the construct of synchronicity to account for experiences of coincidence where there is a "meaningful connection between an inner event (such as a thought, vision or feeling) and one or more external events occurring simultaneously" (Roxburgh, Ridgway, & Roe, 2016, p. 44). A simple example of this is when a spontaneous thought about an old friend not seen or heard from in years occurs the same day that the same friend sends a Facebook message to you (Hocoy, 2012). A more profound example mentioned by the same author is the Red Sea being parted by an east wind at the same time the Israelites were fleeing from Egyptian soldiers (Hocoy, 2012, p. 468). Synchronicities of this last type are "associated with the uncommon and often consist of numinous, life-changing, and deeply spiritual experiences (Main, 2007); these synchronicities can play a critical role in an individual's growth and personal transformation" (Hocoy, 2012, p. 468). Additionally, for an event to be considered a synchronicity, there has to be "no discernible or plausible way in which this paralleling could be the result of normal causes," and "the experience must be meaningful beyond being notable" (Roxburgh et al., 2016, p. 44). When deeply meaningful events occur that are beyond discernable normal causes, they have signification and create wonder to the beholder. Thus, theistic-oriented pastors who have such occurrences in their calling are likely to attribute them to the activity of God. This was borne out in a case study that examined vocational calling and synchronicity.

In this study, researchers found that synchronicity had played a significant role in the career-callings for those who had a synchronistic ontology (Guindon & Hanna, 2002). As the research was directed to career counselors, they instructively observed that "spiritually oriented clients seen by spiritually oriented counselors who accept the possibility of synchronicity (albeit labeled as coincidence, happenstance, serendipity, fate, or the hand of God) would be open to synchronistic thinking" (Guindon & Hanna, 2002, p. 206). Consequently, the authors contended that career counselors who allow for the possibility of synchronicity can benefit those with a synchronistic ontology who are in search of a career-calling. Otherwise, as Peirce posited, a sign without an interpretant has no signification (Robinson, 2010). As an external means of signification, the same could be said of language or words.

As noted earlier, semiotics was said to have been developed by the American philosopher C.S. Peirce (1839–1914) and the French linguist F. de Saussure (1857–1913; Klaver, 2011). Whereas Peirce broadly addressed the phenomena of signs, Saussarian semiotics suggested language as the most important of all sign-systems (Chandler, 2002). Consequently, its focus is on the meaning and signification of words. In pastoral callings, the words of significant others have often been cited as a source and confirmation of a theistic call (Flourishing, 2013; Placher, 2005). This is especially true when such words were spoken as a prophetic utterance.

Dating back to early Christendom, the practice of placing hands upon an individual and speaking a prophetic word has been exercised in the calling of pastors and missionaries (Acts 13:1–3; 1 Timothy 1:18; 4:14). Prophetic speech, however, though commonly recognized by biblical scholars, is difficult to define because of the great diversity of meanings and expressions (Martin, 2016). That being said, Fee (1994) has noted that prophetic speech was common and held in high esteem in the early church and is still practiced in charismatic and Pentecostal

churches. When practiced in the context of a pastoral calling, prophetic speech can be motivational, affirming, specific, and highly personal (Fee, 1994). As described by the Apostle Paul, prophecy is to be highly sought after because of its impact on others: it consoles, exhorts, and encourages (1 Cor. 14:1–3); it reveals the secrets of the heart, brings conviction and accountability, and manifests the presence of God (1 Cor. 14:24–25). It is the combination of these affects and its revelatory properties that give prophecy the semiotic quality as a theistic sign for calling.

Other contexts in which words have had calling-signification can be found in mentoring relationships, the reading of biblical texts, speakers or preachers, and dreams or visions. In each of these contexts particular words have served as catalysts for God's call to pastors (Flourishing, 2013). It is often these particular words or prophecies that pastors will return to when re-aligning their focus with their sense of calling (1 Timothy 1:18; 4:14).

Another external signification of calling is dreams and visions. Though such experiences take place internally, those who have such revelations describe their dreams or visions as a surprise that was unsolicited. It was as if the dream or vision was given to them rather than they manufactured it (Haney-Loehlein et al., 2015). In reviewing how Christians hear from God, Immink (2016) observed that:

> Evangelical and Pentecostal Christians talk very realistic and almost materialistic about their hearing the voice of God . . . Bible texts, cards, things, dreams and circumstances figure in the believers' experience as signs from God. Experiences of divine communication do not pop into their mind, but much rather happen to them. (p. 120)

In this way, dreams and visions are seen as external sources of significations from God. That said, in the literature, dreams are viewed from a great variety of perspectives.

Freud (1913) conducted a great deal of research with dreams and brought scientific credence to dreams as a source of psychoanalytical data. He believed that every dream has a psychological structure that is significant and tied to the activities of the waking state. Jung (2014) furthered the credibility of dream data by positing that dreams offer information about the dreamer in language often couched in symbols and archetypes that one must strive to understand. Both psychologists were pioneers in their respective fields and have strongly shaped the current understanding of the human subconscious. Both also wrote books on the importance of dreams in gaining access to the subconscious where hidden fears, wishes, and conditions of the psyche can be discovered. Also common to both was the semiotic nature of dreams. Dreams have something to say to us, but the language needs to be decoded. For example, an Egyptian pharaoh had a dream in which he saw seven lean cows and seven fat cows (Genesis 41) or Peter had a vision of a sheet with all kinds of living animals on it and heard a voice to "rise and eat" (Acts 10:13). As such, and in the psychological and biblical traditions, dreams are largely couched in the language of symbols. The epistemic differences between the biblical account and the psychological position is the source and interpretation of the dream. The human sciences mostly interpret dreams as an expression of the subconscious, whereas the primary giver of dreams in the Bible is God. This is eloquently stated in the book of Job:

> Indeed, God speaks once, or twice, yet no one notices it—in a dream, a vision of the night. When sound sleep falls on men, while they slumber in their beds. Then He opens the ears of men and seals their instruction. (Job 33:14–16)

Dreams, as with other phenomena, however, are naturally occurring events that can be attributed to a biological function or to God. Similar to synchronicities, which can be understood as a natural occurrence of events that are coincidental, dreams are not an empirical source of

knowledge. In both theological and psychological disciplines, dreams are subjectively interpreted. However, this subjectivity does not dismiss the epistemic value of dreams. Both disciplines (and others as well) have demonstrated from history and research that dreams have been instrumental in scientific breakthroughs, societal changes, inventions, ministry callings, and personal transformations (Carraway, 2017; Polanyi, 1962).

Regardless of the philosophical position one has toward dreams, they are a universal phenomenon; therefore, each person has a hermeneutic by which they are interpreted. In a study that explored dream frequency, it was found that openness to dreams as a source of knowledge and dream frequency were positively related (DeYoung & Grazioplene, 2013). Dream-openness is described as a "variation in a general tendency toward cognitive exploration" and "reflects the ability and tendency to seek, detect, comprehend, appreciate, and use information" (DeYoung & Grazioplene, 2013, p. 615). Subsequently, dreams have epistemic value to those who are willing to cognitively explore them. For openness to be present, a hermeneutic that allows for the intuitive and precognitive knowledge that comes through dreams must be present. Presently, this is not the default response of academia or culture: "Our world is a disenchanted world. No God, no spirits, no supernatural power, no world of miracles or divine intervention. Especially the more educated sections of the population apprehend the world in terms of naturalism" (Immink, 2016, p. 3). This is in contrast to the vocational calling of a pastor which necessitates a mythic and non-empirical paradigm for knowing (Haney-Loehlein, McKenna, Robie, Austin, & Ecker, 2015). Arguably then, for dreams not to be "the forgotten language of God" (Sanford, 1989, p. 4), seminaries and other pastoral training centers must go beyond the required Hebrew and Greek and include the language of God experienced in dreams (Acts 2:17), for when a dream occurs

and is "meaningful beyond being notable" and connects to an interior concern (Roxburgh et al., 2016, p. 44), the theistic mind gravitates to God as its source.

In sum, the epistemic foundations for a pastoral calling were examined through the discipline of semiotics. It was proposed that those of a theistic ontology, such as pastors, were predisposed to an epistemology that embraced the inferred truths relayed through the signs and wonders of a semiotic triage as posited by Peirce. The signs of affect expressed as embodiment were especially noted in the experiences of conviction, passion, God's presence, and epiphanies. These internal signs were juxtaposed with the external signs such as acausal synchronicities, miracles, mentoring relationships, the reading of biblical texts, prophetic words, and dreams or visions. These occurrences can be subsumed in the construct of synchronicity where no or little natural causation for the occurrence can be found (Jung, 1973). Whether the signs of calling be synchronic or embodied, evangelical theology places its emphasis on the epistemic agency of God's Spirit in pastoral calling (Loder, 1989). It is God's Spirit that gives the effectual call to ministry through the many signs and wonders he enacts.

Vocational and Career Dimensions of a Pastor's Calling

Though a pastor's calling is a spiritual phenomenon, its pursuit will likely take place in some religious organization where it will be subjected to many of the same vocational tensions of other careers (Cafferata, 2017; Grey, 2012; Nel & Scholtz, 2016). Thus, though a pastor's theistic experience of calling may be dissimilar to other vocations, the overlapping human experiences of family, health needs, and housing are common concerns in any vocation. Consequently, the field of vocational and occupational literature may help to inform the human dynamics of calling for pastors (O'Neal, 2017).

Research indicates that "pastors are subject to the same sources of stress experienced by people in other occupations and professions" (Cafferata, 2017, p. 313). Also similar to other occupations was the observation "that younger clergy and those with less experience are more vulnerable to stress than those with more experience" (Cafferata, 2017, p. 313). Thus, though pastors understand their calling is from God, the affective and practical dynamics of that calling are experienced in ways similar to other vocational pursuits (McDuff & Mueller, 2000). This observation is in contrast to those who overly emphasize the theistic side of their calling while ignoring the practical and human dimensions of a call which include finances, health, location, schools for children, spousal input, denominational or organizational requirements, and so forth. This acknowledgement is not to secularize theistic calling as some have suggested (Nel & Scholtz, 2016); rather, it is a broadening of theistic involvement in a calling. To deemphasize the human dimension of spirituality is similar to the gnostic heresy which the early church battled (Berkhof, 1979). Gnosticism espoused a dualistic theology that taught the physical and bodily realities of life (e.g., food, rest, sex, etc.) were evil, and the incorporeal realities of the spirit (mind, truth, ideals) were good (Berkhof, 1979, p. 151). Orthodox theology teaches that God is very much involved in human desires, needs, and practicalities of life: "The providence of God is that efficiency whereby he provides for existing creatures in all things . . . This providence extends to all things, not only general but particular, Psalm 145:15,16; Proverbs 16:9,33; Exodus 21:13" (Ames, 1983, p. 107).

Clergy are often stereotyped as individuals with unique professional motivations and irrational labor market behavior based on their religious calling in contrast to the criteria and concern of other professionals such as pay, job security, and advancement potential (McDuff & Mueller, 2000). Recent research, however, has challenged this view, suggesting that clergy

generally make job decisions based on considerations of key job characteristics in a manner similar to that of other professionals (Joynt, 2017; McDuff & Mueller, 2000). Clergy job satisfaction also appears to vary with work conditions such as autonomy and decision-making opportunities, opportunities for professional growth, and the pay and benefits received (Faucett et al., 2013; Mueller & McDuff, 2004).

The above vocational-career literature stresses the commonality of a pastor's calling with other careers. Career challenges, growth, benefits, stress, and work environment impact pastors similar to any other professional. Many pastors would not view their calling as a career similar to an executive or other professionals (Piper, 2013); however, as research indicates, similarities do exist. It appears that a balanced theology that affirms "a worker to be worthy of his wage" (1 Timothy 5:18) and the forsaking all things for the call (Philippians 3:7–14) need to co-exist for pastors to fulfill their calling.

Summary

This chapter reviews the literature of the phenomenon of calling for a seasoned pastor from an interdisciplinary framework. The scarcity of qualitative studies on pastoral calling requires research that is seminal, inclusive, and broad in its scope. Consequently, exploring literature that is relevant to the experience, ontology, and epistemic framework of an evangelical pastor leads to a holistic perception of what it means to be called as a pastor. This holistic perception has similarities and differences to other callings.

The theoretical literature demonstrates a common substructure that underlies the process of perspective change. The theories of transformational learning as posited by Loder (1989) and Mezirow (1991) offer a framework that aligns with the calling experience of a pastor which is deeply embedded with changes of meaning and perspective. Loder's (1989) distinctive theistic

contribution to the transformational learning process, however, is an important inclusion because of the theological ontology of pastors. A pastoral ontology and epistemic framework are different from other callings (if not in kind, certainly in degree), requiring the researcher to examine the theological grid of a pastor's calling. Specifically, this entails the separate theological divisions of special and natural revelation. Special revelation refers to doctrines and experiences which are faith based and not empirically processed for their validity. In contrast, natural revelation refers to those truths which can be ascertained through the empirical process of analysis, deduction, and inductive reasoning. It is proposed that a biblical theology of calling encompasses both epistemic realms, thus having credence for pastors whose ontology is firmly framed by the Bible.

Accordingly, the theological foundation of natural revelation and common grace establishes the validity of the psychological and social sciences as epistemic sources of calling. Human science and calling literature suggest that self-identity, well-being, and meaning are salient psychological dimensions that impact a pastor's calling. Noticeably absent in the psychological/social science research is the theistic distinctive and ontology of that call. Nonetheless, the affect and presence of each psychological dimension are shown to have considerable influence in the development and interpretation of calling for pastors. More accurately stated, a pastor's calling is the epicenter from which the affective states of identity, well-being, and meaning are formed. Arguably, the centrality of calling is the fulcrum upon which a pastor's vocation and person pivot. This being the case, the epistemic certainty and clarity of one's calling is highly significant and potentially a source of great confidence or angst for a pastor. Consequently, the epistemic constructs of a pastor's calling are of utmost importance.

It was proposed that a pastor's calling is epistemologically semiotic; that is, pastors understand their callings through various embodied experiences and external synchronicities that function as theistic signs to their calling. Embodied experiences of conviction, passion, presence of God, dreams, and epiphanies serve as internal theistic signs for pastors in their calling. External signs such as acausal synchronicities (Jung, 1973), prophetic words, and spiritual mentors are also experienced as calling affirmations. The experience of wonder and faith largely accompany these signs and complete the epistemic framework of calling for a pastor.

Lastly, the experience of pastoral calling can be pragmatically examined in the context of a career choice. In contrast to some perceptions (McDuff & Mueller, 2000), research suggests that pastors share the same career issues and concerns as other professions (Faucett et al., 2013). Pastoral callings are mostly pursued in the context of an institution where benefits, wages, and hours are negotiated. It was posited that the mundane and professional concerns of a career can create tension within a pastoral calling when a pastor's theology is not inclusive of human realities such as housing and health benefits.

In summary, a pastor's calling is a rich complex of learning theories, psychological subdisciplines, and theological substrates. No single approach can readily explain the interdisciplinary nature of this calling. Thus, a multidisciplinary research approach that is holistic seems best in representing those who are called to be pastors:

> Holistic connotes an integrative system, assuming from the start that human beings and their understanding of their world are a combination of many things. Furthermore, calling is multi-dimensional. While it is a holistic concept, we can understand the different pieces of calling and how they interact together in the experience and life of a person. (McKenna et al., 2015, p. 296)

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The goal and purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of calling in seasoned pastors. In this chapter, the qualitative research design used for this study is reviewed and described as well as the methods and procedures of the research as guided by the phenomenological methodology of Moustakas (1994). Additionally, the rationale for the selected research design is explored as it corresponds to the stated purpose of the study. In reviewing the participant sampling of the study, the rationale and method for their selection is explained to include the methods and procedures for the procurement of participants, the collection of data, and the analysis of the data as prescribed by Moustakas (1994).

Since much of the data used in the study has been gathered through open semi-structured interviews, an explanation of the interview questions will be reviewed as they relate to the experiences of calling among seasoned pastors. These questions are reviewed as understood by transformational learning theories of Mezirow (1991) and Loder (1981). In addition to the interviews and field notes, a focus group was also used to collect data. The structural analysis and synthesis of the data is guided by the phenomenological research method of Moustakas (1994). Lastly, the trustworthiness of this research design is examined to ensure the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the results.

Design

The design for this research should be compatible with its purpose to explore the phenomenon of the lived experiences of calling in seasoned pastors. Accordingly, a qualitative research method was used in this study, utilizing Moustakas's (1994) transcendental phenomenology (TP) in its design.

A qualitative research design is described as being interpretive, symbolic interactionist, and phenomenological (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 3). This research design is emphatically relevant to a pastor's calling which is epistemically semiotic and highly subjective (Haney-Loehlein et al., 2015). Additionally, common to all qualitative research is the focus on contexts, meaning, and experiences of the participants (Silverman, 2000). The semi-structured interviews, field notes, focus group, and memos of this research facilitate these qualitative conditions (Creswell, 2013). Moustakas (1994) further underscores the value of this focus by adding that "qualitative designs and methodologies study human experiences that are not approachable through quantitative approaches" (p. 23). He expanded upon this by noting qualitative research distinctives such as the following: the focus of the wholeness of an experience and not simply its parts; the search for meaning and essences rather than measurements or explanations; the obtaining of first person descriptions of experience; and the importance of experiential data in understanding and investigating human behavior (Moustakas, 1994, p. 21). The holistic interdisciplinary research approach in understanding a pastor's calling further embraces these additional qualitative distinctives of Moustakas (1994).

Additionally, this qualitative study uses the transcendental phenomenological (TP) research design in its methodology and analysis of the data as outlined by Moustakas (1994). Moustakas's theoretical constructs of TP are predominantly from Husserl (1931). Husserl's TP "emphasizes subjectivity and discovery of essences of experience and provides a disciplined methodology for derivation of knowledge" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 45). This does not infer or dismiss the value of knowledge acquired through empirical research. Elsewhere Moustakas (1994) states, "Transcendental phenomenology is not the only approach to a knowledge of human experience, but rather . . . it precedes and makes possible the empirical sciences" (p. 28).

Therefore, before an empirical investigation of human experience is attempted, the researcher first must acquire data that capture the human phenomenon under research. Moustakas and Husserl argued that apart from a phenomenological method of research that would not be possible. The acquisition of human data, which include experiences of thought, memory, imagination, emotion, desire, volition, bodily awareness, and embodied action, requires an open methodology that is fluid, non-restrictive, and interactive with the subject, such as the phenomenological method of study (Smith, 2013). As such, the phenomenological methodology of Moustakas enable the researcher to access the embodied experiences of a pastoral calling such as convictions, epiphanies, theistic presence, and other physical data (Pitt, 2012; Smith, 2010). Thus, in studying the phenomenon of calling in seasoned pastors which is rich in such experiential data, a phenomenological method of research is required. Moustakas outlined a four-step process to this research method: epoche, phenomenal reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis of meanings and essences.

Epoche is the intentional act made by researchers to bracket and set aside their preconceptions and beliefs of the phenomenon being studied so that they "learn to see what stands before our eyes" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 33). This has been pursued by bracketing and noting my present beliefs on pastoral calling, thus, keeping my beliefs from unknowingly influencing the meaning I may have given to a pastor's experience of calling.

Phenomenal reduction is the textural description of the experienced phenomenon. This is achieved by the practice of horizonalization, which records and assigns equal value to each description of the phenomenon made by a participant of the shared experience. This research process requires openness to all experiential descriptions made by a participant when describing the experience of calling. Afterwards, comments that are not relevant to the phenomenon will be

removed. The descriptions that remain are to be clustered into themes and meaning constructs. The clusters and themes provide the material for imaginative variation.

Imaginative variation is a creative process whereby the data of clustered themes are imaginatively placed in various situations to determine the invariant essences of the experienced phenomenon. For example, roles among the participants can be reversed or removed altogether. This process was pursued by asking hypothetical questions during the interview and during the data analysis to determine the invariant horizons of the phenomenon of calling in seasoned pastors.

The last process of TP outlined by Moustakas (1994) is the synthesis of meanings and essences from the gathered data. Moustakas described this as the integration of "the fundamental textural and structural descriptions into a unified statement of the essences of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole. This is the guiding direction of the eidetic sciences, the establishment of a knowledge of essences" (p. 100). In this last step, the ultimate purpose of TP is realized in the full integration and synthesis of the essences condensed into a unified statement that represents the experience of the phenomenon in its entirety.

People, places, and times change along with researchers, bringing new insight and descriptions of a phenomenon such as a pastoral calling. The implications for the phenomenon of calling are notable. As culture and demographics change, the need for additional studies of calling among pastors will be required. The results of this research provide at least a partial framework from which future studies may build and profit.

Research Questions

The central research question (CQ) guiding this study is as follows: What are the lived experiences of calling for seasoned pastors? This central question is further explored by four sub-

questions (SQ):

SQ1. How do seasoned pastors describe their initial experiences in their search and sense

of calling?

SQ2. How do seasoned pastors describe the ways in which they have critically reflected

on their experience of calling?

SQ3. How do seasoned pastors describe their actions that have resulted from their

calling?

SQ4. How do seasoned pastors describe the development of their calling?

Setting

The setting in which qualitative research is conducted is important because it richly

informs the data. By analogy, the words and descriptions made by literary authors are often

taken from the neighborhood or country in which they wrote. Thus, going to the location where

the participants are living out their calling and where the interviews take place (i.e., the church

building where the pastor serves) can be informative and insightful. This also aligns with the

qualitative method of this research which directs researchers to do their work in the natural

settings of their participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

The setting of the interviews for this study took place at the pastor/participant's church of

service. These churches are located in the urban and suburban communities of central

California. In this regard, it has been noted that though urban communities represent the bulk of

the population, the ratio of churches to population is much higher in rural communities (Flora,

Flora, & Gasteyer, 2015). Also, pastors in urban and rural settings often refer to the differences

between their fields of ministry (Cox, 2013). Because none of the pastors interviewed served in

a rural church, this difference in setting was not explored during the interview. This

geographical area was selected for several other reasons.

The familiarity I have of the regions' ethos, lifestyle, and worldview provided a cultural understanding that assisted in understanding the description of a pastor's calling. It has been observed by social commentators that the culture, politics, and values of the West Coast in the United States are significantly different than Middle America (Hershey, 2017). A second reason for the selection of this setting is the number and diversity of pastors found in this area. California is known for its diverse ethnic population. The region's pastor population reflects this diversity and provided a good heterogeneous sampling of conservative pastors from which to recruit. Thirdly, 10 participants who qualified for this study I personally know live within this area. Lastly, the selection and preference to go to the site of ministry for each pastor is a courtesy and an accommodation to those who are assisting the research by the sacrifice of their time in giving the interview (Creswell, 2013).

Participants

After the IRB approval, potential participants (10–15) were contacted by phone and email to determine their interest. These were pastors whom I know and were part of a local minister's association (interdenominational) to which I belonged. Those who were interested received an Introduction and Information Form (see Appendix A). This form explained the nature of the research and time commitment required for each participant. As part of the recruitment strategy, a snowball method of recruitment was implemented by requesting these pastors to recommend two other pastors who may be interested in being a part of this study (see Appendix B). This method of recruitment, however, did not provide any additional pastor-participants.

To ensure a purposeful sampling group from the interested pastors, a questionnaire was sent to them that had a copy of the Apostles' Creed, several basic demographic questions, and

the Brief Calling Scale (BCS; see Appendix B, Participation Questionnaire). The Apostles'

Creed has been historically considered a conservative representation of the Christian faith

(Packer, 2008). The demographics of the participants such as gender, education, age, church and

community size, denomination affiliation, ethnicity, and length of ministry at the church were

also part of the Participation Questionnaire. The information gathered from the questionnaire

assisted in the discriminate priority selection by establishing the research target population of

conservative pastors and by intentionally procuring from them a variety of traditions, church

sizes, and ethnicities (Patton, 2002). Also included with the introduction and questionnaire was

the Brief Calling Scale (BCS; Dik et al., 2012). This tool was used to ensure the nature of the

phenomenon being studied (i.e., pastoral calling) was present among the pastors who were

interviewed (Creswell, 2013).

In a recent survey of calling research, the BCS was found to be the most commonly used

instrument for assessing the strength and sense of calling (Duffy & Dik, 2013). Its validity as a

measure has "strong evidence of internal consistency reliability" as a "psychometrically

supported means of assessing calling within one's work or career" (Dik et al., 2012). The BCS

consists of four items which assess the presence and search of a calling. The participants

respond to a Likert 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all true of me*) to 5 (*totally true of me*) in

their answers. The BCS gave a cursory understanding of the participants' current perception and

experience of calling to ensure the eligibility of the participants. Permission for the use of the

BCS was gained from its author via email.

Lastly, an Informed Consent form was sent to each participant (see Appendix C). This

form establishes the accountability of the researcher and the research by giving the names and

contacts for the dissertation chair, Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), and

Liberty University's School of Education. The Informed Consent document assured the participants that at any time they could choose not to answer a question and withdraw from the research with no negative consequences. It also succinctly recounted the confidentiality, minimal risks, and benefits of their participation. A consent-signature line was found at the end of the document. Thus, when I received IRB approval for this research, the Information and Invitation letters (Appendix A), Participant Questionnaire (Appendix B), and Informed Consent form (Appendix C) were sent to the participants of this study.

Procedures

Prior to the gathering of any data for this study, a formal request for approval to conduct research was made to the IRB (see Appendix C). The IRB consists of members of the educational institution whose responsibility it is to review all the institution's research proposals to ensure the ethical behavior of researchers and the safety of any human participants involved in that institution's research studies (Hammerschmidt & Keane, 1992). Upon IRB approval, the process of participant recruitment was begun. This was done through phoning each participant which was followed by an email that included: (a) the purpose of the study; (b) the procedures of data gathering (i.e., recorded interviews, field notes, focus group); (c) the commitment necessary for the participant; (d) a demographic form that ensured the purposive sampling of participants; (e) a consent form; (f) and a copy of the IRB approval. Those contacted were mostly former pastoral colleagues of the researcher (10 of 11). Three additional participants were approached through a snowball method of recruitment but two were unavailable (Goodman, 1961).

The procedural process of gathering data began with the Participant Questionnaire (Appendix B). Afterwards, the order and gathering of data during the interview was conducted in the following manner:

1. Greeting, introduction and prayer (10 minutes). Though prayer is not normally included in interviews, for pastors, a moment of prayer dignifies that which is about to take place.

2. Interview proper (45–75 minutes). The content of the interview was directed by the pre-formulated research questions.

3. Closing (five minutes). The participants were informed of the transcribed interview that would be sent to them for purposes of accuracy and/or correction (i.e., member checking, see Appendix G).

During the research and in the collection of data, utmost regard and respect for the confidentiality of the participant was followed. The interview and transcripts were safeguarded in a digital-secured file on a private computer. Additionally, coding and pseudonyms were applied to each participant, church, and location of the research to protect the confidentiality of each. In this regard, the recorded interview was transcribed by Temi, a computerized transcribing service that uses voice recognition software, thus, further ensuring the anonymity of the participants.

The Researcher's Role

Researchers have existing philosophical frameworks, experiences, and cultural expectations that influence their research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Polanyi, 1962). That influence cannot be eliminated; however, it can be acknowledged and bracketed so that the phenomenon under study can speak for itself without other voices intruding. Consequently, phenomenological researchers are in the position of having first to recognize their assumptions of the phenomenon before the research begins. Moustakas (1994) underscored this principle by noting that "the beginning point in establishing the truth of things must be individual perception,

seeing things as a solitary self" (p. 52). Later he said it is wrong to "leap over the primal 'I', the ego of my epoche" (p. 52), when attempting to learn through intersubjectivity with others. Epoche is the place where the researcher must begin to establish the truth of things. Accordingly, my background and experience as a pastor have formed convictions and beliefs about pastoral calling.

My background and vocation are deeply vested in this present study. Professionally, I have been active as an ordained pastor for 35 years. During that time, I have been the lead pastor of three churches spanning 15 years; an associate pastor for four years; and a church planter for nine years. My beliefs and expectations associated with my study are deep and life orienting (Mezirow, 1991). I have personally struggled with my calling and for a season left the ministry altogether (Joynt, 2017). More recently, I have recognized a change or development in my sense of call leading me away from being a lead pastor to a more academic environment and ministry. From these experiences and background three calling assumptions have developed.

The first is that a pastor's call (or for that matter any calling) has a training process that is uniquely designed and developed by the Lord (Berkhof, 1953; Coleman, 2006). A calling does not show up fully developed and ready to be lived out. As with the disciples, time, teaching, observation, and practice were first experienced before they "left their nets to follow Him" (Matthew 4:20). This held belief continues to give me encouragement when I struggle to live my calling.

A second assumption about calling I have is the Holy Spirit's involvement in a pastor's calling (Loder, 1989). Calling is not merely based upon interest inventories. The God-experiential component is a necessary element for those called to a vocational ministry as a pastor. But I also confess that this is one of the most difficult areas of calling for me. The high

degree of subjectivity found in this experience gets severely tested when faced with inefficacy, inability, or outside resistance. Questions arise: "Was that really God who spoke to me or was that experience something from my imagination?" In this respect, the intuitive presence of faith is necessary to follow one's call in vocational ministry. The metaphysical nature and subjectivity of one's experience with the Holy Spirit in a pastoral calling requires faith. Indeed, I do not see how a call to the ministry can be pursued any other way.

Lastly, a third formative experience in my journey of calling came during a transitional time as I was seeking a career path to take. I was in my mid-20s and belonged to a church that had Brethren (i.e., Mennonite) roots with a lay-leadership style of church governance. These particular lay leaders did not believe in formal pastoral training. When I told friends in the church that I was planning to go to Bible college, the elders called and said they wished to speak with me. During the meeting they discouraged me from Bible college or seminary and said the model for pastoral training is found in the non-academic way Jesus trained His disciples. Interestingly, earlier that month I had read something in the Gospel of Matthew that I had never considered: the background and academic training of the Jewish scribe, Jesus actually commended! "He said to them, 'Therefore every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old'" (Matthew 13:52; see also 23:34). I brought this scripture to the leaders and pointed out, though Jesus or His disciples did not have formal training, He recognized and affirmed its value for the Kingdom of God. They disagreed, and I went to Bible college. (To their credit, these same leaders later apologized and said they were mistaken in their counsel.) This experience, however, taught me to trust what God gives to me when it is reinforced by

scripture. That said, scripture is the primary epistemological grid through which I process meaning and understanding in my experience of calling.

In light of above, the importance to bracket my judgments and experiences through journaling and self-awareness in this study was critical. Further, at the outset of the interviews, as well within the Information and Invitation Form, I made it clear that I was there to hear their experience of calling and not to share mine. Along with that, however, was the hope to go beyond solitary learning which Moustakas (1994) defines as monadology knowledge, and to experience a knowledge stemming from intersubjectivity with the participants during the study. Intersubjective knowledge occurs when a common commitment to accentuate and extend the knowledge of an experience is present (Moustakas, 1994, p. 57). My role and attitude as a researcher was that of a co-learner with the participants as they formulated and articulated their experiences of calling.

Data Collection

The importance of triangulation in collecting data is essential for credibility and dependability in qualitative research (Merriam, 1998). As such, this study gathered data from open-ended interviews, field notes, and memos. Guiding the process of collecting data were the methods and procedures of conducting human science research in *Phenomenological Research Methods* (Moustakas, 1994).

Interviews

The interviewing process was the main source of data collection for this phenomenological study, as it is for most phenomenological research (Bevan, 2014; Moustakas, 1994). As such, the critical importance of the interview process is to be highlighted. Interestingly, Moustakas (1994) does not devote much space to the actual interview in his

Phenomenological Research Methods. He has broadly mentioned, however, that (a) the researcher should develop a set of questions or topics to guide the interview process, (b) the topic is to be bracketed by the researcher, and (c) a follow-up interview may be necessary (p. 103). The first two suggestions were followed. In place of a follow-up interview, a brief summary and analysis of the interview content was sent to each pastor for their review and response (see Appendix G). A set of questions to guide the interview is found below and was developed around the four sub-questions that stem from the central research question: "What are the lived experiences of calling for seasoned pastors?" Following that, a discussion that correlates the interview to the research questions was made.

      The interview questioning process. After the small talk and as a preface to the interview, I asked the participant to pray with me as we began. In most interviews this would be presumptuous and even odd for the participant. However, the participants of this study were theistic centered and would expect God to be included in such a life orienting matter as their calling. Additionally, the prayer provided an opportunity for the participant "to take a few moments to focus on the experience, moments of particular awareness and impact, and then to describe the experience fully" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 114). The questions of the interview were as follows (see Appendix D):

1. Please introduce yourself to me, as if we just met one another.

2. Please walk me through your calling development timeline.

3. Of the formative experiences you identified on your timeline, which would you say were the most significant and why?

4. Describe the influences that led to the decision to follow your calling?

5. If you were to identify your calling with a biblical figure who had a calling (e.g.,

Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Disciples, Paul) who would you

choose and why?

6. Finish this thought for me: "To be called as a pastor means . . . "

7. Using a scale from 1 to 10, how certain were you of your calling? How did you

process your uncertainties?

8. Since that initial decision to become a pastor, how would you describe the

struggles in your sense and search of God's calling for you as a pastor?

9. People influence us in our calling. Please describe some of the influential

interactions you have had with others about your calling (spouse, friends,

mentors, family, etc.)?

10. If you could choose someone today as an ideal pastor, who would that be and

why?

11. Several studies have shown the strength of calling to be a primary reason for

staying or leaving the ministry. What are your thoughts and feelings about that?

12. Our calling can sometimes greatly impact the things we do. Describe three

changes (e.g., actions, plans, lifestyle, residence, etc.) you have experienced as a

consequence of your calling and how those changes impacted you and your

family.

13. As a follow-up to the previous question, please describe any external factors that

impacted your calling that were beyond your control (e.g., health, circumstances,

finances, family, etc.) and how those things impacted your calling.

14. How would you describe your experiences of calling today as compared to your

initial call? Has your sense of call changed in intensity, understanding, or

direction? If so how and in what ways?

15.   In the pursuit of your calling, what would you say is the most important thing in fulfilling it?

16.   Some believe that the call to the ministry is unique and different from other callings while others believe we all have a call. How would you describe your calling in comparison to other vocational calls?

17.   There are many different ideas about training and education for those who are called to pastor. What are some things about your calling you wish you had been taught during your training and why?

18.   We've covered a lot of different aspects of a pastoral calling. What advice would you give to a young person who asked for direction about God's calling in his or her life?

19.   I greatly appreciate your time and openness in talking about so many personal things about your calling. Is there anything I missed or that you think is important about a pastoral calling that we have not touched upon?

The above interview questions are correlated to the four sub-questions of the study which subsequently stem from the central research question exploring the experiences and perspectives of calling for seasoned pastors. The sub-questions are as follows: (a) How do seasoned pastors describe their initial experiences that led to a calling? (b) How do seasoned pastors describe the ways in which they have critically reflected on their search and sense of call? (c) How do they describe their actions that have resulted from their calling? (d) How do seasoned pastors describe the development of their calling over a period of time? Additionally, these four questions are aligned with the four condensed phases of transformative learning of Mezirow

(1991) and Loder (1981). These are (a) conflict/dilemma, (b) critical reflection, (c) convictional knowledge, and (d) transformational change (Merriam, 2004). This alignment of TLT with Christian faith development has not gone unnoticed, and several studies have established a parallel between TLT and the process which God uses in calling and transforming people (Loder, 1989; McLaughlin, 2014; Young, 2013).

Questions 1–4 explore the initial formation of calling and address the first research question, "How do seasoned pastors describe their experience of calling?" As described by Mezirow (1991) and Loder (1989), the process of transformation begins with a disorientating dilemma. Its onset can be circumstantial as in a life-threatening car accident (e.g., Loder, 1989), or existential as a loss of meaning and purpose in life (Mezirow, 1990). The first through fourth interview questions, however, do not assume a conflict of any sort. They are open questions designed to see if the experience of calling is congruent with TLT which says that conflict is the catalyst for TLT. Transformative learning is defined as "the process of making a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of an experience, which guides subsequent understanding, appreciation and action" (Mezirow, 1990, p. 1). The first through fourth interview questions are open but they specifically aim at the context (e.g., social, cognitive, affective, spiritual, behavior) and developmental process of a pastoral call.

Questions 5–8 are designed to address the second research question, "In what ways have the participants critically reflected on their search and sense of call?" and relate to TLT's second stage of critical self-reflection. Mezirow (1990) makes a distinction between reflection and critical reflection. Reflection that is not critical can be simply a reminiscence of an automobile you had in college. By contrast, critical reflection is a "discursive rationality-arriving at agreement on meaning through discourse by giving and assessing reasons, critically assessing

arguments and assumptions, examining evidence and seeking to validate beliefs and interpretations consensually" (Mezirow, 1993, p. 389). Additionally, the process of critical self-reflection is strongly engaged in the calling identity of a pastor (Cafferata, 2017). In the identity literature of the social sciences it was noted that pastors have an especially high salience, making them vulnerable to identity issues (Adams & Bloom, 2017; Stets & Burke, 2000). Thus, Questions 5–8, which lend to the critiquing of one's self-identity and calling, are directed along these lines.

Questions 910 focus on the third stage of TLT, reflective discourse, which emphasizes the social dynamic of the critical process of TLT. Critical thinking that is transformative takes place within an individual but in a social context which allows him or her to correct and adjust a perception (Mezirow & Associates, 2000). Several studies have shown the critical importance of others in calling formation for pastors (Flourishing, 2013; Lifeway Research, 2016). Questions that ask about the influence and impact others may have had in a pastor's call address this dynamic. In Question 10, an indirect imaginative variation of this is asked: "If you could choose someone today as an ideal pastor who would that be?" The projected image of an ideal pastor may reveal a pastor's evaluation of his or her own calling identity.

In relation to the third and fourth stages of TLT, the individual (self) and social (with others) process are two different aspects of critical reflection which are necessary for TLT. This dual aspect of critical reflection also corresponds to the second and third components of critical and discursive reflection found in the reduced four-core TLT model introduced in the theory section of this study (Merriam, 2004).

Questions 11–14 address the final component of action found in TLT. Action completes the cycle when real learning has occurred. In TLT theory, if no tangible behavior change has

occurred, transformative learning has not occurred. Moreover, the action referred to can be pro-social in helping others, or it can be personal, such as changing the way one eats. The common element in the TLT's fourth component of action is tangible behavior change.

Questions 15–18 are connected to the fourth research sub-question of calling development. The participants were invited to explore how their understanding of calling has matured, developed, and changed. In an earlier study (Joynt, 2017), findings revealed that full-time pastors left the ministry for reasons such as timing, maturity, and outside vocational interests. Fowler & Nipkow (1991) called attention to the correlation of faith development and the human cycle of maturation. This last group of questions sought to understand the development and evolution of a calling as experienced by pastors and how it may be tied to human processes of change.

Question 19 attempted to bring closure to the discussion and provided an opportunity for the participant to express some concluding and bottom-line thoughts on calling. Moustakas (1994) counseled that the interview should end with a general question which allows the respondents to express their final thoughts of the significance of their experience. It is not uncommon during the last moments of an interview for participants to share the most important thing to know about their experience.

Logistics of interview. Excepting for two pastors, all the interviews took place at the church where the pastor served . In the case of the two exceptions, one interview took place in the pastor's home and the other was conducted at my home. A 60-minute block of time was requested to facilitate the interview. The interview was audio recorded with a SonyICDUX533BLK Digital Voice Recorder and transcribed by Temi, a transcribing service which uses voice recognition software. Audio data were verified by reviewing the text transcript

produced by Temi while listening to the recording. The text of the interview was also given to the participant to ensure the accuracy of the data.

Field Notes

Field notes record the visual information of the interview and setting that otherwise would be missing from the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The collection of data through field notes provides rich nuanced information by the observation of the facial and emotional intensity of the participant that otherwise may be lost. Accordingly, field notes that record visual observations have been categorized as descriptive (Ary et al., 2013) and are typically written during or immediately after the interview.

Memos

Another form of data collection in qualitative research is the memo, which can also be considered a reflective field note (Ary et al., 2013). The importance of this distinction can be blurred and lost during the documentation process; however, "without understanding the complementary functions of these recording processes, data cannot evolve to a higher interpretive level" (Montgomery & Bailey, 2007, p. 66). As such, "memos are a documentation of the researcher's thinking processes rather than a description of a social context" (Montgomery & Bailey, 2007, p. 68). This occurs especially during the coding and analysis of the data. When appropriate, reflective memo taking was made immediately after the interview and while the interview was still fresh in my experience.

Focus Group

A fourth source of data was a focus group. One purpose of a focus group is to gather interactive information of a group that is not available in a one-on-one interview (Kitzinger, 1994). Accordingly, the research question guiding the discussion was focused on *answering the*

call (see Appendix D). Sub-questions related to this were as follows:

1. How would you describe your journey to fulfill God's calling in your life as a pastor?

2. Describe the role and influence of others (e.g., spouse, congregation, denomination, other pastors, etc.) in fulfilling your calling?

3. Describe your biggest challenges in fulfilling your call as a pastor; and how have you interacted with those challenges?

4. As a follow up question, can you describe some of the ways God has confirmed your call as a pastor?

5. If a young college student came to you and said he or she was called to the ministry what three questions would you ask?

6. If a pastor of a small struggling church came to you and said he or she was questioning their calling, what three things might you say or ask to encourage them?

7. Any last things you wish to say about your calling or the experience of being called?

The interaction between the pastor-participants provided a contrast to the interview sessions which focused on the individual experience of calling. The focus group provided a context from which data was collected that emphasize the differences of views and responses of the pastors on their common experience of calling.

Data Analysis

Data of this research were analyzed using four methods. Firstly, a modified version of Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological method was utilized. This method of analysis includes phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis of essence (Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015). Secondly, the data were also examined through the transformative learning theory (TLT) of Mezirow (1991). The purpose of this process was to compare the experience of

a pastor's calling with the transformative learning theories of Mezirow (1991) and Loder (1989).

Theistic calling experiences have been shown to be transformative (Acts 9:1–30; Exodus 2–3;

Loder, 1989). The data of a pastor's calling were assessed through a five-stage model of TLT:

dilemma, convictional insight, critical reflection, reflective discourse, and action (Merriam,

2004). Each TLT stage was compared with the experience and development of a pastor's

calling. Thirdly, using the Peircean Model of semiotics, the data of the pastors was assessed to

determine the signifiers of their calling. This was done using the Peircean Triadic Method

illustrated in Figure 1.

The last two methods of data analysis are straightforward and clear. The first method of

analysis, however, which employs the phenomenological approach of Moustakas (1994),

requires further amplification. This would include his analytical model of phenomenal

reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis of essences.

Phenomenal Reduction

The process of phenomenal reduction (PR) enables the researcher to avoid "all

abstraction, all theorizing, all generalization, even all belief in the existence of what we call real

or not real. For an individual, "the experience of a dream or hallucination can be just as real as

the experience of an actual event" (van Manen, 2011, p. 1). This observation is especially

significant for pastors who can have the non-empirical experience of a dream or event that is

understood as their call to ministry (Schweitzer & Knudson, 2014). The analysis of the data

should reflect an accurate and textured narrative of lived experiences of calling in seasoned

pastors as they describe them. Thus, PR as a method of data analysis seeks to ensure the

phenomenon of calling be fully represented in full textured detail as told by pastors. As a

method of analysis, PR is practiced in two ways: bracketing and horizonalization.

Bracketing begins by focusing and placing parameters on the phenomenon being examined. As such, it follows that the researcher has to be familiar enough with the topic before she or he knows what to bracket. Once identified, the researcher's beliefs and experiences of the phenomenon are also bracketed and recorded by the researcher to avoid bias during the interview. This process is not a one-time event but is practiced periodically by the researcher (Fischer, 2009). Additionally, bracketing is also practiced when new meanings and insights emerge during the research. The new assumptions and beliefs of the phenomenon are ultimately woven into the composite understanding of the phenomenon (Fischer, 2009). Thus, in PR the researcher practices self-awareness by acknowledging the prior beliefs and new insights of the phenomenon he or she has gained from bracketing.

Another form of PR is horizonalization. This is practiced during the initial stages of data analysis (Moustakas, 1994, p. 125). Horizonalization is a method of analysis which affirms the equal value of each statement a participant may make during the interview. Though this may appear cumbersome and unrealistic, horizonalization creates an environment that is unbiased and not judgmental. It communicates acceptance to the one speaking and allows him or her to attribute value to that which they deem to be valuable (p. 122). Thus, the receptivity of the researcher encourages openness and detailed expressions of the phenomenon experienced. Data gathered from the field notes were also considered at this time and compared to the interview data as a triangular referendum on the data. Inconsistencies and consistencies between the field notes, memos, and interviews were observed. Out of these expressions invariant examples emerged that were assembled into thematic clusters which created core themes or invariant horizons.

Invariant horizons or meaning units (Moustakas, 1994, p. 122) are signified by two

criteria: a trait or quality that is necessary to the understanding of the experience; and second, the trait can be labeled and abstracted. Vague expressions not meeting these criteria can be eliminated along with any others that are overlapping or repetitive (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121). After this reduction, the words or expressions that remain are the invariant constituents of the experience, which are then labeled and clustered into universal themes. The universal themes or essences of the phenomenon should reflect structures such as time, space, relationship to self, to others, physical concerns, and causal or intentional structures.

The clustered themes gathered from the interviews are then compared to the other sources of data that have been gathered. In this present research, that included data gathered from field notes and the focus group. The comparison of the data is done to validate or amend the initial core themes (Patton, 2002). Based on these findings, the researcher crafts rich textural descriptions of the emergent core themes. Textural descriptions, a favorite phrase in phenomenology, refers to the use of language that is often tied to the five senses such as rough/smooth, dark/bright, bitter/sweet, loud/quiet, and fragrant/odious. It is the "what" of the experience for a person, whereas when textural descriptions are said to be structural, they are referring to the "how" of the experience (Creswell, 2013). In this respect, the term textural can refer to eidetic language that richly describes the experience of a phenomenon. The next step in data analysis is imaginative variation.

Imaginative Variation

The second major process of analysis is imaginative variation, which Moustakas (1994) explained as a task that uses the imagination to find understanding by "varying the frames of reference, employing polarities and reversals' and approaching the phenomenon from divergent perspectives, different positions, roles, or functions" (p. 97). The goal in such variation is to

uncover the underlying structures of an experience by noting those experiential characteristics which remain despite diverse conditions. For example, if the floatability of wood was thought to be a core theme, imaginative variation would place the wood in various water conditions such as cold, hot, still, moving, salty, polluted, and filtered water to test its essence. The invariant condition of wood floating in each of those watery environments would establish floatability to be an essence of wood. On the other hand, it could also be said that if the wood sank in two of the seven water variables, floatability is not an essence when describing wood. In pastoral calling, consistent descriptions of experience were identified as calling essences.

Besides testing the universality of an invariant theme, imaginative variation is also used to explicate the structures of experience more distinctively during the interview. By imaginatively varying perspectives of the phenomenon, hazy experiences can be clarified and brought to sharp detail. Turley, Monro, and King (2016) observed that, "often in qualitative research interviews, participants struggle to articulate or verbalize their experiences" (p. 87). They proposed that imaginative variation can be used as an "interview technique by engaging the participants in imaginative variation to elicit a richly detailed and insightful experiential account of a phenomenon" (p. 87). For example, "What would this experience mean to you if you were poor or lived in another country?" Varying the perspective or vantage point of the experience through the eyes of someone else can also be productive, such as looking at the experience through the eyes of your spouse or children. Even applying opposite meanings to the experience can clarify and sharpen the perception of an experience. For example, if an experience brought great suffering, how would the perception of that experience be changed if there was no pain? Frequently, the presence of contrasts will illumine the qualities of an experience under study. Whether used alone, with co-researchers, or during an interview, the practice of imaginative

variation is a process of data analysis that can define and clarify the essences of an experience. The last phase of data analysis that Moustakas (1994) outlined is the synthesis of essences.

Synthesis of Essences

The first two phases of data analysis are meant to provide the essences and structures of the phenomenon under review. In this last phase of analysis, the invariant themes of the experience are to be synthesized (Moustakas, 1994). In the calling of pastors, this is especially pertinent and necessary. The literature on calling reveals the interdisciplinary nature of pastoral calling (Loder, 1989). Besides transformative learning theories, the theistic ontology and epistemology of pastors have to be explicated to understand their sense of call. Additionally, the psychological and vocational dimensions of calling were found to be of great significance in the formation and experience of calling for pastors as well. Therefore, to fully represent a pastor's calling, the many different threads of calling need to be woven together. Thus, by synthesizing the various essences, a holistic review of a pastor's call was attempted.

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Trustworthiness

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Trustworthiness addresses the credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability of a qualitative study (Guba, 1981). The trustworthiness of a qualitative study is essential in establishing its place as a credible resource in the research community. With one or two small emendations, the following list was found in Shenton (2004), *Strategies for Ensuring Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research Projects.*

Credibility

According to Merriam (1998), credibility addresses the question: How congruent are the findings with reality? Lincoln and Guba (1985) also asserted that credibility is the most important factor in establishing the trustworthiness of qualitative research. Consequently, to

achieve credibility rigorous standards must be met to establish the trustworthiness of a study. To achieve this, Shenton (2004) encourages the researcher to adopt research methods that are well established. Novel methods of research are suspect until they have been validated by the scientific community. The following five components of research are established in the scientific community and increase the credibility of research.

Triangulation is one such means to establish the credibility of research. Triangulation is the usage of multiple methods or sources in the gathering and processing of data when researching a subject or phenomenon (Patton, 1990). This study used interviews, focus groups, and field notes as collection points for data. Multiple methods of analysis were also used when assessing the data.

Secondly, the background, qualifications, and experience of the investigator are also significant in establishing credibility. As such, the researcher was a seasoned pastor and is familiar with the sense and search of calling.

Thirdly, the practice of member checking invites the participant to review the data results to check its accuracy. Lincoln and Guba (1985) considered this to be the single most important action for a researcher in establishing credibility. In this research, each participant received a transcript summary and brief analysis of the interview to ensure accuracy (e.g., Appendix G).

A fourth source of credibility is thick descriptions of the phenomenon under scrutiny. Moustakas (1994) encourages rich textural descriptions. The presence of detail informs the reader that an item has been thoroughly researched and considered.

Lastly, the review and examination of previous research findings also strengthen the credibility of a researcher's results. For Silverman (2000), a key criterion for measuring the rigor and quality of research is its ability to be connected to an existing body work. Research that is

not connected or built upon prior work may be good research, but it stands alone and is outside the scientific community. As such, this research interfaced with and built on transformative learning theories of Mezirow (1991) and Loder (1989). It also added to the literature on pastoral pedagogy (Burns et al., 2013; Young, 2013).

In sum, credibility is important for the acceptance of research to society and the academic community. Standards and practices that strengthen the credibility of a study follow the rigor necessary for its presence. In terms of the calling experience of pastors, no research or lengthy treatise on vocation will have much credibility with pastors if the calling narrative lacks textural descriptions that are honest, human, and God infused.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability is related to the replication of results if context, participants, and methodology are duplicated. Given the nature and flexibility of qualitative research, however, this would be impossible (Shenton, 2004). Yet, because there are enough similarities among groups in size, culture, and beliefs, "the prospect of transferability should not be immediately rejected" (Shenton, 2004, p. 69). Hence, in qualitative research dependability is pursued by intentional research practices which demonstrate rigor, attention to detail, planned out procedures, and multiple methods of collection and analysis. Several features of the research that were used in this study lend to its dependability.

As a first measure, the research design of this study is organized according to its theoretical constructs, methodology, and analysis of the data. The literature review and historical background of calling provide a context for the research problem. The transformative learning constructs of Mezirow (1990) and Loder (1981) have provided the theoretical framework for the gathering and interpretation of data. The methodological steps that guide the preparation,

gathering, and analyzing data are guided by Moustakas's *Phenomenological Research Methods* (1994). The procedures used in the collection of the data have also been established. Additionally, the research paper trail was documented, thus allowing for the process of duplication of the methods of analysis and data collections which are part of this study.

Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results could be confirmed or substantiated by others. Sometimes objectivity is also associated with confirmability (Patton, 2002). As with other aspects of trustworthiness, triangulation is key to reducing the effect of researcher bias. Other recommended methods are (a) the admission of researcher's beliefs and assumptions (bracketing); (b) the recognition of shortcomings in study's methods and their potential effects (limitations); (c) an in-depth methodological description to allow the integrity of research results to be scrutinized; (d) and the use of diagrams to demonstrate an audit trail. Accordingly, these recommendations were followed to allow confirmability of methods and results.

Transferability

Another way research is proven trustworthy is found in its ability to be applied or transferred to others who are similar and in comparable conditions. When comparisons of phenomenon can be easily made, the transferability of qualitative research increases (Shenton, 2004). Most qualitative studies acknowledge the limitation of specificity when researching a particular phenomenon that has been experienced by a particular group (Creswell, 2013). However, the purposive sampling of this group (i.e., seasoned Christian pastors) allows for other studies to compare or build upon the results of this study.

Ethical Considerations

Creswell (2013) visualized the collection of data as a group of activities orbiting and held in place by the gravitational pull of an ethical center (p. 150). In the Informed Consent form (see Appendix C), the confidentiality of the participant and ministry was protected through participant and site pseudonyms and secure data storage under a protected password (Ary et al., 2013). Additionally, no future remarks without the expressed consent of the participants were made that in any way compromised their anonymity. In this respect, as a research guideline, the Belmont document was used as a base for ethical research in this study (Department of Health, 2014). This report posits the three principles of justice, beneficence, and respect for persons as tangible approaches to safeguard others from harm during human science research. All procedures and methods were guided by these three principles.

Another ethical consideration is the writing of the research. The work and effort that go into a dissertation are immense. The temptation to cut corners and not accurately represent an event, construct, person, or experience is something with which the researcher has to contend. This ethical lapse can be done by making claims without documentation; not giving proper credit to sources and ideas that have been used in a study; plagiarism; falsification of results; and the use of ambiguous words that cover ignorance. These are only temptations, but it is good to know where the trapper's snare is placed (Proverbs 1:17). Ethical accountability for this research was also assisted by prior IRB approval of the research methods utilized with the participants of the study.

Summary

In this chapter, I have explored the appropriateness of the design and method of the intended research. The qualitative and phenomenological approach to the study appears credible

and to be a good fit as demonstrated by the examples found in the literature review by Cheney (2010). Another rationale for this methodology was the alignment of the research problem with the theoretical constructs of transformative learning. These learning constructs focus on perspective transformation and structuring of meaning. Both of these are deeply encountered in the experience of a calling. Thus, the congruity of the theoretical and methodological alignment provides confidence that the research, analysis, and findings of the data are internally congruent, compatible, and consistent. This was further reinforced by examining the trustworthiness of the research methodology. It was found that the research plan has intact a design that lends itself to be credible, dependable, transferable, and confirmable. In sum, phenomenological research on a pastor's calling requires a traceable multi-layered methodology that uncovers the richness and complexity of the phenomenon. Only then will the findings of the research be found to have credibility.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to present the results of the data analysis and to elucidate the lived experiences of a pastoral calling. In this regard, the analysis will attempt to address the research questions: How do seasoned pastors describe their initial experiences of calling? How do they describe the ways in which they have critically reflected on their experiences of calling? How do seasoned pastors describe their subsequent actions that have resulted from their calling? And, how do experienced pastors describe the various stages of their calling?

This will begin by giving a brief demographic overview of the participants followed by a short calling-biography of each pastor. The data gathered from the interviews, focus group, and field notes will then be analyzed using the phenomenological method of Moustakas, the transformative learning grid of Mezirow (1991) and Loder (1991), and the semiotics theory of Peirce.

Participants: An Overview of the Pastor Sampling

The 11 pastor-participants of this study represent a variety of faith-traditions in the Christian church: Assemblies of God (three); Baptist (three); non-denominational (two); Seventh Day Adventist (one); Methodist (one); and one veteran pastor who is no longer a vocational minister (see Table 3). Additionally, the pastoral sampling contained two age groups: 40–50 (three) and 51–68 (eight). In preparation for the ministry, eight of the 11 pastors completed graduate degrees in ministerial majors, one of whom also earned a Doctor of Ministry degree. Of the remaining pastors, two have undergraduate degrees in biblical studies and one has a ministerial certificate through the denomination's course of study. In this respect, all participants have completed a formal program in preparation for their pastoral vocation.

Table 3

Participant Overview

Name	Age Range	Denomination	Size of Congregation	Pastoral Experience	Pastoral Education
David	56-75	A of G	0-500	Church planter (2); pastor 35+ years	Bible college; seminary
Orson	56-75	Foursquare	0-50	15+ years; presently not pastoring	Bible college
Harold	56-75	Bible Church	50-500	35+ years; several churches	Seminary, doctorate
Richard	56-75	Baptist	51-150	20+ years	Seminary
Archer	35-55	A of G	0-200	Church planter, pastor 15+ years	Seminary
Paul	56-75	Conservative non-denominational	0-50	15+ years	Seminary
Francis	56-75	Seventh Day Adventist	50-150	30+ years	Bible college
Kevin	56-75	Baptist	150-250	35+ years	Bible college; seminary
Walter	56-75	A of G	50-125	10+ years	Denom. course of study
Ethan	35-55	Charismatic non-denominational	0-150	Church planter; 10+ years	Seminary
Brian	56-75	UMC	51-150	15+ years	Seminary

Note. A of G (Assembly of God); UMC (United Methodist Church)

The participants (except two) are located in the larger Monterey Peninsula area (est.

population 250,000) which is located on the central coast of California. The area is known for its

affluence and golf courses and tourism as its main industry. It is also home to two higher

educational military campuses whose presence can be felt in the community.

Each participant has had at least five years' experience as a lead pastor to ensure a greater

familiarity with the experience of a pastoral calling. It should be noted that the five-years'

experience can be accumulative and not confined to five consecutive years at one church. As such, nine of the 11 pastors have 12 or more years as the main spiritual leader in a church.

Finally, the church demographics for these pastors are ethnically mixed, reflecting the racial diversity of the area. The churches of these pastors are also reflective of the median size American church today of about 80 (Earls, 2016). Though two churches reached 200 congregants on a given Saturday or Sunday service, the remaining churches averaged between 25–125 people in attendance. Thus, at the very least, the participant-pastors of this sampling serve congregations that represent the size and responsibility of what most pastors commonly encounter. Below are brief highlights of each pastor's calling. These descriptions are not meant to be summations of each call; rather, each calling-sketch is meant to depict a particular aspect of the comprehensive experience of a pastoral-calling.

Biographical-Calling Sketch of Participants

Walter

In this research, Walter is an outlier. His calling as a pastor came to him at the age of 64. Prior to his call, however, he had been active in a variety of ministries as a lay-person and also enrolled in ministerial type courses. Retrospectively, he understood his pre-calling experiences as God "grooming" him for his eventual role as pastor in the same church he had previously served as a lay person.

Additionally, of the pastors interviewed, Walter alone has not experienced a major crisis that has challenged his calling. This too is anomalous among those interviewed. The sense of reward and joy permeated his experience of calling. During the interview this was expressed by the fervor and enthusiasm in which he described his calling.

Also found in Walter's calling narrative were frequent referrals to the Holy Spirit. In 12 different places, he referred to the Holy Spirit as having an influence in his calling. Beginning with his initial calling and then continuing in his development as a pastor, Walter sees the Holy Spirit as of "foremost" importance.

Harold

Harold has the reputation as a pastor's pastor. Several other pastors I had interviewed in the community acknowledged the input and leadership they had received from him. As a former pastor in the community, I too, had sought out Harold's guidance in a time of church conflict. Upon meeting him, I was greeted with a genuine welcome, and I felt he was looking forward to the interview.

Harold's calling narrative is among the clearest of the pastor's interviewed. Perhaps this is related to the Doctor of Ministry work he did during a period of transition in the ministry. His epistemological method is said to be "one of confirmations and disconfirmations." This theme surfaced frequently and was mentioned 16 times in the course of the interview. In the early stirrings of his calling, while on a short-term mission, Harold contracted malaria. His sustained ability to remain on the field and minister was a sign-confirmation from God. He commented, "It was for me an experience of the Lord saying, 'The decisions that you made to come here and confirming that I want you here.'"

The sense of reward he experienced in ministry was also viewed by him as a confirmation of God's call. When recounting things that helped him decide on God's calling, he shared the following:

I just loved being in that place seeing God do things just in serving him. Nothing

spectacular by the world's means, you know, but it was with people. Seeing people

respond to Christ, seeing incremental movement in kids' lives that are from very troubled

backgrounds was very rewarding and that was confirmation.

The sense of reward alone, however, was not the only source mentioned here. Harold mentioned

"seeing people respond to Christ" was part of the confirmation as well. The efficacy of his

ministry brought calling-assurance. By contrast, the experience of non-efficacy in the ministry

told him that he was in the wrong place.

After 10 years as a youth pastor, Harold was asked to be the senior pastor of a wealthy

congregation that had a Christian school, building projects, and other ministries that called for a

large administrative role. He was often absent from home in the evening, missing time with his

young and growing family. Additionally, the leadership he inherited was comprised of business

leaders who were strong in the area of business but not in discipleship. He noted,

Many of the guys that I served with on the board there came from significant business

leadership positions, had really not learned to be servant leaders themselves, yet, [they]

wanted to exercise a lot of power in terms of what's happening on the elder board.

The administrative strain of the pastorate in that church led him to surmise that "the load of a

bureaucracy and administration" wasn't "the direction of my calling." This awareness helped

him to decide to move on to an associate position; even though it might be seen outwardly as a

lesser role, it was more aligned with his calling to teach and nurture as a pastor.

Ethan

In contrast to Harold, Ethan was called as a young man and was the youngest of the

pastors I interviewed. His ministry is mostly to millennials, i.e., young adults between ages 20–

40. His manner and presence were relaxed but not unfocused. During our interview, he pulled

out a white board and began to draw a line along with some notes to illustrate what God is doing

in the church he serves. He explained that the line "represents reality and the only place that you can build community is in reality." After a couple of years in the community, Ethan realized that many of the people he came across were believing things that were not connected to reality (i.e., the truth). "Jesus says, that you will know the truth and the truth will set you free. The word truth means the word reality. So, you will know the reality and that will set you free." Ethan declared,

> God began to show this to us [and] He said, I'm calling the body of Christ to the point of reality. . . . I'm calling the church to take inventory on their lives. So, he began to really show us it. Our lives are made up of many different parts and to evaluate our lives and pull every part of our life into reality, to submit it . . . to take captive every imagination to make it obedient to the reality of Christ.

In the creative visual, as well as in other parts of the interview, God was portrayed by Ethan as someone who actively communicates His purposes and will. Much of Ethan's calling narrative recounts God speaking through "dreams" and "prophetic words." For example, Ethan recalled a dream he had:

> I remember being very lonely, very, very discouraged and I fell asleep and I had this dream . . . and I heard this voice from behind me. From behind me, a voice from behind me. I hear it coming from behind me and the voice when it spoke to me, the voice said, "I am the Lord God. I am the one that you've been searching for, I am Jesus." And when he said these words . . . my whole body exploded like glass. And I woke up and I woke up from this dream and it was this deliverance encounter.

Ethan also has experienced prophetic words spoken over him that greatly shaped the perception of his call. Poloma and Lee (2013) define prophecy as "hearing from God and then

speaking and acting on God's behalf as a result of the prompting of the Holy Spirit" (p. 83). At the outset of his ministry, an older person prophesied and said,

> The Lord will be equipping you in this season of dryness; [it will be] a season of life where you're not up front, where you're not preaching and teaching and on the stage and he's going to be equipping and preparing you in the season, but it's going to be like a couple of years. I feel like it's going to be a long season. And like what happened? That was the last time I preached for seven years.

> The value and awareness of God speaking is ardently practiced and taught by this pastor.

His calling is infused with epiphanies, holy synchronicities, and the activity of God.

Kevin

Of the 11 pastors interviewed, three had fathers who were pastors. Kevin is among the three. From our conversation it was evident that much of Kevin's work ethic and calling-framework was influenced by having a father who was a pastor. From observing his father's experience Pastor Kevin told of his reluctance to enter the ministry:

> Being a pastor's son, that [i.e., becoming a pastor] was the last thing on my mind really. The last thing I might want to do, ministry, was the furthest thing. Ministry is hard. In growing up, you see your dad beat up, talked about, slandered, and you don't want to be a part of that. And so, my goal was to serve the church without being under the authority of the people.

The reluctance to the ministry, however, was mostly towards being a senior pastor. Kevin had a heart for young people. And when he saw the youth of his community directionless and not connected to God, he felt led to minister to them and became a youth pastor. For 22 years he served as such until the church he was serving asked him to become their senior pastor. With

great reluctance and trepidation, he accepted the position, and even then, it was only after much consultation with other "seasoned pastors" and God confirming His will through a Veggie Tales scripture song!

While on the road with his family, Pastor Kevin was deeply wrestling with whether he should accept the senior pastor position when a Veggie Tale song about Esther became an epiphany. He pulled off the freeway and said to his wife Alice, "Did you hear that?! What does Mordecai tell Esther? 'Who knows? God has brought you here for such a time as this?'" This word of confirmation settled the question of a pastoral calling that had been vexing him.

Since that confirmation, I asked how his calling has been nurtured and affirmed. He replied, "Through grief. I think the nurturing and affirming of the call comes through grief." I was surprised by his answer and asked him to explain. He gave several examples where he was challenged, brought to a place of weakness, and then experienced a significant breakthrough. In fact, the theme of struggle and grace was consistent throughout Kevin's calling testimony. In one place after he had accepted the position of senior pastor, he quoted a few words from his mother: "'We've learned this in ministry: your best friend will stab you in the back.' I'll never forget that." These words may hardly seem encouraging to a young senior pastor, but they have helped Kevin to keep true to his calling, perhaps in the same way Jesus prepared His disciples by informing them of their impending persecutions. Kevin summarily noted, "Unless we're willing to fight the fight, we're going to neglect our call."

Richard

Pastors often mention preaching the Bible as a focus to their calling. Richard's enthusiasm and passion to preach, however, seemed more dominant than the other pastors I had

interviewed. Pastor Richard observed that even from childhood he loved going to church and

hearing sermons:

> As I look back on it from this perspective, like I think that truthfully, I was called early
>
> on by going to church. My parents were a part of church. My Dad was always like one
>
> of the head guys, doing everything, teaching and leading and building the chicken coop
>
> and then whatever needed to happen. And so, we were always at church and it was like,
>
> it was like the biggest, most exciting thing in our life to be honest with you, going to
>
> church. And I loved sermons from day one!

Similar to all the other pastors, his calling-journey led him to formal pastoral training.

For Pastor Richard, that meant going to a Christian college and then seminary. However, his

journey was not without unforeseen turns. For example, he began college as a biology major

only to change that to Bible in the first week. Also, while doing an internship in seminary, he

became a hospital chaplain which continued after seminary for another 12 years. During the

chaplaincy period his heart remained eager to preach and teach and he took advantage of any

opportunities to do so by teaching adult Sunday School classes or filling empty pulpits. The

relentless desire to teach and preach appears to be a common feature among all pastors. When a

church did invite him as a candidate for a senior pastor position, he was more than willing to do

so. He has now pastored that church for 22 years.

Archer

Similar to Pastor Kevin, Archer grew up in a pastor's home. Also, similar to Kevin was

his reluctance to enter the ministry. Perhaps it is the firsthand observation of conflict associated

with being a pastor. Or perhaps, it is the busyness of ministry that absents the parent-pastor from

family evenings, but it is not uncommon for children growing up in a pastor's home to be wary

of the ministry (Barna Group, 2013). Paradoxically, it is also a fact that though there may be

reluctance at first, it is not uncommon for children of pastors to follow the pastoral call. That

said, Pastor Archer has wrestled, questioned, and prevailed in his pastoral calling. Perhaps this is

why his calling narrative is strongly developmental.

When Archer first received his calling, it was a general directive to help at his father's

church. At the time, he thought that he "would never become a pastor in a church." Slowly he

assumed more responsibility, first as a worship leader and later as the main teacher in the church.

He later explained, however, that he "really didn't know what it meant to be a pastor." It was

only as he went to another church and saw it modeled that he was able to understand the function

and role of a pastor. He explained that a pastor's primary task was not necessarily to teach or

evangelize but

> to have a genuine love for the people of God. I see far too many, and this will sound
>
> more critical than I mean it to be, I see far too many people got the title of pastor who are
>
> really teachers, who are really evangelist, who are really prophets. So, to make a living,
>
> you have to be a pastor even though you may not really have the call of the pastor, which
>
> is to shepherd the sheep.

This pastoral distinction was underscored to Archer by an example of a pastor in a large church

who, though he was the lead pastor, was not the "primary teacher in the church." This insight

deepened Pastor Archer's understanding of a what it meant to be a pastor and it also gave

direction to his own calling. If he was ever to be a pastor, he would have to learn to love and

shepherd the church. These qualities, however, were not a part of his training nor natural

inclinations. For this reason, Pastor Archer plainly stated, "I have cultivated a pastoral gift. It

wasn't something that came absolutely natural to me. And I think sometimes God does that. He

puts us in situations and then helps us grow into them." Again, these words reflect a developmental model of a pastoral calling which other pastors (e.g., Kevin, Jesse) had already attested to. In fact, Pastor Brian's narrative also spoke of his calling as a formative process that began in high school.

Brian

During a spiritual-emphasis week at his high school, as a student leader Brian witnessed a positive and strong response to the gospel. It was during a prayer session for the week that he realized, "This is what I like to do. Help people know God better and to get them to know Jesus in a personal and real way as I wonderfully experienced in that Christian emphasis week." That simple realization led him to speak with his pastor about preparation for the ministry. His pastor, being a Methodist minister, advised Brian to fulfill the pastoral educational requirements of the Methodist church. The pursuit of his calling through the Methodist church, however, was challenged by the college and seminary choices before him.

As a Methodist minister, Brian was required to fulfill a variety of Methodist polity and subject courses. This greatly influenced his choice of schools as well as training he received in preparation for the ministry. Pastor Brian went on to say that his choice of schools and their associated theologies were "mini-calls" that ultimately shaped how and with whom he would pursue his calling. His choice to become a Methodist minister, however, was later challenged by the very denomination he affiliated with.

After several years as an associate pastor, his position in a church was suddenly eliminated because of a downturn in finances. The Staff Parish Relations Committee said to him,

> We've decided to not retain you because we can't afford you. And I think the hard part for me to get with that was the fact that it wasn't a spiritual thing. It wasn't, oh, we see the sense of God calling you to somewhere else beyond it. No, we just, we just can't afford you.

The tone and bluntness of the interaction of the committee left Brian disillusioned in his call to be a pastor . He exclaimed,

> I got so, so discouraged by that I said, let me take a step back and rethink this whole pastor thing. In fact, I left the ministry. I took a leave of absence and I said, I'll just, I'll just figure out other vocations to look at and see where God is calling me to do anything else besides being a pastor of a church.

Pastor Brian took a leave of absence from the pastorate and began to work in the financial market. As a lay person, however, he attended a local Methodist church where he taught a Bible study and preached a few times without the baggage of the system. He did not have to attend any council meetings or give a report to the board of trustees. "The idea of doing ministry in its purity . . . got back to the roots of why I got into ministry in the first place. Getting people to know God in a personal way." This experience re-oriented Brian in his thinking about ministry and restored his calling as a pastor.

Orson

Similar to Brian, Orson left the pastorate because of attrition. Unlike Brian, Orson did not return to the traditional pastorate. After 17 years of faithfully laboring at a small church, Pastor Orson and his wife decided it was time to close the church doors. Orson said that he "probably waited a year or two too long before finally making that decision." By no means does

Orson imply that his calling to pastor was misled. Orson described a variety of signs that led him to believe that he was called to be a pastor.

While in a pastor's office he saw a poster/picture with a long table that receded into the distance. Beneath the picture it read, "Come, for all things are now ready." At that time, Orson had been earnestly seeking God about becoming a pastor. Orson understood that picture as a confirmation that the time of seeking to become a pastor was about to end. Orson commented, "That just went into my heart, like I couldn't get rid of that thought." Two weeks later, his presbyter approached him and said, "There's a church we'd like you to consider. Another guy had taken it here and he was going to move on and plant another church. You know, that fit with that, the feeling that it was time to go."

While driving on the freeway he also experienced an epiphany of sorts. On a distant hillside he saw many homes dotting the horizon with their evening lights. This vision spoke to him and left him with the belief that his ministry was going to impact the community. In reconciling this belief with the closing of the church, Orson does not think the vision was untrue. He said, "I don't think I would give myself a D-minus for actually doing that, but that was what I felt called to. So, in a little way we did that." Following the sense of calling was the right thing to do he concluded, and a partial impact is still an impact though it did not reach the level he had hoped.

When the time did come to close the doors of the church, Orson "felt strong in his spirit" that he was to finish what he had begun and then close the church. People had moved on, and it was time for him to move on. Secondly, he felt the anointing had left his ministry. Orson placed a high value on the "sense of anointing" and its absence was a sign that he should close the church.

Did Orson leave his call when he decided to leave the pastorate? His response to that was "no." He still considers his calling to be that of a pastor, but its expression is not traditional. His skill set and gifting is expressed at the place where he now works as a manager in the tech-support division of the company. He also leads a ministry at a local church that does service projects such as cleaning yards or painting for those who are elderly, disabled, or unable to do maintenance type things in their homes.

At the end of our interview and almost as a side note, Orson said that his calling was probably more suited for an existing ministry than to pioneer and develop a new church. He explained that the church-planter profile test he had taken at a Christian college misled him into believing he was a church planter:

> In college and Bible college, they give you the tests of what kind of personality you have and whether or not you'd be a good church planter and all that. And I think at the time, the way I filled them out, it looked like I would be, but going back, you know, filling those things out could steer you the wrong way though. And they kind of did for me because it looked like that's my calling. But that didn't really pan out.

Additionally, Orson mentioned the difficulty of being a bi-vocational pastor. In his denomination during the time of his pastorate, 75% of the pastors were bi-vocational. Orson was critical of his denomination's lack of response to the challenges of the bi-vocational pastor. He also mentioned that he experienced little mentoring or support once he went out into the field as a young pastor. These were a few of the areas where Orson felt that his denomination's leadership could have made a significant difference in his experience while in the pastorate.

Francis

Of all pastors interviewed, Francis was most explicit in his commitment to a semiotic framework of calling. As a young adult, Francis sensed a call to the ministry. He was reluctant, however, to go to Bible college. He "made a deal with God" (this phrase was commonly used by him), that if God wanted him to attend this particular Bible college, He would give him a job when he visited the campus. He left home not knowing where he would live or how he would support himself. Through a variety of serendipitous circumstances Francis found both a place to live and a substantially good job on campus that made him among the "highest paid student employees on campus." This experience of semiotic guidance and decision making exemplified the process by which Francis has pursued his calling. Further parsing of Francis' semiotic experience revealed patterns of calling similar to other pastors such as prayerfulness, dialectic-covenant making, and the recognition of a God-inspired thought.

From the outset of Francis' ministry, prayer has been invaluable in the acquisition of God's calling. During the early years of calling formation, Francis committed himself to five weeks of prayer when seeking to know whether God was calling him to be a preacher. Serendipitous meetings with denominational leaders confirmed his call as a preacher during this period of prayerful searching.

Francis' calling is largely a dialectic interactive process: He makes known to God the obstacles or needs before him and then looks to God for answers by "making a deal" with Him. If God answers his requests, then Francis upholds his end of the agreement. The manner in which he spoke of this dialectic with God was business-like and binding as a contract. But not all guidance was given through covenant-making signs.

On several occasions during the interview Francis mentioned God giving him a thought or idea. I asked how he was able to distinguish a God-inspired thought from his own imagination. Searching for words, he was unable to come up with a definitive answer. "It just feels different" was his response. Interestingly, this response was also given by several other pastors (e.g., Archer, Walter, Orson, David).

David

Pastor David has successfully planted two thriving churches. Accordingly, the denomination in which he served recognized his skill set and created the position of Pastoral Care within the district to assist struggling pastors. Because of their large district (450 +/- churches), this was no easy task. Because of his unique exposure and interaction with struggling pastors, I was especially curious what he thought to be critical in fulfilling a pastoral calling.

His first answer was, "Make sure it is God calling you. Because He is the one that will help you to fulfill it even though you are called to be a pastor, he still has to equip you to do so and give you the strength." As with the other pastors, David prioritized the theocentric nature of the calling. In his own journey, however, David struggled greatly with the idea of being a pastor. It was during such a time while walking to a sandwich market that he claims to have received an epiphany that gave him calling assurance. As a "still quiet voice," David said, "The Lord spoke to me strongly and told me, stop fighting the call that I have on your life to be a pastor." This inner experience conclusively settled the matter for Pastor David. "From that point, I no longer fought God anymore. I was going to become the best pastor that I could be. So, all the courses that they offered at my school, I took to become a pastor."

When asked if there were any other qualities needed for a pastor to fulfill a calling, he mentioned two other things: character and training.

With character, David emphasized the importance of honesty and integrity. He said, because he "represents God," he could not be careless about the way he did his taxes or finances. With training, Pastor David was more expansive. He emphasized the importance of nurturing the call with formal and informal education. He frequently referred to former teachers and pastors who informed and nurtured his calling. Their input and influence were clearly significant in the development of his call. When asked, however, "Was there anything you would point out that you wish you were taught?" his quick response was, "Yeah, yeah. Just how to better take care of ourselves." He then went on to describe a physical breakdown that took him away from the ministry for a half-year.

He had just graduated from seminary and planted a church that was thriving; however, his sleeping and eating habits were poor. This contributed to the development of pneumonia, kidney stones, and a seven-month leave of absence. In his words, he was "a wreck!" I asked, "What did you find out about your calling through that experience?" He said, "I realized that I could lose it by destroying myself health wise. And that I thought I was more spiritual than I was, that I didn't need to care for myself and that was a big lie."

As the interview was winding down, David's wife stepped into the room and gave some input to the conversation. She said, "It's important that husband and wife are going in the same direction." When asked what hashtag she would use to describe her partnership with David in the ministry, she said, "calling-anchor." She explained what she meant:

> Our calling, his calling. I felt a personal calling when I was a teenager. I felt like I was
>
> going to marry a pastor or a very strong churchman . . . somebody involved in a church. I
>
> felt that as a teenager. So, having that in my heart and then marrying him—and his
>
> calling was very certain for him—then that became our anchor. We could go into

something new, but that was our, our calling. Ministry has lots of varieties to it. And as we have grown and aged, we've done different ministry things, different focus, different things. Our pastoral call is still number one.

The importance a spouse has in the pursuit of a calling is emphasized here. David's spouse chose the word anchor to illustrate the stabilizing effect of a common call within a marriage. This observation was reinforced by listening to the final pastor-participant in the research.

Paul

I first met Paul when he was an associate Pastor of a large non-denominational church. He was responsible for organizing small groups and other administrative duties. After several years, he left that church to pioneer a new work. In common with some of the other pastors, Pastor Paul did not have any revelations or visions confirming his mission to pastor or start a new church. His decision to start a church came from a desire to teach the Bible and a love for people. He did, however, have confirmation through his spouse that he should pursue his desire. As a pastor of a non-denominational church where there is no organizational support or oversight, this played a significant role in Paul's sense of calling. Paul underscored his spouse's importance by saying:

I say we pastored a church, even though she would never take that role of pastor to herself. I see that we have done this so much together that I have to answer that question [in this way]. I have to say that Laura's involvement and participation, and her agreement was validating. And it's an essential part. We were always walking in step. It wasn't me trying to convince her that this is a good thing.

This deep appreciation and value of spousal support is a common theme among the pastors interviewed (e.g., David, Archer, Richard, and Kevin). Receiving support from those closest to you appears critical in the maintenance of a pastoral-call.

Also supporting his calling was a pastor from another state. This other pastor has served as a mentor and source of encouragement since Paul became a pastor. As a church-plant pastor, the size of a congregation can be a source of discouragement. Church growth is understood as a confirmation of one's calling. Conversely, lack of growth can also be interpreted as a failed calling. Paul has been discouraged by the numbers and admittedly, has questioned his calling as a consequence: "Is this where I should be Lord? Was I listening to my desires or was I responding to your will?" In response to these questions, the input from this other pastor was significant:

> One of the things that was instrumental or helpful for me was his input that we need—to the best of our ability—to be faithful to what we can discern as God's calling for our life. Endeavor to be faithful in your ministry as opposed to putting too much value in the number of people in the seats.

Paul still wrestles with the number of congregants in his church but the input from this unnamed pastor has provided a positive and alternate approach to his struggle and calling.

Results

The results will first be explored through the foundational research questions guiding this study. This will then be followed by a thematic treatment of the data as illustrated by Figure 2 below.
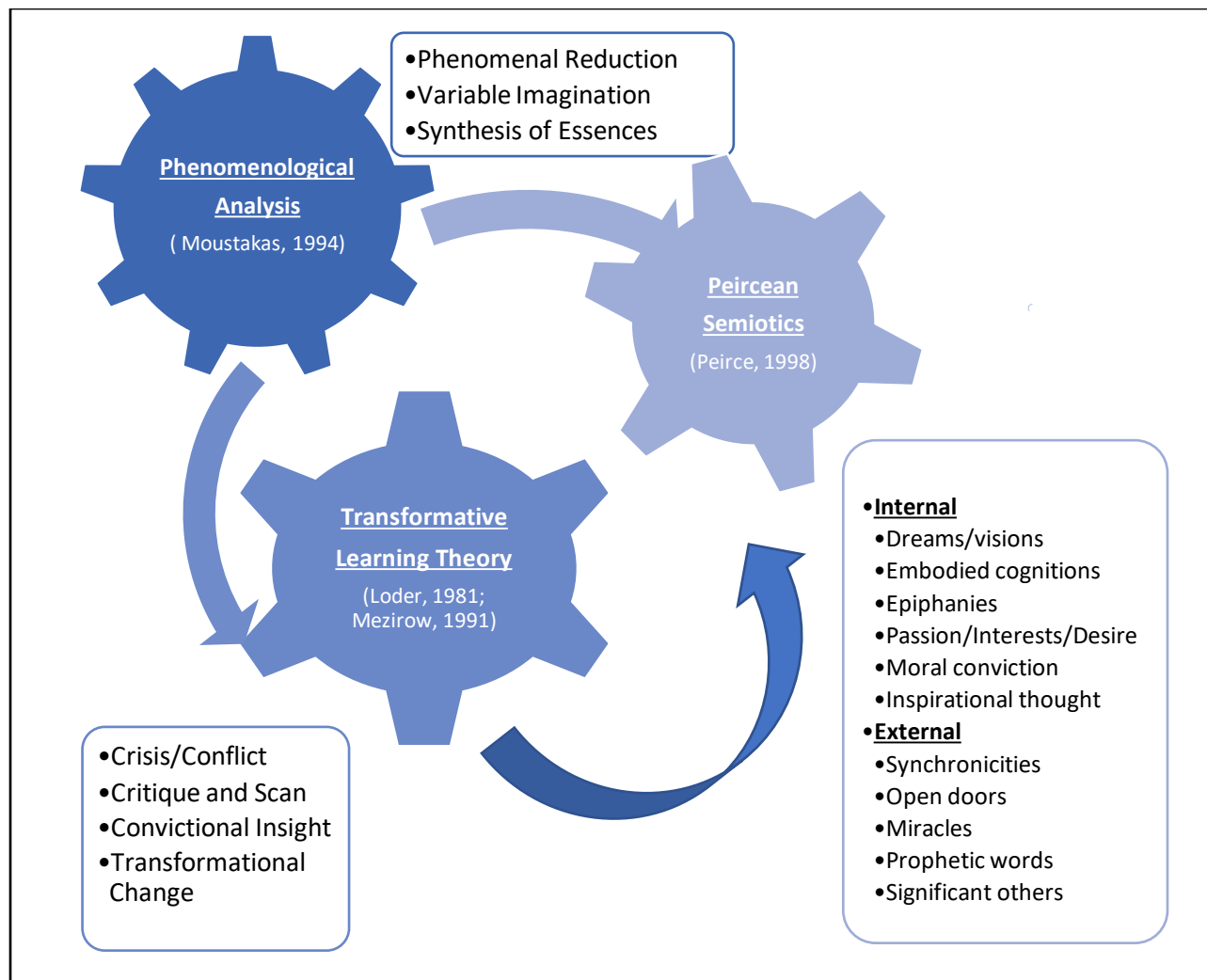
Figure 2. Overview of data analysis and methodology of a pastoral calling.

Foundational Research Questions

The experience of a pastoral calling is a multi-layered and multi-dimensional phenomenon that requires parsing of its various constituent parts. The four research questions of this study were developed to access the complexity and tapestry of this calling. As a preface to these questions, however, a brief foray into the phenomenological method of Moustakas (1994) used in this research will help to establish the context and manner in which the questions were asked. Thus, following this preface, the essences of a pastoral-call will be pursued through the research questions.

Preface: Moustakas' phenomenological method. Moustakas (1994) suggests that phenomenological reduction (PR) and imaginative variation (IV) be used as methods in the analysis and understanding of a phenomenon. As a method of analysis, PR was practiced in two ways: bracketing and horizonalization. These methods were applied during the interview by emphasizing the importance of each participant's experience and understanding of his call. Consequently, openness and vulnerability were demonstrated in the interviews by pastors sharing their calling challenges and changes.

IV was practiced by giving pastors the opportunity to identify with a biblical character in their calling. All but one pastor found a corollary between their calling and a biblical example (Table 4).

Table 4

Pastors' Biblical Models of Calling

Biblical Model	Pastor	Connection	Sampling Quote
Abraham, Moses	David	Starting and pioneering something new (Abraham); Godly character (Moses)	"I would say Abraham for sure because you know, we planted a couple of churches and you know, that's a real calling. It's Abrahamic. You know, to leave where you are to go and to plant and those kinds of things. But also, Moses was very much influential on my life. I always, I felt like he was a tremendous man of patience and I felt like I wanted to have a character like his, a person that was close to God. And so those two were very influential in my life."
Samuel	Orson	Learning to hear from God in order to speak for God	"I just played the role of Samuel. I just kept listening to the Lord and if I could speak prophetically, I did and encouraged and taught."
Disciples	Harold	A calling that developed	"There was a real progress of, of growth in faith through which they [i.e., the disciples] began to understand who Jesus was."
Paul	Walter	Radical change	"I couldn't identify with the apostles. They spent three years with Christ and they still didn't get it. But in an instant, Paul got it. And it was the same thing that happened to me."

Paul, David	Ethan	Calling development (Paul); Worship (David)	"I think Paul, I would say Paul. Okay. And also, David also as like a worshipper of God."
Gideon	Francis	Reluctance to the call and confirmations through tests/fleeces	"Gideon very much. I think Gideon, because he was called to blow the trumpet and assemble them, but he didn't want to be presumptuous and say, I'm going to put myself in as leader now because you called me to pull the people together and so that's when he threw the fleece out and said, you know, if you want me to go further, I need to know what you are telling me this and make sure of this calling that you've given me."
Elisha	Kevin	Sacrifice and cost of the call	"He [i.e., Elisha] had to make a decision whether or not he was going to keep or sacrifice everything and follow God's call."
Matthew	Brian	Change and choice of careers	"I would say it'd be more like Matthew because of family saying there's no money in ministry and to leaving it all behind . . . It's not about the money or the prestige and so on. It's about your faith from the source, from God."
Abraham	Archer	Faith journey; Friendship with God	"I have always identified with Abraham for two reasons. One, and I'm paraphrasing obviously, but God told him, get up and go to the land I will show you. So, the idea of not having any clue really where the journey was going to even take me in the next several months, much less, you know, down the road . . . God called him a friend apart from performance really, really spoke to me. So [for] those two things, I would say Abraham goes to the top of my list."
Isaiah	Richard	Awe of God; Dependency on God	"being awestruck by God, God's nature. And then to be called, is the one who said here am I send me? . . . He had the coal from the altar; he's a man of unclean lips; is humble. So, for me, ministry is about serving an awesome God and being very dependent on him."

Several observations can be made from these preliminary results. Firstly, the connecting links between the pastors and their calling identity are diverse and varied. Even in the instances where two pastors identified with the same biblical model, they differed in *what* they identified in the model. For example, Archer and David (both church planters) identified with Abraham but for different reasons. Archer connected with Abraham because of his friendship with God, whereas David's Abrahamic identity was singularly focused on the new formation of a people.

Similarly, Walter and Ethan connected with Paul as a calling-model. For Walter, he identified with the radical and abrupt change that accompanied Paul's calling. With Ethan, it was the developmental and church planting activity of Paul that he identified with. The point of all this is to recognize that there is great breadth of diversity in the experience, perception, and self-identity among pastors in their call.

The individuality of the calling experience may also be reinforced by the fact that the examples chosen by the pastors were mostly (7 of 10) of their own choosing without any suggestive examples made during the interview. That is, most pastors did not choose any of the examples offered in the interview but came up with their own. Additionally, one pastor said he did not identify with any biblical models. The individuation of model choice by the pastors is indicative of ownership, personalization, and self-identity. It also demonstrates the practice of analogous thinking when pastors describe their calling. Their ready (and in most cases premeditated) choice of a biblical character point to the concrete templates of calling that pastors adopt for themselves. These character templates of calling serve to reinforce and validate the diverse calling experiences of the pastors.

Another observation would be the proximity of the calling context to the biblical model chosen. That is, each pastor chose a model that was connected to his context and condition when he was first called. Their calling paradigm was framed by the genesis of their calling. This may suggest the importance of the initial period of a pastoral calling. Similar to human development, the first years of a calling may be most formative in the perception of what it means to be called. Though the perception of their calling will develop and mature, the initial calling-framework carries a deep influence long after the decision to be a pastor has occurred.

In sum, by bracketing my beliefs and experiences of calling and affirming the unique experiences of each pastor through horizonalization and imaginative variation, an environment of openness and critical reflection was created in which the research questions could be efficaciously pursued.

Research questions and the synthesis of essences. Moustakas (1994) taught that the understanding of phenomena was to be found by the synthesis of phenomenal essences. Additionally, these essences should reflect structures such as time, space, relationship to self and others, physical concerns, and causal or intentional structures that are universally experienced by the participants (Moustakas, 1994). As such, these essences were identified and examined in relation to the four research questions of the study. Attention was also given to significant occurrences when a calling structure is common but not universal.

Question 1: How do seasoned pastors describe their initial experiences in their search and sense of calling?

The initial calling experience of each pastor is unique. Richard was primarily led into his calling by desire and passion in comparison to Ethan's calling-introduction, which was laced with dreams and prophetic utterances. Similarly, the epiphany of David's initial call occurred when walking to a sandwich shop. By contrast, Kevin's calling was uniquely confirmed through a Veggie Tale song. Circumstances and mediums of the initial call appear to be non-uniform in receiving the initial calling. So, can it be said that uniqueness is a calling essence? In this it can be observed that the exception is the rule. The fingerprint of the initial calling for pastors is uniformly unique in its mix of circumstances, mediums, and context. This may be stating the obvious, but its implications are significant. If a calling-template is too rigidly construed, such as one that is overly rational/objective or subjective, a calling-initiate can experience

unwarranted uncertainties. By stressing the uniqueness of the initial call as an essence, the individual is affirmed. But more than that, the calling-construct of an individual is more aligned with the reality that God has created. The felt reality that no model exactly fits our calling is true. Yet, there is value in approximations, biblical models, and templates of the initial call. They give to calling-initiates language and descriptions by which their individual call can be understood and explained, a task that is not easily achieved. With that said, other essences of the initial call also emerged from the data.

Co-mingled with each initial calling is prayer. Whether it was Brian's feel of God's call to the ministry during a high school prayer meeting or Archer wrestling with God while on a beach, each pastor emphasized prayer as part of the initial process. Again, the spectrum of prayer utilized should be mentioned as well. For Francis, his prayer was part of his "deal making" with God. For others, their prayer was similar to Isaiah or Peter who confessed their perceived inability and incompetence to carry out the call (e.g., Kevin, Richard, this present researcher). Still others (e.g., Harold, Paul, and Brian), petitioned God for guidance as they followed their godly passion to be pastors. In each instance, however, prayer was not merely an appendix but a vital organ of the initial call.

Also present in all pastors prior to their calling was their involvement in some form of ministry. That is, before they were called, they were already serving. This insight was reiterated by several pastors, who when asked, "What advice would you give to an aspiring young person who wanted to be a pastor?" they uniformly said, "Begin by serving where you are." Pastor Kevin was emphatic about this and even insisted I write it down:

> I would have these young men that are called to ministry, go help a pastor in the needy
>
> thing. Tom, people come here to this place and say, "You've got a great campus." A lot

of great buildings here. Well guess what? We got dirty hands. So, I know that sounds awful and I know you don't want to write it down, but I'll tell you what, a guy who will get on his hands and knees and scrub, he'll serve God through the rough times.

These seasoned pastors understood an essence of a pastoral-call as servanthood (a common self-identity among these pastors). In their experience, their calling came when they were serving.

Additionally, in their service they experienced a degree of satisfaction and reward. Before they were called to be pastors, they had already experienced a sense of joy in serving the Lord. This cannot be overlooked. Their call to be pastors was born in the pretext of desire and reward. This essence, likewise, has been acknowledged by many others. Spurgeon (1875/2010) famously said, "The first sign of the heavenly calling is *an intense, all absorbing desire for the work"* (p. 26, italics original). The presence of desire and passion is a pastoral-calling essence, and as such, its presence can be construed as a significant signpost that one may be called to be a pastor.

Lastly, this sampling of conservative pastors (see Appendix B, Question One) uniformly had a strong theistic center to their calling (Guinness, 2003; Placher, 2005). This contrasts with other calling studies which list destiny/fate, perfect fit, or passion as the primary "caller" or catalyst to their calling (Duffy & Dik, 2013; Hunter et al., 2010; McKenna et al., 2015). A theistic calling-construct dominates the calling landscape for these pastors. That theism, however, was not uniformly experienced in the same way. Ethan and Archer had a theistic encounter that was deeply affective (Edwards, 1746), whereas Orson, Harold, and Richard had a much stronger cognitive component to their theist calling (Dobrow & Heller, 2015; Friessen, 2004). Regardless of the experience, a strong theistic awareness was at the center of each pastor's call and its development.

In summary, the pastoral calling essences identified with initial calling are the uniqueness of each call, the presence of prayer, involvement in ministry before the calling, passion and joy in serving, and a theistic center.

Question 2: How do they describe the ways in which they have critically reflected on their experiences of calling?

Critical reflection involves a process whereby an individual interacts and asks questions about an event, belief, experience, or decision (Ary et al., 2013). These pastors have critically processed their calling through a variety of means such as prayer, meditation, discussion, counsel, or writing down the pros and cons of a decision. Three pastors (David, Ethan, and Orson) mentioned the use of self-inventory tests such as Meyers-Briggs, to critically reflect on their calling. Interestingly, when Orson was asked, "Reflecting back on your calling. Do you have mixed feelings about it?" he responded:

> I don't feel I was very successful or good at it (i.e., planting a church). You know, in college and Bible college, they give you tests of what kind of personality you have and whether or not you'd be a good church planter and all that. And I think at the time, the way I filled them out, it looked like I would be, but going back, you know, filling those things out could steer you the wrong way. And they kind of did for me because it looked like that's my calling. But that didn't really pan out.

In processing his calling with this profile-test, Orson said he was misinformed and misled to believe things about himself which "didn't pan out." In contrast, when David was asked how his pastoral calling was confirmed, he blurted, "I took gift-tests!" Profile testing can greatly impact the way individuals pursue their calling. Pastor Harold is another example. While in the ministry as a senior pastor, Pastor Harold felt disillusioned by the administrative work he was

required to do. He decided to process his calling by enrolling in a Doctor of Ministry program at

a theological seminary. From Warren's *Purpose Driven Life* (2002), Harold found direction and

clarity for his calling. Applying Warren's acrostic template for purpose (SHAPE = Spiritual

gifts, Heart, Abilities, Personality, and Experiences), Harold discerned that he had drifted from

his calling as a pastor who teaches and shepherds. He decided to take on an associate position

that more aligned with God's calling for his life.

In this regard, it should be mentioned that critical thinking about one's calling as a pastor

often takes place during Bible college or seminary. Courses required for ordination in many

mainline denominations (e.g., United Methodist, Presbyterian, Evangelical Lutheran Church in

America, Episcopal, Reformed Church in America, etc.) interact with the pastoral vocation.

Even those denominations that do not require a Master of Divinity degree require courses that

interact with the pastoral experience (e.g., Assemblies of God, Foursquare International, Church

of God). The point is that pastors, during their educational/preparation period, have critically

processed their calling as a pastor. There may be exceptions to this pastoral training, where only

the Bible is stressed, but each pastor interviewed in this research had training that interacted with

ministry.

Each pastor stressed the importance of education in fulfilling his call. For some (David,

Brian, Francis, Richard), their pastoral education was pivotal in the shaping of their call. David

spoke of the mentoring influence of a professor who "was very instrumental in confirming my

pastoral gifting." For Brian, college and seminary provided a ground of exploration for various

theological traditions. Through this educational experience he was enabled to choose a

ministerial path that God had called him to. While at Bible college Francis also found his calling

confirmed through the leadership at the school and the opportunities they gave him to preach.

Richard also mentioned his time at a small seminary to be a "very, very good experience."

Interestingly, however, while in seminary he was yet unsure of his calling. He said, "I never felt

certain in the sense that I knew I would be a pastor. I was just, you know, preparing myself,

praying that I would, that the Lord would open the door." His preparation at seminary turned out

to be the necessary pretext for a later opportunity where his calling as a pastor would be

confirmed.

These above examples are explicit and pivotal in shaping a calling. The other pastors,

however, also had stressed the importance of their pastoral training. If the uniform experience

and emphasis on pastoral training is among these pastors, does having a pastoral calling require

training? Is it considered an essence? And if so, what kind and what breadth of education is

required? For now, it simply can be acknowledged that among these pastors, education and

pastoral calling are bound up with each other.

Another significant way pastors have critically reflected on their calling has been through

their spouses. Some, such as Paul and Kevin, acknowledged their calling-confidence was linked

to the direct encouragement they had received from their spouses. Pastor Richard likewise stated

that his spouse was the most significant influence in his calling. Accordingly, he said, "The

more, the more I talk with her, the better off I am in terms of understanding things." Other

pastors, however, when given the option to express who has significantly influenced their calling

("such as your spouse, family, friends, spiritual mentors"), did not refer to their spouses but to

the other options.

Lastly, critical reflection of their calling was practiced through dialogue with other

pastors. This may be through seeking counsel through a seasoned pastor during a transition or

crisis when they were in ministry (Kevin, Richard, Walter), or even during the early stages of

their ministry (Orson, Paul, David). In a variety of ways, pastors have used other pastors to reflect on their experiences of ministry.

To summarize, pastors critically reflect on their calling through a variety of means. Profile tests have been useful to some and misleading for at least one pastor. On the other hand, all pastors expressed the benefit of a pastoral education, which to a certain extent, critically interacts with the nature of a pastoral calling. Dialogue with other pastors and spousal input were also mentioned as mediums which offered critical reflection. Significantly, not mentioned were examples of pastors processing their calling with denominational leaders. The three pastors that did mention some interaction with denominational leaders during a time of crisis (Brian and Orson) or transition (Archer) said they were not supportive or helpful.

Question 3: How do seasoned pastors describe their subsequent experiences that have resulted from their calling?

The calling of a pastor can greatly impact his or her family, income, and residence. It has already been mentioned that major educational decisions have been determined by a pastor's calling. Other subsequent experiences linked to a pastor's call are family life and finances. Two pastors mentioned their families were impacted negatively by their ministry and had to make changes. These changes were mostly schedule-related and being more at home during the evening when the children were younger. In both cases, adjustments to schedules were made.

Pastors also mentioned that financial sacrifices came with the call. This reality was strongly stated by Pastor Kevin:

If a college student came and said he was called to the ministry, what three questions would I ask? Number one, are you willing to sacrifice everything for the cause of Christ? And, and that's, that's important because we don't do that anymore. There is no

willingness to sacrifice financially or of our comfort.

For those pastors who did make such sacrifices, such as Orson and Brian, following their call meant experiencing financial pressure because the church was unable to fully support them. This led them to take a second job as they pursued their call. Both pastors felt that their respective denominations could have helped in their financial challenges. As a bi-vocational pastor, Orson thought the denominational leaders could have reached out to give practical help. He felt they were not in touch with a large percentage of pastors who were bi-vocational. He noted that at denominational pastor conferences, a pastor from a large church would usually speak and tell of his success stories:

> And it was great to hear him. They were great people. Yet they didn't know, really didn't know firsthand what I was struggling with, the challenges of the bi-vocational pastor, and how to make it work. You know, where was the Sunday school curriculum that you would be willing to share with me? Sheila [i.e., his spouse] felt alone doing the kids ministry. So, I wished I had more input. Yeah. As time went on, they [i.e., the denominational leaders] realized that 75% of the guys out there were bi-vocational.

The number of bi-vocational pastors in Orson's denomination is about twice that of the national percentile. However, that may be changing. A recent survey in 2015 revealed that fewer than two thirds (62.2%) of U.S. churches have a full-time pastor (Smietana, 2015). In 2010, 71.4% of U.S. churches had a fulltime pastor. That is over a 9% drop in five years. The way things are trending, the bi-vocational pastor may be the new norm.

Pastor Brian also had a financial challenge thrust upon him when the church of which he was an associate pastor unexpectedly told him that they were eliminating his position. With two young children at home and the loss of his income and health insurance, the insensitivity and

business-like manner in which the church's decision was made left Brian disillusioned with being a pastor. He left the ministry and worked in the financial market for a year. He made his way back into church as a lay leader teaching Sunday school and leading a couple of small groups. Eventually, another church opened that was in need of a pastor and he has been a vocational pastor ever since. In reflecting over that experience, Pastor Brian acknowledged that he wished he had learned other skills so that he was not so dependent on the church for an income. He also noted that the denominational leadership could have made his time of crisis easier:

> I think it would have been helpful if the superintendent would have given me more options than just flat out, "Okay, you're going on a leave of absence. Don't you want to think about it? Let's, let's, let's slow you down a little bit. Let's put you on a less than full time. So, you can really think this through." That would have been helpful.

Financial realities deeply impact a pastoral calling as seen from these two pastors. Later, during the focus group, the matter of finances came up again. There was discussion about whether a pastor should remain at a church if the church was unable to financially support him or her. The consensus of the group leaned towards the pastor going elsewhere if the church could not financially support the pastor. The adage, "where God guides, He provides" was overheard. It should be noted, however, there were no bi-vocational pastors in the focus group.

In summary, the subsequent realities that stem from the calling of a pastor are tangible and impactful. Family life and finances were mentioned as items that were especially impacted by a pastor's calling. The amount of attention given by the pastors to the impact of finances on their ministry is indicative of its calling essence as a challenge. Though challenges and sacrifices are surely present, many of the pastors also alluded to the joy, satisfaction, and meaningfulness

of their calling. When asked, "What influenced you to actually follow your calling?" Pastor

Walter's response is representative of the data from this group of pastors: "My love for the Lord.

My passion for His word. A great desire and an unbelievable joy to teach his word and share."

Question 4: How do seasoned pastors describe the development of their calling?

One of the strongest themes emerging from the data is that every pastoral calling is a

process. The idea that a pastoral call is experienced as a single event is not supported by the

experiences and testimonies of these pastors. Francis was clear about the dynamic nature of his

calling:

In my relationship, God has reaffirmed his leadership in my life all through my life. I'm

not leaning on something 20 or 30 years ago that happened, but he's currently leading and

brought me here. He's called me to be here at this church at this time and opened the

doors.

However, this is not to say that there may be singular events that crystalize a calling experience

such as Walter's epiphany that he had "unfinished work to complete." Rather, it underscores

that a pastoral calling is a lifelong process that is both dynamic and developmental, that is, a

pastoral calling is a process and not an event. For example, Pastor Archer said, "I just knew God

was calling me to serve Him in actual church ministries. Somehow. I had no clue of how that

was going to be." He went on to explain, "There was definitely a period, probably along around

2002, 2003 when I really sensed that God was going to lead me at some point into being a lead

pastor, develop a heart for people, learn how to pastor people."   Each separate area can be

understood as a calling-development. Likewise, Paul did not know that when he became a

children's pastor, he would eventually plant a church. He simply responded to his pastor's

request to help out in the children's ministry. Later, he found himself as an associate pastor

leading small groups and doing administrative work. During a transition period in the church, he decided to start a new church and strike out on his own. His calling was forged through a variety of experiences and not a single event.

The stories can be multiplied from these pastors with each one describing a series of events and experiences in the shaping and development of his calling. This was concisely described by Pastor Richard in how his calling was tempered by his experience:

> I think, probably the idealism and expectations have been kicked out of me pretty well. Mm, you know, it sounds ridiculous, but I'm pretty certain now that God is not going to make me be the next John MacArthur or John Piper. I know I'm never going to do that and never going to have a church of 4,000 people. Expectations have been tempered down a bit, by life and reality.

The experience of "life and reality" shaped the expectations, self-identity, and understanding of Richard's pastoral call. This insight opens a portal of understanding by which the biggest variable of calling development can be found: experience. Experience has been defined as "knowledge resulting from actual observation or from what one has undergone" ("Experience," 1989). Though it is a broad term with many nuances, in all its forms, experience keeps the residual of its original meaning which is knowledge by personal encounter, involvement, and experimentation. Contrasted with propositional or theoretical knowledge, experiential knowledge is more empirical in its epistemology. It makes conclusions and interpretations based on "life and reality," as Pastor Richard observed. In the ascertainment of their call and its development, a God-oriented heuristic framework appears to be the primary hermeneutic for pastors. The on-the-job experience of pastors has a powerful epistemic influence on how they perceive God to be working out their calling. Calling expectations, decisions, and directions are

tempered by life, reality, and circumstances, or in other words, the experience of the pastor.

A further example of this is the physical breakdown of David's health. The pneumonia, kidney stones, and overwhelming exhaustion he experienced were interpreted as God telling him to slow down or else he would shut down and "lose it all." Or circumstantially, Brian's serendipitous meeting with Ravi Zacharias led him to choose a seminary that he was not considering. Also, there was Harold's inner experience of reward which he interpreted to be a sign that he was to enter the ministry. Likewise, Walter's pastoral training as a layman with no thought of being a pastor was later understood as God's providence and preparation for the unforeseen role he would have as a pastor. Though only five pastors are mentioned, each pastoral narrative of the sample affirms that the interpretation pastors gave to their circumstances and experiences was pivotal in determining how, when, where, and why their calling was pursued. Therefore, the interpretive understanding that pastors give to their subjective and objective experiences can be said to be an epistemic essence in the development of a pastoral call (see Figure 3).
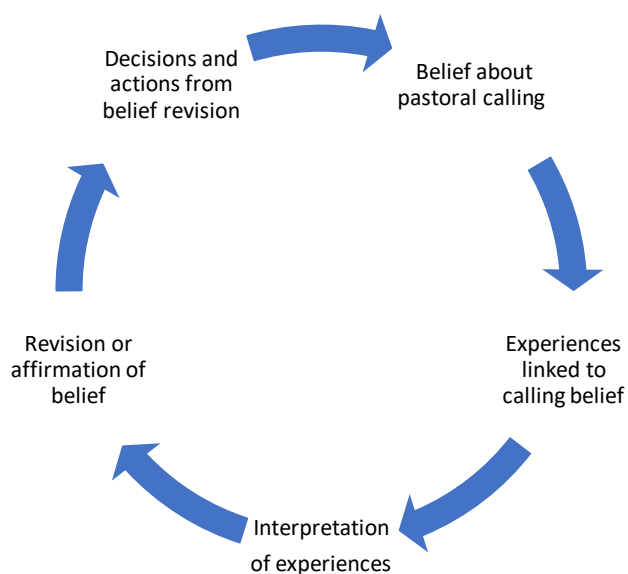

Figure 3. Calling beliefs and the developmental process of a pastoral call.

Besides understanding calling as a process which is largely interpreted through experiences, there are other influences that pastors cite in the development of their call. Education has already been mentioned as a main influence in calling development. Continuing education, such as pastoral conferences, seminars, and sectional minister meetings can provide a re-tooling and equipping of a minister's call. Some conferences and pastoral gatherings, however, are more effective than others. Those that are relevant and address present challenges of the pastorate are most meaningful and helpful (Orson). Pastor Harold also spoke of the necessity of meetings that are specifically geared for pastors. He told of a minister's association that had failed because it became too generic and broad in its audience and subjects. By contrast, he spoke of a "senior pastors only" gathering that was immensely successful because the focus was on fellowship, prayer, and the mutual sharing of pastoral concerns. Though Harold expressed this conviction, not all pastors were equally vocal on this aspect of calling nurturance. In fact, the importance of pastoral collegiality and community was hardly acknowledged by the pastors during the interviews and focus group even though questions of calling nurturance and development were discussed. If this in fact is the case, it can lead to the deprivation of calling nurturance. An extensive study found that "the degree to which a pastor experiences a sense of belongingness . . . with other pastors appears to be one of the most important determinants of that pastor's flourishing" (Flourishing, 2013, p. 37). A nurtured and developed calling require a pastor to be in community with other pastors and not be isolated from his or her peers. The pastor-sampling of this research did not fully explore the degree to which they were in community with other pastors. This can be interpreted as something that is understood and therefore, there is no need to mention it, or it could be that pastors do not consider the pastoral community to be essential in the development of their call. In contrast, each pastor expressed the

importance and place of the pastor-mentor.

Pastors talked of their need for a mentor during the initial stages of their calling (Orson, Brian, Archer), and the high significance of those who did act as mentors in the course of their call (Archer, Richard, Walter, David, Francis, Orson, Paul, Kevin). The pastor-sampling of this research did not fully explore the degree to which they were in community with other pastors. As seasoned pastors, however, they all did acknowledge its importance. In relation to this, pastors frequently undertake the responsibility to reach out to other pastors or developing leaders.

Among the more experienced pastors of this sampling was the vision to mentor young pastors or emergent church leaders. After 30 years as a pastor, Pastor Harold sees the need to "pass-the-baton." He mentioned that he has "been working here [i.e., the church he pastors] for a couple of years, to help the church pass the baton to other younger leaders. Finding those people who take that responsibility." Pastor David also meets with several young ministers who are on staff at the church where he works and quipped, "I work with these guys because they keep me sharp!" Over the past five years, Pastor Kevin also has developed a vision for a new generation of pastors:

It [i.e., his calling] has become more refined in the need to see young men discipled to ministry, whether or not it is full time ministry. We have a generation of young men and women who have not been challenged to ministry, to do ministry.

When asked about the development of his calling, Pastor Archer framed his desire to mentor from a different angle:

I just know that there's young ministers out there that they need to have a better experience than I did. So, I think personal experiences, one is one of them. The other, I

think my wife and I have just sensed now for a few years that the experiences God was

allowing us to have, are going to be used somehow in coaching and helping younger

ministers as they get started in ministry.

For reasons that vary, the vision of mentoring has become a part of their pastoral-calling. Though mentoring novice ministers is a theme among seasoned pastors in their in calling-development, it was not vigorously pursued by all the pastors. Consequently, this aspect of the pastoral call is not a phenomenological calling-essence for pastors. Its presence is common enough to say, however, that pastors in the matured stages of their calling will frequently focus on mentoring their younger counterparts.

In sum, the question of calling-development was understood as a dynamic process heavily influenced by the experiences of the pastors and how they interpreted those experiences. Accordingly, the data revealed that pastors attributed a strong epistemic value to that which they experienced, that is, their calling was largely understood and pursued by that which they experienced. Additionally, research results underscored the importance of the pastoral community and pastoral mentoring in the nurturance of the call. The pastors of this sampling did not place emphasis on the pastoral community but did signify the importance of the pastoral mentor. This was observed in their expressed need for a mentor in their early years as a pastor. It was also indicated by the vision of the more experienced pastors to mentor novitiate pastors and emergent leaders of the church. The four research questions of a pastoral calling viewed through the phenomenological grid of Moustakas (1994) are found in Table 5.

Table 5

A Phenomenological Assessment of a Pastoral Calling

Research Questions	Pastor Calling Essence
How do seasoned pastors describe their initial experiences of calling?	• *Uniformly unique in its mix of circumstances, mediums, and context • *Prayerfulness • *Prior to calling there was involvement in some form of ministry • *Passion and desire to be a pastor • *A sense of reward when in ministry
How do they describe the ways in which they have critically reflected on their experiences of calling?	• *Educational venues such as seminary, conferences, seminars • *Dialogue with other pastors • Spouse (not all referred to their spouse, however)
How do seasoned pastors describe their subsequent experiences and decisions that have resulted from their calling?	• Subsequent experiences and decisions varied with no uniform phenomena (i.e., phenomenological essence) • Most pastors alluded to ministry as a challenge • Many pastors talked about the financial hardships of the ministry
How do seasoned pastors describe the development of their calling?	• *A pastoral calling is a dynamic process that develops over time • *Experiential phenomena have an epistemic value in determining God's calling • *The pastor-mentor is of high importance • The more experienced pastors of the sampling developed a vision to mentor novitiate pastors and church leaders

*Those phenomena with an asterisk were universally experienced and are considered a phenomenological essence of

a pastoral call. Other entries without an asterisk, though not considered a phenomenological essence, were

considered significant by many of the pastors and therefore are included.

Thematic Development

The research questions of this study were interfaced and examined through the

phenomenological methodology of Moustakas (1994). Consequently, pastoral-calling essences

were noted and identified. These foundational results will now be further explicated through a thematic exploration of a pastoral calling through the theories of transformative learning and Peircean semiotics.

Transformative learning theory. Transformative learning theory (TLT) posits that adult learning is the making of new meanings which have a transformative effect on the learner (Mezirow, 1991). For pastors, the creation of new meanings impacted self-identity, vocational aspirations, and purpose. Loder (1989) and Mezirow (1991) affirmed that transformative learning is a process wherein the learner experiences various predictable phases of learning. Though Mezirow (1991) and Loder (1989) use different terminology to describe these phases, the distillation of their TLT phases can be reduced to conflict, critique and scan, convictional knowing, and imaginative application. The data gathered from the interviews and focus group were analyzed through the TLT grid shown below.

Conflict. "I think the nurturing and affirming of the call comes through grief." This bold statement took me by surprise. Pastor Kevin then described several crises he experienced as a pastor. On one occasion a deacon whose wife had terminal cancer came to him and said, "I wish your wife would have cancer instead of my wife." Pastor Kevin understood the deacon to be speaking from pain, but such barbed words do not leave the intended victim unharmed. At another time, a colonel challenged his authority and told him that he was going to have his job. At the time, Pastor Kevin was a young 25-year-old pastor, strongly intimidated by this high ranking official. "It brought grief. It brought stress, heartache. I was shaking full head to toe, just uncontrollably shaking." However, the "grief" became a decisive point in his calling journey. He described how he processed the crisis though prayer:

God, you called me to ministry. You called me to be faithful to you. You're going to

have to fix this because it looks like my job is on the line. And that, that day changed

me. Through grief I've recognized that only God has the authority to move his man

where he wants him to go.

What Pastor Kevin describes as grief, Mezirow (1991) calls a crisis and Loder (1991) would call

conflict. A crisis or conflict can be external, such as a financial crisis, or existential, as in an

identity crisis. In TL, conflict is the context where new meanings are formed and new directions

are forged. The data retrieved from this research confirm this assertion.

Most pastors interviewed (10 of 11) had notions of their calling as young adults. This is a

transitional and turbulent time when young adults are vocationally searching, vulnerable, and

uncertain about their lives. Brian, for example, was a high school student in the Philippines

feeling the cultural pressure of making a career decision when he received his calling. The

majority of the other pastors decided to become a vocational minister during the interim years of

college (Harold, David, Richard, Francis, Archer, Kevin, and Ethan). The remaining pastors

(excepting Walter) were in their mid-20s, not established in a career, and searching when they

chose the path of vocational ministry (Paul, Orson). Accordingly, it could be said that each

pastor was called during a transitional time period in which life decisions were being made

(including the pastor who was called at retirement age). On the surface this may not appear to

align with the catalyst of conflict mentioned in TL. Life transitions, however, have been linked

to the development of psychological distress and major depressive disorders (Hammen, 2005;

Praharso, Tear, & Cruwys, 2017). Thus, though there were few concrete, identifiable crises such

as a parent dying, divorce, or a major car accident (as with Loder, 1989), the life-stressor of

transition was the existential context of each calling. This covert experience of conflict was also found in the unrealized passion for ministry in each pastor.

The interview and focus group data revealed that passion for the call preceded the actual calling. The desire to pastor was present before the calling came to pastor. The gap between desire and its fulfillment can hardly be described as wishful thinking by these pastors. Their desire for ministry was strongly felt as an unrealized passionate dream. Consequently, the tension and incongruence of an unfilled desire produced a state of conflict for these pastors which ultimately served as a catalyst for their call. This, too, aligns with the motivational theory of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957). Cognitive dissonance suggests that the presence of conflicting attitudes, beliefs or behaviors produces a feeling of mental and emotional discomfort. The discomfort places an individual in a state of tension and angst until a reconciliation of the various conflicting attitudes (or desires) and behavior are restored.

This inner dichotomous experience was also observed in a study by McLaughlin (2014). In the campus-wide spiritual renewal which took place at Wheaton College in 1995, McLaughlin observed from the data and recording archives of the school's assemblies that hearts were stirred through the presentation of biblical teachings and historical accounts of dedicated Christians. In contrast to the high spiritual ideals emphasized, however, were the students' and teachers' low spiritual condition. This created a state of campus-wide dissonance which in turn led to a campus wide spiritual revival in which many lives were transformed (McLaughlin, 2014). The affected at Wheaton College, as with the pastors, attributed the state of dissonance to the Holy Spirit (John 16:8). Likewise, Loder (1989) also describes the experience of conviction which brings disharmony to the individual as the work of the Holy Spirit. It was in the acts of

confession and repentance that the college students reconciled their dissonance and it was the acceptance of the call that pastors found harmony with their desires.

In sum, the conflict phase of transformative learning coincides with a pastor's calling experience. The transitional and searching years when these pastors received their call help to illustrate this. Additionally, the existential conflict of unfilled desire and unrequited passion to serve and minister contributed to their experience of dissonance and functioned as a catalyst for their calling. Lastly, it was suggested that the development and nurturance of a pastoral calling was preceded by conflict. Thus, the initial phase of conflict in transformative learning outlined by Loder (1989) and Mezirow (1991) appears consistent with the researched calling experiences of the pastors interviewed.

Critique and scan. In TL, unfulfilled desires or unresolved conflicts lead to the scanning of options and possibilities available for their resolution. Accordingly, this critique and scan phase of TL is comprised of "waiting, wondering, following hunches, and exhausting the possibilities" (Loder,1989, p. 38) that can bring resolve to the conflict. It is a period that may last a few seconds as when an answer comes during a daydream, or it may last several years as with those who have experienced severe trauma during childhood. In all instances of conflict, however, transformational learning argues for the inherent proclivity of humans to seek and scan for solutions. The transitional and existential conflicts associated with calling were scanned in several ways by these pastors.

The enrollment in seminary or Bible college may be understood as a scanning for a pastoral calling. Each pastor interviewed had pastoral-training before they were ordained or became a pastor. Their training was a decision of faith. Not a single pastor knew they were going to be senior pastors as they went to seminary or Bible college. They may have had a belief

about vocational ministry, so they pursued ministerial training, but no one expressed a certainty about God calling them to pastor a church. This scanning process underscores the exploratory character of ministerial training for the pastoral candidates. Even though each pastor interviewed wanted to serve and sought training for that purpose, none of them knew beforehand that their training would eventuate as a senior pastor. They were being equipped to possibly serve as a youth pastor (Kevin), teacher (Archer), effective lay person (Walter), preacher (Richard, Francis), or vocational minister within the church. This would further indicate that an openness and malleability exist in those who are in training for ministry. This is not to say that the pastors did not consider the pastorate as a vocational option. Rather, it is the recognition that a great deal of uncertainty and openness in the application of their ministerial training was present in this sampling of pastors. The pedagogical implications this has for ministerial candidates will be discussed in the next chapter. Eventually, each pastor would first serve as an associate pastor or in some other ministry context before he would become a senior pastor.

Besides ministerial training, many of the pastors critiqued their calling options by confiding in other pastors. For example, in critiquing the possibility of a pastoral call, David talked with his pastor and was affirmed in his pursuit. Similarly, when Kevin was a youth pastor and given the opportunity to be a senior pastor, he consulted and was assured by other "elder pastors." Likewise, when Walter as a layman was asked to become a candidate for the senior pastor position in the church he attended, he sought advice from the pastor who led him to Christ. As a side note, Archer advised that potential pastors "should surround themselves with people that will tell them the truth and not merely say what they want to hear." In sum, the idea of critiquing one's call with others was endorsed and emphasized by all.

Convictional knowing.   The conflict and scanning phases of transformative learning presumably lead to the convictional knowing experience. Loder (1989) presented the idea of convictional knowing as "the state of being thoroughly convinced – as in judicial imagery, when the case is uncontestable and will stand as part of the permanent record" (p. 222). Extending the analogy, Loder (1989) further argued that each convictional knowing experience has three aspects: "a convictor, the convicted person, and the endurance through time of the convictional relationship between them" (p. 222).

The Convictor. Loder (1981) posited a theistic involvement in all TL. As a deistic expression, the Creator has woven into human nature the processes by which all learning occurs. This is framed as transformational logic by Loder (1989). In a more dynamic fashion, Loder (1981, 1989) also attributed the deep transformations of the human spirit to the work of Christ through the Spiritus Creator as the Convictor. The importance of a theistic attribution to TL is especially relevant to pastors who have a deeply embedded theistic epistemology and ontology. Transformations of perspectives, identity, and purpose arise from theistic interpretations of events, circumstances, and affect. Further, these theistic interpretations were ascribed by these pastors to be the convincing (convicting?) evidence of God's call for them to be pastors. That is, enough evidence had been produced by the convictor to establish an enduring calling-conviction that has withstood the challenge of opposition and difficulties. Loder's (1989) judicial analogy of the convictor, however, does not seem to fully represent the pastors researched. The examples of convictional knowing given by Loder (1989) stress a pivotal moment when the convictional knowing occurs (e.g., Paul and the Damascus Road experience; Cleopos and Simon on the Emmaus Road; Archimedes and his discovery). Indeed, Loder's book's title, *The Transforming Moment* (1989), implies a particular moment in time when transformation takes

place. In contrast, the convictional knowing of the pastors interviewed were developed over a

period of months and sometimes years. Though there may have been significant moments of the

Convictor's activity that helped to galvanize their calling such as a dream (Ethan), synchronicity

(Richard), or an epiphany (Walter), no pastoral identity or vocation was developed from a single

experience. Rather, it was a convergence of several significant experiences and new meanings

that occurred over a period of time, which eventuated in a convictional knowing of their call (see

Figure 4). For the calling-conviction to be established, several different forms of evidence were

required. This contrast from Loder is of vital importance in the understanding of a pastoral call.

Experiences and Time

Passion and Desires

Open Doors and Opportunities
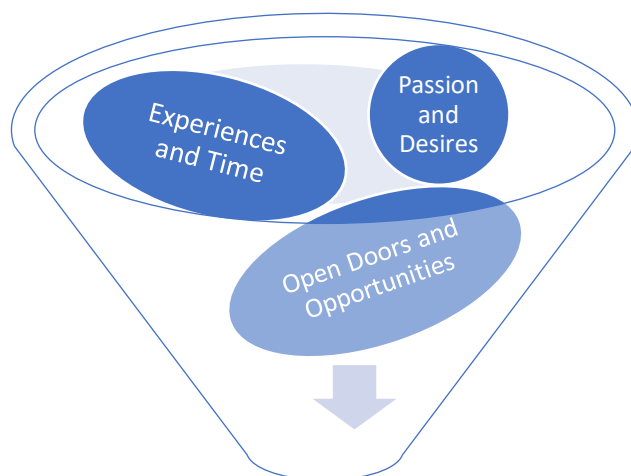
Convictional knowing of a pastoral call

Figure 4. A distillation model of convergent calling theory.

If a pastoral call is understood to be a singular experience and not a multi-event process,

a variety of mishaps can occur. Discouragement and even the premature surrendering of a call

can occur because a singular sought-after experience did not occur. Likewise, if discerning a call

is approached as a 40-meter sprint instead of a marathon, misleading expectations and a less

efficient training regimen could easily disillusion the seeker of a call. By contrast, the data from

this sampling of pastors indicate that convictional knowing of a call occurs when there is a convergence of several streams of experience (e.g., opportunities, desires, mentors, needs, skills, circumstances, spiritual revelations, etc.), that when combined, a spiritual gestalt of a calling conviction is formed (Figure 4). No pastor mentioned a single experience by which he became convicted of his call. This contrasting result can have far reaching epistemic significance in the training of pastors which will be considered in the next chapter. But having said that, Loder's positive contribution to a theistic pastoral calling can be observed in other ways.

The convicted. Though various experiences may have evidential value, this should not be construed as an empirical process in which logic and hard evidence preceded a calling-conviction. For example, when I asked them how they knew it was God calling them, several pastors answered, "you just know you know." This confident response is highly subjective and points to an assurance that transcends the cognitive domain of analysis and learning. In some ways, this form of convictional knowledge is parallel to aesthetic knowledge as Louw (2015) has observed:

> Can one "see" the "unseen"? From merely an empirical, phenomenological and observational point of view, perhaps not. The empiricist only "sees" what the senses experience factually. From an aesthetic point of view, perhaps yes. The artist "sees" more than the eye of the beholder can capture.

Accordingly, the convictional calling of pastors may be more aligned with the artist than the scientist, for by faith they can see more than the eye can capture (Hebrews 11:1). That is, their calling-convictions are grounded in a framework that is less empirical and more intuitive. As such, the intuitional and theistic evidences of dreams, epiphanies, and fortuitous events easily form the bulk of pastoral calling data. This epistemic reality is in contrast to the scientific and

positivistic community of the social and human sciences which largely exclude God as a variable to any and all occurrences. As Loder (1989) affirmed, "Convictional experiences challenge the assumptional [sic] world of the human sciences. They are essentially beyond the naturalistic study and should be recognized and accepted as such" (p. 22). This does not imply, however, an evidential subjectivism without boundaries and guidelines for interpretation. The pastors in this study frequently cite the Christian community and scripture as a grid to interpret their calling experiences. Thus, the convictions of the theistically called are guided by a hermeneutical approach which is emphatically grounded in the unseen and non-empirical realities of faith.

   An over-looked fourth phase: The joy of discovery. Whereas Mezirow (1991) outlines 10 distinctive phases to TL, Loder (1981, 1989) identifies only five. Though not included in the research model used in this study, Loder's (1989) fourth phase of transformative learning he labeled as "release and repatterning" (p. 222). It is worth noting that this fourth phase was often found in the calling data of this research. The phase of release and repatterning is likened to the joy of discovery after a long and difficult search. Likewise, when insight to a vexing problem is reached, the agreeable experience of resolve is encountered. This can be the simple pleasure of solving a Sudoku puzzle or as exhilarating as Archimedes running down the street shouting "Eureka!" when he discovered the theory of hydrostatics. The interview data revealed some of the pastors experiencing this fourth phase as "reward" (Harold), "fulfilment" (Walter), "confirmation" (Francis), "assurance" (David, Kevin), and "clarity of purpose" (Brian). Thus, though Loder's (1989) fourth phase was not adopted in this research as a transformative learning experience, the joy of discovering purpose and meaning—things that can certainly accompany a calling—has motivational value in sustaining one's call.

Interpretation and application. This final phase of TLT has a scanning emphasis similar to the second phase. The second phase scans for solutions and options to resolve conflict, whereas the fifth phase scans for applications of the newly discovered insights of self, purpose, and vocation. The retrieved data reveals that this latter scanning concurs with the psychological literature of the theoretical section of this research.

Self-identity. Perhaps one of the most significant transformations that can occur is the new understanding pastors have of themselves. When asked during the interview to complete the statement, "To be called as a pastor means . . . ," most pastors responded with descriptions that were pro-social such as "to have a genuine love for the people of God" (Archer) and to "serve people" (Kevin). In that regard, the pastors of our research frequently saw themselves as servants of God "and you serve God by serving His people" (Richard). An identity that understands oneself as a servant carries implications that can easily be either misunderstood or misapplied. For example, Pastor Richard in response to the above question said, "And you serve God by serving his people. To be called is humanly a very, very dangerous job. You will no doubt be misunderstood and misconstrued." His response indicated a servant identity which was fraught with danger. This correlates with social-constructionist theory (Maalouf, 2001; Stets & Serpe, 2013) which was found to be profoundly relevant to pastors (Bloom, 2017; Cafferata, 2017). Cafferata (2017) noted that pastors are subject to a high salience which refers to a role-assumptive position (see Table 6). In other words, a pastor's self-identity is largely connected to the various roles he or she adopts. Consequently, the sense of failure or success may easily be tied to the efficacy in which these roles have been fulfilled. In addition, social-identity theory which emphasizes the influence others have in the formation of a self-identity was frequently found in the study as well.

Table 6

Self-Identity and Various Assumed Pastoral Roles

Identity	Assumed Responsibilities
Shepherd	A multi-faceted metaphor assuming responsibility for the protection, nurture, and guidance of a congregation
Servant	A mindset that places the interests and needs of others above your own
Leader	A position that assumes the ability to forge new directions, goals, and vision for the church
Counselor	A relational, emotional, and spiritual problem-solver
Spiritual Parent	A nurturant role that is deeply connected to the well-being and emotional state of others
Teacher	An expert communicator and facilitator of growth and learning
Administrator	A manager of the physical resources and staff personnel of the church
Mentor	An intense relational training leader of a few selected individuals or future church leaders
Theologian	A knowledgeable expert in religious beliefs and the Bible
Prophet	A person who is able to hear from God and speak to present and future conditions
Revivalist	A motivational speaker who elicits church growth and response from the congregation
Model/Example	A leader whose life, family, marriage, and responses are a paragon of Christlikeness

Of all identity-shapers, research found that the pastor's spouse was the most influential. When asked to describe some of the influential interactions they have had with others about their calling, most pastors mentioned their spouse as highly influential in their calling as a pastor.

Representational of most pastors in this present research, Pastor David acknowledged that his spouse was most influential in his pursuit of his calling as a pastor:

> There are many times I did want to quit [being a pastor] because I just felt like, you know, it was too much . . . and my wife would pat me on the back of the back and say the Holy Spirit will help you get there. She was a tremendous coach in my life the entire time up to this day.

In matters of the ministry, Pastor Richard also shared,

> I'm very open with my wife about these issues. She and I talk about it constantly. What's God doing, what He wants us to do? The more I talked with her, the better off I am in terms of understanding things.

Likewise, Pastor Paul recognized that even though he had the title, he and his spouse "were very much a team" and that his wife's "involvement and participation, and her agreement was validating. And it's an essential part. We were always walking in step. It wasn't me trying to convince her that this is a good thing." These strong and positive spousal interactions deeply influenced the roles and self-identity of the pastors. However, Pastors Archer and Kevin gave a different slant to spousal influence by mentioning the consequences of being a pastor without a supportive spouse. Pastor Archer advised:

> If I were to talk to young ministers . . . I would say be careful who you marry. Because if you don't, if you don't bring somebody to the picture that has the same calling as you and doesn't whole-heartedly support your calling, you got things out of order. Because your first calling, is your family and at some point, you don't want to have to choose between the two. And I know many pastors who have had to choose between the two and leave the ministry because their spouse wasn't happy.

This warning was reiterated by Pastor Kevin:

> I've experienced many, many, many pastors leaving the ministry because their wife was
>
> discontent with living situations and not having things that other people had in the
>
> church. So, without a supportive wife, at least from our standpoint, the ministry is pretty
>
> much over.

Though a pastor's spouse was shown to have a profound influence on a pastor's self-identity and calling, other people groups were also found to be transformational in the way these pastors approached their calling: denominational leaders, congregations, and other pastors.

Cafferata (2017) mentioned the influence a denominational executive or leader can have with a pastor who is serving a church that has plateaued, is in decline, or is near death. His research revealed that when a denominational leader validated a struggling pastor, the pastor was "less lonely and isolated, less stressed, and less likely to think of leaving congregational ministry for another ministry or a secular occupation" (p. 327). In this study, three pastors were significantly impacted by their respective denominational leaders.

Pastor Brian considered another vocation after being unceremoniously told that the church could not afford his position anymore. He had young children at home with no income or health insurance. No denominational support or encouragement were given to him during this crisis period. Again, Pastor Archer and his wife dared to plant a new church and sought help from their denomination. They were basically left to their own resources as they sacrificed and gave of their lives to establish this new work. Even their families discouraged the idea of a church plant and said they would fail. Likewise, Pastor Orson, while pastoring a small church, was criticized by a denominational resource person who ironically was there to bring encouragement. Orson was demoralized by the lack of respect shown: "What was really needed

from the denomination was curriculum and Sunday School resources and not someone telling me what I was doing wrong." Each of these pastors had a "sense-breaking" experience with their leadership (Cafferata, 2017). Significantly, in this research not a single reference was made to any denominational involvement which was impactful and encouraging.

A second source of identity influence was found with the congregation. The absence of congregational support has been shown to be a significant identity-stressor (Thoits, 1991). For example, Pastor Richard questioned whether he should continue to pour his life into an unresponsive congregation: "This isn't really what I expected . . . pour my heart, my life, or my passion out and have 47 adults in the auditorium and 16 of them are asleep while I preach. I'm sorry. It's not." But it is not only the unresponsive congregation that is an identity stressor. Conflicts with individuals within the congregation can also be challenging. In fact, when asked during the focus group what the biggest challenge of being a pastor was, the entire group almost in one breath said, "People!" Congregational conflicts can weigh on pastors and challenge their confidence as leaders. Conversely, a respectful congregation can strengthen the calling-identity of a pastor.

Lastly, other seasoned pastors were found to be of immense encouragement in the formation of a calling-identity. Pastor Archer recounted the discouragement he was receiving from all sides in his desire to plant a church. One seasoned pastor's input changed all that:

[Hank] looked at me and he said, man, I believe you can do this. And . . . ironically years later he never ever remembers even saying it! But I think it was a Holy Spirit moment. He spoke, he spoke life into me. I told that story, literally, probably a hundred times about that one person [who] spoke life into me.

Likewise, Pastors Richard, David, Kevin, Walter, Francis, Orson, and Paul mentioned particular

pastors who had spoken into their lives during challenging times. Their input and perspective

significantly bolstered their confidence and helped to galvanize the identity of their calling.

In summary, data retrieved from the pastoral interview and focus group confirm that the

self-identity of pastors is highly salient and more deeply embedded in their person than that of

other vocations. Pastors have been noted to have a deep "structured professional identity

(Horton et al., 2014) that fundamentally shapes one's self-definition. Being a pastor is not just a

job, or an occupation, or even a profession but a calling that involves commitment to pastoral

vows and to God" (Cafferata, 2017, p. 314).

Meaning. Mezirow (1991) and Loder (1989) both affirm that all transformational

learning includes the making of new meanings. As reviewed earlier, the literature revealed that

the presence of a calling was often accompanied by a strong sense of meaning which brought

purpose and significance. That is, the actions, decisions, and goals of the called were

existentially significant and purposeful. This was confirmed with the findings of our study in

several ways.

Pastors often contribute to the epic events in a person's life. Weddings, baby dedications,

funerals, hospital visits, and baptisms are all significant life-events in which a pastor participates.

Such meaningful participation was absent before their calling. For instance, when Pastor Walter

was asked if his love for others has deepened with his calling, he responded,

> Absolutely. Absolutely. *I mean, I'm doing things now that I never thought that I would*
>
> *do.* [italics mine]. I've got a basketball game to go to. We've got a young lady that's in
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> gymnastics and we go to her gym meets. Got another three other young ladies who are in
>
> the ROTC and we go to their competition for the honor guard. I go to ballet recitals. I go

to volleyball games, basketball games, baseball games. I participate in whatever it takes in order to support our youth. You know, I do, Oh, I was out twice this week already on Tuesday and Wednesday, hospital visitation, to have people in our congregation, et cetera, et cetera.

Not all pastors spend as much time attending events that are significant to others, but Pastor Walter had been changed by his pastoral calling and recognized the value he brought to others by his attendance. His calling brought fresh insight into the value of a supportive presence. Likewise, Pastor Harold also recognized the meaningfulness and value his presence can bring to others. During our interview he explained that an aged leader in his church had terminal cancer. He stressed the importance of presence in such situations:

What a strategic role we have to just come alongside and walk with someone through difficult experiences in their life [and] without words necessarily. But that is where a lot of the shepherding does come in. . . . But I sense my ministry with them, it's not so much a lot of new input I'll be giving them. He's in his eighties. But it's just to encourage them, walk with them, watch what God will do in my own life in terms of perhaps, strengthening, deepening my own maturity for a day that that may be what God has for me.

Harold understood the strategic nature of a pastoral call was found by his attendance and presence during a crisis. Pastors believe their presence to be iconic in representing God to those they pastor. Consequently, pastors understand their lives to have great meaning and significance. In the proper context, this is no small matter to the construction of meaning. The meaningfulness of their calling is also connected to the transcendent source of their call.

The pastors interviewed are highly conscious of the Caller in their calling. Unlike most other callings that have been researched, these pastors do not attribute their call to destiny, passion, or a particular ability (Duffy & Dik, 2013). The source of their calling they attribute to a sovereign and all-powerful God who is the creator of all that exists. They believe in a Caller who raises the dead and who brought back to life the Savior of all humankind and who will determine the eternal destiny of each individual. Such awareness and beliefs have deeply impacted these pastors and bring great significance to their work and activities. Their calling is something to be obeyed and not merely pursued. Their calling is not simply following a passion, but Someone they worship and to whom they will have to give an account. By way of analogy, a request made to us by the president would have much more significance than if the same request was made by a friend. Said differently, a personal directive from a CEO has much more importance than the same directive coming from a co-worker. The significance and importance of the request/directive are increased proportionate to the authority and influence of the requestor. These real-life interactions correspond to the calling-significance of the pastors interviewed.

Pastor Richard, for instance, said that each Sunday morning before he preaches, he experiences a "sense of dread." He explained, "Because I'm trying to preach the holy word of God. Trying to handle what I believe is the holy word of God. Handle it well, teach it right. Be correct but be passionate about it." He likened this task to a "solo flight" or to "jumping off a cliff" where his is totally dependent on God for the outcome. "That is, that's my feeling." The sense of dependency and awe was also encountered by Pastor Walter. In response to the question of what it means to be a pastor, Walter responded:

[It's] an unbelievable humbling experience before God and his church needs to be

humbled. Yeah. It is a humbling experience to be an under shepherd to God, to be given

charge of the, to be given charge of those that seek him and having the responsibility to

be correct in your life as well as your word. And that's awesome. And, and to me that is

something that is not only sacred but something I guard closely.

The idea of his call being sacred added signification to Walter's call that goes beyond a mere

vocation. This sacred awareness of the call also produced a feeling of humility in him. In

response to the possibility of one of his two churches closing, Pastor Brian said, "God can do

whatever he wants . . . and that's again, very, very humbling." The humbling reality of outcomes

and changes that are beyond one's scope of ability was felt by these pastors and often led to

statements that said they were dependent on God. Interestingly, the above affective trifecta of

awe, humility, and dependency has been noted by James (1901/1994), Otto (1936), and Briñol et

al. (2018). Briñol et al. (2018) explained the interplay between these affective states:

Awe is a relatively positive emotion that makes people feel uncertain. Several studies

have provided support for the proposition that awe is a relatively positive emotion that is

also associated with doubt. . . . At the same time, awe led people to report greater

tolerance for uncertainty. Furthermore, awe inductions often involve the presence of

contemplating something greater than the self, making people think they are relatively

small, insignificant, and humble. (p. 694)

Such was the experience of the interviewed pastors as they contemplated their calling in the

awareness of God's *mysterium tremendum* as spoken by Otto (1936). Otto (1936) posited that

the awareness of God's overwhelming majesty and might ushers a sense of one's own

creatureliness and dependency. This, too, can be found in the written calling accounts of Isaiah

(Isaiah 6) and Peter (Luke 5:1-11). In their calling, an awareness of overwhelming majesty was coupled with a profound sense of brokenness, creatureliness, and dependency. The awareness of the high calling and the inability to fulfill it was also understood by these two as God's design to develop an attitude of dependence. Thus, weakness and brokenness are meaningfully understood as providential inclusions meant for good.

Pastors also derive meaning from seeing lives change by their ministry and calling. It can be found in the mentoring process of shaping others for the next generation that pastors David, Kevin, and Harold are doing, or it can be experienced in the preaching and teaching done on a Sunday morning. Pastor Harold spoke of this as a sense of reward and confirmation of his call to the ministry:

> I just loved being in that place seeing God do things just in serving him. Nothing spectacular by the world's means, you know, but, but it was with people seeing people respond to Christ, seeing incremental movement in kids' lives that are from very troubled backgrounds.

Summary of transformative learning. In sum, the transformation of identity and the formation of new meanings were found to be a dynamic part of the transformational learning process of being called to a pastoral vocation. These two transformative developments were achieved through the four outlined stages of transformational learning: conflict, critical reflection/scan, convictional knowing, and interpretation/application. The data of this research suggest that the experience of a pastoral calling highly aligns with the presuppositions of transformational learning theory. Specifically, each pastor interviewed indicated that their calling was developed by God through the crucible of transformational learning. This was illustrated through the various narratives and examples found in the interview/focus group data.

Additionally, and in contrast to Loder (1989), the data strongly suggest that a pastoral calling is not so much a transforming moment as it is a multi-faceted convergent process which occurs over an extended period of time. Found throughout this process, however, are the theistic interpretations given by these pastors to their experiences. These interpretations are deeply embedded in a semiotic epistemology which will now be analyzed through Peircean semiotic theory.

Peircean semiotics. "There are no signs for us to see. There is no longer any prophet. And none of us knows how long this will last" (Psalm 74:9). "You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times" (Matthew 16:3b).

Though hardly recognized by theologians or research, the ontology of pastors is highly semiotic. This is especially notable when evaluating the nature of a pastoral calling. Using the triadic Peircean model of sign interpretation as discussed previously (see Figure 1), the various experiences that functioned as calling-signs within the sampling of this research are now considered. Also, for the purpose of clarity these experiences are broadly categorized as internal or external. That is, sign-experiences that have their locus of influence from within the individual are considered as internal. Those which have their source from outside the individual are considered as external.

Internal. The following table (see Table 7) indicates the various internal experiences that functioned as calling-signs for the 11 pastors interviewed.

Table 7

Sampling of Internal Calling-Signs for Pastors

Signs of the Call	Samplings of Internal Calling-Signs Experienced	Number of Pastors with Experience
Dreams/Visions (Imaginative pictures of spiritual realities that have a strong congruence with the recipient)	A dream with the Bible; a dream which conveyed spiritual thirst; the sight of an urban hillside dotted with homes that indicated a church he was to pastor; a religious painting that conveyed the ministry the Lord had prepared	2 [Ethan, Orson]
Embodied Cognitions (somatic experiences that are understood as spiritual realities or truths)	Feelings of peace and love, sense of God, sense of reward, chills/goosebumps	11 [All pastors interviewed]
Epiphanies (sudden and surprising awareness of God's purposes)	Sudden and stark awareness of God's purpose	7 [Archer, Walter, David, Brian, Ethan, Kevin, Orson]
Passion/Interests (affective and purposeful drive to a given objective)	The presence of strong desires to preach and teach the Bible, serve others, see God work, see people healed	11 [All pastors interviewed]
Moral Conviction (strong confident beliefs that require action)	A compelling awareness of the ministry that must be done by the individual	3 [Archer, Walter, Kevin]

Several peaks emerge from the morass of internal calling-sign data. Of note is the unanimous recognition of embodied cognitions in passion and interests as signs of calling. Interestingly, none of the pastors explicitly regarded these two internal phenomena as referent signs given by God. Rather, these internal movements were experienced as a positive motivation in the pursuit of their calling. Granted, it may be hard to attribute to God a human passion or bodily feeling as a theistically initiated calling-sign when it is enmeshed so closely with our own person and interests. As one pastor admitted during a challenging time in the ministry, "I'm not

sure if it is simply my desire to be a pastor or God's leading." Yet, regardless of the murkiness of the origin, every pastor implicitly acknowledged the positive influence and empowerment of their passion and embodied cognitions in the pursuit of their call. If the naturalness of their calling may undermine any confidence of its theistic origin, then one would expect the absence of explicit theistic activity to further challenge that confidence. But in fact, that does not occur. The sparse occurrences of explicit manifestations of the Holy Spirit such as dreams, visions, miracles, and prophetic utterances (Tables 7 and 8, did not alter the confidence of their theistic call. Apparently, the embodied cognitions of peace, love, and the sense of God's presence gave enough internal data for these pastors to believe their calling was from God. This was further reinforced by the external signs of their call.

External signs. The most frequent external calling-sign mentioned could be defined as a providential synchronicity (see Table 8). A providential synchronicity is an uncommon and surprising convergence of events that underscore a particular theistic framework. In this case, it would be that of a pastoral call. Often this is referred to as an "open door," that is, an opportunity that provides the venue and platform to be a pastor. With Pastor Richard, it was the providential opportunity to fill a pulpit of a congregation in need of a pastor. After preaching he was called by the church to be their pastor. He has been there for 17 years. For Pastor Walter, it was when his senior pastor left the church to pursue another ministry and the congregation insisted he candidate for the newly vacated position. Walter understood this opportunity as God's calling to be a pastor even though he was at retirement age and had never pastored a church. He has been the senior pastor of the church for over seven years. Similarly, as associate pastors, Pastors Harold and Kevin were thrust into the senior pastor position when the pastor left. In both instances, the additional responsibility of a senior pastor was regarded as providence

opening a door. The presence of a providential opportunity was considered to be a theistic sign

of a pastoral calling.

The other external sign of a pastoral calling could be categorized as *affirmation from*

others. This category consolidates the remaining items from the list of external signs (Table 8)

as affirmation through prophetic words, spousal support, spiritual mentors/other pastors, and

congregational support. When these items are viewed from the human sciences, the formation of

a pastoral calling aligns with a social constructionist theory of identity (Stets & Burke, 2000).

Yet for these pastors, the affirmation from others is not interpreted as a mere human

phenomenon but as a sign of God's affirmation of a call. In fact, scholars and spiritual leaders

commenting on pastoral-calling frequently see affirmation from others as a biblical guideline, if

not a requirement, for those going into ministry (Friessen, 2004; Pitt, 2012; Spurgeon,

1875/2010). Whether social affirmation is understood from an identity constructionist

perspective or as a guideline for God's will, for the purpose of this research it is important to

underscore the hermeneutic by which a pastor interprets his or her calling. Accordingly, the data

strongly suggests that affirmation from significant others has major sign-bearing significance

when in search of a pastoral calling. Indeed, where affirmation and support were absent, a

subsequent calling crisis occurred in four of the pastors interviewed.

Pastors Brian, Archer, and Orson expected moral support from their denominational

leaders in facing the pastoral challenges before them. Instead, they were left on their own, told

they were not suited for the challenge, or even corrected. Consequently, Pastor Brian left the

ministry for a season, Pastor Archer was demoralized, and Pastor Orson was humiliated and

became greatly discouraged. In the case of Pastor Paul, who served an independent non-

denominational church, the absence of other spiritual leaders with whom he could be affirmed

was also keenly felt as a deficit. He, too, considered leaving the ministry during a challenging time of congregational attrition. It was only through a providential synchronicity that he met another spiritual leader/pastor who gave him a fresh perspective which persuaded him to continue in the ministry.

The above results confirm other studies which found that pastors without a supportive community cannot maintain a strong sense of pastoral vocation or positive identity (Cafferata, 2017; Flourishing, 2013). A semiotic interpretation to these results, however, yields an epistemic construct which understands community affirmation as a theistic sign. The absence of such a sign appears to be analogous to a crossroad with no signage, leaving the traveler to guess which road to choose.

Table 8

Sampling of External Calling-Signs for Pastors

Signs	Samplings of External Calling-Signs Experienced	Number of Pastors with Experience
Synchronicities	Open doors; opportunities	11 [all pastors interviewed]
Miraculous events		0
Prophetic words	Spoken by others	1 [Ethan]
Affirmation from significant others	Spiritual mentors or pastors	5 [Archer, Kevin, Walter, Paul, Orson]
	Spouses	5 [Richard, Archer, Paul, Kevin, David]
	Denominational representatives/leaders	6 [Brian, Orson, Francis, Archer]
	Congregational support	4 [Kevin, Walter, Harold, Richard]

Summary of Peircean semiotics. The ontology and epistemic grid of pastors are highly semiotic. An internal feeling can be more than an emotion or somatic occurrence (Smith, 2010). Rather, somatic feelings of love, peace, confidence, and God's presence have been construed as theistic signs of calling (Pitt, 2012). The interviews and group data from this study confirmed this. The affective experiences which were described as a sense of reward, love, or joy, functioned not only as motivational catalysts but as signs of calling-assurance for several pastors. More extensively, the data pointed to the external sign of community affirmation. Affirmation from significant others was understood by pastors as more than moral support: It was interpreted as God affirming their call. In other words, the affirmation of others was understood as something "external that stands for or signifies something spiritual" ("Sign," n.d., 6a).

Summary

The data gathered from the interviews, focus group, and field notes were interfaced with the various disciplines of phenomenology, theology, epistemology, psychology, transformational learning, and Peircean semiotics. Unintentionally, this resulted in a phenomenological understanding of a pastoral calling which is holistic and panoramic. With the helpful guidance of Moustakas' phenomenological approach, a variety of calling essences emerged from the data. Additionally, the theories of transformational learning as proposed by Loder (1981) and Mezirow (1991) were also found to be systemically accurate in depicting the process and development of a pastoral calling. And lastly, the semiotics of Peirce provided a hermeneutical grid by which to interpret the experiences of pastors who believe in a God who communicates through a variety of internal and external signs. The implications of these findings are discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this research has been to better understand the phenomenological nature and experience of a pastor's calling. In this chapter, the implications and summary of the results will be discussed. This will be done by noting and comparing the findings of this research with that of the literature. Specifically, the theoretical learning theories of Mezirow (1991) and Loder (1989) will be critiqued in the light of the experiences of calling for pastors. Additionally, the research results of the psychological and epistemic dimensions of a pastor's calling will be compared with the relevant literature in these areas. Building upon these comparisons, implications for vocational and pastoral training will be considered along with suggestions for future research. Lastly, the limitations of this research along with some suggestions for future research will be offered.

Summary of Findings

The scope of this research was guided by a series of four research questions that addressed the experiences of calling for pastors. The first question examined the genesis of a pastor's calling. When filtered through the phenomenological grid of Moustakas (1994), several pre-calling essences were present: Each pastor was already engaged in ministry, each was devoted to prayer, and each possessed a strong desire to minister/preach/teach. However, though these pre-calling essences were present, the way and manner of each calling was markedly unique. No two callings were identical, thereby underscoring the limitations of a universal calling-template.

The second question addressed the critical assessment pastors gave to their calling. It was found that pastors critically processed their calling through prayer, pastoral training,

education, other pastors, and their spouses. Not included in the list were any denominational or church institutional leaders. Additionally, the critical assessment made by pastors had a strong epistemic framework that was theistically semiotic. Events, words, circumstances, and responses from significant others were interpreted as signs and indicators from God as to the nature of their calling. As noted in Pastor Richard's reflection, "I think probably the idealism and expectations have been kicked out of me pretty well. It sounds ridiculous, but I'm pretty certain now that God is not going to make me be the next John MacArthur or John Piper." Consequently, the data suggests that the critical reflection of their call led to the formation of self-identity, meaning, and purpose in pastors.

The third question reviewed the subsequent experiences of a pastor after the decision to follow the call. This question sought to understand the ramifications of a calling pursued. The results were mixed with comments suggestive of joy, satisfaction, and meaningful work. There were also, however, strong sentiments about the financial sacrifices and challenges that accompany the call to pastor. At least four pastors noted the importance of spousal agreement in the sacrifices that accompany a pastoral call. Three of the pastors interviewed also expressed discouragement and uncertainty related to congregational size. Their calling was somewhat interpreted by the size and growth of the church they served.

The last research question sought to know how pastors experienced the development and nurturance of their call. In different ways, each pastor expressed the value of the mentoring process of the pastoral call. Among the pastors of larger churches who were interviewed, the desire to mentor younger pastors was present. The passing of the baton to the next generation was important to them. For pastors who had faced challenges to their calling, other mentor-pastors had brought clarity and validation to their calling when in need. For pastors who

suffered unnecessarily alone in their struggle, they wished there had been a seasoned pastor to help navigate their calling during those times. Summarily, each pastor spoke emphatically of the significance of a mentor in the formation and development of his calling.

Discussion

The theoretical and empirical literature of this research was diverse and interdisciplinary. The cause for this was two-fold: the scarcity of theistic calling literature, and the comprehensive or holistic impact a theistic call has on a pastor. Thus, to effectively examine a theistic pastoral-calling, selective aspects of theology, transformational learning, psychology, and semiotics were reviewed in the literature. The discussion that follows will interface my findings with that of the current literature as it pertains to the subject of a pastor's calling.

Theoretical Literature Observations and Comparisons

Theology. A theological understanding was deemed necessary by virtue of the participants' ontological and epistemological views which are eminently theistic. Accordingly, the theological constructs of natural theology and special revelation were explored as they applied to a pastoral call.

Natural theology. The constructs of natural theology which affirm the laws of cause and effect as theistic laws were specifically researched. The data in this research suggest that pastors engage in a theistic empiricism when deciphering their call. That is, their experiences of congregational response, compensation, and opportunities to minister were regarded as confirmations or disconfirmations of a calling. The absence of congregational growth caused three of the 11 pastors to question their calling. This finding corroborates with other studies (Cafferata, 2017; Zondag, 2004) which found that pastors assume congregational growth and

renewal are concomitant with their calling. Where there is no growth or decline in a church, pastors often wonder if God is calling them elsewhere.

The rationalistic idea of cause and effect can also be applied to the common belief that God's calling is accompanied by opportunity. This was expressed by several pastors as an *open door.* The participants connected their call to the various opportunities that came their way. This is in contrast to a calling-belief that transcends obstacles or barriers and in a radical sense, does not listen to pragmatic reasoning (e.g., the biblical patriarchs Abraham, Moses, Gideon, Jeremiah, etc.). The pastors interviewed were not ideologues who had no regard for their circumstances. Rather, the pursuit of their call was guided by the favorable winds of circumstance and compensation. This finding further extends other studies which have demonstrated that pastors pursue places of ministry that are favorable to their well-being and family (Grey, 2012). This finding appears to conflict with the idealism of Piper (2013), who places the call to ministry outside the realm of professional negotiations and career questions of compensation. Perhaps the pastoral vocation, which is largely rooted in the wisdom tradition of scripture, is more connected to empirical considerations of well-being than to idealistic paradigms of spirituality. Pastoral ministry is found in the trenches of human need and suffering. It follows that those who are called as pastors would have a theological grid that perceive the call of God in the corporeal circumstances surrounding their call. In this sense, a pastor is a pastor and not a prophet. Thus, by interpreting a pastor's calling through the behavioral wisdom literature of scripture (contra prophetic literature), an understanding of a pastor's calling assessment may be better understood.

Special revelation. The theological constructs of special revelation affirm that the reality and purposes of God can also be found in sources that are non-empirical and require faith. The

doctrines of all major religions would fall in this category. As such, all theistic calls are non-empirical and fall outside the realm of scientific analysis and require faith. Hence, when applying a special revelation construct to the pastoral call, it is referencing those calling experiences that are metaphysical and transcend the realm of rationalistic thought (James, 1901/1994; Loder, 1981). Such experiences abound and include visions, dreams, miraculous occurrences, acausal synchronicities, prophetic utterances, embodied cognitions, etc. (see Tables 7 and 8, which list the internal and external signs of a pastoral call). Though other calling experiences that are not theistic can also claim non-empirical experiences as a calling source (Duffy & Dik, 2013), and that the source of their calling can be secondary to the calling itself (Duffy et al., 2014), the pastors of this research were emphatic on the theistic source of their calling. For the pastors of this research, without the Caller there was no calling. This underscores the uniqueness and importance of understanding theological constructs when researching a pastor's calling. In the present study this attempt was made by interfacing the wisdom and revelational literature of the Bible with the lived experiences of a pastoral call.

Transformational learning theory. Transformational Learning (TL) emphasizes that adult learning is more about transformation than information. This transformation occurs through the reconstruction of personal meanings placed on identity, values, or goals. Accordingly, results from this research demonstrated that a pastor's calling deeply transform each of these areas. Further, the results underscored the process and development of a calling accorded with the phasing sequence of transformational learning as outlined by Mezirow (1991) and Loder (1989). Also, this research confirmed the findings of other researchers who found TL to be an effective learning theory in representing spiritual growth (Fleischer, 2006; McLaughlin,

2014; Young, 2013). Two novel applications of the theory were found, however, when it was applied to a pastoral calling.

Firstly, the condensed four TL quadrants of this research revealed that a pastoral calling is a process that has momentous events that lead to the conviction of a call. Remove any one of the quadrants of TL and the transformation is not complete. In the analogous construct of Loder (1989), it is an incomplete sentence. The TL learning process of conflict, scanning/critical reflection, convictional insight, and application amazingly correspond to the calling development and experience of a pastor. That is, a developmental model of calling accurately represents the comprehensive and holistic experience of a pastoral call. In the experiences of this study's pastor sampling, the pastoral vocation was not achieved by a single experience or academic degree but through a series of events, disappointments, opportunities, and affirmations. As such, a pastoral calling is likened to a living entity which grows, experiences conflicts, adapts, and needs nurture to survive. The cyclical and dynamic TL process aligns with the experiences of these pastors in contrast to a momentous model which focuses on a singular past event.

Secondly, the particular learning process of TL can be seen in the analysis of each pastoral calling. For example, each pastoral calling was born in the context of conflict. This conflict was diversely experienced as an intense desire to represent God to others as a minister, career search, or during a transitional time of life (e.g., college, retirement). This pre-pastoral calling period can be recognized as a probationary period of experimentation during which the possibility of a pastoral-call was assayed through ministry opportunities, prayer, formal pastoral training, dialogue with significant others, and self-reflection. These activities represent the scanning and critical reflection necessary for TL to occur. During this period the pastoral candidates are seeking clarity and confirmation of their call. The angst of this time can be

intense and similar to other career choice decisions that have large implications. Also, as expressed by the participants, it is a highly impressionable time when the voice and counsel of other experienced pastors carry great significance in determining the calling-framework of the seeker. In calling research, the vital and formative pre-calling period of a pastor with its conflict and critiquing goes largely unrecognized.

A third application of TL to the call of a pastor can be found in the reception of the calling. Loder (1989) described it as convictional knowing and Mezirow (1991) speaks of it as the formation of new meaning. Neither description engages nor elucidates the importance of a theistic faith in the recognition of the call. Loder (1989) does address the inefficacy of the empirical sciences when assessing a theistic convictional knowing. However, the dynamic and response of faith required of the recipient seems to get overlooked in his analysis. Specifically, what conditions enable individuals to believe they have a theistic call? From the data results and research, I would suggest two contributing factors to the engagement of a call: plausibility and positive input from others.

Though faith is not empirical, it is also not separated from the intellect. Faith requires reasons to believe even if those reasons are not empirically based. It is hard for the heart to accept what the mind rejects. Thus, the rationale of a calling-faith can be founded on the experienced joy of a series of acausal synchronicities for which the likelihood of their occurrence is extremely improbable. In both instances, faith is catalyzed by perceptions that support the plausibility of a call.

A second catalyst for calling-engagement comes from the social constructionist field. Though faith is an individual act, it is often constructed through the input of others. The commonly held belief that faith arises through the privacy of one's devotions was challenged by

this research. The majority of the pastors had private moments of inspiration, but they all attested to the major impact others had—for better or worse—upon their faith. This not only applies to the initial calling but to the maintenance of their calling as well. A conclusion to be drawn from this is that through the input of others, faith about one's calling is engaged (Romans 10:14–15).

Psychological dimensions of a pastor's calling. Much research has been made on the emotional dynamics of being a pastor. In contrast, little or no research has focused on the psychological dimensions of a pastoral calling. This being the case, this study could only represent a cursory and selective analysis of those affective conditions that touch upon a pastoral calling. Emerging from the literature, however, several psychological constructs seem to strongly correspond to the calling experiences of pastors. Salient among these constructs are well-being, identity, and meaning.

Well-being. Since the emergence of positive psychology, well-being research has thrived (O'Neal, 2017). Several recent quantitative studies have focused on the behaviors and experiences of pastors associated with well-being (Bloom, 2017; Flourishing, 2013; Lifeway Research, 2016, 2017). The data from this study of a pastor's calling confirm the findings of those studies which found that a marked increase of well-being occurs when a calling is sensed and lived out (O'Neal, 2017). Characteristics of well-being such as meaning and purpose (Duffy et al., 2012), fulfillment and satisfaction (Hirschi, 2012), and career engagement and efficacy (Domene, 2012; Duffy et al., 2012; Hirschi, 2012) were prevalent in the pastors interviewed. Thus, the qualitative nature of this study extends the literature of well-being research by the rich narratives supplied by the pastoral sampling, who identified particular aspects of a healthy calling for pastors such as purpose, meaning, fulfillment, and career engagement and efficacy.

Absent from well-being literature, however, were the particular aversive calling-conditions which accompany the calling of Christ. The dissonance of well-being literature with the lived realities of pursuing a pastoral call which was briefly reviewed, underscored the uniqueness of a pastoral calling in the calling and well-being literature. Hence, this reinforces the need for additional academic research on the particularity of a pastor's calling.

Identity. Perhaps, of all transformations that are deeply embedded traits of a pastoral calling is that of identity (Cafferata, 2017). This was explored through identity theories of social constructionism and well-being research on pastors in ministry (Adams & Bloom, 2017; Bloom, 2017; Flourishing, 2013). The interviews in this study confirmed the pivotal role others have in the identity formation of a pastor. Each pastor alluded to a significant person/s who was of crucial importance in his identity as a pastor. These findings diverged from the literature, however, in the theistic emphasis pastors gave to their identity formation. Social constructionism may exclusively cite the values and expectations of the social environment in the formation of self-identity, but these pastors also emphasized theistic epiphanies, providential synchronicities, and Spirit-initiated embodied cognitions as major influences in their identity-formation as pastors. A mere human science analysis that excludes this theistic influence in identity formation does not accurately represent the pastor's narrative of his or her calling. Consequently, this research argues for a pastoral calling-identity that is a theistically social constructionist phenomenon.

The pastor sampling also revealed that servanthood and shepherding were the most common identity roles pastors assumed. Though nothing in the literature examining pastoral identity highlighted these assumed roles, it would be presumptuous to conclude that an identity question in another qualitative study with pastors would not have the same results as this study.

As a side note, researching the self-identity in a pastor's calling entailed the compilation of snippets of data from a variety of sources. Absent from the data base (or simply not found) was a study that singularly focused on identity and pastoral calling. Given the importance self-identity has in pastoral-work efficacy, well-being in ministry, and clarity of purpose (Bloom, 2017; Lifeway Research, 2017), this finding further underscores the need for an academic project that explores this one subject.

Lastly, the research of this study corroborated with other researchers who have observed that a calling-identity is not a static phenomenon but evolves and changes with time (Flourishing, 2013). That is, though the essence of ministry and servanthood may remain unchanged, the maturation of that call opens other possibilities as a pastor. Consequently, several of the pastors stated their expanding call to include the mentoring of younger pastors and being of assistance to smaller struggling churches with interim ministry. Common among these pastors was their willingness to "move with the cloud" and take on the next challenge God may have for them, thus illustrating that for these pastors their primary identity (and calling) was that of God's servant and not merely a servant of others. Though this is often one and the same, the distinction is critical in determining how, where, and why these pastors served.

Meaning. The relation of meaning to a calling has greater significance than it may at first appear. As one team of researchers observed, "Meaning is a core aspect of calling" (Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011, p. 1007). The literature understands meaning to be inclusive of significance, coherence, and purpose (Martela & Steger, 2016). Stated differently, a meaningful experience will have significance, coherence, and purpose. This was borne out in the pastoral narratives of this study.

Significance. The pastors in this study frequently spoke of meaningful events that were highly significant such as weddings, baptisms, marriage counseling, and funerals. They also were cognizant of the pastoral role they assumed as God's representative when teaching or preaching the Bible. When speaking of that role, several pastors stressed the "accountability" and "weighty responsibility" of that role. By comparison, there were other experiences that questioned the significance of their work because of an unresponsive or small congregation. In these experiences of insignificance, the search for significance was engaged and pursued through the counsel of other pastors, prayer, research, spouses, or spiritual mentors. This search suggests that the exhortation to faithfulness in the face of fruitlessness does not satisfy the innate desire for significance. Pastors want their work to make a difference. As one pastor noted, it was his sense of reward (i.e., significance) in seeing lives changed through his ministry that confirmed his call. Thus, this study confirms other research that established a positive correlation between work efficacy and the sense of significance. It also extends Meaning in Life research (Steger, 2012a) by applying its constructs to pastors. That is, the presence of significance is essential to the maintenance and meaningfulness of a pastoral calling.

Coherence. A pastor's calling is experienced as meaningful when it contains connections, reliable associations, or coherence (Heintzelman et al., 2013). This was verified by the narratives of this study. When ministry did not align with the expectations and beliefs of the pastors, it lacked meaningfulness for them. When Pastor Harold became overly involved in the administrative responsibilities of the church, he felt disconnected from his calling. Through prayer and education (Doctor of Ministry studies), Pastor Harold transferred to another church where his ministry cohered with his calling. When Pastor Kevin was told to push a broom as a youth pastor, this conflicted with his perception of pastoral work. Only after he added the

dimension of servanthood to the pastoral calling did the idea of doing menial work as a pastor make sense or have meaning for him. That is, pushing a broom became coherent as a pastoral activity. These two experiences became meaningful and transformative as these pastors cohered to their calling.

The importance of calling-coherence and pastoral identity was also found in a study that included nearly 1000 pastors in eight different denominations. The study (Flourishing, 2013) found a strong pastoral identity had well-defined core commitments, a clear understanding of strengths and weaknesses, and activities based on core-commitments. The research suggests an undeveloped calling identity can produce murky or vague calling-commitments which can bring an existential sense of incoherence. In Pastor Harold's experience, there was a drifting from the core essentials of his call. The meaning of his pastoral calling was yet being developed. However, his development of well-defined core commitments and the pursuit of activities consonant with those core commitments brought about calling-coherence.

The new meanings of pastoral-servanthood with Pastor Kevin also corroborates with the literature of transformational learning (TL). TL is the application of new meanings to a behavior or event which results in a changed worldview. For Loder (1989), this meant the hidden orders of coherence and meaning (which are present in all spheres of life by the Creator) emerge to replace or alter the conditions of dissonance and disorder. As applied to Pastor Kevin, this would be the replacement of the incongruous beliefs of pastoring and broom-pushing with the coherent belief of servanthood. In fact, the construct of pastoral-servanthood is strongly held by Pastor Kevin as a cohering element to the many activities in which he feels called as a pastor. Servanthood brings a great deal of coherence and meaning to his ministry.

Purpose. A significant source of purpose has been related to meaning and calling research (Haney-Loehlein et al., 2015). Thus, it may come as no surprise that the results of the interviews and focus group revealed pastors to be a people-group with a strong sense of purpose. A distinguishing difference among pastors, however, is the theistic source of their purpose. Interpretations for life circumstances and events are laced with theistic purpose throughout the pastoral narratives. Whether it be an angry congregant or an anonymous gift of $50,000, events are regularly interpreted from a centralized theistic construct. "God is in the details" is the way one pastor mentioned it. Another cited the sovereignty of God as the one who opens or closes the doors of opportunity in confirming his call. Yet another claimed that it is by grief and hardship God confirms a calling. All these interpretations of life's occurrences which bring meaningful purpose originate from an epistemic theistic center. Amazingly, this prevailing zeitgeist among pastors is hardly mentioned in the literature and scarcely present in academic calling research for pastors.

Epistemic considerations for a pastoral calling. Those aspiring to a pastoral vocation are among the most theistically sensitive of vocational seekers. It is not enough for these seekers to pursue a pastoral calling based on career aspirations or personal interests. Those desirous of a pastoral vocation want assurance their calling is from God. Yet, at various times, the pastors interviewed struggled to know if God or another influence was the source of their calling. This corroborates other calling-research which cited the identification of calling-source to be the vexing question in calling research studies (Dik et al., 2012). This pivotal question reveals the epistemic challenge pastors encounter when pursuing their call. Part of the difficulty lies in the obscure and undefined epistemology of a pastor's calling. Upon analysis of the data, however, a consistent semiotic hermeneutic was found in the way pastors understood their calling.

Semiotics. The epistemology of a theistic calling was found to be surprisingly semiotic. The following question was asked in several different ways during the interview: How do you know God has called you? Several pastors said, "I just know, I know." When pressed further, however, there were definite experiences that served as signs which validated their calling. By comparing the convictional insights of their calling with a Peircean model of semiotics, it was found that the pastors of our research were theistically semiotic in the interpretation of God's calling. Both internal and external signs of their call were pivotal in the validation and assurance of their calling. By calling attention to Peirce's triadic semiotic model, the identification and interpretation of those theistic signs can be more readily understood. Additionally, this study found that the strength and clarity of calling signs and their interpretation were proportionate to the strength of a pastor's calling. That is, an indefinite sign brought little conviction. In the one or two pastors of our sampling where the strength of calling was challenged, the presence of definitive calling-signs was proportionally lower. Consequently, a semiotic hermeneutic may inform the epistemic process by which pastors (and others) may better understand their theistic-based call (McKenna et al., 2015).

Embodied cognitions. Perhaps the experience of embodied cognitions as a calling-sign is among the most unexplored phenomena in the birthing of a calling-conviction. This affectively informed cognitive experience was deeply felt as a thought, insight, or epiphany accompanied by a strong theistic awareness. The thought or insight may have arisen from the reading of scripture (e.g., Walter), during a time of prayer (e.g., Brian), or from a series of serendipities (e.g., Francis). Moreover, the importance of these embodied cognitions can be observed in the calling-validation they gave to several of the pastors. However, as important as these experiences were to the validation and motivation of their calling, the affective nature of a

pastoral-call is scarcely noted in the literature. An exception to this is the strong passion necessary for a pastoral-call as mentioned by Spurgeon (1875/2010). But what of other affective cognitions such as faith, compassion, sense of reward, joy, theistic presence, or significance? Do these embodied cognitions have importance in deciphering a theistic call? Can their presence (or absence) be recognized as indicators of a pastoral call?

The downplaying of sensory data in the formation of a calling can undermine the very processes by which humans learn and find meaning. Cognitive science researchers have argued that the over-emphasis on rationalistic thinking of Western culture ignores the broad spectrum of affective experience necessary for the formation of meaning:

> Western culture has inherited a view of understanding as an intellectual cognitive operation of grasping of concepts and their relations. However, cognitive science research has shown that this received intellectualist conception is substantially out of touch with how humans actually make and experience meaning. The view emerging from the mind sciences recognizes that understanding is profoundly embodied, insofar as our conceptualization and reasoning recruit sensory, motor, and affective patterns and processes to structure our understanding of, and engagement with, our world. A psychologically realistic account of understanding must begin with the patterns ongoing interaction between an organism and its physical and cultural environments and must include both our emotional responses to changes in our body and environment, and also the actions by which we continuously transform our experience. Consequently, embodied understanding is not merely a conceptual/propositional activity of thought, but rather constitutes our most basic way of being in, and engaging with, our surroundings in a deep visceral manner. (Johnson, 2015, p. 6)

Thus, the epistemic inclusion of affective data is shown to be necessary for a call to be meaningful. An overly rationalistic framework which ignores such data is "substantially out of touch with the way humans make and experience meaning" (Johnson, 2015, p. 6). When researching the affective dynamics of a pastoral calling, the interview data of this study was infused with affective information. Notations made by the pastors such as grief, sense of reward, confirmation, hope, faith, joy, fulfillment, desire, enjoyment, God's presence, etc., had great influence in the formation of their calling. Lacking, however, was an epistemic formulation which accounted for the importance and influence affective presence had on their calling. Accordingly, an epistemic framework which affirms embodied cognitions may bring clarity and deepen the meaning of a calling. It can also bring a more wholistic understanding of a call by the valuing and inclusion of the affections as a viable data for the called. And lastly, it can encourage a pastor to guard and value the affections of the heart, knowing that from it flows the springs of life (Proverbs 4:23) where the nurturance and sustaining of a call is found.

The importance of affect to a faith-calling is not a novel development. The 18th century revivalist and former Princeton University president, Jonathon Edwards (1720/2001), is acknowledged by many as "the greatest philosopher-theologian yet to grace the American scene" (Piper & Taylor, 2004, p. 13). Edwards witnessed, participated in, and saw the demise of what is known by historians as The Great Awakening revival. As a corrective and future safeguard to the work of God in New England, Edwards wrote "A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections" (1720/2001). In this treatise Edwards observed that it is "by the mixture of counterfeit religion with true, not discerned and distinguished, that the devil has had his greatest advantage against the cause and kingdom of Christ" (Edwards, 1720/2001, p. 3). He further wrote,

Therefore, it greatly concerns us to use our utmost endeavors clearly to discern, and have

it well settled and established, wherein true religion does consist. Till this be done, it

may be expected, that great revivings of religion will be but of short continuance.

(Edwards, 1720/2001, p. 4)

For Edwards, the discernment for true religion can be found in the affections. Interestingly, he did not choose a behavioral or doctrinal template as the means of discernment. Perhaps, he assumed those of deviant character or blatant doctrinal error are readily seen and therefore their counterfeit religion needs no exposure. Regardless, Edwards pointedly acknowledged the affections as the meter for testing whether a person's spirituality was false or true. Can the importance and measuring of a call likewise be discerned through the affections?

Edwards defined affection as the inclination of the soul to something. If the inclination is favorable, intense, and vigorous, it can be regarded as the affection of love. If the soul or will is disinclined to a matter, he described it as hatred. Thus, "it is the degree to which the will is active, either toward or against something, that makes it an affection" (Edwards, 1720/2001, p. 12). Can the favorable (i.e., positive) inclinations of the will that are directed to an evangelical pastoral calling such as teaching the Bible, preaching, counseling, servanthood, the glory of God, and the furtherance of His kingdom be understood as indicators of God's calling to be a pastor? If so, then an epistemic awareness of such affections can be used to bring clarity and assurance to a pastoral calling.

Vocational and career dimensions to a pastoral calling. Most of the pastors interviewed believed that being a pastor had greater demands and accountability than other callings. Thus, while acknowledging the validity of other calls, most pastors sided with Piper's (2013) non-professional construct of a pastoral call. This is in comparison to that of the

Reformed theological framework which tends to place the pastoral calling on the same level as other callings (Gibbs, 2005; Gibbs & Coffey, 2001; Nel & Scholtz, 2016). The pastors of this study connected the greater accountability to the weight and eternal consequences their calling carries. This reiterates the uniqueness of a pastoral calling in calling research. While other callings are measured by success or personal fulfillment, a pastoral calling is a stewardship for which the pastor will have to answer to God. This variable, though hardly mentioned in the literature, was a viable concern to the pastors in this study.

Empirical Literature Observations and Comparisons: Transformative Learning

In several ways, the empirical data found in calling and related literature corroborated with the data results of this study. This was found to be especially true in transformative learning. For instance, the two transformative learning studies reviewed which incorporated a theistic dimension to their research support the findings of calling examined in this research. Each of these studies revealed the process of conflict, scan, convictional insight, and application to be present in transformative learning. Among most pastors interviewed it was found, however, that the conflict and scanning of this process took place at Bible college or seminary before any of the pastors were convinced of their calling. Additionally, it was a convergent process wherein a variety of experiences worked synergistically resulting in a convictional call. This too, adds to the rich and diverse way that transformative learning can be experienced.

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Implications

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Pastors overwhelmingly cite their calling as the basis for attending seminary and the pursuit of ministry (Lincoln, 2011; Lose et al., 2015). This research has explored the various dimensions of a pastoral calling through a multidisciplinary method. This aligns with other calling research which defines a calling as a multidimensional construct (Duffy et al., 2014;

Loder, 1989). Consequently, various theological, psychological, sociological, educational, and vocational constructs were examined and utilized as they pertained to a pastoral calling, producing a limited but holistic view of a pastoral call. The implications of this finding are profound in its theoretical, empirical, and practical applications.

Theoretical

As epic and pivotal as a calling may be for a pastor, the research literature that examines its various assumptions is incredibly sparse. Amazingly, ministers will spend thousands of dollars and years of institutional training based upon a calling which has little and ambiguous research. Theoretical calling constructs that elucidate the epistemic and affective nature of a theistic call are imperative but mostly absent from the literature. Accordingly, a significant finding of this research was the pervasive semiotic hermeneutic assumed by pastors in the interpretation of their calling.

Another significant theoretical implication is the developmental nature of a theistic calling. The view of calling as an event rather than process is a theoretical construct that needs to be re-examined. In this regard, Loder's (1989) book, *The Transforming Moment,* can be misleading. Perhaps a more accurate depiction of a pastoral-calling could be named as the *transforming process*. This conclusion led to the development of the convergent calling theory which posits that the calling to be a pastor is a convictional belief that is born through a variety of events, experiences, and contexts.

Empirical

The empirical findings of this research also revealed the process by which pastors know, develop, and nurture their call. This was accomplished by processing the research data through various tools of identification such as the four-stage transformative learning grid, the Peircean

Triadic Semiotics of a Pastoral Calling, pastoral identifications with biblical examples of a

calling, phenomenological essences of a pastoral calling, and samplings of internal and external

calling-signs for pastors. The empirical data gained by these tools underscore the complexity

and richness of a theistic calling for pastors.

Practical

The combined contributions of the theoretical and empirical findings of this research

have practical implications for various people groups and institutions. Of first importance are

pastors.

Pastors. This research was born in the context of knowing the epic struggle and

challenges pastors encounter in the pursuit of their calling. Their calling can be shrouded in

ambiguous expectations that cloud understanding and create congregational conflict. Pastors are

assumed to fill roles that are not communicated or clearly understood by the churches they serve

(Table 5 Grey, 2012). Further, when called to a church, pastors assume they are there to bring

renewal and growth (Cafferata, 2017). When growth and renewal do not happen, the angst of

cognitive dissonance becomes an unwelcomed accuser in the mind of a pastor. The researched

exploration of the assumed roles, identity, and calling epistemologies of pastors in this study will

hopefully bring clarity to the felt but often unexplored definitions pastors have of their calling.

Those who are not pastors often do not understand the dynamics of a pastoral calling, and

thus, are limited in their ability to empathize and grasp the depth of their struggle. Contemporary

research on calling will often lightly allude to the religious/theistic aspect of a call as something

from the past (Myers, 2014). The Christian academic community, which certainly understands

the significance of a pastoral calling, has mostly produced literature/books that provide

prescriptive guidelines when pursuing a call to ministry. This was not the goal of this research

nor was it found to be especially applicable to those already serving as pastors. Rather, the qualitative research of this study was intended to understand and elucidate the lived experiences of a pastoral calling. This attempt was made with the assumption that unrecognized and unclear beliefs about a calling produce unidentifiable existential stress. Understanding a calling through the descriptive process may not solve the "how" questions of a pastoral call, but it may answer some of the "why" questions and thereby enable a pastor to make sense of their experiences in light of their calling.

Pastoral mentors and denominational leaders. The research noted the importance and lack of mentorship for struggling pastors. Input from denominational leaders was found to have significant influence when pastors are either inexperienced or being challenged in their calling. The study also observed how the absence of executive denominational involvement was instrumental in two of the pastors leaving the pastorate, only one of whom returned. This is not to place blame on anyone but to underscore the vulnerability of pastors to those who are recognized as spiritual leaders in their community of faith. This finding lends itself to another observation.

The data from this research indicate that though pastors attribute their calling identity to God, it is in fact, largely formed (or de-formed) through the medium of people. The input from a congregation, significant others, spouses, and other pastors was found to be necessary for a pastor's calling to be sustained and flourish (Flourishing, 2013; Strunk et al., 2017).

Vocational counselors. In calling literature, the absence of research in theistic-calling is profound. The secularization of calling through the human and vocational sciences has led to a prevailing non-theistic construct of calling among researchers (Myers, 2014; White et al., 2016). Yet, for many, the belief and experience of a theistic calling is a living reality. Vocational

counselors stand at the crossroads for many who are unclear, uncertain, and conflicted about their vocational-future. An existential understanding of a theistic calling will aid the vocational counselor to assist those who claim to have a theistic-calling.

Calling pedagogy. Perhaps, of all implications emerging from this research, the most significant is the mandate to develop a calling pedagogy for pastoral education and training. The reasons for this are several.

Firstly, each of the pastors interviewed acknowledged that though they were in seminary or Bible college, remarkably, they were undecided and unclear about their calling. In a sense, they went to these institutions of pastoral training to explore the possibilities of a calling. Thus, such institutions have the opportunity to explicitly and expansively interact with an epic subject for pastoral candidates that is often given minor attention. Why not offer one or two courses to a subject that will reoccur throughout the tenure of being a pastor?

As noted, the variated experience of a pastoral calling cannot be answered by any one discipline. Rather, as it has been suggested by this study, the calling of a pastor is a convergence of multiple events, meanings, and experiences which together are distilled into a calling (Figure 4). The making of a pastoral call is multi-dimensional, requiring it to be approached from a multi-disciplined framework. A theological exegesis or teaching on the psychological dynamics of a call are necessary, but not fully representative of the experience. In a major way, Loder's multi-disciplinary approach to religious education coincides with what is required for pastors (Loder, 1981). If approached too narrowly, the broad and rich calling spectrum of spiritual, psychological, and vocational dimensions will be missed. By contrast, a holistic approach that explores the identity and practices of pastoral vocational formation necessitated by this distinctive identity will equip the pastoral candidate for the multi-layered calling of a pastor.

A curriculum exploring the various dimensions of a theistic call that is inclusive of theological, philosophical, and the human science disciplines is essential to adequately prepare a pastor in guarding the stewardship of pastoral ministry (see Appendix E for an example). A subject that is foundational for pastors from the attendance of seminary to their lifelong vocational pursuit of God's will deserves at the very least a stand-alone course. But if recent book sales are indicators of interest, calling pedagogy does not only apply to pastors.

The Purpose Driven Life (Warren, 2002) emphasizes the calling God has for each of us. This book has sold 32 million copies in over 85 different languages in less than 20 years (National Religious Broadcasters, 2019). People want to know purpose and meaning in their lives (Frankl, 1985). In fact, some would argue that the search for meaning is innate and is something that distinguishes us as humans (King et al., 2016). A curriculum that explores the various dimensions of a vocation or calling is a human-relevant subject. This would be especially true of college students who are career-conscious and are in search of direction. For example, research found that for more than 40% of university students, career calling was a salient construct (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2010). Other studies found that during this life stage students often feel the painful angst of vocational uncertainty (Price, 2013). A course that explores the meaning and constructs of calling can disambiguate the vocational crisis during college. As such, this would be especially pertinent to a college or university curriculum where the construct and message of a call are embraced and a theology of work is emphasized (Stevens, 1999; Volf, 2001).

Additionally, a theistic course or seminar that explores the various aspects of a call could enrich a church's understanding of its mission. Five established seminaries in an extended study found that their graduates who had become pastors profoundly understood their work as a calling

but failed to instill that same vision in their congregants (Lose et al., 2015). The calling identity of a church could be strengthened by exploring the constructs by which callings are modeled in scripture, experienced by others, and communicated by the Spirit. By exploring a biblical integration of work, experience, and given signs of a calling, the identity of God's ekklesia could be reached by all within a church.

To this list of beneficiaries of a holistic calling pedagogy I would add the various disciplines that broadly interact with questions of career, purpose, meaning, and fulfillment. This list may appear to be inclusive of everyone, but perhaps that is the point: The over-arching search for purpose and meaning is tied to who we are and all that we aspire to do (Frankl, 1985). Whether it is vocational counselors, therapists, or organizational research consultants, each respective discipline examines the conditions and characteristics of purposeful behavior which brings fulfillment of some kind (Adams & Bloom, 2017; Dik & Duffy, 2009; Guo et al., 2014; Haney-Loehlein et al., 2015; Myers, 2014; O'Neal, 2017). A holistic calling pedagogy is foundational to that task in equipping pastors, professionals, and individuals in the search of a purposeful and meaningful calling.

Delimitations and Limitations

The scope of this research was focused on a particular group of experienced pastors who held particular beliefs. By default, the results of this research would be skewed if they were applied to all people groups. For example, this research purposely used a sampling of conservative pastors who held to the historic faith found in the Apostle's Creed. This was not to distance the more liberal pastors; rather, it was for reasons of familiarity and vested interest I had with this particular group. However, there were two other clear limitations of this study that were not intended. Only one ethnic minority and no female pastors are found in this sampling.

This was not intentional, and I had hoped for better representation from either group. However, the area in which I undertook the research is predominantly served by male Caucasian pastors.

A further limitation found in this study was in the operational definition of a pastor as someone employed by a church to do the traditional tasks of a pastor such as preach, teach, counsel, and officiate significant life events. But is the gifting or calling of a pastor limited to this stereotype? Can someone be gifted as a pastor but not have the office or position of a pastor? For example, much of the work done by Christian therapists can be described as nurturant biblical guidance, that is, pastoral work. Or what of Orson, one of the pastors in this study who left the pastorate altogether? Is he still gifted and called as a pastor? He believes he still is. I mention these examples to illustrate the narrow conception of a gifting and calling that is contextually mentioned only once in the Bible (Ephesians 4:11). Thus, the narrow definition and small sample group used in this study imposed limitations to the research and results.

Recommendations for Future Research

The field of research for a theistic-centered pastoral calling is largely untilled. Besides the obvious expansion of the demographics and definition of pastors, there are many directions that theistic calling research can take. Contemporary popular literature such as *The Purpose Driven Life* has successfully reached the masses for whom it was intended. And as such, the content is mostly anecdotal, directive, and prescriptive. Theistic calling literature, however, that is critical in analysis and research based, would further deepen and enrich the popular field that exists by synchronizing and comparing the work of other disciplines. For example, the semiotic inferences of calling interpretation were prevalent among the pastors researched. Other researchers have also noted the need for research that has a more symbolic approach when studying events that are religious (Martos et al., 2010; McLaughlin, 2014). Thus, further

research that explores semiotic theory as it pertains to a theistic call can be expanded to include other religions and spiritual experiences. The significance of such research can help to establish a semiotic lexicon of common interpretations of events and experiences that are linked to having a call.

Connected to this are the embodied experiences of God's presence which are understood as calling confirmations and a mode of spiritual communication. This opens up the large and rather unexplored area of affective spiritual language that is part of the calling lexicon of pastors and Christians in general. Interestingly, Jonathon Edwards (1746) initiated a masterful study on religious affections in the mid-part of the 18th century that is still relevant. Smith (2010) has also contributed to this phenomenon in his book, *Thinking in Tongues: Pentecostal Contributions to Christian Philosophy.* Both texts note the importance of embodied cognition as a valid means of knowing; Edwards (1746) does so from a biblical perspective and Smith (2010) from a philosophical/theological perspective. Qualitative research which explores the affective experiences of a theistic calling will further elucidate the intuitive and immediate processes on which many calling decisions are made, and thus, enrichening the epistemology of a pastoral calling.

This study also noted that among the more seasoned and experienced pastors, the desire to mentor younger pastors was a growing interest. The prospect of leaving parish ministry to focus on this forming passion was freely discussed. Subsequently, this development poses the question of how a pastoral calling may change, grow, and evolve. Future research that studies the maturation of a calling and its connection to the human life cycle is a field of research that can produce predictive phases, that is, if there are any at all.

One last suggestion for further research is the social-constructionist theory of identity formation of a calling. In a small qualitative study ($n = 57$) done with freshman and sophomores at a small denominationally-affiliated liberal arts university, students were likely to situate their calling in the midst of social interaction (Price, 2013). Other researchers with different sampling groups have also observed the importance of a supportive community for the maintenance and nurture of a pastor's calling (Bloom, 2017; Cafferata, 2017; Strunk et al., 2017). A meta-analysis that notes the research and synthesizes the findings on identity formation and a pastor's calling can consolidate the various fragments of research on this profoundly important subject.

Summary

The explication of a calling is of importance to a variety of groups. From the field of organizational management (Myers, 2014) to the institutions of higher learning where men and women are trained to be pastors (Lose et al., 2015), the sense and pursuit of a calling is demonstrably important. Its value and contribution in understanding well-being, work efficacy, and meaningful vocational pursuits has been well established in the research community and continues to place itself alongside the other disciplines of human science. And, though calling research has burgeoned in the last 20 years, it is admittedly a young discipline with definitions and concepts still in process.

The challenge and outlier nature of this study were twofold: the intangible nature of a theistic calling and the comprehensive nature of a pastoral calling. First, pastors overwhelmingly cite God as the source of their calling. This is something no other profession ardently claims. Thus, research sources were limited. Additionally, researching religious constructs and experiences was necessary to understand the epistemic and ontological frameworks of a pastor's call. Unexpectedly, a strong semiotic hermeneutic was uncovered in the way pastors process

their calling. Secondly, the epic nature of that calling which comprehensively impacts a pastor's

life, necessitated multidisciplinary research that explored a variety of psychological, social, and

cognitive beliefs which were meaningful to pastors. This led to the gathering of data through an

eclectic array of sources that could give a phenomenological depiction of a pastoral calling. This

endeavor unintentionally resulted in a holistic study of a pastoral call which I believe most

accurately represents the significance of a pastoral calling, for this calling is not simply to a task,

cause, or vocation, but a life purpose that is deeply structured in the identity, faith, and outlook

of a pastor.

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APPENDIX A: INFORMATION/PARTICIPATION FORM

I would like to invite you to participate in a research study that explores the experience of calling for pastors. Some of the questions guiding this research are:

- How do pastors describe their initial experiences in their search and sense of calling?

- In what ways have they critically reflected on their calling experiences?

- How do they describe the actions and decisions that have resulted from their calling?

- And, how would they describe the seasons and development of their call?

Through the course of this research and as a former pastor I have attempted to answer these questions. My own calling and experiences, however, I am not researching. I am eager to hear and document your journey and experience of calling. The record of your journey will benefit many others who are in pursuit of God's calling as pastors.

The time-commitment for each participant will approximately be one to two hours and will consist of a semi-directed open-ended interview with field notes taken by the study's author, Thom Connors. The interview will be recorded and then transcribed with pseudonyms being supplied for the names and churches of the participants. Confidentiality of the participants will always be maintained. To ensure accuracy, after the interview a transcription of the interview will be emailed to you for any corrections or additions as you see fit. Additionally, there will be an opportunity to attend an expense paid luncheon with the other participant-pastors. At this luncheon a round-robin conversation on *Answering the Call* will be the focus of our time together. Hearing your fellow-pastors share their views and experiences of God's calling should be an enrichening and informative event!

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or to withdraw at any time. If you are interested in participating,

please answer the Participant Questionnaire and sign the Informed Consent form. The completed forms can be sent via email or mailed to the address below. This study is in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Education program through Liberty University's School of Education, Lynchburg, Virginia.

My hope is that this study will energize and strengthen your calling!

Blessings in Christ,

Thom Connors

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT QUESTIONNAIRE

Name:_____ **Church** _____

Address_____**Years as senior pastor**_____

Phone_____**email**_____

Question One: Do you personally have any disagreements with the essential doctrines of the Christian faith as outlined in the Apostles' Creed?   Y____N____

> I believe in God the Father, Almighty maker of heaven and earth; And in Jesus Christ His only begotten Son; He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, Born of the Virgin Mary; He suffered under Pontius Pilate, Was crucified, died and was buried; He descended into hell, On the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, Where He sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; From whence He shall return to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, In one holy universal church, In the communion of saints, In the forgiveness of sins, In the resurrection of the dead, And in the life everlasting. Amen.

Question Two: What denomination or Christian tradition (e.g., Pentecostal, fundamentalism, etc.) do you identify with? _____

Question Three: Are you serving in a church where the initial agreement of the pastor and the length of their tenure is voluntarily determined by the congregation and the pastor? Y___N___

Question Four: How many years have you served as a senior pastor or as the main spiritual leader in a church? _____

Question Five: What is your educational background?

> A. Diploma/ Certificate ____Major_____

B. Undergraduate ___Major_____

C. Graduate ___Major_____

D. Postgraduate ___Major_____

Question Six: What is your marital status? How many years?

A. Single____   B. Married ___   C. Divorced ___   D. Remarried ___

Question Seven: When were you born?

A. 1924-1954   B. 1954-1964   C. 1964-1974   D. 1974-1994

Question Eight: Do you know of anyone else who might be interested in participating in this

study?

Name:_____Phone_____email_____

Name:_____Phone_____email_____

APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Thomas R. Connors. You may contact him at tconnors@liberty.edu. His faculty advisor is Dr. James Fyock at Liberty University's School of Education and may also be contacted at jafyock@liberty.edu. Additionally, if you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and wish to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or irb@liberty.edu.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

This research poses minimal risk as it is asking you to share your experiences of calling as a pastor. However, as a precaution, all identity markers such as location and names, will be substituted with either pseudonyms or codes to ensure the confidentiality of all that is shared. This will also be the case of any published material made available to the public. Additionally, any information or data gathered electronically or otherwise, will be kept private, stored, and made assessible only to the researcher by password encryption. In the event that information regarding child abuse, elder abuse, intent to harm self or others, it is required by law that this information be reported to the legal authorities, thus, nullifying any confidentiality agreements.

Your participation in this study is designed to benefit pastors, pastoral training curriculum, spiritual/vocational counselors, and anyone wanting to have a holistic understanding of what it means to be called of God as a pastor.

Statement of Consent:

If you have read and understood the above information, the Information/Participation

Form, and Questionnaire Form; and agree to participate in this study of a Pastor's Calling; and to being recorded during the interview for transcription purposes, please sign and date below:

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL

INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAVE BEEN ADDED TO THIS

DOCUMENT)

Printed Name:_____

Signature:_____ Date:_____

Please make a copy of this form for your records and send the completed form/s to either

address:

Thom Connors

tconnors@liberty.edu

Thank You!

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW AND FOCUS GROUP RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Interview Questions

Prayer/Introduction:

You've been asked to participate in this study because of your years of experience and interactions with God's calling. The interview is primarily wanting to understand what your experience of calling has been. There are many books that teach what God's calling is and how to perceive it, but few, if any, tell it like it is experienced. This is why your voice is important so that other pastors may see that they are not alone but have a cloud of witnesses so that they may finish the race that is set before them (Hebrews 12:1).

1. Please introduce yourself to me, as if we just met one another.

2. Please walk me through your calling development timeline.

3. Of the formative experiences you identified on your timeline, which would you say were the most significant and why?

4. Describe the influences that led to the decision to follow your calling?

5. If you were to identify your calling with a biblical figure who had a calling (e.g., Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Disciples, Paul) who would you choose and why?

6. Finish this thought for me: "To be called as a pastor means . . ."

7. Using a scale from 1 to 10, how certain were you of your calling? How did you process your uncertainties?

8. Since that initial decision to become a pastor, how would you describe the struggles in your sense and search of God's calling for you as a pastor?

9. People influence us in our calling. Please describe some of the influential interactions you have had with others about your calling (spouse, friends, mentors, family, etc.)?

10. If you could choose someone today as an ideal pastor, who would that be and why?

11. Several studies have shown the strength of calling to be a primary reason for staying or leaving the ministry. What are your thoughts and feelings about that?

12. Our calling can sometimes greatly impact the things we do. Describe three changes (e.g., actions, plans, lifestyle, residence, etc.) you have experienced as a consequence of your calling and how those changes impacted you and your family.

13. As a follow-up to the previous question, please describe any external factors that impacted your calling that were beyond your control (e.g., health, circumstances, finances, family, etc.) and how those things impacted your calling.

14. How would you describe your experiences of calling today as compared to your initial call? Has your sense of call changed in intensity, understanding, or direction? If so how and in what ways?

15. In the pursuit of your calling, what would you say is the most important thing in fulfilling it?

16. Some believe that the call to the ministry is unique and different from other callings while others believe we all have a call. How would you describe your calling in comparison to other vocational calls?

17. There are many different ideas about training and education for those who are called to pastor. What are some things about your calling you wish you had been taught during your training and why?

18. We've covered a lot of different aspects of a pastoral calling. What advice would you give to a young person who asked for direction about God's calling in his or her life?

19. I greatly appreciate your time and openness in talking about so many personal things about your calling. Is there anything I missed or that you think is important about a pastoral calling that we have not touched upon?

Focus Group Question: *Answering the Call*

1. How would you describe your journey to fulfill God's calling in your life as a pastor?

2. Describe the role and influence of others (e.g., spouse, congregation, denomination, other pastors, etc.) in fulfilling your calling?

3. Describe your biggest challenges in fulfilling your call as a pastor; and how have you interacted with those challenges?

4. As a follow up question, can you describe some of the ways God has confirmed your call as a pastor?

5. If a young college student came to you and said he or she was called to the ministry, what three questions would you ask?

6. If a pastor of a small struggling church came to you and said he or she was questioning his or her calling, what three things might you say or ask to encourage that pastor?

7. Any last things you wish to say about your calling or the experience of being called?

APPENDIX E: AN INTEGRATIVE/HOLISTIC COURSE ON CALLING

Session Topic	Sub-Topics	Research Discipline	Scriptures	Corollary Readings
A Called People	Calling roots of Jewish nation and early Christians	Theology; Biblical History	Genesis 12:1-3; Isaiah 43:1; Romans 11:29;	Plachard, *Callings: Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom on Vocation.*
Concepts of a Calling	Current calling definitions	Calling and Vocational Guidance literature	Various vocation and work theologies	Guinness, *The Call.* Myers, *Conversations on Calling*
Biblical Calling Models	Calling-Templates of the Bible	Biblical	Exodus 3; Jeremiah 1; Luke 5:1–11	
The Process of a Call	Five-fold process of a call	Transformational Learning Theory	Exodus 3: Moses	Loder, *The Transforming Moment*
Psychological Dimensions of a calling: Part 1	Well-being and Identity Theories	Well-Being Research; Social science; Constructionism	What the Bible has to say about our identity	McKenna et al., 2015. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity, 34*(4), 294–303.
Psychological Dimensions of a calling: Part 2	Meaning, purpose, and coherence	Meaning of Life research; Terror Management Theory	Ecclesiastes; Acts 17:27,28	Frankl, *Man's search for meaning*
Epistemic Considerations	Part 1: epistemology	Philosophy; Natural Theology	Romans 1; Psalm 19	Chignell & Pereboom, *Natural theology and natural religion.*
Epistemic Considerations	Part 2: semiotic theory and theology	Semiotics; Special revelation	Semiotic theology: Various scriptures	Pitt, *Divine Callings: Understanding the Call to Ministry in Black Pentecostalism*

What's your S.H.A.P.E.? Pursuing God's Call for my life	Knowing God's calling	Practical Theology; vocational guidance	Various scriptures on gifting, interest, ability, experience	Warren, *Purpose Driven Life*

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APPENDIX F: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

January 9, 2019

Thom Connors
IRB Approval 3601.010919: A Phenomenological Understanding of a Calling with Implications for Pastoral and Vocational Education

Dear Thom Connors,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. 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.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

6. Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
The Graduate School

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APPENDIX G: EXAMPLE OF MEMBER CHECK SENT TO THOSE INTERVIEWED

Pastor Walter (pseudonym): *Calling Themes*

The Holy Spirit. When describing your calling you often refer to the Holy Spirit. In twelve different places, you refer to the Holy Spirit having an influence in your calling as a pastor. On first reflection, the Holy Spirit's activity appears to be the major theme you identify in your calling.

The Spirit initiates the Call. When asked what Bible patriarch did you identify with in your calling you immediately mentioned Paul. Similar to Paul's Damascus Road experience where the Spirit initiated his calling in a transforming moment, the Spirit broke into your life while reading Habakkuk and said, "you have unfinished business with me." In both instances, it was the activity of the Spirit who broke into your lives and initiated the call.

The Holy Spirit Confirms the Calling. Additionally, when asked if you have experienced any uncertainties about your call you responded: "I was not uncertain one bit. The minute I stepped in that pulpit, I felt in my heart, the Spirit move, and I felt like I was… I was divinely pushed. I wasn't coerced or anything, but it was just like I was lifted. Yeah. I was lifted into the pulpit. I felt the Spirit move. I felt that calling." Here, you attribute the confidence and certainty you had in the pulpit to the 'felt moving of the Spirit',

Priority of the Spirit. In another place, you give the Holy Spirit priority in the messages/teachings you bring to the church. In one statement you say, "the Holy Spirit is foremost in my life" and when preparing a message you will set aside your study notes and will "just put the message away and I spoke from my heart and let the Holy Spirit move…"

The Spirit and Ministry/Calling Development. Also, in your response to the question of *how* your ministry has developed you linked your ministry-maturation with your sensitivity to

the leading of the Holy Spirit. You said, "it's listening to the Holy Spirit being available as a tool in his hand… that is a component of maturity." This openness to the Spirit's movement you also mentioned it to be a matter of 'trust'. That said, you acknowledge that the Spirit's movement is not simply a feeling but something to <u>be tested with time.</u>

Discerning the Spirit. During the interview I asked, "if somebody wanted to go into the ministry and they say, pastor, I think I got a call on my life to be a pastor, what would you say to them?", you mentioned several things. One thing you observed in discerning the Spirit's calling was time. You said, "sometimes there's a desire in people because they're touched by the Spirit and are moved by a service there. There's an emotional involvement because of a song or a message they heard… but time is way of testing." Longevity and sustained passion for the ministry would appear to be a way by which a person may discern if the Spirit is calling them to serve in the ministry.

The Irreplaceable Work of the Spirit. Lastly, towards the end of the interview you note a young person who you believe has the calling of God upon his life. You have given him every opportunity to pursue that calling but he has not availed himself. Your response to his hesitation was, "I want to cultivate that [i.e., his calling], but he hasn't pulled the trigger on getting the courses or do anything, even though I've given him every opportunity. I've done as much as I can. Now the Holy Spirit got to speak to him." You acknowledged your limitations to bring about a change of commitment in this young man's heart. Only by the strong and persuasive activity of the Spirit will a change of heart take place.

The Sense of Reward, Joy, and Satisfaction. Though not as prominent as the Holy Spirit, a theme that links the sense of blessing with calling seems to be present in your experience of God's calling. Laced throughout the interview are statements that demonstrate a strong love and

sense of joy in your calling. Even when asked, "From the time when you first became a pastor till today, can you describe when your call was challenged?", you responded that there have been a "few difficult people" but that, "there have been very few challenges". In another place, I asked if its "important to love your calling" and you enthusiastically responded, "Absolutely! It is sacred. It's precious!". You expressed a sense of joyful gratitude in several areas of your calling:

> I'm lucky. I have the enthusiasm of a 20 year old out of seminary and a body now that's going to be 70 next month… I'm stoked! I mean, *I'm loving what I'm doing! I love the people. I love the pulpit. I love this word.* I can't wait til Sunday comes. I mean, look, I got books everywhere, studying and teaching and stuff!

From the above quote, the sense of joy and reward can be found in three areas.

Gratitude. You are appreciative of the opportunity and privilege of serving God in the capacity of a pastor. Your genuine enthusiasm was heard as you expressed the above sentiments.

Love of People. Though this may seem to be a given for those in ministry, it is not always the case. Your statements reflect a genuine care and interest you have in those under your charge. This is reflected in the ballet performances and ROTC events you have attended to demonstrate the care you have for your flock. The link between your love for people and your sense of reward and satisfaction, is further illustrated as a 'pastor's pride' as seen below in your response:

> It's unbelievable. It's unbelievable. There is truly a mantle of ministry that you feel there is and it's not, it's not always heavy. It is light. It's rewarding. I mean, when you see people stepping up and they're taking authority and ownership of various ministries in the

church, and he would see the spiritual growth to them, you know, you could take what I would call a pastor's pride in that work. They get it.

From the above statement it might be said that the joy of your calling is linked to the love you have for your flock.

Teaching and Preaching. The responsibility to prepare and speak God's word each week carries a great amount of joy for you as well. The opportunity to study God's word brings you personal growth, encouragement, and meaning to you. This carries over to the delivery of the message which you eagerly anticipate each week. This was beautifully expressed by you saying, "I love the pulpit. I love this word!" For this and other reasons mentioned, a thick strand of felt reward/satisfaction can be found in the weave of your calling experience.