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JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

To Stay or Step Down: Assessing the Pastoral Qualifications of Pastors with Prodigal Children

A Thesis Project Submitted to
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Doctor of Ministry

by
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Thesis Project Approval Sheet

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ABSTRACT

TO STAY OR STEP DOWN: ASSESSING THE PASTORAL QUALIFICATIONS OF PASTORS WITH PRODIGAL CHILDREN

P. Kevin Garber

Liberty University School of Divinity, 2022

Mentor: Dr. Robert A. Gowins

The pastor's home life is a reflection of his ability to effectively lead Christ's church. Two seminal New Testament passages (I Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9) address, among other qualifications, the behavior and testimony of the pastor's children. This vital aspect of a pastor's leadership within the home must be given important emphasis and due consideration. With an examination of the nuances of these two seminal passages, exploration of published literature relevant to this topic, and an in-depth investigation of three pastoral case studies, the writer will offer a resource for pastors and parishioners who are facing the dilemma of whether a pastor should stay or step down—when the testimony of their children is legitimately called into question, and thus their ability to lead the church.

Abstract Length: 126 Words

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Introduction

An article in *Fundamentalism Today* co-authored by Dr. Ed Hindson, Dean Emeritus of Liberty University School of Divinity, begins with an illustration that strikes at the very heart of this thesis project:

He was the pastor of a prominent Independent Baptist church. As we sat in his car in front of the church one spring afternoon, he reminisced over his 17 years as pastor there. The church had grown from less than 100 to over 1,400 in regular attendance. They had just moved into new multimillion-dollar facilities, and the church had just given him the parsonage as a gift in appreciation for his years of service. Spiritually and financially, this church was on a stable foundation. The pastor's enthusiasm was contagious as he elaborated on the many blessings and victories of his fruitful ministry. By all external criteria, he was entering his fifties as a highly successful minister. Yet as we talked, his enthusiasm turned to regret. Beyond the external evidences of success, we discovered a broken man who would trade all the trappings of his large church for an opportunity to live his life over. In spite of the fact that he had helped hundreds of people, his own children, now grown and married, had wandered far from God. This true story could be repeated hundreds of times over. It causes one to seriously consider the question, "Why do preachers' kids go bad?"¹

Though the magazine is now defunct, and the article dated, its relevance remains with sobering clarity. Among today's pastors, one-third (34%) with children ages 15 and older say at least one of their children is no longer actively involved in church. And one in four (27%) say they have faced "significant parenting problems."²

The subject of one's children is closest to the heart of any parent. It is excruciatingly close to the heart of any pastor who is dealing with, or has dealt with, a wayward son or daughter. There

¹ Ed Dobson and Ed Hindson, "Fundamentalism Today: Why Preachers' Kids Go Bad," *Fundamentalist Journal*, 2, no. 5 (May 1983): 12, https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/sor_fac_pubs/140.

² The Barna Group, *The State of Pastors: How Today's Faith Leaders are Navigating Life and Leadership in an Age of Complexity* (Ventura, CA: Barna Group, 2017), 35-36.

are many pastors who are hurting and perhaps full of regret.³ Moreover they are aware, because they are biblically astute, that their prodigal child(ren) could also pose a challenge to their qualifications as a pastor.

The author is reminded of a poignant passage from the Old Testament:

Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth!
For the LORD has spoken:
“I have nourished and brought up children,
And they have rebelled against Me;
The ox knows its owner
And the donkey its master’s crib;
But Israel does not know,
My people do not consider.”

Alas, sinful nation,
A people laden with iniquity,
A brood of evildoers,
Children who are corrupters!
They have forsaken the LORD,
They have provoked to anger
The Holy One of Israel,
They have turned away backward.⁴

With a tone of incredulity, the LORD expresses His sentiments regarding children He has nourished and raised who have turned out to rebel against him. The heartbreak of prodigal children is clearly something the covenant-keeping God understands.

³ Ibid. For example, Barna Indicates that 42% of pastors surveyed expressed regret that they had not spent more time with their children (35).

⁴ Isaiah 1:2-4, New King James Version (NKJV). Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references in this thesis project will be from the New King James Version of the Bible.

Ministry Context

The pastor's calling is a dangerous one.⁵ The pastor's walk is a difficult one. He is commissioned to be both gentle shepherd⁶ and fearless kingdom warrior.⁷ He is called to live an exemplary life both publicly and privately. He is mandated to lead well in his home and in the church. A unique and audacious challenge, to say the least.

Whether filling a senior pastoral role or that of an associate pastor or elder in some capacity, the spotlight of this paper is upon those who have felt the call of God upon their lives to preach and teach the Word of God and to shepherd the flock of God.⁸ More particularly, the author will focus upon the pastor who has children: the parent-pastor, a term used by the Barna Group referring to pastors who are parents.⁹ The word order is purposeful (parent-pastor) as the

⁵ So says Paul David Tripp in his book, *Dangerous Calling*: Paul David Tripp, *Dangerous Calling* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).

⁶ In I Thessalonians 2:7, Paul says, "But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children." In II Corinthians 10:1, he makes "gentleness" the basis of his appeal to the church in Corinth: "Now I, Paul, myself am pleading with you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ..."

⁷ In the above Corinthian passage, Paul also alludes to warfare: II Corinthians 10:3-6 says, "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled." Thus, in the same passage, Paul expresses both gentleness and fierceness. It is also interesting to note Paul's exhortation to Timothy along these lines: "This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare..." (I Timothy 1:18).

⁸ Important mention should be made regarding the church with a plurality of elders, some who are vocational ministers and others who are among the laity (whose vocational work is outside the church). Alexander Strauch builds a strong biblical case for this in his book, *Biblical Eldership*. Andreas Köstenberger underscores a plurality of elders as the prescribed biblical design for church leadership at the pastoral level: "The biblical pattern is for a group of elders to give joint oversight to a local congregation, with one or several pastors being primarily devoted to teaching and providing pastoral care." Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership* (Littleton, Colorado: Lewis and Roth Publishers, 1988); Andreas Köstenberger, *1-2 Timothy & Titus, Biblical Theology for Christian Proclamation* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), 126.

⁹ Barna Group, "Prodigal Pastor Kids: Fact or Fiction?" Research Releases in *Family & Kids* (November 11, 2013), accessed March 22, 2017, <https://www.barna.com/research/prodigal-pastor-kids-fact-or-fiction>.

emphasis is upon proper priorities, that of family responsibilities first and then the care of the household of God.

To be a parent-pastor is a blessing not a burden. One is reminded of Jacob's response to Esau in Genesis 33:5, "Then Esau looked up and saw the women and children. 'Who are these with you?' he asked. Jacob answered, 'They are the children God has graciously given your servant.'"¹⁰ Indeed, the Scriptures are wonderfully clear on this matter: "Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them..."¹¹ Children are a blessing. They can be the source of a parent-pastor's greatest joys ... and deepest pain.

Nothing can so wound a pastor's heart and break his spirit as issues within his family. Marital strife can be emotionally eviscerating. Consequential problems with his children are heart-rending and a "gut punch"—expelling the air from the pastor's labors and effectiveness.

One's heart can readily identify with the troubled pastor who, on a ministers' blog, expressed his emotional duress upon finding that his daughter had committed a moral indiscretion with a young man in the church:

October 11, 2016

VanPastorMan

Ray, I've been a pastor for 15 yrs [*sic*] (am in my late 40's). About two years ago my daughter had sexual relations with a boy in the church basement after services. We (us and the boy's parents) were floored when we found out and decided to not bring this up publicly so as to not embarrass them both. The boy's father just last night told the elders what happened and I don't know if I will be able to stay on at the church. They questioned my parenting a lot more than the other man whose son had been with my daughter. I explained that my daughter was a virgin when it happened. The father of the

¹⁰ Genesis 33:5, New International Version (NIV).

¹¹ Psalm 127:3-5a, NKJV.

boy acted like he didn't believe it. For some reason he wanted to think my daughter was the sexual aggressor towards the boy. I wanted to point out his son was the one who pursued my daughter and talked her into it. Anyways, I don't know if I might soon be an ex pastor [*sic*] which is why I stumbled on this site and read your story. May God be with you and thanks for letting me get this off my chest.¹²

In view of the pervasive, ever-increasing moral assault on our prepubescent and teenage children, no marvel that an American pastor's family faces challenges on a level previously unknown in modern history.¹³ And it is proven, ultimately, that the home environment offers only a percentage of a child's influences. Ryan Ayers observes: "Parents are losing the influence they have with their children because of hectic work schedules society places on them, as well as scholastic schedules placed on children. The average full-time working parent spends about 17.5 hours a week influencing their child ... [Other] influences can be from television, schoolteachers, friends, and accepted societal norms. Many outside influences do not hold the same values or moral standards most pastoral families hold today."¹⁴

The pastor's children are being impacted by other factors perhaps significantly more than by parental influence. Some have sought to mitigate this via homeschooling and traditional Christian school education, to be sure. But the fact remains, children are being influenced by a host of other things amid a godless culture which is counter to everything a Christian home

¹² Bo Lane, "How Do I Feed My Family Now that I'm Not a Pastor? A Guide to Jobs for ExPastors," ExPastors, accessed February 27, 2022, <http://expastors.com/how-do-i-feed-my-family-now-that-im-not-a-pastor-a-guide-to-jobs-for-expastors>.

¹³ 2021 U.S. Gallup poll: Changing one's gender is morally acceptable: 46%: Megan Brenan, "Changing One's Gender Is Sharply Contentious Moral Issue," Gallup, accessed February 27, 2022, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/351020/changing-one-gender-sharply-contentious-moral-issue.aspx>. Pornography is morally acceptable: 43%: Andrew Dugan, "More Americans Say Pornography Is Morally Acceptable," Gallup, accessed February 27, 2022, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/235280/americans-say-pornography-morally-acceptable.aspx>.

¹⁴ Ryan K. Ayers, "The Pastor's Faithless Child: Strengthening Methods for Hurting Parent-Pastors" (Doctoral dissertation, Liberty University, 2014), ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, 32.

believes and teaches. No marvel, then, when children go astray or “dip their colors” for a moment of pleasure.

Spiritual Warfare

Poised to unravel the ministry of any pastor, through whatever means necessary, is the arch enemy of Christ and His servants, the devil. It is interesting to note the twice mention of “the devil” amid the pastoral qualifications in I Timothy 3:1-7. Verse 6 says of the neophyte (new convert): “not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil.”¹⁵ And in verse 7, regarding the pastor’s testimony to those outside the church, Paul writes: “Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.”

The Christian’s chief adversary, Satan, is both patient and strategic. He assaults when the believer is most vulnerable and where he is the most vulnerable. The classic warning the Apostle Peter gives is for anyone and everyone: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.”¹⁶ It is interesting, and not coincidental, that Peter includes this warning on the heels of his treatise to pastors in the earlier part of this passage (I Peter 5:1-4). Howard Hendricks has said, “Satan will lie in the weeds for forty years to entrap one of God’s servants.”¹⁷ Could it also be said that Satan is lurking in the

¹⁵ Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, New International Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2001), 218, is illuminating here, as he compares the use of the objective genitive versus the subjective genitive. The latter (subjective) being favored in view of the active role of the devil in verse 7 of I Tim 3. Thus, it would suggest that it is the condemnation of the devil, that is, caused by the devil as the accuser of the brethren.

¹⁶ I Peter 5:8.

¹⁷ H.B. London, foreword to *Pastoral Restoration: The Path to Recovery* by Chris Fabry, PDF File, Focus on the Family, modified November 6, 2020, <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Pastoral-Restoration-The-Path-to-Recovery-Single-Pages-with-Afterword.pdf>.

weeds and waiting for the right moment to pounce upon the pastor's children? One can say with strong certainty that he is. It is noteworthy that Satan went after the children of Job in his vicious assault upon all that godly man had, for nothing could have wounded Job's heart more profoundly than the loss of his children.¹⁸

The pastor's children are vulnerable, and the enemy knows that an assault on them strikes at the very heart of every parent-pastor. One cannot overlook the battle that rages in the nether world, and the pastor cannot be so naïve as to think his children are exempt from this battle.

Jim Binney, author, counselor, and conference speaker (and former senior pastor of 16 years), in his insightfully honest book, *Help for Parents in Crisis*, has observed, "Never before in recorded history has the family been under attack as it is today! The war against the family is in progress, and a primary battleground is the parent – child relationship. The world, the flesh, and the devil are outdoing themselves in raining havoc and destruction on the home and the target of choice is the children."¹⁹ Moreover, Binney expresses his view of the inherent danger to the pastor's children when they are made a disproportionate part of the criteria for the pastor's fitness for ministry. He questions: "Have we set our children up for [Satan's] attack by basing the strength of our calling on the weakest of our family?"²⁰ In the author's exegetical analysis of the two seminal texts on pastoral qualifications,²¹ he will carefully consider this question.

¹⁸ Job 1:13, 18-19.

¹⁹ Jim Binney, *Help for Parents in Crisis* (Greenville: Counselor's Pen, 2009), i.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 204.

²¹ I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9.

Problem Presented

As a senior pastor for over eleven years while raising three children, the writer had his share of the ups and downs of normal life with kids. But when the author's children reached their later teenage years, they each went through periods of prodigality that greatly affected the dynamic in the pastoral home. On two occasions, the writer offered his resignation to a church's leadership team.²² Both times his offer to resign was refused.

The author's sensibilities were greatly challenged, nevertheless, as he attempted to balance what he and his wife were experiencing as a family with what the Scriptures teach about the home life of a pastor. It was nearly impossible for this writer to reconcile the disparity he felt between the picture the Bible paints and what was being experienced in real life and ministry.

Any serious issues involving the pastor's children leave much opportunity for speculation, criticism and, at the very least, major distraction from ministry. This kind of turmoil and suffering within a pastor's family can certainly be used by Satan in many destructive ways. That is surely the reason for the sobering qualifications regarding a pastor's family in the Timothy and Titus passages.

For those who wish to earnestly follow the dictates of Scripture, both pastors and congregants, there should be an ongoing awareness of the calling and qualifications of the pastor. This is not to suggest hyper-scrutiny or undue critical analysis on anyone's part, but rather an informed awareness of the important role and qualifications of the pastor as he lives out this

²² The writer recalls a very sobering meeting with the deacons in which he fully disclosed unfortunate events involving one of his children, and then earnestly and conscientiously offered his resignation to the deacon body. This was in full view of, and with a clear understanding of, the Timothy and Titus passages. There were many tears in that meeting room. There was also a unanimous vote by the deacons not to accept the pastor's resignation, but rather to work and pray through the tragic situation together. The pastor sought additional counsel from fellow pastors and one admired and trusted former seminary professor. There was a resounding sense of affirmation and approval for the present course of action: staying in the pastorate and working through the family issues involving the writer's child. Thankfully, the end of this saga involves genuine repentance and reconciliation.

calling in full view of his family, the church, and the community. With that said, the pastor's familial life is of chief concern. Per the scriptural qualifications, the elder's children are to visibly demonstrate his ability to care for and lead the household of God. When his home life is in question, particularly the behavior or testimony of his children, it creates a rightful concern as to whether the qualification regarding the pastor's children is being fulfilled.

In real-life situations, the dilemma comes in asking and answering important, albeit difficult, questions: Have his children crossed the lines of unreasonable behavior as outlined in Scripture? At what age or stage is this concern no longer valid, or is it always in view regardless of the age or location of his children? Is there a clear point at which a pastor should consider stepping down?

It is important to note that the implications of his children's testimony, per the seminal texts, suggest that there is indeed a time when this important qualification has been violated and a pastor must step down, be it voluntarily or involuntarily. Pastoral and congregational awareness of this process are key, but there is a troubling concern that this is a seldom-enforced church discipline.

In some instances, the qualifications set forth in the two seminal passages which will be under our consideration (I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9) have been either ignored, lightly treated, or "modified" to suit whatever whim or practical need. John MacArthur laments:

God's standards for leadership in the church are high, a basic and extremely crucial truth that many evangelical churches today either deny or ignore. New Testament standards for pastors are often lowered, selectively applied, or simply disregarded. Some congregations and denominations pick and choose pastoral qualifications that seem most relevant and appropriate for the times, that satisfy personal preferences, and that do not conflict too sharply with contemporary social standards and practices. Some take the liberty to waive biblical standards when they like a pastor and the application of those standards might result in his dismissal. Nothing is more needed in the church than the careful application

of the biblical principles of leadership. Yet sound, qualified spiritual leaders are alarmingly scarce in contemporary churches.²³

Indeed, the high calling and duty of the pastor should be rightly esteemed on the part of the pastor, the congregation, and its leadership team. And it should not, therefore, be treated with cavalier disregard nor, on the other hand, precipitously walked away from.

The pastor has been given a special and important stewardship from God. The author would note Paul's own view regarding this: "I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God,"²⁴ Moreover, it is important to highlight Paul's view of his calling to preach as a direct commandment from God. Titus 1:3, within the broader context of the seminal passage under consideration (Titus 1:5-9), states: "...but has in due time manifested His word through preaching, which was committed to me according to the commandment of God our Savior." Thus, a stewardship and command from God should be neither lightly esteemed nor readily discarded. This overarching principle should be brought to bear upon the problem regarding the parent-pastor's prodigal children, as some pastors and/or congregants do not regard it with proper sobriety, or they are tempted to react with undue haste.

Purpose Statement

In view of this problem, the author sees the need for a viable, biblical, and cogent resource to balance biblical demands with practical, real-life situations. The purpose of this research is to rightly divide the Scriptures in carefully defining and explaining the pastoral qualifications (what

²³ John MacArthur, *Titus: The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, ed. Anne Scherich (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 18.

²⁴ Colossians 1:24-25.

they mean and do not mean), to land on a practicable understanding of what the seminal passages teach regarding the pastor's children, and to apply these precepts to the situations involving the three case studies: John Piper, Jim Cymbala, and Jack Hyles. From these three well-known pastoral examples, the author will explicate the varying conclusions and offer viable steps for the pastor, leadership team, and the congregation when the pastor's familial qualifications are called into question.

The writer's intent is to provide practical insights for pastors and churches who are facing serious issues regarding the testimony of the pastor's children. This paper will offer a scripturally comprehensive, well-reasoned view of such problems and offer appropriate, balanced responses to these issues. For pastors who are currently experiencing a prodigal, for those who will experience this heartache, and for those who are living with grief and perhaps guilt because of a wayward son or daughter who is no longer living for the Lord, this project will offer hope and encouragement in walking the difficult path of dealing with such issues in a biblically sound way.

Basic Assumptions

Foundational to this study is a belief in the verbal, plenary inspiration of Scripture, a literal or historical-grammatical approach to Bible interpretation, and an unwavering conviction that the Word of God is the final authority on all matters of faith and practice. Thus, the Scriptures are authoritative and final in their definition of, and qualifications for, the pastoral office and ministry.

This leads the author to conclude that the pastoral leadership of the local church is decidedly a male role in office and function. The author will not be exploring any views postulating women's leadership in the senior pastoral role (though the author recognizes this present reality in some

churches).²⁵ For this reason, the writer will consistently refer to the pastor of a local congregation in the masculine.

That there are objective, purposeful standards in the Bible regarding pastoral qualifications there can be little debate. These objective qualifications for the office of the pastor are outlined in two seminal texts: I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. Moreover, these qualifications are to be soberly reviewed and prayerfully considered in any and all situations. This is an absolute essential if a pastor and church want to be obedient to the Lord.

The writer believes he will find and confirm that the nuanced meanings of the seminal texts are purposeful under the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit in His authorship of these passages. The context of the Timothy passage addresses perhaps children of any age (from younger to older children). The Titus passage more specifically addresses older children who are capable of debauched behavior.²⁶

The writer believes that God's intent for these passages is to provide realistic and practical guidelines for pastors and congregations regarding the pastor's ability to effectively serve. It is believed that these guidelines can indeed be understood and prayerfully followed, as God Himself gives direction in individual circumstances.

Further, it is asserted by this writer that Paul's injunction to Timothy to "rightly divide the word of truth" (II Tim 2:15) should be embraced by every pastor and congregation facing such an unfortunate situation regarding the pastor's children. It is incumbent upon them to do so.

²⁵ The author is, nevertheless, concerned for any pastor (male or female) who is experiencing the heartache of a wayward child(ren).

²⁶ It is important to note that the same Greek word for children is used in both passages: τέκνον (*teknon*). The age implications are gleaned from the context of each passage.

The author believes there are some misconceptions about the true teaching of these passages among those who desire to conscientiously follow the dictates of Scripture. And that there is, perhaps, a willful ignoring of these passages on the part of some pastors and churches for myriad reasons.

Finally, one must be careful in drawing legalistic lines and setting absolute parameters (e.g., what sins, what age, how many children can defect, etc.) for there are no staunch answers for every situation. If there are, that individual or church is leaving the consideration out of the hands of the Holy Spirit as the ultimate Guide to the application of Scripture.

Definitions

The following special terms are used throughout this thesis:

Pastor/elder is referring to (and limiting the research to) senior pastors, elders, associate pastors who have a leading role in local congregations. The pastoral office and role are defined by the Scriptures in masculine terms; thus, our allusion to the masculine pronoun in each reference. These two terms (pastor and elder) will be used interchangeably in this paper.

Parent-pastor is a term coined by the Barna Group to refer to those pastors who are parents. This term has been elucidated earlier in this chapter.

Pastoral Epistles or Pastorals refer to Paul's letters to Timothy (1, 2 Timothy) and Titus as they ministered as his emissaries to the churches in Ephesus and Crete, respectively.

Prodigals: The author has chosen H. Norman Wright's definition for the purposes of this thesis: "A prodigal is someone who goes against the family's value system. A prodigal says, 'I'd rather go this way, and I choose to reject all this over here.' In a sense, it's going counter-culture to the way the person has been raised. Prodigals have an intensity in their rebellion that is

missing in the actions of other highly disobedient kids.”²⁷ It should be noted that, for this writer’s purposes, a pastor’s wayward or prodigal child can refer to a believing child with rebellious, ungodly conduct which brings reproach upon his or her parents, or it can refer to an unbelieving child whose conduct can be called into question, especially while living in the pastor’s home. Conversely, it is possible for an unbelieving child to reflect behavior that bespeaks of a godly upbringing, that which does not bring reproach upon his or her parents. Thus, it is conceivable for an unbelieving child to honor his parents’ values and not be called into question regarding his or her conduct. There will be a close examination of the Titus 1 passage regarding the implications of “having faithful children” in Chapter 3.

Prodigality is the act of engaging in prodigal behavior as defined by this paper.

Seminal texts refer to I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 which have to do with the qualifications for the office of the pastor/elder.

Limitations

This thesis project is limited to library research and involves historical case studies as opposed to “live” field research. (It is broadly known, for example, that Spurgeon suffered from depression because he himself wrote about it.) It will not survey a relatively large cross section of pastors and churches—via questionnaires and personal interviews—as in the more traditional research approach for a Doctor of Ministry Project. Its selected research methodology is limited to published literature and will assume a more theoretical approach.

This project is subject to published material on the three pastors selected for the case studies. This includes books, articles, recorded interviews, interview transcripts, conference videos,

²⁷Caryn D. Rivadeneira, "Married, with Prodigals," *Marriage Partnership* (Summer 2000): 38, accessed February 27, 2022, https://bi-gale-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/global/article/GALE%7CA66107707?u=vic_liberty.

preaching videos, press coverage. This precludes the ability, of course, to ask for elaboration or clarification on any given topic or point. There were no interviews conducted by this author with the subjects.

Delimitations

This project is limited by virtue of the research component. Rather than collecting data from a larger sample of pastors and churches experiencing the issues outlined in this treatise, it is purposefully limited to three case studies which are broadly available through written and videographic means. The selection of these case studies will, nevertheless, represent a viable spectrum of major issues involving the pastor's children (e.g., insubordination, rebellion, moral failure, unbelief). Further, there will be a theoretical component based upon research and biblical exposition that will seek to address various scenarios a pastor and church may encounter.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to be highly prescriptive or preventative in nature. That is, it is beyond this project's reach to adequately address the how-to's of shepherding within the home, how to preventatively ensure that one's children do not become ministry "casualties," or specific measures pastors should take to avoid the perplexing issue of prodigality other than the general, biblical admonitions given in this paper.

This treatise will not deal with what a pastor should do once they have resigned or been terminated (e.g., vocational pursuits, spiritual counsel, etc.).

This project's case studies involve conservative, evangelical pastors and their congregations. There is no interest in exploring varying interpretations of the role of the pastor or any data pertaining to those who do not hold to a historical-grammatical approach to biblical hermeneutics. What will be viewed is how these Bible-focused pastors, their families, and congregations handled the heart-wrenching issues involving the pastor's prodigal children.

It is beyond the scope of this project to address the new demands and the changing dynamic of pastoral ministry amid the current global pandemic and how it has impacted the pastor's home. Quite obviously, new data will emerge which is reflective of this change in church and familial culture attributable to the COVID outbreak. Already, the latest statistics reveal a concerning uptick in pastors who have contemplated leaving the ministry (38%) and who are generally "unhealthy" as defined by Barna.²⁸

Thesis Statement

This treatise will offer a thorough examination of the seminal biblical texts regarding the pastoral qualifications and provide much-needed clarity concerning the biblical requirements for the pastor's family, namely, his children. It will dispel misconceptions and offer a measure of guidance and hope for this most heart-rending of issues. Three case studies will reveal scenarios representing major issues involving older children which could potentially become disqualifying factors for a pastor/elder.

²⁸ Currently, only 35 percent of America's pastors fall into the healthy category (based upon Barna's assessment of spiritual, physical, emotional, vocational, and financial categories). Barna Group, "38% of U.S. Pastors Have Thought About Quitting Full-Time Ministry in the Past Year." *Leaders & Pastors* (November 16, 2021), accessed February 27, 2022, <https://www.barna.com/research/pastors-well-being>.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND FOUNDATIONS

The resources for this project are limited to published literature and are appropriately varied. Bible commentaries, journals, relevant books, articles, and interviews on the thesis topic were consulted. For the exegetical study of the two seminal texts and ancillary texts, conservative Bible commentaries, scholarly journal articles, and relevant books were researched. For the case studies of Chapter 4, essential information was collected from books, interview transcripts, videos, magazine and newspaper articles, and ministry websites.

The author will first highlight the biblical commentaries and journal articles that were most helpful to this paper. Next, the primary books are considered. Finally, the biblical references that were pertinent, beginning with the seminal texts regarding pastoral qualifications.

Published Literature

Biblical Commentaries and Journals

Albert Barnes is the epitome of the pastor-theologian. His insightful commentaries, *Barnes Notes*, on both the Old and New Testaments are still admired today. The author appreciates Barnes' pastoral perspective on the Scriptures and careful verse-by-verse exposition using the King James translation. Charles Spurgeon lauded this commentary as essential for every pastor. The writer's interest lies particularly in how an older commentary (published in 1847), written by a theologian from yesteryear, addresses the nuances of Titus 1:6 (and other pertinent texts) as compared to modern commentators and translations.²⁹

Homer Kent, as the former professor of New Testament and Greek at Grace Theological Seminary, accomplished his purpose of providing an "extremely literal" translation of the Greek

²⁹ Albert Barnes, *Ephesians to Philemon*, Barnes Notes on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005).

text of I Timothy, Titus, and II Timothy (purposeful order). Simply titled, *The Pastoral Epistles: Studies in I and II Timothy and Titus*, it is comprehensive and scholarly as it deals with the Greek text, simple and clear in its explanations without being technical and verbose. It was a help to this writer as it provided a reasonably thorough introduction to each epistle and explained in clear terms the seminal texts under our consideration. Kent's simple and straightforward outlines of the Pastoral Epistles are noteworthy.³⁰

George Knight's *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text* is frequently cited in other conservative commentaries. His expert handling of the Greek text and the nuances thereof makes it an indispensable reference for this paper. In particular, his treatment of the Titus 1:6 passage regarding the "faithful" children of elders (versus "believing") is decisive. Moreover, Knight's conclusive arguments regarding the Timothy and Titus passages referring to children who are still in the home (and under their father's direct authority) provides pivotal insights for the purposes of this project.³¹

The stated purpose of the *Biblical Theology for Christian Proclamation* series is based upon their editors' belief in the underlying unity of the Scriptures which has its basis in the unity of God Himself. Thus, each author (Köstenberger, et al.) seeks to tie his analysis of a book(s) to the theology of the Bible as a whole. Andreas Köstenberger's commentary on 1-2 Timothy and Titus is both scholarly and stout (at 605 pages). Köstenberger's general introduction to Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus (referred to as the LTT throughout his commentary) is quite extensive and very helpful in affording a comprehensive understanding of the interrelationship of the letters,

³⁰ Homer A. Kent, *The Pastoral Epistles: Studies in 1, 2 Timothy and Titus* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1995), 72-73, 214-215.

³¹ George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1992).

the unique roles of Timothy and Titus, the chronology of the letters, a chronology of Paul's ministry, the false teachings that Timothy and Titus were facing in Ephesus and Crete, respectively, and numerous other important topics that were helpful in understanding the whole (all three letters). Each individual book's introduction soundly covers the occasion and purpose for writing as well as the opponents to Timothy and Titus as they carry out Paul's instructions for each unique setting. Köstenberger's verse-by-verse exposition is scholarly (with an abundance of references), in-depth, and insightful. His treatment of our seminal texts (I Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9) was informative, grace-filled, and balanced. The massive conclusion of this volume covers major biblical and theological themes in the LTT. Among them, and very helpful to this writer, Köstenberger thoroughly discusses church leaders (elders/overseers).³²

The MacArthur New Testament Commentary series was consulted for a clear and straightforward analysis of the seminal texts (I Timothy 3, Titus 1) as well as other relevant New Testament passages referenced in this project (Ephesians 4, I Peter 5, John 21, Luke 15). MacArthur's excellent insights into the Pauline Pastorals and Prison Epistles (e.g., Ephesians), as well as Peter's charge to pastors in I Peter 5:1-4, were an important resource for this writing. John MacArthur is well-known for his conservative scholarship, devotional aspect, and thorough treatment of the text, including copious references to supporting Scripture from both Old Testament and New Testament. His work is copiously referenced in this paper.³³

New International Commentary on the New Testament (NICNT): This commentary series of both Old and New Testaments has been well-respected for decades for its reliable, evangelical theology. It is committed to the infallibility of the Scriptures and was an excellent choice to

³² Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Commentary on 1-2 Timothy & Titus*, xiii.

³³ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995).

provide a thorough and scholarly exposition of the Pastoral Epistles. Philip Towner, in *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, offers excellent translation of the Greek text and abundant footnotes. The NICNT was also consulted for an enhanced understanding of some of the ancillary texts referenced in this paper (Luke 15, Ephesians 4, I Peter 5), as were the other primary commentaries selected for this project.³⁴

Norris C. Grubbs' profoundly astute and illuminating article, "The Truth about Elders and Their Children: Believing or Behaving in Titus 1:6?", presents a very thorough and strong argument in favor of the passive sense of *pistos* (meaning: "faithful") used by Paul in Titus 1:6: "having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination (emphasis mine)." With well-researched biblical and extrabiblical data and careful contextual analysis, he provides convincing proof that this rendering was Paul's intent in the Titus passage. The opposing view renders an active sense of *pistos* which is translated "believing." The implications, quite obviously, are enormous. The writer found his arguments to be solidly presented, compelling, and extremely helpful in understanding this difficult text.³⁵

Kevin Smith's erudite article, "Family Requirements for Eldership," was most helpful as it addressed the important and yet challenging nuances of the familial statements within the pastoral qualifications listed in I Timothy 3 and Titus 1. He asserts that the two lists of requirements for elders unquestionably emphasize character over charisma. Moreover, Smith demonstrates that the literary structure of each list indicates that the pastor's family life holds "pride of place" among the character requirements for this office and is the most important area

³⁴ Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*.

³⁵ Norris C. Grubbs, "The Truth about Elders and Their Children: Believing or Behaving in Titus 1:6?," *Faith and Mission* 22/2 (2005): 3-15.

to be evaluated in the pastoral candidate. Finally, Smith draws excellent conclusions regarding what it means to be a blameless father.³⁶

Books

In *The State of Pastors: How Today's Faith Leaders are Navigating Life and Leadership in an Age of Complexity*,³⁷ David Kinnaman and the Barna Group, in partnership with Pepperdine University, have produced an excellent, ready reference for understanding the current state of Protestant pastors in North America. The Barna organization draws on over thirty years of experience and hundreds of thousands of interviews. The book focuses particularly upon more recent interviews with more than 14,000 pastors. It examines three dimensions of a church leader's life, and accordingly the report is divided into three parts: (1) Self-leadership: regarding the pastor's internal/personal life and closest relationships, (2) Congregational leadership: regarding a pastor's everyday experiences of ministry, and (3) Cultural leadership: a pastor's outside engagement with the community and culture. Of particular interest, as per the focus of this project, is the content addressing the pastor's "self-leadership." Regarding this aspect of leadership, the report rightly notes: "Before he or she is a church leader, a pastor is a human being. And nothing about being a pastor precludes church leaders from the full human experience—good, bad and ugly." It is the humanity of the pastor that is explored in Part 1 of the book, encompassing personal and relational wellbeing (e.g., familial relationships). The statistics that are shared within are both encouraging and alarming. Of additional interest (among much valuable information) are the statistics concerning the average age of today's pastors and the

³⁶ Kevin Smith, "Family Requirements for Eldership," *Conspectus* 01:1 (Mar 2006): 27-43.

³⁷ Barna Research Group, *The State of Pastors*.

percentage of pastors' homes with children under eighteen still living at home. This vital information meaningfully informs the focus of our study.

The appeal of the book, *Help for Parents in Crisis*, by Jim Binney is threefold: (1) because of the writer's personal acquaintance with him through family/marriage conferences, (2) because of Binney's seasoned career as a pastor and Christian counselor, and (3) because of the remarkable transparency with which he writes. Of all the resources examined by this author, no pastor has given such detailed account of his experiences with a wayward child. On the whole, the book offers many helpful insights from this counselor and conference speaker regarding parenting. Regarding this writer's purposes, Binney discusses the qualifications of the pastor in reference to the pastor who has wayward children. He addresses the fundamental question: Does a pastor's wayward child(ren) disqualify him from the pastorate? Binney takes exception to a rigid, deterministic interpretation of the Timothy and Titus texts. His elucidation of "determinism" and the implications for the pastor's ministry and qualifications are noteworthy in this exceedingly practical work. It offers encouragement and hope to parent-pastors, indeed, to all parents who are dealing with the hardship of wayward children.³⁸

In the scholarly, insightful, and exceedingly practical book, *God, Marriage, and Family (Second Edition): Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation*,³⁹ Andreas Köstenberger and David Jones offer a truly biblical approach to marriage and family. The authors' intent to make the Bible the beginning and end point (that is, a return to the Bible is the cure for what ails the fledgling family) is solidly accomplished. Especially helpful to our purposes are their treatment of spiritual

³⁸ Jim Binney. *Help for Parents in Crisis*.

³⁹ Andreas J. Köstenberger, and David W. Jones. *God, Marriage, and Family (Second Edition): Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation*. Vol. 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).

warfare in Chapter 8, and pastoral qualifications—as they pertain to the pastor’s home life—in Chapter 12. The authors’ stated purpose is to promote an understanding of the Bible’s clear teaching on the home that fosters obedience and earnest application of its truths. Since the family and marriage are God’s idea, He has the blueprint (“the Master’s Manual”) on this sacred institution. This information is all the more critical today (hence, the second edition), as the authors suggest, because of contemporary issues and the continued rapid disintegration of the biblically-defined family unit. The content is most helpful as we delve into the pastor’s home dynamic.

Amid the commentaries consulted for the author’s focus upon the prodigal son in Luke’s Gospel,⁴⁰ Tim Keller’s book, *The Prodigal God: Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith*,⁴¹ offers a fresh and spiritually invigorating perspective on this most famous of Jesus’ parables. The writer found it helpful for its numerous rich insights, and particularly for its illumination of the lavish heart of the father in this story, as his character reflects the heart of God toward prodigals.

With his indomitable style and unapologetic approach to biblical truths, John MacArthur and the Master’s Seminary Faculty have compiled a book that deals with the many facets of pastoral ministry as defined and outlined in the Scriptures. *Rediscovering Pastoral Ministry: Shaping Contemporary Ministry with Biblical Mandates* is a work that seeks to address contemporary issues pertaining to the pastorate with the timeless principles and standards of the Word of

⁴⁰ As found in Luke 15:1-3, 11-32.

⁴¹ Tim Keller, *The Prodigal God: Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2008).

God.⁴² Particularly helpful to our work are Chapter 5 and Chapter 6. Chapter 5, in part, deals with the pastor’s leadership within the home and carefully examines the focus on the pastor’s children in I Timothy 3:4 and Titus 1:6. MacArthur’s treatment of the word “faithful” in the Titus passage was of particular interest and will be considered in the exegesis of the seminal texts in Chapter 3 of this project. Chapter 6 was illuminating, as it addresses the call of God to pastoral ministry. This all-important aspect of the pastorate (“the call”) is nearly universally embraced by those who fill that office.

Spiritual Leadership is a classic work on pastoral leadership within the church (and home). Among the numerous Bible texts he elucidates, J. Oswald Sanders looks intently into I Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9, and I Peter 5:1-7 as he examines the importance of character, spiritual giftedness, natural abilities—all infused with the power of the Holy Spirit. Insightful, in-depth, and very practical content that has been lauded by many and is useful to our understanding of key Bible texts on leadership. Of particular help, is Sanders’ balanced handling of the godly “ambition” to serve as a pastor (I Timothy 3:1), and his clear elaboration upon each of the qualifications of the elder in the Timothy and Titus texts. In concluding pages, he addresses the possibility of disqualification from ministry—an important consideration to our study.⁴³

In his thoroughly biblical and comprehensive book, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership*,⁴⁴ Alexander Strauch carefully unfolds all that the Scriptures teach regarding the most critical role in New Testament church leadership: the

⁴² John MacArthur. *Rediscovering Pastoral Ministry: Shaping Contemporary Ministry with Biblical Mandates* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishing, 1995).

⁴³ J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership: Principles of Excellence for Every Believer* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1967).

⁴⁴ Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership* (Littleton, Colorado: Lewis and Roth Publishers, 1988).

elder/pastor/overseer. Highly useful to our purposes, Strauch carefully examines each of the elder's qualifications as set forth in our seminal texts (I Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9). In addition to the Pastorals, he covers every ancillary text regarding elders' appointment, attitude, character, responsibilities, ministry, and relationships (as found in Acts, Ephesians, Philippians, I Thessalonians, I Peter, Hebrews). Strauch makes a strong, biblical case for a plurality of elders in each local assembly. He challenges the traditional norms and stimulates our thinking in doing so. His treatment of disciplining elders in Chapter 19, regarding when an elder/pastor should resign or be discharged, is insightful and instructive to our study.

Ryan Ayers' doctoral thesis, "The Pastor's Faithless Child: Strengthening Methods for Hurting Parent-Pastors,"⁴⁵ was helpful to the author in both format and research content. Ayers' project speaks to the dilemma of the pastor who has unbelieving children and the implications of this for his personal wellbeing, his home dynamic, his social interactions, and his congregational ministry. Of note is Ayers' reference to John MacArthur, who asserts that "having faithful children"⁴⁶ means believing children. Ayers takes issue with this stringent interpretation. The personal and candid responses of one hundred pastors interviewed provided some detailed insights of how those with faithless (rebellious and/or unbelieving) children were coping, and how those with faithful children were perceiving this issue in their fellow pastors. Absent, is any data reflecting whether any of these pastors resigned or were in the process of resigning as a result of their child's behavior.

⁴⁵ Ryan K. Ayers, "The Pastor's Faithless Child."

⁴⁶ Titus 1:6

Biblical References

The seminal texts for pastoral qualifications that form the foundational bedrock for this thesis project are I Timothy 3: 1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. They are our primary focus as we consider the office, responsibilities, and character of the pastor/elder. Of the seventeen qualifications listed in I Timothy 3 and the sixteen qualifications in Titus 1 (all of which will be at least briefly addressed, and all of which are important), our specific focus will be the familial qualifications contained in these passages regarding the pastor's children. I Timothy 3:5-6 declares: "one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?)." In Titus 1:6, Paul instructs: "if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination." With careful consideration of the circumstances, biblical context, and specific wording of each text, the author will extensively examine both their meaning and application to today's parent-pastor.

I Timothy 5:17-25 addresses important aspects of pastoral ministry. Specifically, Paul sets forth the honor of pastors, the protection of pastors, the rebuke of pastors, and the selection of pastors. Of particular importance is the discussion concerning the rebuke and removal of pastors when the prior qualifications listed by Paul in 3:1-7 have been violated. This important passage is given due consideration in Chapter 3 as the potential for disqualification is elucidated.

In I Peter 5:1-4, the apostle gives his unique and authoritative perspective on pastoral ministry. In this important text, Peter defines himself as an elder and an eyewitness of the sufferings of Christ. He passes along to his fellow elders that which was given to him by Christ

Himself, namely, the mandate to feed the flock of God.⁴⁷ This passage will be given special consideration in Chapter 5.

In Ephesians 4:10-13, Paul speaks of the special gift of Christ to His church: “pastors and teachers.” The grammar suggests that the terms are inextricably linked and bespeak of both the office and function of the pastor-teacher within the body of Christ. The high calling of pastors, as Christ’s special gift to His church, is a central theme in this paper.

In a thorough discussion of prodigality as it relates to the pastor’s family, a key text on this is found in Luke 15:11-32; what is popularly called “The Parable of the Prodigal Son.”⁴⁸ This arguably most famous of Jesus’ parables tells the story of the younger son who took his inheritance and ventured into a far country and wasted his substance on a lavish, lustful lifestyle. The story illuminates three characters: the younger son, the elder brother, and the loving father. Chief among these characters would be a rightful spotlight upon the heart of the father. The great pastor-preacher from yesteryear, G. Campbell Morgan, called Jesus’ parable in Luke 15 “The Parable of the Father’s Heart.”⁴⁹ Chapter 5 will highlight this important passage.

John 21 narrates the seashore encounter between Jesus and His disciples, post resurrection.⁵⁰ The unique focus in this passage is upon Peter.⁵¹ Here, in a poignant dialogue, the Son of God personally restores the beleaguered apostle. Of particular importance are verses 15-17, where a brief but penetrating series of questions is asked and answered and a new charge is given to Peter

⁴⁷ As recorded in John 21:15-17.

⁴⁸ Luke 15:1-3 must also be included with this passage as it gives the context of Jesus’ remarks: to whom He was speaking and why.

⁴⁹ G. Campbell Morgan, *The Parable of the Father’s Heart* (London: H. E. Walter, 1948).

⁵⁰ John 21:1-25.

⁵¹ And to a lesser extent, John and the other disciples are importantly included here.

by the Lord, restoring him to useful ministry in shepherding the flock of God. More will be considered in Chapter 5 regarding this important passage.

The first four chapters of I Samuel, among other important narrative, give some detailed information regarding Eli and his sons. We are given a glimpse of Eli's family dynamic and his dealings with his wayward sons. More will be said of this in Chapter 5 as the writer will draw out some important contrasts revealed in this Old Testament passage.

Relevant, meaningful insights are to be gleaned from I Samuel 8:1-9, 9:6, and 12:1-5 regarding Samuel and his two sons. Joel and Abijah did not walk in their father's ways, and one is left to marvel at the tragic dynamic of a godly parent and their ungodly offspring. Some important considerations will be brought to light regarding these Old Testament texts in Chapter 5.

It is instructive to consider the list of godly kings in the Old Testament whose sons were wicked and, conversely, the list of ungodly kings whose sons were godly. One such example is found in the progression of Hezekiah – Manasseh – Amon – Josiah, found in II Kings 20-21. Manasseh had a godly father (Hezekiah) with an impeccable reign of righteousness. Manasseh succeeded his father and became king at just twelve years of age. Though godless, he reigned fifty-five years over Judah. Appallingly, he sacrificed his own son in the fire (II Kings 21:6). Amon, his son, became wicked, as well, but reigned just two years and was assassinated. Josiah, the son of a wicked father, became a godly leader and a reformer in Judah. One is left to ponder why the Old Testament record does not reveal that a godly parent will inevitably produce godly offspring; but such is clearly not the case. As with the above references to Eli and Samuel, this sobering reality helps to inform one's understanding of the parent-pastor's limitations regarding the decisions of his adult children.

Theological Foundations

The Old Testament, with its Spirit-directed candor, is rife with the stories of prodigals. God does not seek to gloss over this all-too-frequent reality of family life. In the very first family, Adam and Eve experienced the radical disobedience of Cain. God's own direct experience of this with Adam's and Eve's rebellion indicates that the potential for prodigality is engrained in the human heart, though they had a perfect Father and lived in a perfect environment.

The Old Testament also expresses the impact children's behavior can have upon a father's ministry and reputation. Leviticus makes mention of the priest's daughter who "plays the harlot" and thus brings reproach upon her father's ministry: "she profanes herself ... she profanes her father."⁵² This has implications (for the priest) that what his children do has a bearing upon his priestly ministry. It forms an Old Testament example of a child's behavior impacting the honor and holy calling of his or her father in terms of sacred ministry.⁵³ Matthew Henry comments: "[The priests'] children must be afraid of doing anything to disgrace them (v. 9): If a priest's daughter becomes a prostitute, her crime is great; she not only pollutes but defiles herself: other women have not that honor to lose that she has, who, as one of a priest's family, has eaten of the holy things, and is supposed to have been better educated than others."⁵⁴

One is mindful of Eli's wicked sons who did not walk in his ways and about whom the prophet-priest received a formidable rebuke from the Lord because "he restrained them not."⁵⁵ In

⁵² Leviticus 21:9.

⁵³ In terms of the priests holy calling, compare Lev. 21:6-9 and Deut. 33:8.

⁵⁴ Matthew Henry, *The NIV Matthew Henry Commentary: In One Volume* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1992), 140.

⁵⁵ I Samuel 3:13.

similar fashion Samuel's sons rebelled, refusing to follow the godly lead of their father, and all Israel became aware.⁵⁶

The author would posit that, in the Old Testament economy at least, being a “man of God” was clearly no guarantee of producing godly offspring. The writer has previously cited, for example, the godly king Hezekiah whose son Manasseh became one of Judah's most wicked kings,⁵⁷ though he later repented—perhaps because of Hezekiah's latent, godly influence.⁵⁸ Old Testament examples abound for this type of tragic pattern.

In the New Testament, Luke 15:11-32 affords the only “living” example of the issue of prodigal children in terms of family dynamic. Though the New Testament offers no actual examples of any apostles, prophets, evangelists, or elders with prodigal children,⁵⁹ it does carefully address the importance of a proper family dynamic in passages such as Ephesians 5:21-6:1, Titus 2:1-5, and I Peter 3:1-7. Moreover, and quite importantly, it outlines the familial qualifications for the office of pastor/elder in the two seminal passages under consideration in this paper.⁶⁰ In terms of a healthy family life, it is understood that these God-called leaders are to serve as examples to the flock.⁶¹

⁵⁶ I Sam 8:3,5.

⁵⁷ See II Kings 18:1-20:21; 21:1-17.

⁵⁸ See II Chron 33:10-19.

⁵⁹ Per Christ's gift to the church of these godly leaders (see Ephesians 4:11-12).

⁶⁰ I Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9

⁶¹ I Peter 5:3 enjoins, “nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.” In addition to New Testament commands, it is presumed that, as a student of the Scriptures, the pastor will be carefully following the commands and precepts of the Old Testament (as in Deut. 6:6-7, 20-25; Psalm 78:5-7; Proverbs 19:18; 23:13-14).

The calling of a pastor is a high and holy calling. It is patterned after the heart of God (Psalm 23) and the ministry and example of the Lord Jesus. Matthew 2:6 prophetically speaks of Christ: “Who will shepherd My people Israel.” Jesus is referred to as the “Good Shepherd” (John 10:11), the “Great Shepherd” (Hebrews 13:20), and the “Chief Shepherd” (I Peter 5:4). Marvelously, He confers this responsibility first to Peter in John 21:15-17: “Feed My sheep” (which is mandated three times in response to Peter’s three professions of love). Peter then passes it along to others: “Shepherd the flock of God.”⁶² No marvel, then, that the objective qualifications set forth for the local church shepherd are among the most demanding and detailed of any qualifications found in Scripture for any office or leadership role. Therefore, they should not be lightly esteemed.

Theoretical Foundations

Much has been written regarding the pastoral qualifications listed in the seminal texts and how these various qualifications should be “fleshed out” in real life and ministry experience. And, more particularly, a great deal has been written regarding the familial qualifications of the pastor/elder and the implications of these requirements. The husband-wife qualification is one aspect, and the requirement regarding the pastor’s children (in both the Timothy and Titus texts) is the other aspect that has been extensively examined. The writer’s bibliography represents a mere sampling of the works available on this topic.

⁶² I Peter 5:3.

The objective qualifications of the pastor/elder are clearly set forth in two New Testament passages: I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. At the very center of these Pastoral passages are the authoritative and specific qualifications regarding the pastor's home.⁶³

I Timothy 3:4-5 reads, "one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?)." Titus 1:6 states, "if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination." In both texts, the pastor's children are mentioned as being a vital part of his ministerial credentials. Ostensibly, if an elder's children are in proper submission to parental authority, are faithful,⁶⁴ and not accused of degeneracy or defiance, the pastor is qualified to lead the congregation. On the other hand, if an elder's children exhibit negative behavior as highlighted in these passages, the pastor's qualifications can (and should) be brought into question. William Mounce rightly comments: "having submissive children,' is the first of two statements that define what Paul means by managing well. An indication of a person's managerial ability is the general posture of his children. If they are rebellious and troublesome, if they are not submissive but out of control, the father should not be allowed to manage the church."⁶⁵

Moreover, it is fitting for those who are to hold the pastor accountable—whether a body of elders, deacons, or members of the congregation—to be aware of this very important aspect of

⁶³ Kevin Smith asserts, "The literary structure of each list of eldership requirements indicates that the family requirements for elders hold pride of place." Kevin Smith, "Family Requirements for Eldership," 27. Thus, this writer would underscore, the familial qualifications take "center stage" in the list of qualifications.

⁶⁴ In Chapter 3, the writer will extensively treat the two primary views about what this word (*pista / pistos*), rendered "faithful," may imply.

⁶⁵ William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*. Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 2016), 179.

the pastoral qualifications and be ready to lovingly confront or compassionately comfort the pastor and his family when issues may arise.

As this paper will reveal in its case studies (Chapter 4), church polity and governance play a significant role in how an issue of prodigality is addressed. The elder rule model creates an environment of mutual accountability and mutual support amid the troubling, uncharted waters of dealing with a child's undesirable behavior. The senior pastor with a paid staff represents another model with varying degrees of accountability and support. In one extreme of this model, there is little to no accountability and virtually no opportunity for a burden to be shared. In another variation, there are accountability and support but perhaps to a lesser degree than what elder rule affords.⁶⁶

Regarding the potential for disqualification, I Timothy 5:17-25 gives clear direction for the rebuke and possible removal of "sinning" elders. In the case of a pastor's rebellious child, a Spirit-directed, Scripture-centered protocol should be prayerfully followed, as sinful negligence in this matter reflects upon a pastor meeting this all-important qualification to continue to lead the church.

⁶⁶ Among this paper's sources, Getz, Köstenberger, MacArthur, Piper, and Strauch are strong proponents and examples of the elder rule model.

CHAPTER 3: EXEGESIS OF BIBLICAL TEXTS

Introduction

In this chapter, the author will address a careful exegesis of the seminal texts regarding pastoral qualifications (I Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9) with more specific and heightened focus upon the statements made by Paul within these texts regarding the pastor's home dynamic and his children. The writer's purpose is to provide a synthesis of conservative scholarship on these important pastoral passages. Though respected Bible commentators do not provide a consensus on every point, the reader is afforded an extensive, well-stated rationale for divergent views.

In addition, the author will consider another important passage in Paul's first letter to Timothy regarding the handling of pastors whose qualifications are called into question. In I Timothy 5:17-25, Paul picks up the discussion regarding elders (from 3:1-7) and addresses, among other important matters, how to deal with pastors who are sinning. This passage deserves a careful look, and the writer will bring it into proper focus upon the topic.

The Seminal Texts

I and II Timothy and Titus have, since the eighteenth century, popularly been referred to as the "Pastoral Epistles."⁶⁷ This designation seems warranted since the recipients (Timothy and Titus) are acting as Paul's emissaries in local churches and are charged with, among other things, appointing spiritual leaders. The unique yet similar challenges each is facing regarding church leadership (in Ephesus and in Crete, respectively) underscore the importance of each epistle in terms of providing a clear definition of the pastoral qualifications and role. Godly, qualified

⁶⁷ The designation was coined by Berdot and then Anton (1703, 1753, respectively). George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 3. The writer will refer to them as "Pastoral Epistles" or simply "Pastorals."

leaders were sorely needed in each setting. More will be said of this as we introduce each of the epistles.

Unique to the Pastoral Epistles, Paul's triumvirate greeting, "Grace, mercy, and peace," is noteworthy.⁶⁸ Paul's most usual greeting was "Grace and peace." To this writer, the inclusion of "mercy" in the Pastoral greetings suggests that even among the choicest of God's servants there is still a decided need for mercy. Moreover, Timothy and Titus will need this mercy poured through them as they minister to the hurts and failures of others. In view of the writer's focus upon the pastor's home, he would highlight an intriguing statement made by Paul in II Timothy 1:16: "The Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus." Onesiphorus had selflessly ministered to Paul on many occasions and is put forth as an exemplary servant of Christ; yet Paul is asking for mercy to be shown to this man's household. It is the author's considered view that the very best of Christ's disciples can lay claim to nothing outside of God's unfathomable mercy. Moreover, it is indeed significant that Paul's prayer for mercy extends to Onesiphorus' entire family. How appropriate, as this study considers the great need for mercy in the pastor's home.

The Pastoral Office

In approaching the topic of pastoral ministry, James Stitzinger points out five distinct terms which should be recognized as referring to the pastoral office:⁶⁹

1. *elder* (*presbyteros*), a title highlighting the administration and spiritual guidance of the church (Acts 15:6; I Timothy 5:17; James 5:14; I Peter 5:1-4)

⁶⁸ As found in I Timothy 1:2; II Timothy 1:2; and Titus 1:4.

⁶⁹ James F. Stitzinger, "Pastoral Ministry in History," in *Rediscovering Pastoral Ministry*, ed. John MacArthur (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishing, 1995), 39.

2. *bishop* or overseer (episkopos), which emphasizes guidance, oversight, and leadership in the church (Acts 20:28; Phil. 1:1; I Tim. 3:2-5; Titus 1:7)
3. *shepherd* or pastor (poimen), a position denoting leadership and authority (Acts 20:28-31; Eph. 4:11) as well as guidance and provision (I Pet. 2:25; 5:2-3)
4. *preacher* (kerux), which points to public proclamation of the gospel and teaching of the flock (Rom. 10:14; I Tim. 2:7; II Tim. 1:11)
5. *teacher* (didaskalos), one responsible for instruction and exposition of the Scriptures whose teaching is both instructive (I Tim. 2:7) and corrective (I Cor. 12:28-29)⁷⁰

The above terms are used interchangeably in several passages.⁷¹ Thus it is noted by this writer, in agreement with many conservative scholars, that they are synonymous in nature and refer to the same office.⁷²

Christ as Head of the Church

When recognizing the role of pastoral leadership in the church as described by the above terms, it is important to focus upon the ultimate Leader of the church, Christ Himself. Paul declares that “He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence” (cf. Eph. 1:22-23).⁷³ Likewise, Ephesians 4:15-16 underscores Jesus’ headship: “but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things

⁷⁰ The writer would also note Ephesians 4:11, where the “pastors and teachers” office is listed.

⁷¹ See Acts 20:17 and Titus 1:5-7 (elder/bishop); I Peter 5:1-2 (elder/bishop/shepherd); I Timothy 5:17 and Hebrews 13:7 (teacher/preacher); I Timothy 5:17 and Hebrews 13:7 (pastors or shepherds/teachers). Note: These are highlighted by Stitzinger.

⁷² For an excellent, scholarly treatment of the interchangeability of these terms, see Benjamin L. Merkle, “Ecclesiology in the Pastoral Epistles,” in *Entrusted with the Gospel*, ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger, and Terry L. Wilder (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group), 188-193, ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=529732>.

⁷³ Colossians 1:18. Eph 1:22-23 says, “And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”

into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”

Christ is head of His church. He is not only the “good shepherd” (John 10:11,14), He is also the “Chief Shepherd” (I Peter 5:4). Thus, all human leadership should be in acknowledgement of His ultimate authority and patterned after His humble example of servant-leadership. There must be a passionate and intentional focus—in cooperation with the Father and empowered by the Holy Spirit—to bring Him glory in all things in the church (Eph. 3:20-21).⁷⁴

Paul’s First Letter to Timothy

The book of I Timothy is the lengthiest of the Pastorals with six chapters. It is addressed to Timothy, Paul’s “true son in the faith.”⁷⁵ One first learns of Timothy in Acts 16:1-3 where he is identified as a “disciple” whose mother (Eunice) is a Jewish believer and his father is, presumably, an unconverted Greek. One later finds that Timothy’s grandmother, Lois, is also a believer (II Timothy 1:5). Timothy lived in Lystra, and the believers in that city and in Iconium, about twenty miles to the north, spoke well of him (Acts 16:2). He is thus invited to join Paul and Silas and becomes a beloved member of the missionary team. Timothy is continually mentioned in Paul’s letters—culminating in his final letter, the highly personal II Timothy.

The purpose of this first letter to Timothy is explicitly expressed by Paul in 3:14-15: “These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; but if I am delayed, I write so that

⁷⁴ Ephesians 3:20-21 states, “Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”

⁷⁵ I Timothy 1:2.

you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.”

Though it is not this writer’s intent to render a commentary on the entirety of I Timothy and Titus, there are noteworthy passages worthy of mention here, especially as they lend additional insight to the specific passages under consideration.

Importantly, I Timothy begins with Paul’s assertion that he is an apostle of Jesus Christ by “the commandment of God our Savior and the Lord Jesus Christ, our hope” (1:1). It is significant that Paul used the word “commandment” instead of “by the will of” because it is clear in this epistle, as also in Titus where he uses the same terminology, that he wants to render his instructions to Timothy and the church with the full weight of his apostolic authority. The Greek word “command” (*epitage*) carries the idea of a royal edict; it is non-negotiable and mandatory. It makes the words of this letter weighty and powerful. Though addressed to his “true son in the faith” and one who knew him well,⁷⁶ Timothy was to carry out this message with authority.

Paul makes a statement in Chapter 1 that should resonate within the heart of every elder: “And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry.”⁷⁷ It is a meaningful reality for every God-called pastor to ponder.

Paul pens a transparent and hope-filled statement for all believers in I Timothy 1:15, “This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.” There are five such common sayings in the Pastoral Epistles.⁷⁸ When Paul identifies himself as the “chief of sinners” he transparently declares that no one is

⁷⁶ I Timothy 1:2

⁷⁷ Ibid. 1:12

⁷⁸ I Timothy 1:15; 3:1; 4:8-9; Titus 3:4-8; II Timothy 2:11-13.

beyond the reach of the grace and mercy of the Lord Jesus. His quote of this oft-repeated phrase suggests that the door into ministry is not reserved for an elite few who have no regrettable past. To the contrary, Paul swings open the door for many to be candidates to serve the Lord as a brilliant testimony to His mercy and grace.⁷⁹

I Timothy 3:1 also begins with “This is a faithful saying.” As noted, that phrase (expressed identically in the Greek) is used by Paul five times in the Pastoral Epistles, and only in the Pastoral Epistles. It bespeaks of a well-known, oft-recited maxim embraced by the early church. Here, it indicates that the early church understood and placed a great importance upon church leadership. There was both an esteem and a sense of sobriety associated with the office of the elder, and rightly so.

Verse 1 continues, “If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work.” It is interesting to note Paul’s use of two different Greek words, both of which are translated “desires.” The first term (*oregetai*) means “to reach out after,” or “to stretch out oneself to grasp something.”⁸⁰ The second term (*epithumeo*) denotes a fervent or passionate desire, a strong inner compulsion. It is interesting to mark Jesus’ use of this word to His disciples just before they partook of the Last Supper together in commemoration of Passover.⁸¹ Thus, both the strong, internal motivation and the external striving after are indicated here. What starts within the heart and soul of a God-called individual manifests itself in the enthusiastic pursuit of that calling.

⁷⁹ The writer would note here Paul’s own remarks regarding his sinfulness in I Timothy 1:13, “although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy....”

⁸⁰ John MacArthur, *I Timothy: The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 95. (See also, Vincent’s Word Studies in the Greek NT, 227.)

⁸¹ Luke 22:15 – “Then He said to them, ‘With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer;’”

Having sensed a calling and an inner compulsion, the prospective elder must then consider this in view of the objective standards for the office listed within our two seminal texts.⁸²

The Pastoral Qualifications in I Timothy 3:1-7

I Timothy 3:1-7

This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

There are seventeen qualifications listed in I Timothy 3:1-7 for the office of the pastor.⁸³ In considering the I Timothy qualifications for the elder, these will be taken in order with some meaningful commentary for each. Those regarding the familial qualifications in reference to the pastor's children will be considered separately and in much greater detail.

The author's rationale for touching on each of these qualifications is threefold: (1) to provide the fuller context of this important section of the Pastoral Epistles, (2) to engender a fresh awareness of these qualifications, and (3) to underscore the importance and essentiality of each, as they all are worthy of due consideration. Regarding their importance, Gene Getz rightly asserts:

Taking very seriously the qualifications of maturity outlined by Paul [in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9] is one of the most important leadership principles that emerges from the biblical story. It should be a priority principle. It's the key to modeling Christlike behavior for the people in the church. It is also the key to creating love and unity and

⁸² I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9.

⁸³ Seventeen, not sixteen, if one takes the household qualification in verse 4 in two separate parts: (1) ruling the household and (2) having children in subjection—as seems to be the case for the deacons in verse 12 where the two are separated.

one-mindedness among all of the elders as they lead the church to carry out the Great Commission.⁸⁴

“A bishop then must be blameless”

This is the overarching qualification for elders. It forms the umbrella under which all the other qualifications reside, and therefore deserves lengthier consideration here. It is important to note the Greek particle *de* (δε), translated “must,” before this first qualification; it denotes an essentiality, an absolute necessity. The pastor *must* be blameless.

The term “blameless,” *anepilēptos* (ἀνεπίληπτος), means literally: “not able to be held” or “one who cannot be laid hold of.”⁸⁵ Put in legal terms, one who cannot be held on a particular charge. The writer would highlight Spiros Zodhiates’ succinct rendering, “One who has nothing which an adversary could seize upon with which to base a charge.”⁸⁶ It is the same term Paul uses with regard to widows in I Timothy 5:7. Widows who are taken into the official order are to be “blameless.” In the New Testament, this word is used only in I Timothy.⁸⁷ The use of the present participle “*be* blameless” (“be” *einai*) means he is presently (right now) in a state of blamelessness.

The idea, then, is to be above reproach and to be continually above reproach. Paul’s later words in 4:16 seem to underscore this: “*Take heed to yourself* and to the doctrine. *Continue* in them... (emphases added).” The account of Paul with the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:28 bears

⁸⁴ Gene A. Getz, *Elders and Leaders: God’s Plan for Leading the Church - A Biblical, Historical and Cultural Perspective* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2003), 145.

⁸⁵ Marvin R. Vincent, *Vincent’s Word Studies in the New Testament: Volume IV* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1886), 228.

⁸⁶ Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary* (Chattanooga, TN, AMG Publishers, 1992), 170.

⁸⁷ It should be noted that this is a different term than the one used in Titus 1:6. There, the term “blameless” translates the Greek word (*anengkletos*) which means “unreprovable” or “unchargeable,” which is also used regarding deacons’ qualifications in I Timothy 3:10.

mention here: “Therefore take heed to yourselves....” The pastor’s blameless (unimpeachable, unassailable) character and conduct must be an ongoing state, and thus demands an ongoing scrutiny on the part of the pastor and those to whom he is accountable. He is to be ever mindful of his calling and the high standard of that calling—a daunting, continual consideration. More will be said of this in a careful look at I Timothy 5:17-23 later in this chapter.

In examination of the qualifications that follow, one can note four areas where spiritual leaders must be blameless or above reproach: (1) In their moral character, (2) in their home life, (3) in their spiritual maturity, and (4) in their public reputation.⁸⁸

“The husband of one wife”

The best rendering of this, per the Greek text, is “a one-woman man.” This has more to do with a moral qualification than a marital one. This, therefore, does not mean that an elder must be married, as we see in the life of Paul (I Corinthians 7:8; 9:5) and Timothy who was evidently single as he ministered to the church in Ephesus. Nor does it mean that a man cannot be remarried. This takes into consideration the widower who has the liberty to remarry “in the Lord” (I Corinthians 7:39), and also the man who has undergone a biblical divorce, per Christ’s allowance regarding adultery,⁸⁹ and Paul’s allowance regarding the departure of an unbelieving spouse.⁹⁰

The focus of this morally impeccable man is upon one woman. She enjoys his sole affection and attention regarding the intimate, husband-wife relationship. He is not flirtatious; he does not have a roving eye. It is significant that marital fidelity should be cited first among the

⁸⁸ John MacArthur, *I Timothy*, 104.

⁸⁹ See Matthew 5:31-32; 19:9.

⁹⁰ I Corinthians 7:15.

qualifications (under “blameless”), for it bespeaks of a covenant-keeping God who is ever faithful. It also highlights a vulnerability and instills a warning, for it is here that many a godly leader has failed. It should also be noted that this same qualification is listed among those for the deacon.

“Temperate”

The Greek, *néphalios*, has a literal meaning of “wineless” or “unmixed with wine.”⁹¹ Much could be said about the potential danger of being too familiar with, or lingering long at, the wine. Proverbs 20:1 and 23:29-35 offer stern warnings in this regard (cf. Proverbs 31:4 regarding abstinence for kings). There are anecdotal warnings to be seen in the lives of Noah (Genesis 9:20-27) and Amnon (II Samuel 13:28-29). Metaphorically, the word has a meaning of watchfulness, clear-headedness. The pastor must be a well-disciplined, clear-thinking individual. This term can be linked to the following qualification regarding sober mindedness.

“Sober-minded”

This can also be rendered “prudent” (as in the NASB). This man is disciplined and sensible in his thinking. He is a man of sound judgment. His thoughts and actions are ordered by the Word of God.

“Of good behavior”

The NASB renders this, “respectable.” The Greek, *kosmios*, conveys the idea of being “orderly.” An elder’s disciplined thinking translates into an orderly lifestyle. Homer Kent explains, “The ministry is no place for the man whose life is a continual confusion of unaccomplished plans and unorganized activities.”⁹²

⁹¹ John MacArthur, *I Timothy*, 105.

⁹² Homer A. Kent, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 127.

“Hospitable”

Literally, “the love of strangers.” This is vividly illustrated with Jesus’ words in Luke 14:12: “Then [Jesus] also said to him who invited Him, ‘When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just.’”

“Able to teach”

This is one of the primary distinguishing marks of the pastor; he is “apt to teach” (KJV). This phrase in the Greek (*didaktikos*) is also used in II Timothy 2:24, “And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient.” The idea is of a skilled teacher of the Scriptures who works hard at this privileged responsibility.⁹³ Thus, the principal duty of the elder is to teach and preach God’s word.⁹⁴ It should be noted that it is not listed among the qualifications for the office of the deacon.

The ability to teach, preach, exhort, correct, rebuke, is essential for the pastor. The Titus passage, as will be seen, further elucidates this qualification.⁹⁵ Timothy and Titus were each dealing with the false teaching of the Judaizers and must appoint elders who will be able to

⁹³ See I Tim 5:17.

⁹⁴ See I Tim. 4:6, 11, 13, 16; 5:17; Titus 2:1; II Tim. 2:15, 24.

⁹⁵ Titus 1:9 reads, “...holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.”

counter this false ideology. In another passage and in another time, the church at Pergamos stands as a classic illustration of this essential qualification.⁹⁶

As this paper moves to the consideration of the pastor's familial qualifications, the author would underscore here that this divinely enabled ability to teach has its first and most important expression in the home. The pastor's children should be the direct beneficiaries of one who is gifted by the Holy Spirit to teach. What benefit and blessing should thus be afforded to the elder's children; what meaningful exhortations and practical applications from the Scriptures should be their heritage.

“Not given to wine”

The pastor's disciplined life does not allow for control by any substance, alcohol or otherwise, as his testimony before others must constantly be considered. He could not be described as “a drinking man” by anyone in any setting.

“Not violent”

The elder is not “pugnacious” (NASB). It means, quite literally, he is not a striker, a giver of blows. Physical violence has no place in the pastor's life, nor does verbal assault—which can be equally destructive.⁹⁷

“Not greedy for money”

This bespeaks of a desire for gain at any cost. Character is too often compromised for the sake of money. This must never be true of a pastor.

⁹⁶ Per Rev 2:12-16, it is clear what was happening in Pergamos was to be soundly refuted by the solid teaching of the Word of God by the elders. This qualification and charge in I Timothy and Titus (re: teaching, preaching, correcting, rebuking) is a serious matter. The errant doctrine being promulgated and embraced in Pergamos is an illustration of this.

⁹⁷ John MacArthur, *I Timothy*, 111.

“But gentle”

The servant and representative of Christ must be exceedingly gracious in his demeanor and actions. His dealings with others are marked by forbearance and kindness.

“Not quarrelsome”

The man of God is not contentious or argumentative. He is peaceable and has no desire to quarrel. Solomon highlights the importance of this godly disposition: “The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger, and his glory is to overlook a transgression.”⁹⁸

“Not covetous”

Paul’s own testimony bespeaks of the fact that he is “free from the love of money” (as the NASB renders it). During his three-year tenure in Ephesus, he made it clear that he was after no one’s silver, gold, or clothes (Acts 20:33). A pastor’s motive for ministry must not be tainted with a desire for wealth or material things.

The following characteristic is conspicuously absent in the Titus passage:

“Not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil.”

The prospective pastor may not be a neophyte (a new convert). He must be a seasoned, mature believer. It is interesting to note that this qualifier does not occur in the Titus passage. It is most likely due to the fact that the churches in Crete were much younger works. Many in the pool of prospective elders could have been considered relatively young in the faith.

“He must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.”

The elder’s testimony among those outside of the church should be winsome and exemplary. He must be viewed as a man of impeccable character whether others agree with his stand for

⁹⁸ Proverbs 19:11.

truth or not. I Peter 2:12 underscores this: “having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.”

The last two qualifications (“not a novice”; “he must have a good testimony among those who are outside”) are accompanied by explanatory warnings in relation to our enemy, the devil. Pride, which may easily ensnare the novice, leads to a fall—the same as experienced by Satan because of God’s judgment.⁹⁹ And improper conduct among the unbelieving (those outside the church) also leads to the devil’s ensnarement, a legitimate hindrance to the pastor’s and the church’s gospel witness in the community. This strongly alludes to the reality of spiritual warfare in reference to pastoral ministry.

As the focus now moves from I Timothy to Paul’s letter to Titus, the author would highlight the striking similarities between the two lists of qualifications under consideration. Norris C. Grubbs’ offers his astute observations regarding this:

Most commentators note the similarities between the lists in Titus 1 and 1 Timothy 3 regarding qualifications for overseers. Both passages have the expressed purpose of describing qualifications for overseers/elders. Each passage begins with the broad standard of blamelessness which is explained by characteristics which follow. The overall concern of each passage is that church leaders be “above reproach” in their daily lives. The perceived connection between these passages, however, is more than just thematic in some general manner.¹⁰⁰

Grubbs continues by identifying conceptual parallels, synonyms, and exact verbal parallels in the two passages. He concludes, “Overall, the similarities between these two passages far

⁹⁹ As noted previously (in Chapter 1), the *New International Commentary* is illuminating here in providing an alternate rendering, as it compares the use of the objective genitive versus the subjective genitive. The latter (subjective) being favored in view of the active role of the devil in verse 7. Thus, it would suggest that it is the condemnation of the devil (*viz.*, *caused* by the devil). Satan is identified as “the accuser of the brethren” in Revelation 12:10. Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 218.

¹⁰⁰ Norris C. Grubbs, “The Truth about Elders and Their Children,” 10-11.

outweigh the differences. The differences may be stylistic or specific to the unique situations of these two letters. In either case, these two passages are unquestionably parallel.”¹⁰¹

Paul’s Letter to Titus

Titus was a Gentile convert, led to Christ by the trailblazing missionary-apostle after release from his first imprisonment. Paul refers to him in this epistle as, “my true son in the faith.”¹⁰² It is interesting to note that Titus appears only in the writings of Paul (and nowhere in Acts, for example). Some years after his conversion, and after considerable travels with Paul that spanned two decades, Titus is now the personal representative of the apostle charged with appointing elders in the various cities of Crete under the direction of his mentor. Titus had accompanied Paul to the island of Crete where, shortly thereafter, Paul left him and journeyed on to Greece.

The Greek indicates this was a temporary leaving, as Titus was briefly stationed there to make sure that Paul’s unfinished business was completed. What was clearly of most pressing concern was the appointment of godly, qualified leaders as the threat of false teachers and the damnable doctrines they promulgated were a clear and present danger. These Judaizers were similar to the opponents Timothy was facing in Ephesus. The *Baker Illustrated Bible Commentary* notes:

Titus is one of the most trusted—and most “Greek”—of Paul’s protégés. Paul charges him with establishing church life on an island that is home to some of Greek civilization’s most ancient memories. Moreover, Titus is a veteran of Paul’s battle over Jewish custom and teaching in Gentile churches (Gal. 2:3). Paul considers him the perfect emissary for dealing with a situation in which teachers “of the circumcision” (1:10) complicate these new converts’ situation.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Titus 1:4.

¹⁰³ Reggie Kidd, “1-2 Timothy and Titus” in *Baker Illustrated Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), np.

It is against the backdrop of false teaching in and around these missionary churches that the urgent need for godly, teaching elders becomes paramount. Titus' appointment to this task is clearly strategic.

The Pastoral Qualifications in Titus 1:5-9

Titus 1:5-9

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you—if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.

As we consider the list of sixteen qualifications here in the Titus passage, which Köstenberger, in agreement with Grubbs, portrays as “roughly congruous” with the Timothy passage,¹⁰⁴ we will highlight only the few differing or additional qualifications given by Paul, as they add an important dimension to the overall qualifications found in I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9.

At first glance (as previously noted), what is clearly missing in the Titus passage is the injunction: “Not a novice.”¹⁰⁵ This is certainly because the churches in Crete were young, likely made up of newer converts. Paul left off this qualification because it did not apply. Though newer in the faith, these prospective elders would still embody the qualifications listed here and would manifest the unique gifting of the Holy Spirit enabling them to perform their God-ordained duties in Christ's power.

¹⁰⁴ Andreas Köstenberger, *1-2 Timothy & Titus*, 310, 313.

¹⁰⁵ I Timothy 3:6.

“A steward of God”¹⁰⁶

The J.B. Phillips New Testament renders this statement (with context): “To exercise spiritual oversight a man must be of unimpeachable virtue, *for he is God’s agent in the affairs of his household*” (emphasis mine).¹⁰⁷

Alexander Strauch gives fuller depth to the meaning of this phrase:

The necessity for proper qualification is further stressed by the interruption of Paul’s thought in verse seven. After beginning to list the domestic requirements for elders, Paul suddenly adds a profound reason for the necessity of these qualifications. An elder is “God’s steward,” and “must be” morally and spiritually qualified to manage God’s invaluable possessions. There can be no debate upon this point. A “steward” (Greek, *oikonomos*, literally means house-manager) is a manager, an administrator, and a trustee of someone else’s household, property, or business. A steward acts on behalf of another’s interests. He is accountable and responsible to another for what has been entrusted to his care. “Steward” is an appropriate name for elders/overseers. Since the local church is called the household of God (I Timothy 3:15), the elder/overseer who manages it can be called, “God’s steward.” So in this passage Paul emphasizes that an elder must be above reproach because he is “God’s steward.” The emphasis is on “God” as the steward’s owner. Thus God demands that those entrusted with supervising his house be morally and spiritually fit.¹⁰⁸

“Not self-willed”¹⁰⁹

Strauch explains, “A self-willed man wants his own way regardless of others (self-willed literally means self-pleasing). He is stubborn, arrogant, and inconsiderate of others’ opinions, feelings, and desires. A self-willed man is headstrong, independent, self-assertive, and ungracious toward those of a different opinion.” In view of a plurality of elders (a preferred biblical model of leadership), Strauch adds, “A self-willed person is not a team player, which in

¹⁰⁶ Titus 1:7.

¹⁰⁷ J.B. Phillips “New Testament,” nd, accessed July 12, 2021, <https://www.ccel.org/bible/phillips/CP17Titus.htm>.

¹⁰⁸ Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 174-175.

¹⁰⁹ Titus 1:7.

the shared leadership of the eldership will cause much contention and division. Furthermore, a self-willed man will scatter the sheep because he is unyielding, overbearing, and blind to others' feelings and opinions. Such a man must not be permitted to be an elder."¹¹⁰ The writer would posit, the self-willed individual who continues in this vein should be rebuked or dismissed if he is currently serving as a pastor/elder.¹¹¹

“Not quick-tempered”¹¹²

To be sure, there is a place for “righteous anger” in the Christian’s walk through this world, and certainly among those who deal with the sins of God’s people on a regular basis.¹¹³ But it is the improper channeling and expression of anger that becomes destructive. Again, Strauch is fully explanatory and most helpful on this point:

The Bible warns against the perils of an angry man in Proverbs 29:22, “An angry man stirs up strife, and a hot-tempered man abounds in transgression.” The fierce looks and harsh words of a quick-tempered man tear people apart emotionally, leave people sick, destroy the spirit, and turn people away from God’s family. Man’s anger is a hindrance to the work of God, “for the anger of a man does not achieve the righteousness of God” (James 1:20).

One of God’s beautiful attributes is that He is slow to anger. So, His stewards must also be slow to anger. Since an elder must deal with people and their problems, a “hothead” will find much fuel to provoke his anger. With his ugly, angry words, a quick-tempered man will destroy the peace and unity the Lord desires for His people.

This injunction has its counterpart in Timothy’s list, “not quarrelsome.”¹¹⁴ The man of God is peaceable; he is not looking for a fight. He is ever a promoter of unity within the body of Christ.

¹¹⁰ Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 175-176.

¹¹¹ I Timothy 5:20 states, “Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear.” Indeed, a *continuance* in disavowing any of these important qualifications by one’s actions is cause for review, rebuke, and possible removal.

¹¹² Titus 1:7.

¹¹³ Ephesians 4:2 (cf. John 2:15-17).

¹¹⁴ I Timothy 3:3.

“A lover of what is good”¹¹⁵

This translates a singular Greek word *philagathos*: “having strong affection for that which is intrinsically good.”¹¹⁶ This is a meaningful expansion of the positive trait that precedes it here in the Titus list (“hospitable”) which means, literally, “a lover of strangers.” Albert Barnes is noteworthy regarding the servant of Christ who is a lover of all that is good:

[This phrase] may apply to anything that is good. It may refer to good men... and there is no more essential qualification of a bishop than this. A man who sustains the office of a minister of the gospel, should love every good object, and be ready to promote it; and he should love every good man, no matter in what denomination or country he may be found—no matter what his complexion, and no matter what his rank in life.¹¹⁷

This is profoundly true, and is striking because Barnes writes this in the mid eighteenth-hundreds. The Word of God transcends generations and provides rich meaning and instruction to pastors in Barnes’ day at a very critical time in American history. “A lover of what is good” is a marvelous descriptor for one who shepherds the flock of God and winsomely reaches out to a diverse culture with the gospel.

“Just”¹¹⁸

A common word in the New Testament (*dikaios*), Barnes interprets it as the pastor who is “upright in his dealings with all.”¹¹⁹ MacArthur insightfully elaborates on this oft-used word, particularly in this context:

[The word] denotes that which is proper, right, and fitting, and is frequently rendered “righteous.” Since it could refer to a general righteousness, which would make it seem out of place in this list of specifics, it may be best to see it as meaning “fairness,” a

¹¹⁵ Titus 1:8.

¹¹⁶ John MacArthur, *Titus*, 40-41.

¹¹⁷ Albert Barnes, *Ephesians to Philemon*, Barnes Notes on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Baker Books, 2005), 268.

¹¹⁸ Titus 1:8

¹¹⁹ Albert Barnes, *Ephesians to Philemon*, 269.

commitment to and understanding of that which is just and equitable. That quality is critical to the credibility of a leader. It is used of God Himself. In His high priestly prayer, Jesus addressed His heavenly Father as “O righteous [dikaios] Father” (John 17:25). Paul spoke of God as “just [dikaios] and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Rom. 3:26). John gives us the divine promise that “if we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous [dikaios] to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (I John 1:9; cf. 2:29; 3:7). The pastor who is just, or righteous, is a man who reflects the just and fair character of God Himself.¹²⁰

“Holy”¹²¹

This word (*hosios*) can be translated “devout.” It speaks of one who is obedient and committed to the purposes of God. MacArthur points out that Paul also connects these two words found in the Titus list (just, holy) in I Thessalonians 2:10, where the adverbial forms are used: “[Paul] testified that his own life exhibited those virtues: ‘You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly [*hosios*, “holily”] and uprightly [*dikaios*, “justly, fairly”] and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers’ (I Thess. 2:10).” MacArthur meaningfully continues:

A Christian cannot achieve sinless perfection in this life, but every sin is to be confessed. “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us” John declares. But, “if we confess our sins, [the Lord] is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (I John 1:8-9). By God’s grace, mercy, and power, not only pastors but all believers can be cleansed “from all unrighteousness.” Like Paul, they can live “devoutly and uprightly,” thereby pleasing the Lord, being an example to others, and removing cause for scandal in the church.¹²²

Moving from the broad lists of qualifications in I Timothy 3 and Titus 1, the writer’s narrowed focus will now be upon the brief, choice statements made by Paul in these seminal texts regarding the pastor’s children. The author will treat these separately (first in Timothy, then

¹²⁰ John MacArthur, *Titus*, 41.

¹²¹ Titus 1:8.

¹²² John MacArthur, *Titus*, 42.

in Titus) and then will make some important comparisons and distinctions regarding the two texts as he offers a synthesis of conservative scholarship on these passages.

Regarding the Pastor's Children

The overseer's family life takes priority amid the myriad qualifications for that office, and well it should.¹²³ Of all the qualifications for this sacred post, Paul singles it out as the most important qualifying factor for leading the church of the living Savior, the household of God.¹²⁴

Regarding the all-important familial qualifications for the pastor, Andreas Köstenberger and David Jones write:

The qualifications for church leadership stipulated in the Pastoral Letters give prominent coverage to an applicant's marriage and family life. In 1 Timothy 3:1-13, the primary passage on the subject, it is required that both overseers and deacons be "faithful husbands" (*mias gynaikas andra*, 1 Tim. 3:2, 12; cf. Titus 1:6); that overseers keep their children under control with all dignity (1 Tim. 3:4; cf. Titus 1:6); and that they manage their own household well (1 Tim. 3:4). For, according to Pauline logic, "if anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?" (1 Tim. 3:5 NIV). Indeed, as the apostle makes clear later in the same chapter, the church is "God's household" (1 Tim 3:15 NIV). There is thus a close relationship between church and family; and Christian maturity in the fulfillment of one's duties as husband and father becomes one of the most essential requirements for those aspiring to the office of pastor or elder.¹²⁵

The Timothy Passage

I Timothy 3:4-5 declares:

"[A bishop must be] one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?)"

¹²³ Kevin Smith asserts, "The literary structure of each list of eldership requirements indicates that the family requirements for elders hold pride of place." Kevin Smith, "Family Requirements for Eldership," 27.

¹²⁴ See I Timothy 3:15; Titus 1:7. Note: Family life is singled out as the most important qualifier as viewed under the overarching qualification of blamelessness.

¹²⁵ Andreas J. Köstenberger, and David W. Jones. *God, Marriage, and Family*, chapter 12, np.

Having established the interchangeability of the pastoral terms “bishop” (*episkopos*) and “elder” (*presbuteros*),¹²⁶ the writer moves directly into gaining a better understanding of the familial qualifications for that office. Regarding this passage, Warren Wiersbe offers this practical note: “This does not mean that a pastor must be married, or, if married, must have children. However, marriage and a family are probably in the will of God for most pastors.”¹²⁷

There is little debate among conservative scholars regarding the general meaning of the Timothy passage under consideration. To put it succinctly: A pastor must have the affairs of his household in order, recognizing that he is to take the lead in his home; and his children should be submissive to his authority. It is fitting now to look more intently at the meaning of these first two phrases.

“One who rules his own house well”¹²⁸

The two familial qualifications at this juncture will be treated separately. As mentioned, it seems appropriate to take the household qualification in verse four in two separate parts: (1) ruling the household and (2) having children in subjection—as is the case for the deacons in verse twelve, where the two are separated.¹²⁹

To “rule” (rendered “manage” in the NASB) means to “preside” or “have authority over.” It is the same word used in 5:17: “Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor,

¹²⁶ Clearly seen in Titus 1:5, 7 where the terms are used synonymously (cf. Phil. 1:1, where the church leaders are addressed as “bishops”/ “overseers” (*episkopoi*). *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* notes: “[In Philippians 1:1] the fact that “elders” are not mentioned gives added support to the evidence of the Pastorals that the same leaders in each local congregation were called both elders and overseers. Ralph Earle, “1 Timothy” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary with the New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 11:364.

¹²⁷ Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary: New Testament* (Colorado Springs, Victor/Cook Communications Ministry, 2003), 221.

¹²⁸ I Timothy 3:4a.

¹²⁹ I Timothy 3:12 reads, “Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.”

especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.” Thus, in the home and in the church, there is a God-ordained leadership role assumed by men.

In his unique role in the home, the husband and father is given both the responsibility and accountability before God of all that is associated with the household. This pertains, of course, to the elder’s family (as seen below with his children) as well as to all the resources of the household. The elder must properly manage the finances and material possessions just as he must “manage” his children. It would seem clear that one cannot manage one without the other. John MacArthur rightly notes, “Someone, for example, who managed his family well, but mismanaged his money and possessions, would be disqualified [from being an elder].”¹³⁰ As the writer has noted, deacons are also charged with being responsible managers in their own homes.

Ruling one’s household “well” (*kalos*) bespeaks of presiding over all the affairs of the home with excellence. This orderliness is truly a pleasant, winsome thing to behold—both in the church and in the community at large.

“Having his children in submission with all reverence”¹³¹

The NASB renders this, “keeping his children under control with all dignity.”¹³² The Greek word for children here (as also in Titus 1:6) is *tekna* or *teknon*. It is the general term that can mean children of any age as opposed to *paidia* (παιδιά) or *teknion* (τεκνίον) which refer more specifically to younger children.¹³³ In the Titus passage, older children are clearly implied, as they must not be accused of dissipation or rebellion—unlikely behavior for a younger child.

¹³⁰ John MacArthur, *I Timothy*, 116.

¹³¹ I Tim 3:4b.

¹³² The New American Standard Bible (Anaheim: Lockman Foundation, 1998).

¹³³ These terms refer more specifically to children perhaps seven years of age and below.

The word rendered “submission” (“under control” in the NASB) is a military term. This denotes discipline, orderliness, proper subjection to authority. An elder’s children are to exhibit these qualities in a spirit of respect and humility under the loving leadership of their father. One cannot emphasize strongly enough the importance of a truly loving servant-leader embodied in a father who mirrors the heart of God. This will facilitate a voluntary subordination on the part of the children, which is the prevailing sense of this word *hupotage* (ὑποταγή) in the New Testament.¹³⁴

The fact that these are children still within the home is emphasized by George Knight, as he properly notes: “Although [teknon] can be used of an adult (e.g., 1:2, 18; 5:4), the qualification [*en hupotage*, “in submission”] indicates that the ‘children’ in view are those under authority and therefore those not yet of age ...”¹³⁵ This important distinction will become part of our focus as we continue our study into the Titus passage. Paul then posits a sobering question in the next phrase which establishes the home as the all-important proving ground for the potential pastor.

“(for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of
God?)”¹³⁶

The parenthetical proviso Paul offers above, in the form of a rhetorical question, underscores that the proving ground for an elder’s leadership is quite clearly the home. It is an argument from the lesser to the greater. If his household is managed well in all respects, if his children exhibit

¹³⁴ For an excellent, in-depth treatment of the two interpretations of this phrase: “having his children in submission with all reverence,” see Kevin Smith, “Family Requirements for Eldership,” 35-37.

¹³⁵ George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 161. Knight further elaborates, “Since the word [*hupotage*] is used in its four NT occurrences of different situations, the nuance of meaning for [*hupotage*] in each situation differs accordingly. For the phrase [tekna en hupotage] the note of obedience may be presumed in light of Eph. 6:1ff. and Col. 3:20 ...”

¹³⁶ I Tim 3:5

discipline and submission with a proper attitude, then he is a viable candidate to lead the church of the living Savior—the much larger and more complex household of God. If he is not successful with his leadership in the home, he is not qualified to lead the church.

The *New International Commentary* offers, “[The pastor’s] management in the household becomes something of a template for management in the church. This logic essentially reflects the widespread conviction in Paul’s day that one’s private behavior determines to some degree one’s potential to lead in the public arena.”¹³⁷ Thus, manage well in the home and you will likely manage well in the church.

William Mounce underscores this vital maxim:

[Paul’s reason for saying this] . . . is that what holds true in the home also holds true outside the home. A person’s ability to manage the church, which is God’s household, will be evident in the managing of his own household. This verse also assumes that an overseer would be married and have children. Given the nature of the list . . . this is not a demand that an overseer be married or have more than one child; it is saying that a person who is married and has children must exhibit the proper leadership in his own household before attempting to do the same in God’s household.¹³⁸

Homer Kent concurs, offering his helpful insights on this passage:

The way in which a man controls his home reveals his capacity for leadership and government. This ability is most obvious when there are children in the home. This is not a demand that an overseer must have children (although this would be the usual situation), but if he does, they must be controlled. The administrative ability required to cause a home to function smoothly will also be necessary if one is to superintend a church. Deficiency in these matters at home disqualifies a man from serving in a ruling capacity in the church.

When children are in the home, they are to be controlled with dignity. (It is the father who displays the dignity.) The kind of father who cuffs his children around will usually treat church members in similar fashion. Even in the close association which exists among members of a family, there must be a dignified and respectful relationship maintained.”¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 217.

¹³⁸ William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 177.

¹³⁹ Homer A. Kent, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 133, 134.

Regarding the critical importance of successful family leadership, John MacArthur remarks,

An elder is responsible for leading people to God, to holiness, to obedience, and to witness— crucial matters that must be tested in his own home. Resolving conflict, building unity, maintaining love, and serving each other are essentials to church life that are challenges also in the home. If he succeeds in his family, he is likely to succeed in God’s family. If not, he is disqualified.¹⁴⁰

He offers additional (and candid) elaboration in the book, *Rediscovering Pastoral Ministry*:

The pastor or shepherd... is to care for [the flock] with the love of a mother and father. That is the pastoral portrait Paul painted: “We proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children ... just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children” (I Thess. 2:7, 11). Since the pastor is to be a leader of the Lord’s church and a loving parent to the family of God, what better way can he qualify than by proving his spiritual leadership in his own family?

If you want to know whether a man lives an exemplary life, whether he is consistent, whether he can teach and model the truth, and whether he can lead people to salvation, to holiness, and to serve God, then look at the most intimate relationships in his life and see if he can do it there. Look at his family and you will find the people who know him best, who scrutinize him most closely. Ask them about the kind of man he is.

There are many fathers who work hard. Some also manage their households well but do not lead their children to Christ and a life of godliness. These men are not potential candidates as pastors. Since spiritual leadership is a parenting process where the pastor or elder must be able to lead his people by his life as well as his precepts, the church needs to look at some proving ground where they can see that kind of leadership already visible in his life. That proving ground is the home.¹⁴¹

Regarding Paul’s rhetorical question on the exemplary home life of the pastor, Andreas Köstenberger comments, “The requirement for church leaders to manage their own households competently excludes candidates who are capable leaders but whose private lives are in disarray. Also, as in the home, overseers must care for God’s people gently rather than rule with an iron fist (in Luke 10:34-35, *epimeleomai*, “care for,” denotes the tender care exercised by the good

¹⁴⁰ John MacArthur, *I Timothy*, 117.

¹⁴¹ John MacArthur, *Rediscovering Pastoral Ministry*, 91.

Samaritan).”¹⁴² Köstenberger has rightly noted the orderliness of the pastor’s private life in relation to his family and the tenderness with which he cares for his own.

Underscoring the importance of caring leadership, J. Oswald Sanders notes in his classic, *Spiritual Leadership*, “If a man has not succeeded in exercising a benevolent and happy discipline in his own family, is there reason to expect that he will do better with the family of God? If his home is not well ordered nor his children well controlled, his ability to offer worthy hospitality will be greatly restricted, and his influence on other families diminished.”¹⁴³

The writer would emphasize the vital, ongoing ministry that must be taking place in both arenas, for the pastor is charged with effective leadership and care in the church and in the home simultaneously. Sanders insightfully shares:

The clear implication is that, while caring for the interests of the church or other spiritual activity, the leader will not neglect the family which is his personal and primary responsibility. In the economy of God, the discharge of one God-given duty or responsibility will never involve the neglect of another. There is time for the full discharge of every legitimate duty. Paul implies that the ability of a man to exercise spiritual authority over others is evidenced by his ability to exercise a wise and loving discipline in his own home. Leadership has often been forfeited through failure in this realm.¹⁴⁴

The pastor’s home is indeed his first and most important ministry. This essential qualification is equally underscored in Titus 1:6, as this paper will now explore.

The Titus Passage

Titus 1:6 declares, “if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination.”

¹⁴² Andreas J. Köstenberger, *1-2 Timothy and Titus*, 130.

¹⁴³ J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, 35.

¹⁴⁴ J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, 35.

With regard to being “blameless,” or above reproach, Paul explicates the meaning of blamelessness in the requirements that follow in the Titus list, just as he does in the Timothy passage. After Paul’s declaration regarding marital fidelity and moral integrity, he focuses upon the elder’s children with this brief but potent statement in the latter part of verse 6: “having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination.”¹⁴⁵

Perhaps on a par with the debate over Paul’s statements in I Timothy and Titus regarding marital status: “the husband of one wife,”¹⁴⁶ this phrase in the Greek: *tekna echōn pista* (“having faithful children”) has been given understandable scrutiny and has generated much vigorous debate.

The King James Version, New King James Version (per the rendering above), 21st Century King James Version, the Holman Christian Standard Bible, New English Translation, the Christian Standard Bible, and Young’s Literal Translation, all translate *pistos* (adjectival form, *pista*) as faithful, that is, “having faithful children.” This is a rendering in the passive sense.¹⁴⁷ Numerous others render it in the active sense: “having believing children,” or “having children who believe.” Ten contemporary translations of Titus 1:6 are featured below.

¹⁴⁵ Titus 1:6b.

¹⁴⁶ I Tim. 3:2, 12; Titus 1:6.

¹⁴⁷ Norris C. Grubbs, in his excellent article, “The Truth About Elders and Their Children: Believing or Behaving in Titus 1:6,” explains the active and passive sense of *pistos*: “The adjective *πιστά* has the lexical form of *πιστός*. The standard lexicons in the field of NT Greek are fairly united in dividing the semantic range of *πιστός* into an active and a passive meaning. The active idea is translated with glosses like ‘trusting,’ ‘believing,’ or ‘confiding’ and conveys the idea of having trust in someone or something. The term is used substantially in the active sense to mean believers in the NT. The passive idea is translated with glosses such as ‘trustworthy,’ ‘faithful,’ ‘dependable,’ or ‘sure’ and describes someone or something as being worthy of trust or belief.” Norris C. Grubbs, “The Truth About Elders and Their Children,” 4.

The America Standard Version (ASV) renders it: “if any man is blameless, the husband of one wife, *having children that believe*, who are not accused of riot or unruly” (emphasis added).

The New International Version (NIV) renders it: “An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, *a man whose children believe* and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient” (emphasis added).

The English Standard Version (ESV) renders it: “if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, *and his children are believers* and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination” (emphasis added).

The New American Standard Bible (NASB) renders it: “*namely*, if any man is beyond reproach, the husband of one wife, *having children who believe*, not accused of indecent behavior or rebellion” (emphasis added).

The Contemporary English Version (CEV) renders it: “they must have a good reputation and be faithful in marriage. *Their children must be followers of the Lord* and not have a reputation for being wild and disobedient” (emphasis added).

The New Century Version (NCV) renders it: “An elder must not be guilty of doing wrong, must have only one wife, *and must have believing children*. They must not be known as children who are wild and do not cooperate” (emphasis added).

The New Living Translation (NLT) renders it: “An elder must live a blameless life. He must be faithful to his wife, *and his children must be believers* who don’t have a reputation for being wild or rebellious” (emphasis added).

The Revised Standard Version (RSV) renders it: “if any man is blameless, the husband of one wife, *and his children are believers* and not open to the charge of being profligate or insubordinate” (emphasis added).

The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) renders it: “someone who is blameless, married only once, *whose children are believers*, not accused of debauchery and not rebellious” (emphasis added).

The World English Bible (WEB) renders it: “if anyone is blameless, the husband of one wife, *having children who believe*, who are not accused of loose or unruly behavior” (emphasis added).

Evidentially, this verifies that most contemporary Bible translations have rendered this statement in the active sense: “believing” or “believers.” In addition to Bible translators, conservative commentators are also divided on this important, nuanced statement in the Greek. The writer will first feature the commentators who hold to the view of “believing” children.

Having “Believing” Children

William Mounce succinctly states in his commentary on I Timothy 3:4-5 in reference to Titus 1:6, “The children must be faithful (or believers) and should not be known as incorrigible or insubordinate (Titus 1:6).”¹⁴⁸ Mounce, it appears, gives credence to both views. In his elaboration upon Titus 1:6, Mounce touches on arguments for both views, while acknowledging that the Titus passage appears to go a step beyond the Timothy passage if it requires that children be believers (versus “faithful”). He also points out that this does not necessarily imply that a

¹⁴⁸ William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 177.

father has any direct control over his children’s salvation—which he, of course, does not.¹⁴⁹

Mounce’s analysis of the specific text (and broader context) is as follows:

τέκνα ἔχων πιστά, [*tekna echōn pista*] “having believing children,” repeats the general idea applied to both overseers and deacons in 1 Tim 3 that “the home is regarded as the training ground for Christian leaders There it is required that a church leader manage his household well (1 Tim 3:12), which includes having submissive children and maintaining fatherly dignity (1 Tim 3:4). This is not a requirement that an overseer have children, but if he does have children, they should be faithful. Knight notes that the implication of ἔχων [*echōn*], “having,” children means that Paul is speaking “only about children who are still rightfully under their father’s authority in his home While this is a helpful insight as one seeks to apply the passage to the church, it is not dependent on ἔχων [*echōn*] as much as on the overall context that evaluates a man’s ability to lead by looking at his management of his home. Yet the criterion is based not so much on the character of the children, regardless of where they live, as on a man’s ability to manage his home, the results of which can be seen in his children wherever they live. πιστός [*pistos*] could mean (1) “faithful, loyal,” although it does not supply the content of their faithfulness—faithful to God, faithful to the family, faithful to a child’s responsibilities, faithful to the church, etc.—an omission that argues against this option

The commentator acknowledges,

This requirement would go one step beyond those listed in 1 Tim 3, where the qualifications for being a well-managed family do not require that the children be Christians. In this case [the Titus passage] Paul cites two basic requirements of the elder’s children: their status (i.e., Christians) and their behavior (v 6b). It can be objected that a father has no direct control over his children’s salvation, favoring the more neutral translation “faithful.” However, if Paul is saying that elders must have believing children, this does not necessarily require fathers to have some control over their salvation. It may simply mean that a Christian leader should have Christian children This would be a requirement for eldership that stands outside of the father’s direct control.

Mounce candidly concludes, “A decision is not easy.”¹⁵⁰

In his evaluation of the Titus passage in the *New International Commentary*, Philip Towner, in agreement with other conservative scholars, underscores the overarching qualification of

¹⁴⁹ To underscore Mounce’s statement, the author would cite John 6:65, where Jesus declares: “Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father.”

¹⁵⁰ William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 388-389.

blamelessness under which all the other qualities reside.¹⁵¹ While admitting the “steeper requirement” in Titus 1:6 than that which is found in I Timothy 3:4, he leans decidedly toward the view that *pistos* means “believing” (i.e., the elder’s children are to be professing Christians)—citing the influencing backdrop of Cretan society and of the false teachers Titus was to strongly oppose.¹⁵² In Towner’s view, “household solidarity” (a Christian father with Christian children) was to be demonstrated in this pagan society. He explains:

In each case [the Timothy and Titus passages], the reputation of the aspirant is thus brought into view, with the requirement being that there be no grounds for an accusation of civic or domestic impropriety against him. As the concrete qualities will demonstrate, this assessment is not limited to the Christian community but takes in also the opinions of those outside the church. First, Paul explores the domestic sphere of life, noting two aspects of behavior. As in 1 Tim 3:2, the first matter of concern is the prospective leader’s marriage. The phrase translated “faithful to his wife” (lit. “husband of one wife”) describes fidelity within marriage and does not specifically delve into matters of polygamy or remarriage Secondly, the candidate’s reputation as a father comes under scrutiny indirectly as the behavior of his children is examined in a way not taken up explicitly in the Ephesian context (cf. 1 Tim 3:4). His children are to be either “believing” or “faithful/trustworthy.” While it may seem a steeper requirement than we find in 1 Tim 3:4, which does not mention the faith of the children but probably assumes it, the former meaning corresponds better to the range of the “faith” word group in these letters to coworkers [see 1 Tim 1:2]. It is probably the more rugged, pioneer situation of the church in Crete that requires assurance that the leader’s household is not a divided one. As a reflection on the father’s reputation as a householder, the religious convictions of the children would be expected to conform to those of the master/father.

Regarding the second part of Paul’s statement (“not accused of dissipation or insubordination”), Towner illumines the stark contrast Paul presents to believing behavior:

We might wonder how such a requirement would be measured. In this case, Paul may again draw upon the wild stereotype of Cretan society, as he describes “believing” in contrast to behavior that belies genuine faith: “not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient.” The legal language of “accusation” does not here envision a formal legal

¹⁵¹ Philip H. Towner, in the *New International Commentary* states, “Overall, the leader must be ‘blameless’ (1:7). It is synonymous with the term ‘above reproach’ that identifies the comparable general qualification for the overseer in 1 Tim 3:2.” Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 476.

¹⁵² Titus 1:11, “They must be silenced, because they are disrupting whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach—and that for the sake of dishonest gain.” (NIV)

setting; the sense here is of accusations that might come from any quarter. The first of two genitive terms describing the content of the “accusation,” “wild,” covers a range of dissolute activity from sexual promiscuity to drunkenness with excessiveness in the use of money and food lying between. As in Eph 5:18 and 1 Pet 4:4, the widest sense of the word is meant to cover the most ground. Paul adds “disobedience” (better, “rebellion” or “insubordination”) to the uncontrolled conduct. Notably, this is precisely a characteristic of the rebellious teachers troubling the communities (1:10; cf. 1 Tim 1:9), whose behavior Paul will shortly caricature by drawing on the Cretan stereotype (vv. 12– 13a). With the household setting in view, the implication is of disobedience that has reached the level of a flagrant disregard for the father’s authority. It seems likely that Paul places this behavior on the continuum leading to the misconduct that characterizes the opponents (see 2 Tim 3:2; Deut 21:20). It may seem a rather excessive requirement to the modern Western mind, but in a general sense within the honor and shame framework of first-century Mediterranean culture, a householder’s good reputation and respect depended upon this kind of household solidarity. But at a more basic level, for a church whose first concern was to pull free from the attraction of the rude elements of Cretan culture, its leadership had to point the way. Households that had collectively turned away from that attraction and embraced the value system of the gospel would present an opposing picture in society and counteract the effects of rebellious Christian teachers who were reluctant to separate from Cretan values.¹⁵³

In a likeminded assessment, D. Edmond Hiebert, in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, endorses the view that the Titus passage is indicating “believing” children who demonstrate genuine, Christian conduct:

Since older men would be chosen for leadership, it is assumed that the elder would have children. The latter must “believe,” share their father’s Christian faith. The original (*tekna pista*) may mean “faithful children: but “believing children,” is the intended here, referring to those who are old enough to have made a personal decision. If they remained pagans, it would throw into question the father’s ability to lead others to the faith. As professed believers, the children must personally fulfill the ethical requirements of the Christian life. They must not be chargeable as being “wild,” self-indulgent and wasteful in their manner of life, like the prodigal son, nor be “disobedient,” refusing to bow to parental authority. An elder’s inability to train and govern his children would place in question his ability to train and govern the church.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 477.

¹⁵⁴ D. Edmond Hiebert, “Titus” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary with the New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 11:430.

In his own translation from the Greek and commentary on this critical passage,¹⁵⁵ Homer Kent has rendered *tekna echōn pista* as “having believing children.” He observes:

Children who were still pagans would be a great handicap to an elder. In that day when overseers were selected, not from among seminary graduates of which there were none, but from adult converts, this qualification would indicate that the candidate was a careful Christian.

“Having children who are not unruly.” It is possible for one’s children to be professed Christians but still be a source of embarrassment to their fathers because of unrighteous lives. “Dissoluteness” is *asōtia* (from *sōzō*, to save, and alpha privative), and designates the character of an abandoned man, one that cannot be saved. No such accusation should be possible against the overseer’s child. The offspring should also be properly controlled by his parents, not unruly and insubordinate. The Greek term describes one who is not brought under subjection (*anupotakta*). The case of the wayward “preacher’s boy” is all too frequently occurring.¹⁵⁶

John MacArthur, one of the more widely known proponents of this view, with his signature candor confidently expresses the importance of the elder having children who are professing Christians. He keys off the NASB rendering of Titus 1:6c: “Having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion.” MacArthur offers:

The second specific qualification for eldership mentioned here is that of family leadership. A man who cannot spiritually and morally lead his own family is not qualified to lead an entire congregation.

To find out if a man is qualified for leadership in the church, look first at his influence on his own children. If you want to know if he is able to lead the unsaved to faith in Christ and to help them grow in obedience and holiness, simply examine the effectiveness of his efforts with his own children.

Children translates *teknon* and refers to offspring of any age. Paul has just referred to Titus, a grown man, as his “true child [*teknon*] in the faith” (v. 4). His immediately following reference to dissipation strongly suggests that he has in mind primarily grown or nearly grown children. Even very young children can believe in Christ, and they certainly can be rebellious. But they cannot be guilty of dissipation in any normal sense of the word.

¹⁵⁵ As the former professor of New Testament and Greek at Grace Theological Seminary, and in teaching the “Pastoral Epistles,” Homer Kent felt the need to render an “extremely literal” translation from the Greek which would also be easily understood by those who were limited to English. Homer A. Kent, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 9.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 219-220.

Pistos is a verbal adjective that passively means “trustworthy,” or “faithful” (as KJV), and actively means to believe, as rendered here. Some commentators believe that Paul is using only the passive sense here and is simply referring to children who are well behaved, who can be trusted to do what is right and are faithful to their parents.

In the New Testament pistos is used passively of God’s faithfulness (see e.g., 1 Cor. 1:9; 10:13; 2 Cor. 1:18), of Christ’s faithfulness (see e.g., 2 Thess. 3:3; Heb. 2:17; 3:2), of the faithfulness, or trustworthiness, of God’s word (see e.g., Acts 13:34; 1 Tim. 1:15; 2 Tim. 2:11; Titus 1:9; 3:8). It is also used passively many times of people in general. But it is significant that, except for this sometimes disputed text (Titus 1:6), it always is used of people whom the context clearly identifies as believers (see e.g., Matt. 25:21, 23; Acts 16:15; 1 Cor. 4:2, 17; Eph. 6:21; Col. 1:7; 4:7; Rev. 2:10, 13; 17:14). Unbelievers are never referred to as faithful. That fact alone argues strongly for the rendering here of children who believe, that is, who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ. Even if the idea were that of faithfulness to parents, the use of pistos in those other passages would argue for its referring to the faithfulness of believing children. In an elder’s home, especially, a child who is old enough to be saved, but is not, can hardly be considered faithful. He would be unfaithful in by far the most important way.

Succinctly stated, MacArthur’s view is that a child who is old enough to be saved will be saved in a pastor’s home, without exception. For those who have yet to reach an age of accountability, he refers to the Timothy passage as applicable. MacArthur suggests,

If a man’s children are too young to understand the gospel and to trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior, then the standard given to Timothy applies. An overseer, or elder, “must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?)” (1 Tim. 3:4-5; cf. v. 12). As children grow older and the issue is no longer control, the more demanding criteria in Titus 1 come into play.

In underscoring the critical criterion of a pastor having children who believe, MacArthur continues,

Many Christian men who work hard to support and manage their households utterly fail in leading their children to salvation, to godliness, and to Christian service. It is not that a faithful and conscientious father is responsible for his children’s rejection of the gospel. He may have made every effort to teach them their need of salvation through trust in Jesus Christ and have set a godly example for them to follow. Nevertheless, such men are not qualified to be elders if they do not have children not only who believe but who also are not accused of dissipation or rebellion. Successful spiritual leadership of their own families is their proving ground, as it were, for spiritual leadership in the church, because they are to be models of Christian living.

Asotia (dissipation) carries the ideas of prodigality, profligacy, and even of rioting (as KJV). It was commonly used of drunken revelry at pagan festivals (cf. Eph. 5:18). Anupotaktos (rebellion) does not in this context refer to political or military insurrection but rather to personal unruliness, refusal to recognize or submit to proper authority, of

parents or of society. A man whose children are profligate and unruly, even if they are genuine believers, is not qualified for pastoring or for other elders' duties.

MacArthur concludes that both unbelief and prodigality in an elder's children disqualify him from leadership in the body of Christ, however difficult a standard that may impose on otherwise good and godly men. He asserts,

No matter how godly and self-giving a man himself may be in the Lord's service, children of his who do not believe and who are known for their dissipation or rebellion distract from the credibility of his leadership. If he cannot bring his own children to salvation and to godly living, he will not have the confidence of the church in his ability to lead other unbelievers to salvation or to lead his congregation in godly living. Unbelieving, rebellious, or profligate children will be a serious reproach on his life and ministry.

Finally, in his forthright commentary on this difficult passage, MacArthur enjoins a proper, biblical understanding of God's sovereignty in balancing this delicate issue:

Based on a defective understanding of God's sovereign election, some interpreters argue that Paul could not possibly hold a man responsible for the failure of his children to be saved if God has not elected them. But that sort of thinking is unbiblical. Scriptural predestination is not fatalism or determinism. God's sovereign election, as clearly taught in Scripture, in no way mitigates against Scripture's equally clear teaching that salvation comes only through personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and that the Lord uses believers to witness the gospel to unbelievers by what they say and by how they live.¹⁵⁷

MacArthur's view leaves the reader to wonder how the pastor can be assured that his faithful witness and lifestyle example of the gospel will ensure that his children (by sovereign election) will be brought into the community of faith any more than he can be assured of the same result among those who are in his charge within the greater household of God. If this principle is at work without fail in the home, it ought also to translate into the arena of the church.

Having "Faithful" Children

¹⁵⁷ John MacArthur, *Titus*, 31.

Importantly, the writer will now consider the contrasting view offered by several conservative scholars on the rendering of this phrase in the Greek as “having faithful children.”

It is interesting to note that Albert Barnes, a prior generation pastor-theologian, renders the meaning of *pistos* as “faithful” (versus “believing”). As a prolific commentator in the mid eighteen-hundreds, and picking up on the rendering of this word in the King James Version, Barnes’ commentary is as follows:

Having faithful children. That is, having a family well governed, and well trained in religion. The word here—*pista*—applied to the children, and rendered *faithful*, does not necessarily mean that they should be truly pious, but it is descriptive of those who had been well trained, and were in due subordination. If a man’s family were not of his character—if his children were insubordinate and opposed to religion—if they were decided infidels or scoffers, it would show that there was such a deficiency in the head of the family that he should not be safely entrusted with the government of the church

“*Not accused of riot.*” That is, whose children were not accused of riot. This explains what is meant by *faithful*. The word rendered *riot*—*asotia*—is translated *excess* in [Ephesians 5:18], and *riot* in [Titus 1:6]; [I Peter 4:4]. It does not elsewhere occur in the New Testament The meaning here is that they should not be justly accused of this; this should not be their character. It would, doubtless, be a good reason now why a man should not be ordained to the ministry that he had a dissipated and disorderly family.

Or unruly. Insubordinate; ungoverned.¹⁵⁸

Thus, in Barnes’ view, the pastor’s children demonstrate a proper submission to their father’s authority whether they are truly saved or not.

George Knight decisively addresses this question and corresponds with Barnes’ viewpoint:

“Should [*pista*] in this clause be understood as “faithful” or as “believing”? The range of usage shows that either meaning is a possibility The context here and the parallel in 1Tim 3:4-5, however, provide some important indicators: The qualifying statement here, “not accused of dissipation or rebellion,” emphasizes behavior and seems to explain what it means for *tekna* [children] to be *pista* [faithful]. Likewise 1 Tim. 3:4 speaks of the overseer “keeping his children under control with all dignity.” In both cases the overseer is evaluated on the basis of his control of his children and their conduct. It is likely, therefore, that [*tekna echōn pista*, “having faithful children”] here is virtually equivalent to [*tekna echonta en hupotage*, “keeping his children under control”] in first Timothy 3:4. If that is so, then [*pista*] here means “faithful” in the sense of “submissive” or “obedient,”

¹⁵⁸ Albert Barnes, *Ephesians to Philemon*, 268.

as a servant or steward is regarded as [*pistos*] when he carries out the requests of his master (Mt. 24:45f; 25:21, 23; Lk. 12:42f; 1 Cor. 4:2 ...). This proposed understanding of the passage goes contrary to a consistent pattern in recent English translations (*RSV*, *NEB*, *TEV*: “believers”; similarly *NASB*, *NIV*), but the considerations cited above seem compelling.¹⁵⁹

In his commentary on the Titus passage, Andreas Köstenberger states this identical view: “Similar to I Timothy 3, which stipulates that an overseer’s children must obey him with full respect (v. 4), Paul here states that the elder must be a man who has ‘faithful children who are not accused of wildness [*asotias*; cf. Eph 5:18; I Pet 4:4; Prov 28:7 LXX] or rebellion’ (lit., unsubjected,” *anupotakta*; cf. Heb 2:8).”¹⁶⁰ Regarding the word in question (*pistos*), he asserts:

“Faithful” (*pista*) probably means “obedient and submissive to their father’s orders” (cf. 1 Tim 3:11; 2 Tim 2:2, 13; note the possible inclusion with v. 9: “faithful message”). While *pistos* can also mean “believing” (and does so most frequently in the LTT [Letters to Timothy and Titus]), this meaning is less likely here in view of the context and the parallel I Tim 3:4, not to mention the theological difficulties of squaring such a requirement with the doctrine of election and the question of how new churches could have had enough men with converted children.

The fact that the other two NT references to “wildness” relate to orgies of drunkenness and the other two references to “rebellion” relate to outright mutiny (v. 10; I Tim 1:9) suggests that Paul isn’t referring to occasional disobedience but deep-seated rebellion against parental authority. Anyone who aspires to serving as an elder in the church, which involves exercising authority over the congregation, must properly exercise authority at home, with his children responding in obedience and submission.¹⁶¹

In his thoroughgoing work, *God, Marriage, and Family*, Köstenberger and co-author David W. Jones correspondingly suggest that an elder’s children are to be “faithful,” that is, submissive and obedient to their father’s example and instructions. In arriving at this conclusion, they correctly cite context, the parallel passage of I Timothy 3:4 (which makes no stipulation of

¹⁵⁹ George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 289-290.

¹⁶⁰ Andreas J. Kostenberger, *1-2 Timothy and Titus*, 313.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.* 314

believing children), and theological difficulties regarding the doctrine of election with rendering the word as “believing.”¹⁶²

Finally, the author offers Alexander Strauch’s cogent insights on Paul’s brief but potent statement in our text. He accurately summarizes:

Not only is an elder to be a one-woman man, he must have proper control of his children (see I Timothy 3:4). The translation, “having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion,” is better rendered as having *faithful children*, which is its rendering in the King James Version. This translation renders the Greek word, *pistos*, in a passive sense meaning faithful, loyal, trustworthy, trusted, or dutiful (1 Corinthians 4:17), which better suits the strong contrast with “dissipation or rebellion” that follows. In other words, Paul does not set up a contrast between believing and unbelieving children. Even the best Christian fathers cannot guarantee that all their children will really believe. To say this passage means believing Christian children places an impossible standard upon a father. Salvation is a supernatural act of God. God, not good parents (although they are used of God), ultimately brings salvation (John 1:12,13).

While the characterization of a prospective elder’s children as faithful does not mean that they must be believers, it implies that they must be responsible and faithful family members. This requirement is similar to that of 1 Timothy 3:4,5, where an elder’s children are expected to be submissive and under his control. Here, though, the qualification is stated in a more positive way—the elder must have children who are loyal and dutiful, good citizens, or—as we might say today—responsible children.

Strauch underscores the strong and stark contrast Paul sets forth between “faithful” behavior and that which is marked by recklessness and rebellion, a pattern of conduct which should never be true of an elder’s dependent children. He posits:

In contrast to faithful children, an elder must not have children who are “accused of dissipation or rebellion.” These are very strong words. “Dissipation” means debauchery, profligacy, or wild, immoral living (cf. 1 Peter 4:3,4; Luke 15:13). Nigel Turner describes dissipation this way: “It is more than wastefulness, worse than prodigality, and nothing short of immoral debauchery and excessive lewdness.” “Rebellion” means to not be subject to control, to be disobedient, unruly, or insubordinate. Such children not only bring disgrace and shame upon their father, as Eli’s children did (1 Samuel 2-3), but bring disqualification from leadership upon him. An elder must be a model father. Wild and disobedient children are a bad reflection on the home, especially on the father’s lack of

¹⁶² Andreas J. Köstenberger, and David W. Jones. *God, Marriage, and Family*, chapt. 12, np.

discipline and inability to guide others. If one who aspires to eldership lacks such ability, he will never be able to manage God's family.¹⁶³

Strauch is correct in rendering the word *pistos* as "faithful," as it sets up Paul's contrasting statement regarding children who have an established pattern of rebellion manifested in appalling, abhorrent behavior.

In this section of Chapter 3, the author has provided an extensive synthesis of conservative analysis of the seminal texts. It offers a beneficial rendering of pertinent material for the purpose of providing sufficient context and a fuller expression of each commentator's viewpoint. This, ultimately, is for the convenience and edification of the reader. The author will consider the implications of these seminal texts in the context of real-life ministry in Chapter 4 as we look intently into the stories of three pastors and their prodigals. A vital, secondary focus in this present chapter is now upon the matter of disqualification.¹⁶⁴

The Potential for Disqualification

The mere presence of a list of objective qualifications for the office of a pastor, as we have seen in I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9, suggests that there is the possibility of disqualification. Paul's own words, in his letter to the Corinthians, portend this reality: "But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified."¹⁶⁵

Regarding Paul's personal concern, J. Oswald Sanders rightly notes: "Even his glowing record of sacrifice and boundless success in the service of Christ could not quiet in Paul's heart a

¹⁶³ Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 173-174.

¹⁶⁴ I Tim. 5:17-25 will be the focus regarding the potential for disqualification (most specifically, verse 20).

¹⁶⁵ I Corinthians 9:27.

wholesome fear that after having preached to others, he might himself be disqualified To him it was an ever-present challenge and warning, as it should be to all entrusted with spiritual responsibilities.”¹⁶⁶ An awareness of possible disqualification should foster vigilance on the part of the pastor and the church. Moreover, it underscores the importance of ongoing scrutiny on the part of both. Gene Getz offers: “... every time our elder team evaluates some other prospective candidates, it gives us an opportunity to once again look at our lives in the light of God’s standard. This, of course, should not lead to morbid introspection but to a careful look at our Christian character.”¹⁶⁷

The writer now turns to I Timothy 5:17-25 where Paul addresses important aspects of pastoral ministry, including a protocol for accusation and rebuke:

Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,” and, “The laborer is worthy of his wages.” Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear. I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality. Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people’s sins; keep yourself pure. No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach’s sake and your frequent infirmities. Some men’s sins are clearly evident, preceding them to judgment, but those of some men follow later. Likewise, the good works of some are clearly evident, and those that are otherwise cannot be hidden.¹⁶⁸

When considering the above text, John MacArthur posits four principles given by Paul for maintaining (or restoring) a truly biblical eldership.¹⁶⁹ These principles form a simple outline which the writer has adapted for his purposes: (1) Honoring Pastors, (2) Protecting Pastors, (3)

¹⁶⁶ J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, 151.

¹⁶⁷ Gene Getz, *Elders and Leaders*, 146.

¹⁶⁸ I Tim 5:17-25.

¹⁶⁹ John MacArthur, *I Timothy*, 217.

Rebuking Pastors, and (4) Selecting Pastors. Our primary focus will be upon pastors who are subject to rebuke, but it is fitting to briefly address each of the major components of this text, as they highlight the seriousness and sacredness of the pastoral office.

Honoring Pastors

“Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,’ and, ‘The laborer is worthy of his wages.’”¹⁷⁰

Part of Paul’s resumed address here regarding elders, picking up from his comments on their qualifications in Chapter 3, includes an important consideration of proper honor. One can surmise from the above text that pastors are indeed worthy of honor; and for those who “rule well” that honor includes appropriate financial remuneration. Paul cites two Bible texts, one in Deuteronomy (25:4) and the other likely from Luke’s Gospel (10:7),¹⁷¹ quoting the words of the Lord. This “double honor” is bestowed upon those who work hard (“labor”) in the ministry of preaching and teaching.¹⁷²

Regarding the honor of elders, the author would correspondingly highlight I Thessalonians 5:12-13: “And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. Be at peace among yourselves.” In this passage, the saint is exhorted to both “recognize” and respect those who lead them (i.e., their pastors). This is the rightful, assumed attitude of parishioners toward their shepherds. To be sure, the elder should be one who warrants this kind of love and

¹⁷⁰ I Tim 5:17-18.

¹⁷¹ Cf. Mt. 10:10.

¹⁷² “Labor” translates *kopiaō* which means to work vigorously, to the point of exhaustion. Such was the case in Paul’s own ministry (I Cor. 15:10; Gal. 4:11; Phil. 2:16; Col. 1:29; I Tim. 4:10), as noted by George Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 232.

admiration by virtue of his qualifications and testimony. Nevertheless, the proper disposition, both earned and bestowed upon the qualified pastor, is one of recognition,¹⁷³ loving esteem, voluntary submission,¹⁷⁴ and prayerfulness.¹⁷⁵

The author would exhort that this respectful attitude should be at the fore in dealing with any problems related to the pastor and his family. To approach such a matter, one should display deference and respect because of the office he holds—something that is sometimes lacking in this present day.

Protecting Pastors

“Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses.”¹⁷⁶

Those who lead Christ’s church are often targets of criticism and accusation. These attacks can be leveled at the pastor personally and/or toward his family. The motives for false accusation are numerous. MacArthur suggests that would-be accusers may be resentful of the elder’s calling, resistant to his teaching, unsubmitive to biblical authority, and jealous of the Lord’s blessing upon his life.¹⁷⁷ Paul gives careful and clear instruction on how to deal with such assaults.

First, Paul enjoins that some accusations are to be rejected out of hand if they do not have the added confirmation of two or three witnesses. Such spurious accusations do not merit any serious

¹⁷³ The word “recognize” (Gk. *eidō*) means to purposefully know and take an interest in—connoting a very close acquaintance with, and appreciation for, the pastor (and his family). This is something that becomes crucial in dealing with familial issues that may arise. Thus, the congregants are well acquainted with the pastor, and they truly know his wife and his children. See Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*, 510.

¹⁷⁴ See Hebrews 13:17, 24a.

¹⁷⁵ See I Thess 5:25.

¹⁷⁶ I Tim 5:19.

¹⁷⁷ John MacArthur, *I Timothy*, 221.

consideration. The qualifier “except from two or three witnesses” is from Deuteronomy 19:15 and is brought forward by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 18:16. Paul uses it elsewhere in II Corinthians 13:1, “By the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established.”

Second, only those accusations which are confirmed by at least two or three witnesses warrant any further investigation. These may still prove to be false but are to be taken seriously at the outset. Paul’s instruction is both meant to protect the pastor from false accusation and to provide the guidelines for legitimate confrontation. In the case of the pastor’s children, one can deduce that only those accusations that are confirmed by witnesses should be considered for further scrutiny.¹⁷⁸

Rebuking Pastors

“Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear.”¹⁷⁹

Given the broader context of I Timothy, one understands that Timothy was charged not only with installing elders but with the necessary and unpleasant task of removing others. The church dynamic in Ephesus, as one can surmise from this missive, indicates that perhaps some elders had been hastily installed (5:22) or no longer met the important qualifications set forth by Paul (3:1-7). Nevertheless, it should be noted, the context clearly suggests that elders are to be subject to ongoing assessment. The author would highlight Paul’s face-to-face admonition to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:28: “Therefore take heed to yourselves.”¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ This, of course, does not take into account the elder’s own revelation of his child’s conduct (to fellow elders and/or the church), which will be considered in Chapter 4.

¹⁷⁹ I Tim 5:20.

¹⁸⁰ Acts 20:28a. Paul’s address to the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:17-38) forestalls some of the issues with which Timothy is dealing. Satan’s attack on the church would come from without and from within: “Savage wolves” would come in and wreak havoc with the flock (v. 29), and from among the elders some would arise and teach misleading things to garner their own following (v. 30).

“Those who are sinning”¹⁸¹

The context clearly implies that Paul’s focus continues to be on elders.¹⁸² Though specific disqualifying factors are not named in the above text, one can rightly deduce that failure to meet the objective standards set forth in I Timothy 3:1-7 are in view (e.g., disqualifying personal character issues, familial issues, false teaching, or perhaps failure to properly fulfill the pastoral or teaching role for myriad reasons).

The present active participle could suggest there is an ongoing pattern of sin (continued, persistent sinning), or perhaps, more simply, that the sin is current (i.e., present sin and present guilt).¹⁸³ (If the former is true, this could also inform regarding children: Is there an established pattern of sin/rebellion on the part of an elder’s children? If so, those who are continuing in a pattern of rebellion—with no repentance—cause their father’s qualifications to be brought into question.) If the latter is in view, then known, present conduct and associated guilt is to be addressed. Paul prescribes both the form and forum for this address below.

“...rebuke in the presence of all”¹⁸⁴

The strong reproof of an elder’s errant conduct is to be done publicly—in front of the entire congregation—by his fellow elders. Barnes agrees that those who sin should be rebuked “before all the church or congregation.”¹⁸⁵ He continues, “The word *rebuke* properly denotes to reprove

¹⁸¹ I Tim 5:20a.

¹⁸² The obvious, sensible flow of the passage propounds this. There is no logical break in Paul’s pattern of thought to leave his focus on elders and begin to address sinning parishioners in general (despite his use of a general address: “*those* who sin”). Knight is in agreement with this view (236).

¹⁸³ George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 236.

¹⁸⁴ I Tim 5:20b.

¹⁸⁵ Albert Barnes, *Ephesians to Philemon*, 184.

or reprehend. It means here that there should be a public statement of the nature of the offense, and such a censure as the case demanded.”¹⁸⁶ Since the text does not directly say “removal,” one is left to conclude that there is latitude afforded here to assess an elder’s sin(s) and determine if his conduct—or perhaps the unchecked conduct of his children—constitutes removal from office. Some have suggested (ala MacArthur) that the mere nature of public rebuke calls a pastor’s blamelessness into question and thus calls for his removal from office.¹⁸⁷

“...that the rest also may fear”¹⁸⁸

Other elders who are witness to and a vital part of this process will be given a sobering acquaintance with the ugly realities of sin and failure. This rightfully causes a healthy fear of rebuke (and potential removal) to all other pastors.¹⁸⁹ Moreover, in view of the public nature of the rebuke, this solemnity grips the entire congregation.

To underscore the matter’s seriousness and the courage it will take for Timothy (and others) to confront these issues, Paul issues a solemn command: “I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality.”¹⁹⁰

This protocol for accusation and rebuke was to be courageously, resolutely followed without prejudice or partiality. There should be no prejudgment (assuming the pastor’s guilt), and favoritism was to be equally rejected. Regardless of an elder’s popularity (or unpopularity), the

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ John MacArthur, *I Timothy*, 222.

¹⁸⁸ I Tim 5:20c.

¹⁸⁹ Again, echoes of I Corinthians 9:27 can be heard here, for Paul went to great lengths to ensure that he would not become disqualified.

¹⁹⁰ I Tim 5:21.

success of the church (or perceived downward trend in the ministry), this pattern was to be carefully followed. Paul enjoins Timothy to follow these standards in full view of the omniscient Father and Son, and the onlook of the holy angels.¹⁹¹

Selecting Pastors

Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people's sins; keep yourself pure. No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities. Some men's sins are clearly evident, preceding them to judgment, but those of some men follow later. Likewise, the good works of some are clearly evident, and those that are otherwise cannot be hidden.¹⁹²

Clearly, the way to avoid the unpleasant and unfortunate business of "rebuking" an elder is to safeguard the procedure for their installation, allowing sufficient time and proper scrutiny to reveal both those who are unworthy/unfit and those who are worthy. Earlier, Paul has made it clear that both elders and deacons are to be "tested."¹⁹³

"Do not lay hands on anyone hastily,"¹⁹⁴

Not hastily laying hands on anyone almost certainly refers to initial ordination of a pastor/elder. That is its sense in other places of its mention, and particularly in the Pastorals.¹⁹⁵ It is interesting to note that in the earliest exposition of this text by Chrysostom the reference to elder ordination is underscored.¹⁹⁶ Does it also include the possibility of restoration of repentant elders, as some have suggested? There is no occasion in Scripture where the laying on of hands

¹⁹¹ Paul elsewhere refers to angels as observing the church in I Cor 4:9; 11:10.

¹⁹² I Tim 5:22-25.

¹⁹³ I Tim. 3:10 reads, "But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless." The "also" is instructive, as it immediately follows the text referring to pastoral qualifications (3:1-7). Thus, one would correctly read: "Just like the elders, let the deacons also be tested."

¹⁹⁴ I Tim 5:22a.

¹⁹⁵ As per I Tim 4:14 and II Tim. 2:6 (cf. Acts 6:6; 13:3).

¹⁹⁶ Homer Kent, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 187.

symbolizes the acceptance or confirmation of a repentant individual. That is not to suggest, however, that this text could not be applied, in principle, to the restoration of an elder. After a sufficient amount of time has passed, in avoidance of laying on of hands “hastily,” it is possible for an elder to be restored to useful service—certainly in the case of errant children. With regard to this prospect, it is important to note Peter’s restoration to useful service—a matter the author will consider in Chapter 5.

“nor share in other people’s sins; keep yourself pure.”¹⁹⁷

Hasty ordination was to be avoided lest Timothy appear to be condoning the actions of a sinning elder. Homer Kent observes:

Paul seems to mean that failure to exercise this caution implicates those responsible for hasty ordination in the sinful effects of their unwise choice. Of course, even after careful examination, those who ordain may find that they have been deceived. Certainly, if they have used every precaution available to them, they are not held responsible by God for the sinful lapse of an erring elder. But if they, out of partiality or haste, born of failure to take seriously the nature of the eldership, have ordained hastily, then guilt to some extent must rest upon them. Timothy is to keep himself spiritually pure from blame on this score.¹⁹⁸

In our text, Paul now offers some “fatherly advice” to his protégé in view of the pressures and demands of ministry. In a parenthetical statement, Paul shows concern for Timothy’s health by advising him in the use of wine for medicinal purposes: “No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach’s sake and your frequent infirmities.”¹⁹⁹ It appears that Timothy had committed himself to total abstinence in order to “keep [himself] pure,”²⁰⁰ which likely sparks Paul’s personal note.

¹⁹⁷ I Tim 5:22b, c.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid. 187.

¹⁹⁹ I Tim 5:23.

²⁰⁰ I Tim 5:22c.

“Some men’s sins are clearly evident, preceding them to judgment, but those of some men follow later. Likewise, the good works of some are clearly evident, and those that are otherwise cannot be hidden.”²⁰¹

Finally, regarding the above verses, the writer would summarize thusly: Some men’s disqualifying sins (in terms of eldership) are already evident and therefore prohibitive for this office. “Preceding them to judgment” may mean either the scrutiny of others (i.e., elder body review) or the judgment of Christ. The scrutiny of the ruling elders is likely in view, but the Bema Seat may also be foreshadowed.²⁰²

On the other hand, the sins of some men become evident later; they are not initially apparent. This could be true, for our purposes, of the potential pastor’s children and family life. Given time and proper scrutiny, the prospective elder’s dysfunctional family dynamic may become apparent, thus disqualifying him from the office. The author would strongly underscore that more careful attention and consideration of this important aspect of a pastor’s qualifications should be given in the lead-up to calling a pastor.

In the same manner (“likewise”), the good works of some are apparent already (“clearly evident”) and the good works of others (“those that are otherwise”) will eventually come to light. It seems clear that time is not the enemy of the pastor-elder review process. And it is imperative that the matter of pastoral qualifications and ordination be taken very seriously.

²⁰¹ I Tim 5:24-25.

²⁰² II Cor 5:10.

In Chapter 4, the writer will examine the cases of three senior pastors who experienced the heartache of prodigal children and will bring the exposition of the seminal Pastoral passages (I Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9) and I Timothy 5:17-25 into focus.

CHAPTER 4: THE STORIES OF THREE PASTORS AND THEIR PRODIGALS

Introduction

The list of Christian leaders with tragic and compelling stories regarding their prodigal children reads like a who's who: from Billy Sunday to Billy Graham, from John Piper to John Ortberg.²⁰³

Monica, the mother of Saint Augustine, is the Catholic patron saint for prodigal children. Augustine famously admits, in *Confessions*, to his prodigal years and the faithful prayers of his mother which brought him to the end of himself and to the marvelous grace of salvation in Christ.²⁰⁴ Indeed, the universal, age-old reality of prodigal children has been intertwined in the human story from biblical times to the present age. Philosopher James K. A. Smith makes this poignant observation: “[Your children are] going to break your heart. Somehow. Somewhere. Maybe more than once. To become a parent is to promise you’ll love prodigals.”²⁰⁵

In the previous three chapters the author has laid the foundation for this study, provided a comprehensive literature review, and conducted a thorough exegesis of the seminal texts and relevant ancillary text.²⁰⁶ For his stated purposes, there will now be the consideration of three well-known pastors and the stories of their prodigal children: John and Abraham Piper, Jim and

²⁰³ Billy Sunday, the most influential evangelist of the early 1900's, had three sons—all of whom became alcoholics and died tragic deaths. Billy Graham's elder son, Franklin, was a noted rebel in his earlier years. John Piper's son, Abraham, will be treated in our case study. John Ortberg, best-selling author, former teaching pastor of Willow Creek Community Church (with Bill Hybels) and then pastor of the prestigious Menlo (Presbyterian) Church near San Francisco, has three children: one is transgender, and another (son) is a self-avowed pedophile—the cause of Ortberg's resignation from Menlo Church in 2020.

²⁰⁴ Saint Augustine, *Confessions Sermons*, (Catholic University of America Press, 1953).

²⁰⁵ James K. A. Smith, “Letter to a Young Parent,” *Comment* (Spring 2011), quoted in David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians are Leaving Church and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 20-21.

²⁰⁶ I Tim 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 (seminal texts), and 5:17-25 (ancillary text regarding disqualification).

Chrissy Cymbala, Jack and David Hyles. There will be an examination of how these pastors faced the dilemma of their wayward children, and the writer believes that each glimpse, and the conclusions drawn, will be instructive and edifying to the reader.

The Piper case provides a biblically astute and spiritually discerning response to this parent-pastor dilemma—and a profound example. The Cymbala case presents an earnest, heart-level response which provides a powerful appeal to prayer and reliance upon the Holy Spirit in navigating the uncharted waters of a child’s rebellion. The Hyles case gives to us a riveting and revealing example of what *not* to do in the case of a prodigal son or daughter.

John and Abraham Piper

John Piper is a well-known pastor-theologian, college chancellor, prolific writer (author of more than fifty books), and conference speaker. One of his best-known works, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (published in 1986), became the name for his expansive ministry. He is the former pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota, retiring in 2013 after thirty-three years as the pastor-teacher. He is the chancellor of Bethlehem College and Seminary, and founder and teacher of desiringGod.org.

Dr. Piper and his wife, Noel, are the parents of five adult children: four sons (Karsten, Benjamin, Abraham, Barnabas) and one adopted daughter, Talitha, who is African American. Among the conservative evangelical ranks, he has been a strong voice for racial healing, having spent his formative years in the South (Tennessee and South Carolina).

As for each of the parent-pastors, the writer wishes to share an excerpt which will provide a meaningful glimpse into the heart of John Piper. Regarding suffering, Piper writes,

“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.” (James 1:2–3)

Strange as it may seem, one of the primary purposes of being shaken by suffering is to make our faith more unshakable.

Faith is like muscle tissue: if you stress it to the limit, it gets stronger, not weaker. That's what James means here. When your faith is threatened and tested and stretched to the breaking point, the result is greater capacity to endure. He calls it steadfastness. God loves faith so much that He will test it to the breaking point so as to keep it pure and strong. For example, He did this to Paul according to 2 Corinthians 1:8–9: “*We do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.*”

The words “but that was to” show that there was a *purpose* in this extreme suffering: it was in order that — for the purpose that — Paul would not rely on himself and his resources, but on God — specifically the promised grace of God in raising the dead. God so values our wholehearted faith that He will, graciously, if necessary, take away everything else in the world that we might be tempted to rely on — even life itself. His aim is that we grow deeper and stronger in our confidence that He Himself will be all we need.

He wants us to be able to say with the psalmist, “Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides You. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever” (Psalm 73:25–26).²⁰⁷

With the subject of his wayward son under the author's consideration, Piper's views on suffering and trials are quite apropos. Any parent can identify with the level of grief and consternation one goes through as they anguish over their wayward son or daughter.

There is a purposeful selection of John Piper (and his son, Abraham) to be first in our study. This is because, in the author's view, the manner with which he and his fellow elders deal with the matter of a sinning, rebellious son is exemplary. As we will discover, there is careful consideration of biblical precepts along this unfortunate journey, and their response forms a template against which our other case studies can be compared or contrasted.

²⁰⁷ John Piper, *Future Grace* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah Books, 1995), 347.

Abraham Piper, second to the youngest son, is now thirty-nine years old. The events which we will detail occurred twenty years ago while his father was pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church. Primarily it was Abraham's agnostic attitude and determination to walk away from the faith, observed by his father and shared with the elders of the church, that came to a head in 2001. At the age of nineteen he was excommunicated from his father's church. His behavior after this—which lasted some four years—paints an image that validates the need for his excommunication. In his own words: "When I was 19, I decided I'd be honest and stop pretending I was a Christian. At first I pretended that my reasoning was high-minded and philosophical. But really I just wanted to drink gallons of cheap sangria and sleep around."²⁰⁸

John Piper describes the behavior of his son during those four years after the excommunication:

We never lost the relationship in that. The night after that excommunication, I called him at 10:00 and said, "Abraham, you knew what was coming." He said, "That's what I expected you to do. That has integrity. I respect you for doing it." From then on, for the next four years, he was walking away from the Lord, trying to make a name for himself in disco bars as a guitarist and singer, and just doing anything but destroying himself. We were praying like crazy that he wouldn't get somebody pregnant, or marry the wrong person, or whatever.²⁰⁹

Piper provides a further glimpse of his role during those years: "I was pursuing [Abraham] constantly through those four years, emailing him every day almost, taking him out to lunch every time he came back to town, trying not to preach at him. Everything in me wanted this kid back."²¹⁰

²⁰⁸ Abraham Piper, "Let Them Come Home," *Decision Magazine*, September 2007, 9.

²⁰⁹ Christine A. Scheller, "Q & A: John Piper on Racism, Reconciliation, and Theology after Trayvon Martin's Death," *Christianity Today*, March 30, 2012, accessed March 23, 2021, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2012/marchweb-only/john-piper-racism-reconciliation.html>.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

After four years of prodigality, Abraham Piper was restored to the church in what his father describes as “a beautiful restoration service.” Piper comments: “He came back to the Lord four years later and the church had a beautiful, beautiful restoration service. He wept his eyes out in front of the church and was restored. This is church discipline at its best. He [Abraham] wrote an article about it for *Decision* magazine.”²¹¹ Abraham’s introduction of his father right before John Piper’s message at the annual pastor’s conference in 2008 is touching because of its humor and sincerity. It is clear at that point, three years after his restoration, that he greatly loved and respected his father.²¹²

In his article in *Decision Magazine* in 2007, Abraham Piper recounts the end of his wayward journey and his enduring respect for his parents:

When I was 19, I decided I’d be honest and stop pretending I was a Christian. At first I pretended that my reasoning was high-minded and philosophical. But really I just wanted to drink gallons of cheap sangria and sleep around. Four years of this and I was strung out, stupefied and generally pretty low. Especially when I was sober or alone.

My parents, (John and Noel Piper) who are strong believers and who raised their kids as well as any parents I’ve ever seen, were brokenhearted and baffled I’m sure they were wondering why the child they tried to raise right was such a ridiculous screw-up now. But God was in control.

One Tuesday morning, before 8 o’clock, I went to the library to check my e-mail. I had a message from a girl I’d met a few weeks before, and her e-mail mentioned a verse in Romans. I went down to the Circle K and bought a 40-ounce can of Miller High Life for \$1.29. Then I went back to where I was staying, rolled a few cigarettes, cracked open my drink, and started reading Romans. I wanted to read the verse from the e-mail, but I couldn’t remember what it was, so I started at the beginning of the book. By the time I got to chapter 10, the beer was gone, the ashtray needed emptying and I was a Christian.

The best way I know to describe what happened to me that morning is that God made it possible for me to love Jesus. When He makes this possible and at the same time gives you a glimpse of the true wonder of Jesus, it is impossible to resist His call.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Abraham Piper, “My Introduction to My Dad’s Message,” [desiringGod.org](https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/my-introduction-to-my-dads-message), February 7, 2008, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/my-introduction-to-my-dads-message> (accessed August 20, 2021).

Looking back on my years of rejecting Christ, I offer these suggestions to help you reach out to your wayward child so that they, too, would wake up to Christ's amazing power to save even the worst of us.²¹³

In this article, the younger Piper goes on to list twelve suggestions for ministering to a prodigal child. These twelve suggestions are still available on the *Desiring God* website.²¹⁴

On May 15, 2009, a full audio transcript of an interview with John Piper titled: "Should a Pastor Continue in Ministry If One of His Children Proves to Be an Unbeliever?" was provided on the *Desiring God* website. It offers a full biblical perspective on what was happening in John Piper's life and in the leadership of Bethlehem Baptist Church during the initial days of his son's rebellion:

[Interviewer:] Should a pastor continue in ministry if one of his sons, arriving at a mature age, proves to be an unbeliever?

Well, as you know, that hits close to home. So maybe the best thing I can do is tell you the way the elders at Bethlehem managed this, because that's me.

When that happened, I went to the elders and I said to them, "Here's the situation. I think my son needs to be pursued by the elders as far as you can, and then he needs to be excommunicated if he doesn't respond." He was 19 years old.

And so for I forget how many months they did this. Maybe six months or so. And I said, "I am willing to step back and go on a leave of absence, or resign, or whatever you think appropriate in this situation." They never faced this before with any theological thoroughness.

So for those months they were pursuing him, talking with him. He was working for one of the elders at the time, and they had some conversations. And we were studying the issue, because it says in Titus 1:5-6 that the children of elders should be *pista* (faithful). *Tekna* is the neuter word for "children" in Greek, and *pista* agrees with it. So it is "faithful children."

Now if you just absolutize that as "they must be believers" then not only would I have had to resign, but every pastor would have to resign until his children become believers. (I'm giving you one of the arguments against it. Children become believers, they're not born believers—unless you have a very unusual view of baptism as an infant baptizer.)

²¹³ Abraham Piper, "Let Them Come Home," 9.

²¹⁴ Abraham Piper, "12 Ways to Love Your Wayward Child," *desiringGod.org*, May 9, 2007, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/12-ways-to-love-your-wayward-child> (accessed August 20, 2021).

So the idea would be that you can't be a pastor until they become believers—say, nobody with children under six should be a pastor. Or another take would be that if they profess faith and then walk away from it you have to leave the pastorate.

Well the elders studied that through and they wrote a paper. It was just a two page thing that said that a pastor shouldn't resign on account of an unbelieving adult child. [Editor's note: This paper isn't available, but you can read another similar one by Justin Taylor.]

And so they let me press on, but we did follow through with the discipline. And God was merciful to, I believe, use that letting go to awaken and restore. And I'm thankful for it.

So I don't think the point of those stipulations in 1 Timothy and Titus is to lead to the quick resignations of pastors, but to discern whether a man has a maturity and a giftedness to lead a well-ordered family. That's what it's for.

How can you manage the flock if you can't manage your household? And good management doesn't mean perfect outcome. It didn't for God, and it doesn't for us.²¹⁵

There are several important observations the writer would make in view of the disclosures by Pastor Piper in this interview. One should first note the qualifiers in the interviewer's question. This is a son (or daughter) who has arrived at "a mature age." Perhaps this is an indirect reference to Abraham Piper's age at the time of his defection (nineteen years old). Further, one who "*proves* to be an unbeliever (emphasis added)" would imply that this older child's behavior is demonstrating their renunciation of the faith and/or of Christian values which they may have held previously. In addition, the implication of the question is: Now that they are no longer directly answerable to parental authority (in Piper's case Abraham was out of the home), should the elder's qualifications be called into question?²¹⁶

It is noteworthy that Piper speaks of shared oversight among a team of elders. Because of this leadership dynamic, it allowed him to share the burden of his son's rebellion with his fellow

²¹⁵ John Piper, "Should a Pastor Continue in Ministry if One of His Children Proves to Be an Unbeliever?" *desiringGod.org*, May 15, 2009, <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/should-a-pastor-continue-in-ministry-if-one-of-his-children-proves-to-be-an-unbeliever> (accessed August 13, 2021).

²¹⁶ One would logically conclude, based upon this qualifier, that were the child still under parental authority within the home (i.e., not of "mature age") the question would be answered/addressed differently, viz. the elder's qualifications would be called into question.

pastors/elders. He consulted with them and asked for their help in reaching out to Abraham. It is instructive to see this type of leadership come into play in such a situation.

It is informing to learn that the elders of Bethlehem Baptist Church had never faced this question before “with any theological thoroughness.” The fact that Piper’s situation with his son and his commitment to Bible-centered leadership motivated them to consider the deeper implications of the Scriptures is an important consideration in our study.

Of significant importance is that Piper offers to resign, or to step away and perhaps take a leave of absence. This is a valid consideration in view of a pastor recognizing first of all his responsibilities to his family, and then his willing allegiance to the Scriptures that directly address this question and the implications regarding his leadership in the church.²¹⁷ This is also excellent because it allows the body of Christ to observe a pastor’s humble willingness to follow the dictates of Scripture and to prioritize ministry to his own family. Upon careful examination of the Titus passage and the circumstances, the elders determined that Pastor Piper did not need to resign or step away.²¹⁸ They did, however, follow through with biblical excommunication.

One can readily surmise from this interview that Paul’s admonition to Timothy to show no partiality—even to a pastor’s son—is being followed. I Timothy 5:21 reads, “I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality.” Clearly, the excommunication that followed demonstrates this precept in action.

²¹⁷ I Timothy 3:4-5 and Titus 1:6.

²¹⁸ Their thorough examination of Titus 1:6 regarding the meaning of *pista* (“faithful” versus “believing”) leads Piper to rightful conclusions: If it means “believing” then he (and a host of other pastors) would have to resign. His arguments are valid and run counter grain to MacArthur’s (et al.) view that a pastor’s children must be believers.

Piper’s consultation with the elders and asking for their help in reaching his son indicates that there was a period of time during which they applied grace and patiently waited for a desirable outcome (Piper estimates six months). Thus, loving appeals would have been made to Abraham over that time with a view to repentance and restoration. It is meaningful to note that a fellow elder, for whom Piper’s son was working, was having meaningful engagement with the errant young man during this time. No hasty, graceless decisions were to be made.

The idea of how to treat a sinning brother in the church—which is not elucidated in the interview but is clearly followed—is found in at least two key passages of Scripture: Matthew 18:15-17 and I Corinthians 5:1-5. The final step in Abraham’s case is excommunication (Matthew 18:17b).²¹⁹

John Piper expresses gratitude for being allowed to “press on” as a pastor. He continued in this role for twelve more years until his retirement in 2013. He also is thankful for the outcome of the church discipline which resulted, at that time, in the restoration of his son.

In a succinct but encouraging analysis of the I Timothy and Titus texts, Piper rightfully asserts that those passages are not meant to steer us toward the precipitous resignation (or termination) of pastors, but rather to underscore the importance of having men lead the church who manage their homes well—even through the most difficult and trying of circumstances.

Lastly, Piper references God, the perfect Parent, whose perfection does not ensure perfect outcomes since He has granted to each of us freedom of choice. This observation by Piper is neither irreverent nor irrelevant, for there are some who strongly hold to the view that godly

²¹⁹ Matthew 18:17b – “But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.” According to Piper: “This means he is not welcome to be a member of the church, nor to partake of the Lord’s supper. It means that Christians love him, not as a brother, but the way Jesus loved sinners.” John Piper, “The Leniency of Excommunication,” *desiringGod.org*, March 27, 2008, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-leniency-of-excommunication> (accessed August 13, 2021).

parenting—certainly by pastors—guarantees godly offspring.²²⁰ This “spiritual determinism” does not have its basis in Scripture. The author would again note our great God and Savior who laments the reality of His own wayward children: “Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth! For the Lord has spoken: ‘I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me.’”²²¹

The writer will fittingly conclude this case study with John Piper’s sidebar comments within his son’s article in *Decision Magazine*, “Let Them Come Home”:

DON'T LET GO by John Piper

"Those who sow, in tears shall reap with shouts of Joy!" (Psalm 126:5, ESV). My main memory of Abraham's prodigal years is tears. As I knelt in prayer, I would remember the 9-year-old Abraham walking with me to 6:30 a.m. winter prayer meetings—willingly. I would take hold of Jesus' cloak and cry: "O Jesus, please, don't let go of him."

He was never more than a breath away. One moment I would be rejoicing over some simple blessing, and then suddenly he was there, a heaviness, an ache. I would wonder what he was doing. And I would pour another prayer into the great censer before the throne.

Then there was fear. Will he destroy himself? Will he ruin a girl's life? Will he get a disease? Will he turn out to be an Esau? To survive I had to make the daily transfer: "Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you" (Psalm 55:22). Every day the sorrow was new. Every day sustaining mercies were new (Lamentations 3:23).

All the while God was making me a broken-hearted pastor. God loves His people through the pain of His shepherds. None of our sufferings is wasted. We do not graduate from the seminary of sorrows in this life. But oh, how glad I am that this class is over, and Abraham is home. Thank You, Jesus, for not letting go.²²²

Pastor Piper makes a profound statement regarding broken-heartedness and the love of God being poured out through the pain that His shepherds endure. This writer would underscore that

²²⁰ Proverbs 22:6 is sometimes (erroneously) used to give Scriptural footing to this view: “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.”

²²¹ Isaiah 1:2.

²²² John Piper, “Don’t Let Go” *Decision Magazine*, September 2007, 11.

there is indeed a suffering aspect to pastoral ministry, and sometimes that suffering “according to the will of God” happens because of wayward children.²²³

Jim and Chrissy Cymbala

Jim and Carol Cymbala started out in ministry as newlyweds. Despite a lack of formal training, they have built one of the most recognized and respected churches in the nation: the Brooklyn Tabernacle.

While pastoring a church in New Jersey, they came to help the Brooklyn Tabernacle in 1971 when it had less than twenty people in attendance. After two years, they gave their fulltime attention to this fledgling flock. Over their fifty years of ministry at the multiethnic church, they have seen its membership grow to more than sixteen thousand, with regular attendance numbering approximately ten thousand each week. Cymbala’s wife directs the Grammy Award-winning, 270-voice, Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir. They have three adult children, two girls and a boy: Chrissy, Susan, and James.

The dramatic and much-needed turnaround at Brooklyn Tabernacle happened after the Lord revealed to Pastor Cymbala the vital importance of prayer. Prayer would become the focus of the ministry at the Brooklyn church. The Tuesday night prayer meeting is, as Cymbala describes it, the engine that powers the church. Cymbala is an award-winning author and conference speaker, and God’s blessings at the Tabernacle have increased and expanded to the founding of other similar satellite churches around the world. In each and every place, prayer remains the focus.

Chrissy Cymbala, the eldest of three children, was alongside her dad through much of the early years of a burgeoning ministry. They enjoyed a close relationship. Chrissy’s testimony

²²³ I Peter 4:19, “Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.” This is suffering because of one’s faith in, and walk with, Christ.

indicates that her parents were wonderful and godly examples. What they were in public they were also in the home. As a pastor's daughter, she describes an idyllic environment:

Love and music permeated our home.... It was totally normal for me to hear about God and the amazing things He could do. I had a front-row seat to watch genuine faith being lived out.... I was oblivious to how discouraged my parents were since they never let the problems at the church affect our home life or me in any way. My world felt safe and secure. It was perfect as far as I was concerned.”²²⁴

With the backdrop of such a wonderful growing-up experience, one could envision the best of outcomes in the life of this pastor's child. Sadly, that would not be the case.

When trouble began to surface in Chrissy's life at the age of sixteen, Jim Cymbala was not at first completely aware. He confides:

Our oldest daughter, Chrissy, had been a model child growing up. But around age sixteen she started to stray. I admit I was slow to notice this—I was too occupied with the church, starting branch congregations, overseeing projects, and all the rest that ministry entails. Meanwhile, Chrissy not only drew away from us, but also away from God. In time, she even left our home. There were many nights when we had no idea where she was.²²⁵

With all the attention she received as a pastor's kid, Chrissy Cymbala felt the need to be “perfect.”²²⁶ As an early adolescent, she struggled with feelings of inadequacy and not being good enough. These internal struggles eventually manifested in a secretive, rebellious lifestyle. At age sixteen, she met a new Christian at the church. Jaye was twenty-one and had been “a man of the world.” Her infatuation led to a secretive relationship which she hid from her parents. Their relationship had become intimate by the time Chrissy was seventeen. She went away to

²²⁴ Chrissy Cymbala Toledo, *Girl in the Song: A true story of a young woman who lost her way—and the miracle that led her home* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2015), 12, 14, 16, Kindle.

²²⁵ Jim Cymbala, *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire* (Zondervan Grand Rapids, MI 1997), 61, Kindle.

²²⁶ Chrissy Cymbala Toledo explains: “Our church had grown to a few thousand people now and was becoming well known around the country. Because my dad was the pastor, I started getting even more attention, and that only made me feel as though I had to be more and more perfect. I had to maintain the image that I created in my mind—at all costs.” Toledo, *Girl in the Song*, 49.

Bible college in New Orleans, he met her down there, the rules were broken, and she was kicked out. After returning home, she soon found out that she was pregnant. She became involved again in church life and hoped that Jaye would marry her. After hiding the pregnancy from her parents for seven months, her mother noticed changes and asked her if she was pregnant.

The news was almost too painful to bear. Jim and Carol Cymbala were devastated primarily because Chrissy had been lying to them and leading a double life. Compassionately, “they sent her to a home in upstate New York to deliver the baby and eventually Chrissy decided to place the infant in foster care.”²²⁷ She felt this was the right decision because her boyfriend was unwilling to help and she was unable to care for the baby on her own. After a brief time of deliberation, however, she decided to reclaim her daughter, Susan Joy.

In a very difficult “tough love” decision, one that Chrissy Cymbala later called “a line in the sand,” her father refused to allow Chrissy back into the home and they had no contact with her or the baby.²²⁸ He left the matter completely in God’s hands. The ensuing two and a half years of separation were heart-wrenching for the Cymbalas. Pastor Cymbala describes it: “Carol and I went through the darkest two-and-a-half-year tunnel we could imagine.”²²⁹

During this time, Jim Cymbala did not make this known to the church. Instead, he shared the burden with some pastor friends around the nation. His rationale was that he did not want his personal life to be the focus of attention when there were so many hurting people in his congregation.

²²⁷ Christian Broadcasting Network. “Rescuing the Girl in the Song,” YouTube video, 8:40, August 11, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M2zqt9D_0z0.

²²⁸ After much prayer and anguish, Jim Cymbala felt strongly that he was to have no further contact with his unrepentant, rebellious daughter.

²²⁹ Cymbala, *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire*, 61.

After enduring another very difficult Christmas season, Cymbala recalls a cold Tuesday night in February at the Brooklyn Tabernacle. During the prayer meeting, an usher handed Pastor Cymbala a note. He explains,

A young woman whom I felt to be spiritually sensitive had written: “Pastor Cymbala, I feel impressed that we should stop the meeting and all pray for your daughter.”

I hesitated. Was it right to change the flow of the service and focus on my personal need?

Yet something in the note seemed to ring true. In a few minutes I picked up a microphone and told the congregation what had just happened. “The truth of the matter,” I said, “although I haven’t talked much about it, is that my daughter is very far from God these days. She thinks up is down, and down is up; dark is light, and light is dark. But I know God can break through to her, and so I’m going to ask Pastor Boekstaaf to lead us in praying for Chrissy. Let’s all join hands across the sanctuary.”

As my associate began to lead the people, I stood behind him with my hand on his back. My tear ducts had run dry, but I prayed as best I knew.

To describe what happened in the next minutes, I can only employ a metaphor: The church turned into a labor room. The sounds of women giving birth are not pleasant, but the results are wonderful. Paul knew this when he wrote, “My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you...” (Gal. 4:19).

There arose a groaning, a sense of desperate determination, as if to say, “Satan, you will not have this girl. Take your hands off her – she’s coming back!” I was overwhelmed. The force of that vast throng calling on God almost literally knocked me over.

When I got home that night, Carol was waiting up for me. We sat at the kitchen table drinking coffee, and I said, “It’s over.”

“What’s over?” she wondered.

“It’s over with Chrissy. You would have had to be in the prayer meeting tonight. I tell you, if there’s a God in heaven, this whole nightmare is finally over.” I described what had taken place.²³⁰

Within thirty-two hours of that prayer meeting, Chrissy showed up at their house. Jim

Cymbala hurried downstairs to see his daughter. As he vividly recalls,

[She was] on the kitchen floor, rocking on her hands and knees, sobbing. Cautiously I spoke her name: “Chrissy?”

²³⁰ Ibid. 64-66.

She grabbed my pant leg and began pouring out her anguish. “Daddy – Daddy – I’ve sinned against God. I’ve sinned against myself. I’ve sinned against you and Mommy. Please forgive me.”

My vision was as clouded by tears as hers. I pulled her up from the floor and held her close as we cried together.

Suddenly she drew back. “Daddy,” she said with a start, “who was praying for me? Who was praying for me?” Her voice was like that of a cross-examining attorney.

“What do you mean, Chrissy?”

“On Tuesday night, Daddy – who was praying for me?” I didn’t say anything, so she continued:

“In the middle of the night, God woke me and showed me I was heading toward this abyss. There was no bottom to it – it scared me to death. I was so frightened. I realized how hard I’ve been, how wrong, how rebellious.

“But at the same time, it was like God wrapped his arms around me and held me tight. He kept me from sliding any farther as he said, ‘I still love you.’

“Daddy, tell me the truth – who was praying for me Tuesday night?”

I looked into her bloodshot eyes, and once again I recognized the daughter we had raised.²³¹

In the Cymbala case, one gets a sense of the marvelous power of prayer and the beauty of patiently waiting on the Lord for a prodigal’s return. Over an extended time, God used the tough, enduring love of her parents and the fervent prayers of God’s people to bring her home. Cymbala summarizes this journey: “Through all this, Carol and I learned as never before that persistent calling upon the Lord breaks through every stronghold of the devil, for nothing is impossible with God.”²³²

Jack and David Hyles

Jack Hyles was a nationally known Baptist pastor, pastoring churches for fifty-four years. He was most notably the pastor of First Baptist Church of Hammond, Indiana from 1959 until his

²³¹ Ibid. 66-67.

²³² Ibid. 67-68.

death in 2001 (forty-two years). For many years the church was touted as having “the world’s largest Sunday School.” Church attendance on some Sundays was recorded as high as 30,000. From 1996 to 2001 (the last five years of his ministry) the church had an average attendance of 15,000 with approximately 10,000 baptisms in each of those years. He was a revered leader in the IFB (Independent Fundamental Baptist) movement and hosted pastors’ conferences—called “Pastors’ Schools”—at First Hammond for thirty-seven years. He was the founder and chancellor of Hyles-Anderson College, which began in 1972, and the superintendent of Hammond Baptist Schools. In 2000, their combined enrollment was 4,000 students. Hyles is the author of forty-nine books and pamphlets and spoke in conferences all over the nation and around the world.²³³

Jack Hyles and his wife, Beverly, had four children: David, Cindy, Linda, and Becky. Pastor Jack Hyles and his son David, the eldest, will be the subjects of this case study. The following excerpts are from Hyles’ classic work, *How to Rear Children*:

Satan has pointed every weapon in his arsenal at our young people. Promiscuous petting, Hollywood movies, secular magazines, the new morality, [lewdness] in dress, television, popular songs, and the permissive society have all joined hands to try to corrupt the morals of our youth. If a child reaches the marriage altar retaining his purity in our generation, it certainly will be on purpose and not by accident. It will be the result of prayer, training, and discipline as administered by loving parents.²³⁴

In the same passage, Hyles asserts,

The child should attend a fundamental church that takes a stand against the permissive society, indecent dress, improper exposure of the body, and unwise association between the sexes. He should hear a man of God thunder against sin and for righteousness. He should be taught the “thou shalt nots” of the Bible. He should get the idea from early childhood that he is to keep his body pure and clean and save it for the one God has for him.

²³³ Bio information from Hyles website: “The Jack Hyles Home Page,” Fundamental Forum Electronic Press, accessed August 10, 2021, <https://www.jackhyles.com>.

²³⁴ Jack Hyles, *How to Rear Children* (Crown Point, IN: Hyles-Anderson Publishers, 1972), chapt. 17, accessed September 16, 2021, <http://www.fbbc.com/messages/hyleshowtorearchildren.htm>.

He should be taught the Scriptures which deal with virtue and chastity. There is absolutely no substitute for a child growing up at the feet of a prophet of God, a man who rains wrath upon evil and warns men of evil deeds.²³⁵

In Chapter 22 of this work, titled “How to Make a Man Out of a Boy,” Hyles shares that his son David, sixteen at the time, has been called by God to be a preacher and is already preparing for the ministry. Regarding the importance of having godly heroes, Hyles exults that he is his son’s hero. He shares,

Recently David had to wait two and a half hours on Sunday evening for his dad. When we got home someone asked him why he didn’t come home earlier with the rest of the family. He replied that he wanted to wait for his dad. Then they asked him, “What did you do for two and a half hours alone out in the hall?” David stood up and with masculine physique and presentation he said, “I will tell you what I did for that two and a half hours alone in the hall: I walked up and down the hallway realizing how many people would love to wait two and a half hours to get to ride home with Dr. Jack Hyles, and I thanked God that I have the privilege.”

Hyles then adds,

Nearly seventeen years ago I got on my knees over the body of my only son and prayed for God to make him a man. I never prayed that he would be a preacher; I prayed that he would be a man, a Christian man with integrity, discipline, leadership, ability, courtesy, gentleness, strength and honor; yes, in every way, a real man. I have tried now for almost seventeen years to help him become a man. I think he will, I believe I am now ending my work that I [set] out to do that day. I think I have about made, with God’s help, a man out of a boy.²³⁶

David Hyles is the eldest child (and only son) of Jack Hyles’ four children. His formative years were spent under the ministry of his father at the First Baptist Church in Hammond, Indiana. He was made one of the leaders in the bus ministry—which brought in thousands of boys and girls to Sunday School—and, at the age of eighteen, was made the youth pastor of FBC Hammond. As much as the author can ascertain, at the age of twenty-eight, David left the

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Ibid., chapt. 22, np.

ministry at FBC Hammond to become the senior pastor of Hyles' former church, the Miller Road Baptist Church in Garland, Texas.

The grounds for the younger Hyles' departure from Hammond were scandalous, rife with moral degeneracy. David Cloud notes,

Jack Hyles said in his book *How to Rear Children*, "I have spent thousands of hours trying to make a man out of my son." In this book, Hyles described Dave as a self-controlled young man. Dave was promoted as a youth pastor, evangelist, and later as a pastor by the gushing father, yet he was a serial fornicator and adulterer. I have talked personally with former staff members, church members, and people who knew Dave Hyles who confirmed this miserable fact.²³⁷

David Hyles' moral indiscretions began in junior high school—at the age of fourteen—according to a former classmate and testimony by the Hyles children's former guardian.²³⁸ Throughout his teenage years he was sexually promiscuous, and this pattern continued throughout his ministry at the church in Hammond and beyond. It has also been established by individuals close to the situation that Pastor Hyles was very aware of his son's behavior. Paula [Hyles] Polonco, the first wife of David Hyles, remarks in a phone interview:

I believe that Brother Hyles knew that David had moral problems from the time he hit puberty, but it was never dealt with. I mean when I was dating David, the books that [Jack Hyles] has written on rearing teenagers and dating, we never did one thing that he taught.²³⁹ We never double dated. [David] came and went as he pleased. That boy had not one rule for his life. Never. He did what he wanted to do. I met him fresh out of high school. We both graduated the same year and went to college. He never had restrictions on his life. And his dad would get up and preach this and browbeat everybody to death to raise their kids that way, but David didn't have to live that way.... I would just sit there, and he would say, "My son David and Paula never single dated," and I would look at

²³⁷ David Cloud, *The Hyles Effect: A Spreading Blight* (Canada: Bethel Baptist Print Ministry, 2012), 59, accessed September 13, 2021, <https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/read/34311884/the-hyles-effect-way-of-life-literature>.

²³⁸ The student is unnamed, the guardian is Victor Nischik (as disclosed in his interview with D.A. Wade). Victor Nischik, "Victor Nischik Speaks About Jack Hyles Issues," *The Bible For Today*, June 19, 1993, accessed September 6, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ou-q3dF6MYs>.

²³⁹ Hyles taught that single dating should never be permitted among teenagers; only double dating was allowable. This rule was enforced at Hammond Baptist Schools and Hyles-Anderson College.

David and start laughing and think, “This is hilarious; I can’t believe that he gets up and says this.”²⁴⁰

Pastor Hyles was confronted about his son’s behavior on numerous occasions but chose to ignore it.²⁴¹ Robert L. Sumner, in his revealing article “The Saddest Story We’ve Ever Published,” states:

One minister, who both went to school and worked with Dave, said it was common knowledge at [FBC Hammond] that [David] had moral problems. People quit the church over it. Pastor Hyles refused to even discuss it. Parents went to him with letters Dave had written their daughters containing obscene and immoral content. He would reach for the letters and say, "I'll take care of it," but the only thing taken care of was the evidence, which the parents no longer had in their possession.²⁴²

In an interview with the Chicago Post-Tribune, Linda Murphrey, David’s younger sister, stated, ““My brother became my dad, but a darker version,’ Murphrey said. ‘(My father) covered up for my brother no matter what he did.’”²⁴³

With incredible irony, in his book *How to Rear Children*, Jack Hyles writes,

The parent who spans his child offers for himself more opportunities for service to God. In writing to Timothy in I Timothy 3:4,5 Paul says that a pastor should be one who "ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)" He also disqualifies from the office of deacon one who does not control his children properly. I Timothy 3:12, "Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well." Hence, one who does not follow God's plain teaching about discipline is not qualified to hold either of the offices in the New Testament church. God will not use men who disobey Him in this vital matter. One reason God blessed Abraham so mightily is the fact that he could trust him to "command

²⁴⁰ Paula Hyles, Phone interview with Pastor Dave Coleman. 1993, accessed September 12, 2021, <https://brucegerencser.net/tag/paula-hyles>.

²⁴¹ Reference Paula Hyles phone interview with Dave Coleman and Victor Nischik interview with D.A. Wade. Ibid.: Nischik, “Victor Nischik Speaks About Jack Hyles Issues.”

²⁴² Robert L. Sumner, “History of Jack Hyles Expose: The saddest story we ever published,” *The Biblical Evangelist*, https://www.biblicalevangelist.org/jack_hyles_chapter3.php.

²⁴³ This quote cited by Alexandra Kukulka in the *Chicago Tribune* in her article titled: “Highland woman alleges youth pastor at First Baptist Church of Hammond raped her in 1970s: ‘He knew exactly what he was doing’,” Chicago Post Tribune, March 27, 2020, accessed September 10, 2021, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/suburbs/post-tribune/ct-ptb-hyles-lawsuit-st-0329-20200327-qhcr4b7utbbatna2io7e2j7j5q-story.html>.

his children and his household after him," according to Genesis 18:17-19. Eli the high priest in the days of Samuel, forfeited great blessings from God because he did not properly discipline his sons. His two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were both wicked men. In I Samuel 3:12-14 we have God's judgment upon him. Notice very carefully in verse 13 the words, "because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not." Judgment fell upon Eli and upon his house because he did not discipline his sons.²⁴⁴

Pastor Hyles expressed, with correct biblical insight, that failure to maintain proper discipline in the home—and the resulting unbridled behavior of the children—disqualifies one from the pastorate. But there seemed to be (and increasingly became) a disconnect between what Hyles preached and touted in public and what was being lived out in the home. Linda Murphrey recalls,

My dad lived a double life. One of righteous family man and dynamic speaker in the public eye. But one of sordid sexual secrets privately. Secrets that only my siblings and me and my mom knew.... My brother, my older brother, he became another version of my father.... I felt I had one main responsibility as a child. It was simple but daunting. And that was to keep all the secrets. There were so many. You see, [my father] had taught us that the best way to please God was to please him."²⁴⁵

Jack Hyles was an intimidating figure in his home and in the church. The culture that Jack Hyles created and cultivated at FBC Hammond was one of unquestioned allegiance to authority. Chief among the sins he preached against was the sin of accusation or talebearing. In his book, *Jack Hyles on Justice*, he alarmingly distorts the clear meaning of I Timothy 5:17-20—a passage which, among other things, addresses the importance of confrontation when sin is discovered in an elder's life. Regarding the "inexcusable" sin of judging, Hyles writes:

Judging is inexcusable. Romans 2:1, "Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself for thou that judgest doest the same things. But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things."

Who is inexcusable? The drunkard? No! The harlot? No! The whoremonger? No! The thief? No! The murderer? No! Who is inexcusable? "Whosoever thou art that judgest." This means you are not to judge outside of your own area. If a man is given an area of

²⁴⁴ Hyles, *How to Rear Children*, chapt. 11, np.

²⁴⁵ Linda Murphrey, TECxOjaiChange Speech, "From Cult to Courage," August. 21, 2012, 2:33, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pdtxM0rD86I>.

judgment, but judges outside his own area, the Bible says that is inexcusable.... The judge, the gossip, the slanderer, the critic, the tattler and the babler are inexcusable. It is the only sin which is inexcusable!²⁴⁶

Here then is Hyles' audacious misinterpretation of a vital passage dealing with pastoral accountability:

Judging is the only sin that warrants public rebuke. I Timothy 5:17-20, "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And the labourer is worthy of his reward. Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses. Them that sin rebuke before all that others also may fear."

The only sin mentioned here is false accusation. God is not instructing us to rebuke publicly everybody in the church who commits a sin, nor is He giving us permission to do so. That is foolishness! You could never do it, for everyone sins every day. In reality, the only sin spoken of here is the sin of false accusation.²⁴⁷

Pastor Hyles' character was to be above reproach, but he was not above rebuke—nor is any pastor. The author's exposition in Chapter 3 renders a clear understanding of this passage and the implications thereof in the life of a pastor or elder. When one has disqualified himself because of a pattern of sinful behavior, he is to be rebuked (by his fellow elders) before all and removed.

In another case of unfortunate irony, the lack of internal rebuke at the church in Hammond (per I Timothy 5:20) led to other pastors providing the rebuke externally. Roger Voegtlin, pastor of a sister IBF church just twenty-six miles from Hyles-Anderson College, in a scathing denunciation, rebukes both the elder and the younger Hyles for their egregious sins and years-

²⁴⁶ Jack Hyles, *Justice* (Crown Point, IN: Hyles-Anderson Publishers, n.d.), accessed September 24, 2021, chapt.9, <https://www.jackhyles.com/justice1.htm>. Note: Hyles quotes from the King James Version (as rendered).

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

long coverup.²⁴⁸ Robert Sumner, editor of *The Biblical Evangelist*, posted a revealing and lengthy article which sought to expose and rebuke the sins of Jack Hyles and his son David.

Years later, in an open letter to First Baptist Church, Linda Murphrey reveals her jealousy over her father's misplaced affections:

I was never really sure if it was you that he loved, or merely the adoration and prestige he received from you. Definitely the latter, perhaps both. In either case, I always knew that you, his ministry, mattered more than I did. I didn't blame you. I envied you. As a little girl, I longed to matter as much to him as his ministry did, but I couldn't compete. Everything he did, everything we did was "for the sake of the ministry." The lies we had to keep were "for the sake of the ministry." The pretense we were forced to live was "for the sake of the ministry." The mandated secrecy was "for the sake of the ministry." Those six words still ring in my ears, I heard them so much as a child. Jack Hyles' ministry was ALL that mattered to him. And when the time came for him to choose between the ministry and me, he chose you. He always chose you...²⁴⁹

Tragically, the Hyles saga is an extreme case of what can happen when God's clear mandates regarding pastoral leadership—in the home and the church—are not followed. Despite being a glaring testimonial of what not to do, an appalling case of negative examples, one should not lose sight of the vivid illustration it affords as to the importance of a proper understanding of the Scriptures and a proper submission to the precepts which define and govern the office of the pastor.

With that in view, the author will invert the facts and propose a "what-if" scenario for the edification of the reader. In this scenario, Pastor Hyles learns that his fourteen-year-old son is acting immorally (conduct which would certainly be included in the idea of "debauched")

²⁴⁸ Refundamental [sic] Joe. "Why I'm Not 100% for Jack Hyles' by Roger Voegtlin – 1989 – Jack Hyles Issues." YouTube video, 1:55:30, July 24, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jYjG3vtNncY>.

²⁴⁹ Bruce Gerencser. "Linda Murphrey Writes an Open Letter to First Baptist Church Hammond," No Longer Quivering (blog), patheos, March 24, 2013, <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/nolongerquivering/2013/03/linda-murphrey-writes-an-open-letter-to-first-baptist-church-hammond/>.

behavior in Titus 1:6). Realizing fully the qualifications of his office and the implications of his son's behavior, he consults with his leadership team—in this case, his deacons—and decisive steps are taken. He expresses a willingness to either step down or at least step out for an indefinite time to get his family life under control and to minister to the pressing needs of his son. One should mention here that the daughters, though younger, were not engaged in any questionable activity; only one of the four children is acting out. Still, David Hyles' immoral behavior is scandalous and would likely warrant Pastor Hyles taking a step back to deal with his son and to help him stop this reprehensible pattern of behavior—while there is still time to facilitate a course correction. One must remember, David Hyles is under the direct authority of his father at this time. The elder Hyles has every right and reason to expect obedience.²⁵⁰ Hyles' own somewhat humorous words paradoxically underscore this:

Get your child in all the activities of the church. All of them! When the doors open, get him here. Get Junior in the choir. "But he is thirteen; his voice is changing." Okay, let him get up and sing sourly. That is how I sing all the time. Get him in the choir. You say, "He cannot sing." Then let him hum. If he cannot hum, just let him move his mouth and pray nothing will come out. But you say, "Brother Hyles, Junior will not go." Oh, brother. What in the world kind of parent are you? I dare my boy not to go when I say go. He is seventeen years old now and thinks he might be able to whip his dad, but I have some holds he does not know about. I will wring his neck if he does not obey me.²⁵¹

Continuing with our desirable scenario, if Hyles remains engaged with his pastoral ministry—having prayerfully arrived at this conclusion with his leadership team—there would be a renewed understanding on everyone's part that his primary responsibility to his family was being observed. Moreover, correcting and restoring his son affords Hyles the opportunity to mirror the

²⁵⁰ This, of course, would also be assuming that the parent-pastor (Hyles) had the moral authority to correct and instruct his son (which he apparently did not). It becomes clear from an abundance of testimony from within and without the home that the family was entirely dysfunctional.

²⁵¹ Jack Hyles, "Satan's Bid for Your Children," Crown Point, IN: Hyles-Anderson Publishers, May 23, 1971, accessed September 24, 2021, http://www.fbbc.com/messages/hyles_satans_bid_for_your_child.htm.

heart of God as we observe in Jesus’ familiar parable in Luke 15 regarding the prodigal son. Profound love and compassion, as revealed in that moving parable, are hallmarks of the restorative process. All of this, should he remain in the pastorate, would be marvelously modeled before his congregation. This gives living, breathing credibility to the statement, “one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence,”²⁵² as the pastor is managing his home—even through the most trying and difficult of circumstances.

What tragedy within the body of Christ could have been averted if the relevant Scriptures had been applied and obeyed? Regrettably, this unseemly pattern in David Hyles’ life continued and worsened. After leaving FBC Hammond, he went on to pastor Miller Road Baptist Church in Garland, Texas where he had adulterous affairs with numerous women. This conduct continued in other churches and places. Moreover, there are strong allegations of child abuse (which resulted in death) as well as involvement in pornographic websites and a “swingers” lifestyle. The author would posit that much, if not all, of this disastrous outcome could have been thwarted if David’s teenaged sins and rebellion had been confronted and corrected by his father. That is clearly the mandate of every parent-pastor, indeed of every Christian father.

Where Are They Now?

Today, Abraham Piper has a large following (approaching one million) on TikTok, which rivals his dad’s following on social media. He essentially denounces everything about his evangelical (“fundie,” as he calls it) background and upbringing, and applauds others who have the courage to deconstruct their faith as he has done. He is married with children, a multimillionaire (through various entrepreneurial ventures), and lives in California.

²⁵² I Timothy 3:4.

Chrissy Cymbala's dramatic return to the Lord is documented in her father's book, *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire*. According to Pastor Jim Cymbala, the evidence of her genuine repentance was immediate. He recalls, "By that fall, God had opened a miraculous door for her to enroll at a Bible college, where she not only undertook studies but soon began directing music groups and a large choir, just like her mother. Today she is a pastor's wife in the Midwest with three wonderful children."²⁵³

Chrissy and her husband Al lead a multiethnic church in Chicago, the Chicago Tabernacle. They, too, have established a Tuesday night prayer meeting which is the focal point of their ministry. The Sunday services average 1,000 in attendance. Chrissy's book, *Girl in the Song*,²⁵⁴ tells the story of her dramatic homecoming and offers hope to the wayward and to the parents who long for their return.

There is currently a class action lawsuit filed against David Hyles alleging rape and sexual abuse during the time he was the youth pastor at FBC Hammond. He has founded a ministry, "Fallen in Grace," through which he purportedly ministers to fallen preachers and Christians. However, in 2020 he was accused of having an online affair with a woman. He is now sixty-seven.

Conclusion

The stories of these three well-known pastors and their prodigal children offer us a better understanding of the emotional distresses and ministry implications for any pastor whose family is experiencing this turmoil. Untold days and hours of heartache are vividly expressed by two of

²⁵³ Jim Cymbala, *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire*, 67.

²⁵⁴ Toledo, *Girl in the Song*.

the three pastors.²⁵⁵ To a greater extent, the Piper case displays a burden shared—as the leadership team (elders) and the congregation are made aware of the unfortunate situation and are involved in the process of prayer and attempts at reconciliation. Moreover, they were involved as the saga played out over four years, resulting in Abraham Piper’s restoration to the fellowship of the church. The Cymbala case reveals that only a few fellow ministers and congregants were made aware of this painful dilemma. Once the congregation was informed—during that momentous Tuesday night prayer meeting—the entire church became involved in a fervent prayer effort to see Chrissy Cymbala repent and be restored. The outcome is a beautiful illustration of the power of prayer!²⁵⁶

Each case provides a glimpse into differing leadership structures within local church ministry. As has been noted, Piper was an elder among other elders. To be sure, he was a leader among equals, but the leadership structure afforded accountability and a shared burden when his son defected.²⁵⁷ Cymbala is largely a solitary figure, leading the church with the aid of a paid pastoral staff. This structure does not seem to afford the important advantages of accountability

²⁵⁵ Sadly, the Hyles case displays only a pattern of coverup and denial.

²⁵⁶ One is reminded of the continual, fervent prayers offered by the church in Peter’s behalf: “Peter was therefore kept in prison [by Herod], but *constant prayer* was offered to God for him by the church” (Acts 12:5, emphasis added).

²⁵⁷ Gene Getz speaks of this dynamic in *Elders and Leaders: God’s Plan for Leading the Church – A Biblical, Historical and Cultural Perspective*, where he lists fourteen leadership principles for the local church. He asserts: “Every group of spiritual leaders needs a primary leader who both leads and serves, and who is accountable to his fellow spiritual leaders.” (Chapter 29 Principle 6, 149.) In the same chapter, Getz also offers: “PRINCIPLE 10: Mutual Accountability ‘Spiritual leaders in the church should hold each other accountable for their spiritual lives as well as the way they carry out their ministries.’” Gene A. Getz. *Elders and Leaders*, 149-152.

and transparency.²⁵⁸ Hyles is an outlier in terms of properly functioning leadership structure within the church.²⁵⁹ Other than a paid pastoral staff (who were accountable directly to him) and deacons, who were apparently a “rubber stamp” and subject to strong intimidation tactics, there was no structure of accountability, and no persons in whom the pastor could confide as he walked through the painful dilemma of a rebellious son. The undesirable outcome serves to underscore that a lack of proper, biblical leadership within the church can lead to potentially disastrous results.²⁶⁰

It is noteworthy that all three pastors remained in the pastorate. In the author’s view, two of these leaders legitimately so. After careful and prayerful deliberation, the elders of Bethlehem Baptist Church were favorable to John Piper continuing in ministry. (It should be noted that there are no recorded issues during these years with any of his other four children.) Regarding Jim Cymbala, there is no evidence that a leadership team or the congregation were weighing his qualifications in view of the behavior of his eldest child (who was living an immoral lifestyle and had become pregnant by her boyfriend). Other than confiding in some unnamed ministry leaders across the nation, Cymbala and his wife largely handled the matter alone in the local setting. Moreover, Cymbala does not divulge any indication that he was deliberating about his pastoral credentials during this time or that he considered offering his resignation. It appears that the

²⁵⁸ Though there were pastors on paid staff at Brooklyn Tabernacle and First Baptist Church of Hammond, there does not appear to be an accountability structure in place, and there is no record in published literature that either pastor confided his struggles with an errant child to pastoral staff. Leadership authority was vested in a singular leader in each case.

²⁵⁹ Though a familiar structure (paid pastoral staff and a deacon body), the actual *function* in Hyles’ case did not follow a truly biblical pattern as it afforded no legitimate accountability and mutual support.

²⁶⁰ Regarding the role of the “primary leader,” Gene Getz comments: “Clearly, the New Testament story teaches that a primary leader—to be in the will of God—must always be a servant-leader. There’s no place in the body of Christ for authoritarianism, manipulation, and lack of accountability.” Gene A. Getz. *Elders and Leaders*, 150.

“tough love” he demonstrated in disallowing his daughter back into their home was an effort to distance himself from her debauched behavior; it gives clear indication that he was neither ignoring nor endorsing such behavior. One can readily see how this “line in the sand” was both painful and deliberate, and hopeful of a desired outcome of repentance and restoration.

Two of the three prodigals were in older teenage years when they completely defected (i.e., their behavior became outwardly prodigal). Abraham Piper was nineteen. Chrissy Cymbala was college age (eighteen) when the rebellion became pronounced. She became intimate with her boyfriend at age seventeen but kept her conduct a secret from her parents. What Cymbala did not know could not be properly dealt with.²⁶¹ David Hyles became immoral as a young teenager, at age fourteen. Numerous testimonies underscore this tragic reality.²⁶² Had the elder Hyles been properly attuned to his son’s life and sensitive to signs that were all around (including direct confrontation from parents), David Hyles’ wayward behavior could have been addressed and properly dealt with by his father. One is reminded of Proverbs 19:18, where the writer implores: “Chasten your son while there is hope, and do not set your heart on his destruction.”²⁶³ The conscientious parent-pastor should certainly exemplify this principle. The sad indictment against Jack Hyles is akin to that of Eli, whose sons acted immorally and he “restrained them not.”²⁶⁴

²⁶¹ The author recalls a casual conversation with a pastor’s son who confessed that he had been immoral in high school—without his father ever finding out.

²⁶² Testimonies from his former wife Paula, a former classmate, the former guardian of the Hyles children, unnamed parents who personally confronted Pastor Hyles (per interview transcripts).

²⁶³ See also Prov. 23:13-14.

²⁶⁴ I Samuel 3:13 (KJV). The writer would further qualify the matter regarding Eli’s sons, Hophni and Phinehas. Eli, who died at age ninety-eight, would have long since been dealing with adult sons and their debauched behavior. His unmitigated authority to restrain them would have been as high priest: to rebuke, disavow and disallow their idolatrous and adulterous behavior as priests. Nevertheless, the example still suggests that a father has the right and responsibility to speak truth into the lives of his adult children, as did Jacob with his twelve sons (see Genesis 49:1-28). It is noteworthy that John Piper ultimately used his pastoral authority in the rebuke of his son, Abraham, as he exercised church discipline in the form of excommunication.

In the above Old Testament example, it is more than intriguing that the very first prophecy Samuel must deliver is to Eli, the elderly priest who was his guardian and mentor. It is a harrowing prophecy and young Samuel is afraid to declare it:

Then the LORD said to Samuel: “Behold, I will do something in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears it will tingle. In that day I will perform against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knows, because his sons made themselves vile, and he did not restrain them. And therefore I have sworn to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli’s house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever.”²⁶⁵

The indictment upon Eli, the father and priest, comes in verse 13 as the LORD declares that Eli did not restrain (literally “rebuke”) his sons. Previously, the Lord Himself rebuked the erring priest for honoring his sons above Him: “Why do you kick at My sacrifice and My offering which I have commanded in My dwelling place, and honor your sons more than Me, to make yourselves fat with the best of all the offerings of Israel My people?”²⁶⁶ Eli does offer a “mild” rebuke when he hears of his sons’ debauched behavior but it falls upon deaf ears.²⁶⁷ The lesson is clear: Speak into the lives of your children while there is time—and while you still have the incontrovertible authority to do so.

In this writer’s view, irrespective of personal moral accusations against Pastor Hyles, he was disqualified from the pastoral office by virtue of the fact that his errant, undisciplined son made him disqualified. Hyles was clearly not one who was “managing his household well,” and did not have his child(ren) in subjection as the Scriptures teach. Other elders—should they have properly been in place—would have had the right to confront, rebuke, and remove him from office

²⁶⁵ I Samuel 3:11-14.

²⁶⁶ I Samuel 2:29.

²⁶⁷ I Samuel 2:22-25.

because of his inattentiveness in the home and the resulting debauched behavior exhibited by his eldest child. Thus, Hyles becomes a tragic “textbook” case for the removal of a pastor because of his lack of parental control over his wayward son—a child who was still in the home.²⁶⁸

The author will draw one final parallel with the blatant dysfunction in Eli’s family and priestly ministry: Eli speaks corrective rebuke into Hannah’s life (I Sam. 1:14) but fails to control the behavior of his own sons. Jack Hyles exhibits this warped sense of authority, for he preaches forcefully on separation and holiness to others while not maintaining that standard in the life of his adolescent son.

The author is saddened by the outcomes of two of our three case studies. Of the three pastors’ children, only one has repented and returned to their spiritual roots. As has been noted, Chrissy Cymbala is a “success story” in terms of the full recovery of a prodigal daughter or son, and this is cause for rejoicing. Conversely, Abraham Piper and David Hyles have given no signs of genuine repentance and a return to their spiritual moorings.²⁶⁹

Moreover, it should be noted that, although biblically sound in both function and form (as a plurality of elders offering mutual support and accountability, everything in the Piper case was carried out with exemplary obedience to the Scriptures), the desired outcome was not permanently achieved. Abraham Piper was restored after four years of prodigality—but only temporarily. Ultimately, he chose his own path and has continued to move away from all the truths he was brought up to believe. So, even a “textbook” case of biblical obedience on the part of Piper and the church did not result in a prodigal coming back to spiritual realities. Thus,

²⁶⁸ More will be said of this in Chapter 5, as the author makes careful distinction regarding children who have left the home.

²⁶⁹ The writer happily and humbly reports that, by the grace of God, all three of his children—after relatively brief defections as older teens—are walking with the Lord and engaged in their local churches.

illustrating that even the best of biblical examples does not ensure the best outcome. Known only to God is the mysterious weaving of divine sovereignty and the freedom of human choice.

Abraham Piper has clearly exerted his personal liberty, to the heartbreak of his faithful parents.

Chapter 5 will offer some additional observations regarding these three case studies. There will also be the consideration of two important questions that arise from the explicated texts of Scripture and these case studies.

CHAPTER 5: ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS, QUESTIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

In this final chapter, the author will explore four meaningful topics. First, he will draw some important conclusions as the three case studies are revisited. Next, the writer will consider two critical questions that arise from this project—emanating from both the exegesis of the seminal texts and the case studies. In the last two sections, the author will consider God’s heart for pastors and God’s heart for prodigals.

Additional Observations from Case Studies

The Piper, Cymbala, and Hyles case studies illustrate three distinct ministry scenarios and three distinctive ways of handling the dilemma regarding a pastor’s prodigal child. The writer will offer additional observations and draw some helpful conclusions regarding each unique scenario.

The case of John and Abraham Piper illustrates the difficult dilemma of a pastor’s adult child, no longer living at home, who is involved in scandalous behavior. This difficult situation was, in this writer’s view, carefully handled in a biblical manner and ultimately mirrored the heart of God. In a display of abundant grace, there were six months of intervention with the hope of reconciliation. That having failed, church discipline ensued. Pastor Piper, who initially offered to resign, and the elders took the correct path: no resignation was needed or accepted because Piper was ultimately not responsible for the unfortunate decisions of his adult son who was acting as a free moral agent.²⁷⁰

As for the other Titus 1:6 consideration of “having believing children” (as some translations and commentators render it), which is germane to the Piper case, the author has rendered

²⁷⁰ This matter will be more thoroughly considered in answering Question 1, which is to follow.

sufficient evidence in Chapter 3 to suggest the correct understanding of *pista* is “faithful.” The writer now proffers Norris Grubbs’ well-researched and astute article, “The Truth About Elders and Their Children: Believing or Behaving in Titus 1:6,” as a conclusive summation:

In summary, the lexical evidence suggests “faithful” is the most common meaning of πιστά [pista]. The parallel passage in Timothy requires children to be obedient which fits within the semantic range of “faithful.” Historical and exegetical considerations within Titus suggest “faithful” as the best meaning for πιστά [pista] in this passage

When considering the office of elder ... [a church] should look for people who manage their households well. If they have children, the children should be under control, demonstrating the leadership of the father. Parents are clearly commanded in the Scripture to teach their children about Christ, and every father should pray and do all that is necessary for his children to be saved. Titus 1:6, however, is not suggesting that only fathers who have “believing” children can be elders. Instead, Paul is saying that only fathers who have “behaving” children can be elders.²⁷¹

Tragically, Abraham Piper has denied the faith as an adult. If *pista* means “believing,” then John Piper would have been disqualified from the pastorate at Bethlehem Baptist ... and any subsequent pastorates. The author has sought to dispel such a notion.

The Cymbala case study represents some “gray areas” where the lines are not so clearly defined as they are in the Piper and Hyles cases. Chrissy Cymbala was in her later teenage years when she made unfortunate decisions (dating an older man and becoming intimate) while still in the home of her pastor father—all without her parents’ knowledge. This behavior continued while away from home at college and, upon returning home after being expelled from the Christian university, she became pregnant—which she also concealed from her parents. When it was discovered that she was pregnant, she was told to leave the home and live on her own—presumably as a matter of discipline and an attempt to distance her from the Cymbala home and any appearance of condoning her reckless behavior. Thus, there were indications of rebellion and

²⁷¹ Norris C. Grubbs, “The Truth About Elders and Their Children,” 14.

scandalous sin before leaving the home, and then a continued pattern of sin at college and after returning home.

It is difficult to imagine how a parent-pastor can be held accountable for concealed sin—even when it occurs while the child is still living in the home. The author recalls a pastor's son confiding in him that he had engaged in immoral behavior as an older teenager without his parents' knowledge. One can conjecture that an attentive parent-pastor will hopefully discover such sin sooner rather than later. (Pastor Cymbala admits to being preoccupied with his fast-growing ministry.) Once the sin is revealed, however, there should be decisive action—as is indicated in the Cymbala case. What has already been noted in Chapter 4 is the need in the Cymbala case for early-on transparency and accountability so that the burden is shared, and the church leadership and congregation become a vital part of the process of working toward repentance, healing, and restoration. Or, in a less-desirable outcome, the informed leadership becomes a part of the necessary process of church discipline, as in the Piper case.

The Hyles case reveals the unfortunate situation where a teenaged son is living in the pastor's home but engaging in prohibitive behavior (as indicated in Titus 1:6c). The clear implication has been stated earlier in this treatise: Taking all factors into consideration, Jack Hyles should have either stepped down or been removed. At the very least, some plan of remediation should have been put in place by the church leadership to help ensure that the pastor was giving due attention to his wayward son and his family.²⁷² But with no accountability for the senior pastor (a common issue among some early fundamentalists), Hyles was left to follow the dictates of his own heart.

The author is sympathetic to the best intention of the fundamentalist movement: a desire to return Christians to true biblical holiness. His own spiritual roots are in this movement; hence,

²⁷² A plan of remediation that would include, for example, a sabbatical or an extended leave of absence.

the purposeful citation from the now defunct *Fundamentalism Today* article at the beginning of this paper. One should qualify negative statements about fundamentalism with mention of the underlying premise of fundamentalism, which was—at least in the early days—a sincere and legitimate message of separation from the world (which really has to do with biblical sanctification). There was, it is believed by this author, a sincere desire to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in His ongoing work of setting the believer apart from the world in genuine holiness of lifestyle. Over time, this apparently morphed into a conformity to external standards without the internal dynamic of the Holy Spirit’s work and the cleansing effect of the Word of God (John 15:3). The Spirit and the Word are the agents at work in the process of sanctification—not rigid conformity to an external standard. Though ultimately responsible for his own sins, the author believes that David Hyles was negatively influenced by this distorted ideology and the duplicitous example of his father.

Jack Hyles, ironically, was trapped in the legalistic brand of fundamentalism he helped to create. He was preaching a standard that he himself did not fulfill. Nevertheless, he maintained a false sense of his own spirituality that was based upon externals, including the favorable accolades heaped upon him by his admirers. The Barna Group offers insightful commentary and a caveat regarding this unwholesome dynamic that can occur in pastoral ministry:

Pastors can mistake the attention they receive for being a spiritual leader for spiritual maturity. It’s not uncommon for congregants to project their un-lived spiritual lives on to their leader and call it spirituality. Then, constant praise for inspiring messages and caring deeds can tempt leaders to believe the projections placed on them and call *that* spirituality. This can lead to narcissism that ends in spiritual abuse of the flock, characterized by power and control instead of care and guidance.²⁷³

²⁷³ Barna Group, *The State of Pastors*, 31.

It has been noted in Chapter 4 that all three pastors remained in the ministry—two of them legitimately—despite the heartache and hardship of dealing with a prodigal.²⁷⁴ There is much to be said for (legitimate) perseverance in ministry. David Kinnaman, who leads the Barna Research Group, offers his informed perspective: “It is my belief ... that the Christian community in North America does not need stronger leaders; we need more resilient ones.”²⁷⁵ Ordination into pastoral ministry cannot be lightly esteemed, and walking away from one’s calling should not be handled precipitously.

Two Critical Questions

Question 1

Is there an age or stage at which the pastor is no longer accountable for the behavior of his children?²⁷⁶ Or is he always to be scrutinized regarding his children—even after they have become adults and are on their own?²⁷⁷ This question hearkens back to the author’s introduction, citing the article from *Fundamentalism Today* in which a successful pastor bemoans his wayward adult children.

To answer this, we must first make a clear distinction that is to be seen in the Timothy and Titus passages regarding the use of *teknon* (children) and the ages indicated. The context of each

²⁷⁴ As previously stated, Jack Hyles should have resigned or been removed from ministry based upon his unhealthy family dynamic and refusal to address this all-important matter.

²⁷⁵ Barna Group, *The State of Pastors*, 9. For an excellent, highly-researched treatment of resilience in ministry, see Bob Burns, Tasha D. Chapman, and Donald C. Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us about Surviving and Thriving* (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2013). Chapters 11 and 12 of this helpful book deal with resilience amid marriage and family stressors.

²⁷⁶ For example, after leaving home or after a certain age even if still residing in the home.

²⁷⁷ MacArthur, as we noted in Chapter 3, indicates that there is legitimate, lifelong scrutiny of a pastor’s children. Mounce also alludes to this possibility.

passage suggests that we can rightly make this distinction. In the Timothy passage (I Tim 3:4-5), George Knight observes: “Although [*teknon*] can be used of an adult (e.g., 1:2, 18; 5:4), the qualification [*en hupotage*, “in submission”] indicates that the ‘children’ in view are those under authority and therefore those not yet of age ...”²⁷⁸ Thus, these are children—not yet adults—who are obliged to be obedient to their parents. In the Titus passage, though the same word is used (*teknon*), the context indicates that these are older children under consideration. As has been pointed out in our exegesis, these are children tempted by, and capable of, untoward, debauched behavior. John MacArthur rightly notes, “[Paul’s] immediately following reference to dissipation strongly suggests that he has in mind primarily grown or nearly grown children. Even very young children can believe in Christ, and they certainly can be rebellious. But they cannot be guilty of dissipation in any normal sense of the word.”²⁷⁹

Mounce, in *Word Biblical Commentary* (citing George W. Knight), alludes to the possibility that these are children who are still in the home. The Titus 1:6c statement reads, “*having* faithful children (emphasis added).” The writer would put forth Knight’s assessment: “[*echōn*, “having”] is used here to ‘denote the possession of persons to whom one has close relationships.’ The implication is that Paul is talking only about children [albeit older] who are still rightfully under their father’s authority in his home ...”²⁸⁰ Thus, these are children old enough to engage in such scandalous behavior and yet are still under their father’s roof. The inference could be made, then, that once children have left the home and are no longer under their father’s direct authority, the parent-pastor is no longer to be held accountable for their behavior.

²⁷⁸ George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 161.

²⁷⁹ John MacArthur, *Titus*, 30.

²⁸⁰ George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 289. Knight cites *Bauer’s Greek Lexicon* (BAGD).

Painful as it may be, regrettable as it may be, the parent-pastor should not be assailed for children who are now completely on their own and making unfortunate life choices as completely free moral agents. That is not to say that there will not be those—parishioners and others—who are aware of the ungodly choices made by a pastor’s adult children and the ensuing criticism that may arise. Ayers, for example, notes that pastors with “faithful children” (i.e., professing believers not engaged in prodigality) were even more likely to criticize and hold responsible fellow pastors who had faithless children—some 34% indicating that they held the parent-pastor in some measure responsible for his child’s prodigal behavior.²⁸¹

The writer would hasten to add this does not, of course, mean that a pastor should stop praying for and caring for his children—though they are removed from the home environment. One is struck by the example of Job, who exhibited godly concern for his (ten) adult children and their walk before God:

His sons used to hold feasts in their homes on their birthdays, and they would invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. When a period of feasting had run its course, Job would make arrangements for them to be purified. Early in the morning he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them, thinking, “Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.” This was Job’s regular custom.²⁸²

How eloquently this speaks to the ongoing love, compassion, and commitment of a parent.

This age-of-children question is exceedingly apropos when one considers that the pastorate today consists of an older order of leaders than it did twenty-five years ago.²⁸³ This increases the

²⁸¹ Ryan K. Ayers, "The Pastor's Faithless Child," 73. The writer admits to his own bristling upon reading of the lifestyle choices made by John Ortberg’s adult children (as noted at the beginning of Chapter 4). There was an immediate question in the author’s mind as to the lack of parental influence which may have contributed to such a regrettable outcome. Such a reaction, the writer would submit, is not uncommon.

²⁸² Job 1:4-5 (NIV).

²⁸³ The median age of a pastor (2017) was fifty-four as opposed to forty-four (1992). Barna Group, *The State of Pastors: How Today's Faith Leaders are Navigating Life and Leadership in an Age of Complexity* (Ventura, CA: Barna Group, 2017), 13.

likelihood that these pastors will be dealing with adult children—some of whom have abandoned their faith and/or walk with the Lord.

Moreover, in these days of rampant social media engagement, it is quite easy for congregants and others to discover and follow the activities in which a pastor’s adult children are engaged. This can either bode well for those who are conscientiously following Christ or fuel critical scrutiny for those who are living otherwise. The case of Abraham Piper, with over a million TikTok followers, illustrates this point.

The Old Testament example of Samuel—who was both prophet and priest—is instructive here. It is important to note that the prophet-priest received neither rebuke from the Lord nor the people of Israel regarding his wicked, adult sons. God had rebuked Eli for his sons’ behavior prior to this,²⁸⁴ but there is no recorded rebuke of Samuel in this regard. Thus, he continued his ministry without impediment—even though his two adult sons “did not follow in his ways.”²⁸⁵

Question 2

Is there a duration of time which is reasonable for the sake of correction, grace, and reconciliation? The implication in the Titus passage—which is particularly brought to bear in this instance—is regarding children old enough to engage in debauched behavior. If so, is it a “one-and-done” scenario? In other words, if the behavior is truly scandalous (immorality,

²⁸⁴ I Samuel 2:12-17, 22-25, 27-36; 3:13 (NKJV).

²⁸⁵ Samuel’s sons, Joel and Abijah, did not walk in his ways (I Sam 8:3,5). And yet, it apparently posed no hindrance to Samuel’s walk with God (vv. 6-9) nor his own reputation in Israel (9:6; 12:1-5). Samuel’s testimony before Israel was impeccable. I Samuel 12:1-5 highlights this. In the Old Testament economy at least, being a “man of God” was clearly no guarantee of producing godly offspring. One could also cite, for example, the godly king Hezekiah whose son, Manasseh, became one of Judah’s most wicked kings (see II Kings 18:1 - 20:21; 21:1-17), though he later repented—perhaps because of Hezekiah’s godly influence (see II Chron 33:10-19). Old Testament examples abound for this type of tragic pattern.

drunkenness, drugs, illegal activity), is that sufficient cause for immediate resignation or removal?

The Titus passage indicates an elder cannot have children who could be sufficiently, successfully accused of this kind of base behavior. Knight rightly asserts, “Therefore the potential elder’s children must not be guilty of ‘sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousals, drinking parties’ (I Pet. 4:3).”²⁸⁶ If still living at home and under the father’s control, this kind of conduct could be considered as a disqualifying or impeachable issue (if the elder is presently serving); that is, the father could be deemed derelict in his responsibilities to have his children—within the home—under his control. If this is the case, there should be serious consideration for the pastor/elder to step down or be removed. At the very least, this writer would submit, it is cause for pause—where the pastor and the leadership team consider it best to have him reassess and reprioritize his primary responsibilities to his family.

This dynamic can be noted in the John Piper interview in which Piper relates that he expressed to the elders his willingness to step away or take a leave of absence. Moreover, the Piper interview reveals that the elders of Bethlehem Baptist Church gave space for about six months for the potential repentance and restoration of Andrew Piper. Since the attempted remediation was unsuccessful, Piper’s son was excommunicated from the church.

In addition, the Cymbala case study can be noted as illustrating that—over a two-year period—Jim Cymbala patiently waited and prayed for the restoration of his errant daughter. There is no record of the congregation or church staff involved in this process until the very last, and no indication that Pastor Cymbala offered to step back or step down during this time. One

²⁸⁶ George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 290.

can rejoice, nevertheless, that prevailing prayer turned the heart of his errant daughter. Chrissy Cymbala repented and was restored into the fellowship of the Brooklyn Tabernacle.

The absence of any such gesture is noteworthy in the Hyles case. There is no record of Pastor Hyles offering to resign or to take a leave of absence while he got his house in order and dealt with his rebelling son.

In addressing this difficult question of a grace period, much could be added regarding the importance of each individual case being assessed by godly leadership—with much prayerful consideration and reliance upon the direction of the Holy Spirit. When this writer offered his resignation to the leadership team of the church he was pastoring, many of the men in that group began to weep with shared remorse and would not accept his resignation. In the ensuing weeks, repentance and restoration of the wayward child was the result.

The writer would emphasize the importance of accountability and support. No pastor should walk this difficult path and bear this heartache alone; there must be the confluence of godly men and women who are called alongside to share this burden. Even the Lord Jesus, amid the darkest hour of His earthly life, called Peter, James, and John to watch and pray with Him in the Garden of Gethsemane.²⁸⁷

God's Heart for Pastors

I Peter 5:1-4 is a crucial passage for understanding the pastoral role:

The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.

²⁸⁷ Matt 26:36-46.

Yet, humanly speaking, the author would submit that this passage would never have been penned, nor the powerful message of Pentecost preached,²⁸⁸ had Peter not been publicly restored by the Lord Jesus on the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

John chapter 21 records the story of the Disciples' unexpected seaside encounter with the resurrected Christ and the resulting restoration of Peter. The writer had the privilege of standing on that historic spot on the Galilean seashore where it is believed the events in John chapter 21 occurred—where Peter's life and ministry are put back together by the Lord. In the writer's study is a rock from that seashore to commemorate the significance of such an event and the implications for himself and any other God-called pastor. The author will thus make two important observations from this culminating passage in John's Gospel.

First, it is important to note Peter's reluctance to resume his service. The case can be made for his reluctance based upon verse 3a of the text: "Simon Peter said to them, 'I am going fishing.'" The NASB renders it more literally and accurately, "I am going to fish." The writer would suggest that Peter is personally despondent or discouraged at this point based upon John's careful choice of words in this passage and with a look at the Greek grammar.

Instead of using the common aorist form of the infinitive, John uses the present form of the infinitive "to fish." The present infinitive is used to refer to action that is ongoing or progressive. David Black, a noted Greek scholar, offers: "The present infinitive implies that Peter and his fellow disciples were contemplating a return to their former occupation while they waited for Jesus to appear in Galilee."²⁸⁹ The very words of Scripture are inspired and important. One gets a

²⁸⁸ Acts 2:14-40.

²⁸⁹ David Alan Black, *Learn to Read New Testament Greek* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994),147.

crystal-clear sense of this in Galatians 3:16 where Paul makes a case for the singular use of the word “Seed” as opposed to its plural “seeds” in referring to Christ.²⁹⁰ Peter had been fishing for men (see Matt. 4: 19; Mark 1: 17); now he seems resigned to going back to just fishing.

Further, the case can be made based upon context. The way this passage unfolds suggests that Christ appears here to a diminished disciple. Peter needed to hear from Jesus, as did Thomas in the previous passage.²⁹¹ The author would submit this post-resurrection event—just as for Thomas—was tailor-made for Peter. It is also would appear that Peter’s prior, personal encounters with the risen Christ had not yet afforded him the sense that he could still be useful to his Master. Again, the author would submit, Peter may have felt personally disqualified.

Having considered the case for his reluctance, the *cause* of Peter’s reluctance has been well-documented in Scripture. Peter had denied Christ not once but three times.²⁹² This, after confidently asserting that he would follow Christ to the death.²⁹³ Peter was aware that Jesus not only foretold the event, but He had personally witnessed it. As Luke 22:61 describes, “And the Lord turned and looked at Peter.” One can only imagine the gaze of Christ in that moment. Peter had failed the Lord miserably. He knew it. The Lord knew it. But he was about to realize that failure need not be fatal nor final, not with Christ.

The second thing the writer observes in this passage is Christ’s readiness to restore His servant.²⁹⁴ The author will proffer the why and how of Jesus’ restoration.

²⁹⁰ Gal 3:16 reads, “Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, ‘And to seeds,’ as of many, but as of one, ‘And to your Seed,’ who is Christ.”

²⁹¹ See John 20:26-29.

²⁹² Luke 22:54-62 records Peter’s three denials.

²⁹³ See John 13:36-38.

²⁹⁴ Per John 21:15-22.

Why did Christ need to restore? The writer would submit Peter had relegated himself to the status of second-class servant. Knowing human nature as one does—in relation to guilt and shame—there is little doubt that Peter truly needed this encounter with Christ.

How did Christ restore? First, by simply yet marvelously allowing Peter to reaffirm his love. Christ allows Peter three times to profess his love to offset his three denials. Peter says in effect: “I love you ... I love you ... I love you.”²⁹⁵ It is a struggling but honest love. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, John records an intentional interchange in the Greek between *agapaō* and *phileō*. The former term referring to the highest kind of love and commitment, the latter term denoting affection. Christ uses *agapaō* twice; Peter uses *phileō* exclusively. Peter is no longer willing to boast of great love and devotion.²⁹⁶ It is important to note that Jesus uses Peter’s word in His final question: “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love [*phileō*] Me?”²⁹⁷ This grieved the apostle, causing him to earnestly appeal to Christ’s omniscience: “Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.”²⁹⁸ The rebuke in Christ’s tone and use of words is felt, but Peter has been given the chance to express his sincere and honest love for Christ.

Second, Christ restores Peter by recommissioning him for service. The Lord issues three commands: “Feed My lambs” (v. 15). “Tend My sheep” (v. 16). “Feed My sheep” (v. 17). This writer would submit that Peter needed to be recommissioned by the Lord Himself for service. (No one else could or should do this, only Jesus.) For one must conclude at this pivotal time in

²⁹⁵ Ibid. vv. 15-17.

²⁹⁶ No longer, as in former times (cf. John 13: 37-38; Mark 14: 29-31; Luke 22: 33-34; Matt. 26: 33-35).

²⁹⁷ John 21:17.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

Peter's life, though he had seen the resurrected Christ, Peter needed to know that he could still be used by the Lord.

The writer would underscore that all pastors are mandated to nurture and nourish the Lord's sheep. It is their primary duty. The one who reinforces that injunction is none other than Peter. In I Peter 5:2, he says: "Feed the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers...."

Third, Jesus restores Peter by reminding him of the one essential thing: "Follow Me" (vv. 19, 22). The apostle is to follow Christ no matter what—even unto death (v. 18), and no matter who—as Peter has just inquired concerning John, "and what shall this man do?"²⁹⁹ Christ's repetition of those familiar words hearkens back to when He first called Peter.³⁰⁰ To follow Christ on these terms is to demonstrate the kind of love for Him that He commands. It is clear, Jesus demands total commitment from His followers and pastors are to model this level of devotion.

John chapter 21 is a remarkable passage that demonstrates the heart of a God who gives second chances. Peter is reluctant to resume his place and service in Christ's kingdom; Jesus is ready to restore him to a place of useful ministry for His glory.³⁰¹ The principles here set forth are remarkable and can be life changing.

God's restorative and healing ways are to be embraced by both prodigals and pastors alike. He is indeed the God of the second chance. For the beleaguered pastor with a wayward child,

²⁹⁹ Ibid. v. 22.

³⁰⁰ See Matthew 4:19.

³⁰¹ The author would posit that so complete was Peter's personal sense of Christ's forgiveness and restoration to service, that he authoritatively uses the same word for the sin of which he was guilty as he preaches to his countrymen in the temple (Acts 3:12-14). Twice, he decries their *denial* of Christ.

there is restoration and healing, help and hope. When Jesus restored Peter, He was restoring an apostle and elder to useful service and Spirit-empowered ministry to the Body of Christ.

God's Heart for Prodigals

At this point, it is important to consider how God views the prodigal child. Two primary passages, one from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament, will be brought into focus to properly illustrate and illuminate regarding the heart of God on this matter.³⁰²

The writer begins with the illustration of a well-known father and his prodigal son: David and Absalom. The man after God's own heart has had his own heart broken by his rebellious son. It is riveting to observe David's reaction to the tragic scene unfolding in II Samuel 18. In verse 5, David instructs his captains (Joab, Abishai, and Ittai), "Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom." And then in verses 29 and 32, he inquires after the battle: "Is the young man Absalom safe?" When the king is informed that his son is dead, he retreats to the upper chamber over the gate and begins to wail: "O my son Absalom—my son, my son Absalom—if only I had died in your place! O Absalom my son, my son!"³⁰³

There is not a true father or mother who cannot identify with David's brokenness at the loss of a child. One can readily understand the raw human emotion generated by such a tragic scene. Many have experienced the loss of a child; many others have experienced the heartbreak of a prodigal. But there is an even deeper message here. For the author believes that this Old Testament scene, though decidedly human, depicts the heart of God for prodigals. One finds

³⁰² The author will draw out some illuminating parallels between Hosea 14 and Luke 15:11-32 regarding the heart of God for prodigals.

³⁰³ II Samuel 18:33.

evidence of this in Hosea 14 and a viable correlation in Luke 15 with the story of the prodigal son, or as Tim Keller has branded it, “The Prodigal God.”³⁰⁴

Moreover, one can recall the Lord Jesus lamenting over the city of Jerusalem for her historic waywardness: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing!”³⁰⁵ Another Lukan passage reveals the brokenness of Jesus as he wept over the city amid Israel’s spiritual blindness: “And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, ‘Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.’”³⁰⁶ The writer would submit that one can, paradoxically, rejoice in the heart of God broken over prodigal children.

Hosea 14:1-9

The Book of Hosea concludes with a note of prospective rejoicing and hope (Chapter 14). Though the book has focused upon God’s dealings with an unfaithful spouse (Israel)—as illustrated through Hosea’s unfaithful wife (Gomer)—there is now an appeal for them to return. Hosea 14:1-2, 3b reads: “O Israel, return to the LORD your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity; take words with you, and return to the LORD. Say to Him, ‘Take away all iniquity; receive us graciously, for we will offer the sacrifices of our lips For in You the fatherless finds mercy.’” Wonderfully, despite their sin and rebellion, they are enjoined to come back to a merciful God. They are to return with appropriate words which bespeak of a heart of repentance. If they will do this, God has promised to lovingly heal them of their backsliding and

³⁰⁴ Timothy Keller, *The Prodigal God*.

³⁰⁵ Lk. 13:34.

³⁰⁶ Luke 19:41-42.

abundantly bless them (vv. 4-7). It is interesting to note, at the conclusion of Chapter 14, that the wise will understand and embrace “these things” (i.e., the marvelous, merciful ways of the LORD); the unwise, however, will stumble because of them (v. 9).³⁰⁷

A similar picture of forgiveness and restoration is vividly illustrated in the familiar passage in Luke’s Gospel of the prodigal son. And the selfsame pattern emerges: the prudent will understand and embrace these things and the unwise (and unholy) will stumble because of them.

Luke 15:11-32

The Gospel of Luke has a marvelous, continuing theme: the Son of God’s compassion for the down-and-out, the gentiles, the tax collectors, those who were generally disdained by the religious hierarchy of the day. In the context of Luke 15, one finds out immediately the reason that Jesus spoke these three parables. Luke 15:1-3 reads, “Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, ‘This Man receives sinners and eats with them.’ So [Jesus] spoke this parable to them....” In this compelling passage, Jesus is telling of God’s great interest in those who have a deep sense of need, and aiming His biting, backhanded comments at the Pharisees—the ones who felt they “had it all together.” The last parable of the trilogy is one of the most poignant and penetrating stories in the New Testament.

Luke 15:11-32 conveys the third parable Jesus told regarding the seeking heart of God for those who are lost.³⁰⁸ The great pastor-preacher from yesteryear, G. Campbell Morgan, called

³⁰⁷ Hosea 14:9 reads, “Who is wise? Let him understand these things. Who is prudent? Let him know them. For the ways of the Lord are right; the righteous walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them.”

³⁰⁸ Each one of these stories is designed to illustrate one central truth, namely, God’s love for lost sinners. They are: (1) the parable of the *lost* sheep, (2) the parable of the *lost* coin, and (3) the parable of the *lost* son.

Jesus' parable in Luke 15:11-32 "the parable of the father's heart."³⁰⁹ The writer concurs, for the focus in this story is largely on the heart of this gracious father—though it is traditionally titled, "the Parable of the Prodigal Son." The term "prodigal" is defined as "recklessly extravagant."³¹⁰ Tim Keller suggests that this term "is ... as appropriate for describing the father in the story as his younger son. The father's welcome to the repentant son was literally reckless, because he refused to 'reckon' or count his sin against him or demand repayment. This response offended the elder son and most likely the local community."³¹¹ The author will offer three characteristics of this father's heart that underscore the "reckless" heart of God for prodigals.³¹²

The Father's Heart is Magnanimous

The father's magnanimity of heart is seen in his generosity toward his sons and even his hired servants. The son's request, "Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me,"³¹³ is immediately honored by the father. As the younger son, he was entitled to one-third of his father's estate. (The eldest son would get two-thirds.) It was not uncommon for a father to give the inheritance to his sons while still alive. Nevertheless, this son's request was tantamount to saying: "Dad, I wish you were already dead!" The father's generosity toward the hired servants

³⁰⁹ Morgan, *The Parable of the Father's Heart*.

³¹⁰ *Random House Unabridged Dictionary*, s.v. "prodigal," accessed October 11, 2021, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/prodigal>.

³¹¹ Timothy Keller, *The Prodigal God*, xvii.

³¹² The author would underscore that everyone, ultimately, is a prodigal in need of lavish forgiveness. Tim Keller rightly notes: "The message of the Bible is that the human race is a band of exiles trying to come home. The parable of the prodigal son is about every one of us." *Ibid.* 109.

³¹³ Luke 15:12.

is highlighted in the son's reflection in the far country, as he recalls that they have "bread enough and to spare."³¹⁴

It becomes apparent in the above verse that the father's generosity leads to the prodigal's repentance. One is immediately mindful of Romans 2:4 and the obvious parallel: "Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?" The author ponders Psalm 145:9 as cause for rejoicing: "The Lord is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works."

The Father's Heart is Merciful

"And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him."³¹⁵

A merciful, compassionate bent is demonstrated in the father's eagerness to run and embrace his son—literally falling on his neck and kissing him again and again.³¹⁶ It is worth noting that the father's look of compassion while the son is merely a silhouette in the distance is the same word that is used of Jesus as He looked upon the multitudes and was "moved with compassion."³¹⁷ This word in the Greek, *splanchnidzo*,³¹⁸ indicates that the father had a physical, gut-wrenching response to seeing his disheveled son, ravaged by the pig-pen existence he had

³¹⁴ Luke 15:17.

³¹⁵ Luke 15:20.

³¹⁶ Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: For a Deeper Understanding of the Word, New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1992), 1376.

³¹⁷ Matt 9:36.

³¹⁸ Spiros Zodhiates, *Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible: Key Insights into God's Word, New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1992), 1376, 2277.

been living. Irrespective of the lost money and sinful lifestyle, the father's merciful heart moved him to immediate action.

It seems the son's reputation had preceded him home.³¹⁹ He had disgraced his family and his village. By Jewish law he should have been stoned.³²⁰ Instead, the father runs to embrace him and protect him. Should the scenario present itself, anyone wishing to throw stones would hit the father first.

The father's mercy caused him to lavish his son with forgiveness. What ensues are all signs of complete restoration and utter forgiveness: the kiss—a sign of genuine affection; the best robe—reserved for the guest of honor; the ring—a symbol of authority; the sandals—slaves wore no shoes, but sons did.³²¹

Moreover, the father's merciful heart caused him to rejoice in his son's repentance.³²² A merciful heart always rejoices when a sinner repents, as in the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin.³²³ This elaborate feast (they killed the fatted calf, the one saved for the most special occasions) was a joyous celebration for the father, the son, the servants—everyone but the elder brother.

The Father's Heart is Faithful

This is an observation, in general, that is striking as one looks at this text. The father was there when the son left; he was there when he came home. He had faithfully labored to provide

³¹⁹ In Luke 15:30, the elder brother discloses that he is aware of the younger brother's debauched lifestyle.

³²⁰ See Deut. 21:18-21.

³²¹ Luke 15:22 reads, "But the father said to his servants, 'Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet.'"

³²² Luke 15:23-24.

³²³ See Luke 15:7,10.

for his own (an inheritance, land, servants). He had faithfully looked for his son's return. Perhaps a thousand sunsets had come and gone, but now as he strained his eyes once again—looking down the long road and into the horizon—there appears the familiar silhouette of a welcome figure.

Three-word sentences can be powerful: “Be thou clean.”³²⁴ “Your son lives.”³²⁵ “Lazarus, come forth!”³²⁶ The author can envision another profound, three-word phrase uttered by this father to his wayward child: “Son, welcome home!”

As do numerous other Old Testament writers, Jeremiah captures the heart of God for wayward sons and daughters:

Is Ephraim My dear son?
Is he a pleasant child?
For though I spoke against him,
I earnestly remember him still;
Therefore My heart yearns for him;
I will surely have mercy on him, says the LORD.³²⁷

When one recognizes God's disposition toward the dispossessed, it breathes fresh life into one's perspective and dealings with them. That spiritually displaced son or daughter is not to be disregarded nor disdained—not by pastor nor parishioner. The pastor has a divine appointment, a meaningful opportunity to focus upon and demonstrate the heart of God in this matter toward his prodigal child. And, this writer would submit, his parishioners are the beneficiaries of seeing this “covenant love” in action as the pastor models how to manage one's home—even amid the most trying of circumstances.

³²⁴ Luke 5:13 (KJV).

³²⁵ John 4:50.

³²⁶ John 11:43.

³²⁷ Jeremiah 31:20.

Will the congregation make room for this? Will they lovingly and patiently support the pastor's family during this time? Or will they be hasty to bring accusation and judgmental attitudes?

To be sure, there is a proper balance to be struck. There can be legitimate grounds for resignation or dismissal.³²⁸ Yet there can be equally valid grounds for prayerful support and patience through this process by both pastor and congregation.³²⁹

Let no one be guilty of playing the unfortunate role of the "elder brother" as did the Pharisees of old. Like the Pharisees in Luke's Gospel, Hosea declares that "transgressors stumble in [the ways of the LORD]."³³⁰ For clearly in Hosea 14 and Luke 15, the ways of our loving Lord are bent toward reconciliation, restoration, healing, and hope. That is good news for the prodigal, and good news for the beleaguered parent-pastor longing for their return.

³²⁸ As in the case of Pastor Jack Hyles, who continually ignored confrontations from concerned (and wounded) congregants and chose to do nothing to correct his errant son's behavior.

³²⁹ As illustrated in the gracious forbearance which marked the Piper case.

³³⁰ Hosea 14:9

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper has explored the important matter of pastoral qualifications (all of which are to be understood and applied) with particular focus upon the pastor's children. In addressing this difficult topic, the author has dealt with essential, albeit challenging, biblical texts. A thorough exegesis of relevant Scripture has been brought to bear upon three case studies with the intent of offering helpful insights into real-life situations. These case studies have afforded a meaningful glimpse into the struggles of pastors who were dealing with the heart-wrenching dilemma of loving and leading their families while shepherding God's flock.

Though there has been the inclusion of much detailed information, the author recognizes that there is still much to be considered and explored in addressing this important issue. The writer will now posit, based upon his findings, some practical considerations for pastors and churches who have been charged with the responsibility of navigating these difficult waters.

Prayer

In dealing with the complicated matter that has been addressed in this thesis, the author would begin with a simple exhortation to pray. The essentiality of prayer cannot be overstated. Every engagement in the Christian life should begin and end with prayer. It was (and is) modeled in the life of the Lord Jesus and should permeate all that is undertaken in His name.

In addressing the formidable matter of spiritual warfare, it is important to recognize that "the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds" (II Corinthians 10:4, ESV). The Cymbala case study reveals the profundity and power of prayer to bring an errant daughter to a place of repentance and restoration—and out of the grip of Satan.

Moreover, there is a critical need for organized, systematic prayer to be offered up for the pastor and his family—and certainly when they are facing the issues outlined in this treatise. John Maxwell, noted pastor, author, and speaker, preached a message titled: “The Pastor’s MVP.” It is clear, according to Maxwell, that the pastor’s “most valuable player” is the one who comes alongside the pastor to continually uphold him in prayer. His book, *Partners in Prayer*,³³¹ commends to pastors and churches the vitality of a prayer ministry that undergirds pastors and their families. For John Maxwell, it was life-changing.

Prayer expresses an utter dependence upon God. It affords the marvelous opportunity to ask for the guidance and tutelage of the Holy Spirit in applying the Scriptures to present, perplexing circumstances. It engages God’s ability to do what only God can do. Brethren, let us pray!

Preparedness

Prayer and watchfulness go hand in hand. It is incumbent upon every pastor and leadership team to be prepared, to be forewarned and forearmed regarding the essential matters discussed in this thesis.

The critical importance of knowing the Scriptures—particularly as they relate to the pastoral calling and qualifications—must continually be emphasized. Neither willful neglect nor unwitting ignorance in this regard can be abided. The Piper case study illustrates the vitality and importance of preparedness in terms of understanding and applying the Scriptures. Everything done in that case is clearly a reflection of biblically-anchored insights.

³³¹ John C. Maxwell, *Partners in Prayer: How to Revolutionize Your Church with a Team Prayer Strategy* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishing, 1996).

The idea of preparedness would also suggest having a ready system of support in place for the pastor and his family when they go through turbulent waters. Fellow elders and/or deacons and other godly individuals within a congregation can make up this important “safety net.” This system of support should also include trusted individuals outside of the fellowship in whom the pastor can confide. Though the intent of this thesis is to facilitate a measure of preparedness for the pastor/elder and parishioners, much remains to be researched and written in this regard.

Prevention

Understanding and avoiding pitfalls for the pastor (and his family) is a final matter of importance. Protecting one’s time, being conscientious about self-care, understanding the healthy markers for a pastor and family all contribute to this essential element of prevention. Books such as Burns’ *Resilient Ministry* and Tripp’s *Dangerous Calling* (and many others) provide a wealth of counsel to pastors.³³² The writer wishes that he had availed himself more to these kinds of resources, for they underscore the adage: “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” The Hyles case study reveals a dire need for the pastor to understand the inherent dangers of ministry and the vulnerability of one’s family—especially the elder’s children. One can only conjecture that a much different (and desirable) outcome might have been achieved.

Finally, an unexpected discovery in the author’s research was the average age of today’s pastor. With an older pastorate, there is a decided need for these battle-tested elders—especially those who have been through a prodigal experience—to mentor the younger pastors and help them to avoid ministry “landmines.” And most certainly, should the need arise, to walk with

³³² Bob Burns, Tasha D. Chapman, and Donald C. Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us about Surviving and Thriving*; Paul David Tripp, *Dangerous Calling*.

them through these kinds of family crises. Much still should be inculcated regarding the pressing need for every Paul to have a Timothy ... and a Titus.

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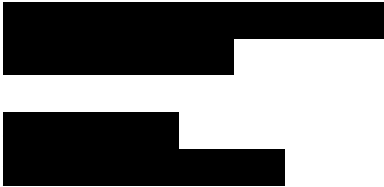
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EDUCATION

Doctor of Ministry (2022)

Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, Lynchburg, VA

Thesis: To Stay or Step Down: Assessing the Pastoral Qualifications of Pastors with Prodigal Children

Master of Divinity (1998)

Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, Lynchburg, VA

Summa Cum Laude

Master of Divinity Award—LBTS, 1998

Master of Arts in Religion (1998)

Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, Lynchburg, VA

Summa Cum Laude

Bachelor of Science in Religion (1997)

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

Cum Laude

Preaching Award—Liberty University, 1996

HIGHER EDUCATION EXPERIENCE

**Faculty/Instructional Mentor, Liberty University Online
School of Divinity / College of Arts & Sciences (2006 – present)**

BIBL 104 – Survey of Biblical Literature

BIBL 105 – Old Testament Survey

CHMN 201 – Introduction to Church Ministries

EVAN 101 – Evangelism & Christian Life

RLGN 104 – Christian Life and Biblical Worldview

RLGN 105 – Introduction to Biblical Worldview

CSTU 101 – Western Culture

INQR 101 – Inquiry and Research

INDS 200 – Career Planning and Professional Development

INDS 400 – Knowledge Synthesis for Professional & Personal Development

**Instructor of Religion, Liberty University
School of Divinity (1998 – 2000)**

CHMN 201 – Introduction to Church Ministries

MINISTRY EXPERIENCE

Senior Pastor, Berean Baptist Church, Lynchburg, VA (2005 – 2008)

Senior/Founding Pastor, LakePoint Church, Lindenhurst, IL (2000 – 2005)

Appointed as a missionary by the North American Mission Board, selected by Thomas Road Baptist Church to lead this church plant. Established structure, leadership, doctrinal statement, children's ministries, adult ministries, worship ministry, Life Training, small groups, men's & women's ministries, etc. Chartered in 2001.

**Associate Director of Pastoral Ministries, Interim Director of Center for Ministry
Training, Liberty University School of Divinity (1998 – 2000)**

Over student ministry internships in local churches. Over ministry placement of Liberty University, Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, and Liberty Bible Institute graduates. Executive Director of Shepherds' Ministries, including three traveling teams, nursing home ministry and evangelistic outreach.

Itinerant Evangelist, Garber Ministries (1976-1984, 1987-1991, 1994 – 2000)

Traveling coast to coast ministering to hundreds of local churches through preaching/teaching and music in numerous settings, including concerts, revivals, camps, retreats, banquets, community functions, high school assemblies, special services, and regular Sunday services.

Senior/Founding Pastor, Parkway Bible Church, Knoxville, TN (1992 – 1994)

Started August 1992. Established the structure, leadership, doctrinal statement, children's ministries, adult ministries, music ministry, Sunday school, radio broadcasts, etc. Responsible for preaching/teaching the Word of God, setting the goals for the church, training the leadership, coordinating all ministries, oversight and delegation of financial responsibilities and mission endeavors.

Youth Pastor / Interim Minister of Education, Union Church, Knoxville, TN (1991 – 1992)

Directly responsible for all teaching in the youth department, youth activities and fund raisers, parent involvement, counseling, camps, retreats, youth budget, organizing the church Sunday School (including monthly teachers' meetings, curriculum, activities, etc.). Oversight of entire children's programs including choirs, Sunday School, special activities, Vacation Bible School, Wednesday night AWANA-type program. Assisted pastor in elders' meetings, hospital visitation, service coordination, regular TV and radio programs, etc. Headed Monday night visitation. Church attendance averaged 400. Youth department grew from 15 to 60.

Executive Director, Youth Encounter, Richmond, VA (1985 – 1987)

Regional youth organization based out of Open Door Baptist Church. Organized multi-church youth camps (2 per summer), and winter retreats (both had between 300 and 800 in attendance). Headed up a national 800 24-hour crisis hotline for teens. Responsible for office management and finances. Assisted with and participated in high school assemblies. Organized special fund-raising banquets and activities.

ADDITIONAL PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

Chaplain for Lindenhurst/the Lakes Area Chapter of the Kiwanis International, Lindenhurst, IL (2001 – 2005)