



COVENANT
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Electronic Thesis & Dissertation Collection

J. Oliver Buswell Jr. Library
12330 Conway Road
Saint Louis, MO 63141

www.covenantseminary.edu/library

This document is distributed by Covenant Theological Seminary under agreement with the author, who retains the copyright. Permission to further reproduce or distribute this document is not provided, except as permitted under fair use or other statutory exception.

The views presented in this document are solely the author's.

Contemplative Pace and Practice of Ministry Leadership

By
Russ Masterson

A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of Covenant Theological Seminary
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry

Saint Louis, Missouri

2026

Contemplative Pace and Practice of Ministry Leadership

By
Russ Masterson

A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of Covenant Theological Seminary
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry.

Graduation Date May 15, 2026

Dr. Scotty Smith
Faculty Advisor

Dr. Jake Gross
Second Reader

Dr. Joel Hathaway
Director of DMin Program

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate how ministry leaders prioritize contemplative pace and practices to foster resilient leadership in themselves and their ministry leadership teams. When most ministry leaders begin their careers, they think they will study and preach, meet and pray with people, and serve the sacraments. Yet, they soon discover that much of their energy is devoted to organizational logistics, managing expectations, financial oversight, long-term planning, creating solutions, pacing change, leading through conflict, ministering to anxious and frustrated people, and handling conflicting interests. These dynamics can easily create a busy, but not fulfilling or resilient, ministry leader.

This study utilized a qualitative method using semi-structured interviews with seven senior pastors with extensive experience in ministry leadership. The interviews focused on gaining data with four research questions:

1. How do ministry leaders understand contemplative practices?
 - a. For themselves?
 - b. For the ministry leadership team?
2. What contemplative practices have ministry leaders found helpful?
3. What contemplative team practices have been helpful to the ministry leadership team?
4. How do contemplative practices create resilience?
 - a. The leader?
 - b. The leadership team?

The literature review focused on five key areas to understand ministry leadership in this context:

1. Resilience in ministry leadership
2. Biblical analysis of Jesus' contemplative practices and the Law Gospel Distinction in relationship to contemplative practices
3. Contemplative practices of leaders, namely prayer and solitude

4. Emotional health benefits of contemplative practices
5. Organizational health benefits of contemplative practices

The literature review and qualitative research revealed twelve principles of unhurried ministry leadership for a ministry leader to consider for implementation:

- Principle #1: Our Identity as God's Beloved
- Principle #2: We Slow Down to Heal
- Principle #3: We Slowly Begin the Day
- Principle #4: We Break from the Week with Sabbath
- Principle #5: We Retreat from the Busyness\
- Principle #6: We Control Our Calendar
- Principle #7: We Create an Intentional Pace for Sustained Ministry
- Principle #8: We Host Gatherings and Retreats
- Principle #9: We Lead Intentional Meetings
- Principle #10: We Create an Intentional Pace of Ministry for the Church
- Principle #11: We Structure the Contemplative (HR Policies and Job Descriptions)
- Principle #12: We Codify the Contemplative (Staff and Leadership Handbooks)

This study concluded that contemplative pace and practices create a more resilient ministry leader and ministry leadership team. Contemplative pace and practices create slow, intentional pacing, which allows the leader and team (through relationship with Christ and reflection on events and emotions) to recover from the highs and lows of ministry. This contemplative way of leading, filled with spiritual practices that slow the leader and ministry team down, benefits the church (or ministry) as a system of relationships and an organization that desires to operate in peace with progress.

To the people of Christ the Redeemer Church of Marietta

He doesn't hold an oar; he doesn't perspire, he doesn't shout. He is languid in the crash in the cursing. This man is the harpooner, quiet and poised, waiting. And then this sentence: "To ensure the greatest efficiency in the dart, the harpooners of this world must start to their feet out of idleness, and not out of toil."

- Eugene Peterson

Contents

Chapter One: Introduction	1
The Busy Ministry Leader	
Busy to Contemplative, Anxiety to Peace	
The Foundation and Motivation of Love	
Purpose Statement	
Research Questions	
Significance of this Study	
Definition of Terms	
Chapter Two: Literature Review	14
Resilience in ministry leadership	
Biblical analysis of Jesus' contemplative practices and the Law Gospel Distinction in relationship to contemplative practices	
Contemplative practices of leaders, namely prayer and solitude	
Emotional health benefits of contemplative practices	
Organizational health benefits of contemplative practices	
Chapter Three: Methodology	77
Design of the Study	
Participant Sample Selection	
Data Collection	
Data Analysis	
Researcher Position	
Study Limitations	

Chapter Four: Findings	87
Introduction to Research Participants	
Definition of Personal Contemplative Practices	
Key Personal Contemplative Practices	
Key Communal (or Team) Contemplative Practices	
Contemplative Practices for Leadership Resilience	
Summary of Findings	
Chapter Five: Discussion and Recommendations	117
Summary of the Study and Findings	
Recommendations for Practice	
Recommendations for Further Research	
Epilogue	140
Appendices	143
Appendix 1: Weekly All-Staff Meeting	
Appendix 2: Monthly All-Staff Meeting	
Appendix 3: Quarterly Staff Conversation	
Appendix 4: Staff Member Annual Review	
Appendix 5: Monthly Elder Meeting	
Bibliography	148

Chapter 1

Introduction

Research suggests that when most ministry leaders first begin their careers, they thought they would simply study and preach, meet and pray with people, and serve the sacraments. Yet, they soon find much of their energy devoted to organizational logistics, managing expectations, financial oversight, long-term planning, creating solutions, pacing change, leading through conflict, ministering to anxious and frustrated people, and handling conflicting interests. Dean Hoge and Jacqueline Wenger, who research Protestant and Catholic leaders at Catholic University of America, write:

The gap between what ministers would ideally like to do and their work and what they are actually required to do is a problem for seminary educators and denominational officials. It is a structural problem contributing significantly to burnout.¹

Furthermore, ministry leaders often find the logistics of their personal lives, as well as an ever-increasing pace of societal change, growing steadily to the point of overwhelm. The authors of *Resilient Ministry* state that before too long, many ministry leaders “wonder what they have gotten themselves into.”² It is easy for overwhelm to become normative.

As the dichotomy between role-expectations and role-reality begins to emerge, many ministry leaders question if they can continue in ministry, much less whether they

¹ Dean Hoge and Jacqueline Wenger, *Pastors in Transition: Why Clergy Leave Local Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 119.

² Bob Burns, Tasha D. Chapman, and Donald C. Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us About Surviving and Thriving* (Downers Grove: IVP Press, 2013), 12.

could flourish along the way. Hartness Samushonga, from the London School of Theology, in the article “Distinguishing Between the Pastor and the Superhero: God on Burnout and Self-care,” writes, “The nature and demands of pastoral ministry can 'drain' ministers' emotional, cognitive, spiritual, and physical energy reserve, which may affect their overall effectiveness.”³ The “drained” pastor is depleted by ever-growing administrative and leadership demands and limited time. Chandler, in her article “The Impact of Pastors' Spiritual Practices on Burnout,” further supports this experience finding that, “With increasing organizational demands and complexity, organizational leaders are apt to struggle with work overload and burnout.”⁴ She continues, “As a result of burnout, pastoral leaders experience additional stress, frustration, loneliness, isolation, and spiritual dryness...unrelenting ministry demands, busyness, and filling multiple roles impacts a ‘people-pleasing’ tendency and threatens personal boundaries and overall health.”⁵ Ministry leaders then have to manage the resulting negative emotions while faithfully leading in ministry and loving their families. The complexity of these demands require the ministry leader to address how busyness can take over one’s heart and life.

The Busy Ministry Leader

The calendars of ministry leaders quickly fill with church activity, parishioner needs, staff assistance, and family responsibilities. Andrew Root is a professor and

³ Hartness Samushonga, “Distinguishing Between the Pastor and the Superhero: God on Burnout and Self-care,” *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 31, no. 2 (2020): 6, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10649867.2020.1748919>.

⁴ Diane Chandler, “The Impact of Pastors' Spiritual Practices on Burnout,” *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 64, no. 2 (June 2010): 6.1, <https://doi.org/10.1177/154230501006400206>.

⁵ Chandler, 2.

practical theologian at Luther Seminary who has been teaching and training pastors for twenty years. He writes of the dangers of the busy life in *The Congregation in a Secular Age*, stating, “Depression in late modernity is a fatigue with no direct outward cause. It is the feeling, born within yourself that you just don't have the energy to be yourself. If it gets too heavy, you can become too fatigued to be at all.”⁶ Growing alongside the loss of time for personal and communal contemplative practices is a loss of self. Thus, overwhelm creeps into the busy ministry leader's heart. The modern person – including many ministry leaders -- simply accepts the situation, buttressing overwhelming schedules with personal pride, reframing busyness as a sign of living well. Root writes, “To be busy is to feel like your life is full or has some version of fullness. And late modernity busyness is the quickest but riskiest way to produce this sense of fullness.”⁷ Root posits that the modern secular answer to this loss, caused by the increased speed of life, is money. The modern person uses the idol of money as a defense against the negative effects of an unsustainably fast pace of life that never quite delivers the fulfillment it promises. Root writes:

We think money could free us from speed, which is why, in the end, we don't really want money at all. What we long for is to rest in time, to find ourselves in a different relationship with time. We have all sorts of dreams about money because we assume it's the path to give us back time. We wonder—and even count—how much money it would take to release us from the acceleration of time.⁸

⁶ Andrew Root, *The Congregation in a Secular Age: Keeping Sacred Time against the Speed of Modern Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021), 7.

⁷ Root, 31.

⁸ Root, 21.

Society's increased speed and infatuation with, if not addiction to, busyness is a major problem for the leader. Eugene Peterson, the pastor, scholar, and writer who has shaped much thought about pastoral ministry, writes in *The Contemplative Pastor* of the toxicity of busyness:

The word “busy” is the symptom not of commitment but of betrayal. It is not devotion but defection. The adjective “busy” set as a modifier to pastor should sound to our ears like adulterous to characterize a wife or embezzling to describe a banker. It is an outrageous scandal, a blasphemous affront.⁹

Peterson suggests that ministry leaders should resist the lure of busyness and the adjective of “busy” upon themselves and their staff. He notes the motivations of pastoral busyness often being vanity (e.g., “I want to appear important”) and laziness (e.g., “I let others decide my schedule”). He further supports these assertions saying, “It is far more biblical to learn quietness and attentiveness before God than to be overtaken by what John Oman named the twin perils of ministry, ‘flurry and worry.’ For flurry dissipates energy, and worry constipates it.”¹⁰ Peterson concludes that the modern pastor is busy and overwhelmed when he should be contemplative and thoughtful. This is illustrated by his depiction of the poised harpooner (from *Moby Dick*) as the metaphor for the unhurried, peaceful pastor. He writes:

He doesn't hold an oar; He doesn't perspire, he doesn't shout. He is languid in the crash in the cursing. This man is the harpooner, quiet and poised, waiting. And then this sentence: “To ensure the greatest efficiency in the dart, the harpooners of this world must start to their feet out of idleness, and not out of toil.”¹¹

⁹ Eugene Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 17.

¹⁰ Peterson, 25.

¹¹ Peterson, 24.

In *Leading with a Limp*, Dan Allender, the psychologist, professor, and author whose work is vital in the study of theology, trauma, and spiritual formation, writes of this call toward simplicity for the busy pastor. He says, “To reduce chaos and complexity in our lives, we must build in margins and set boundaries; we have to limit what we do.”¹² Building in margin can increase the likelihood of a leader developing a contemplative, non-anxious heart and life. Leaders need time to reflect, learn, and plan.¹³ Peterson’s harpooner insight (stated above) urges pastors toward a prayerful life of intentionality, cultivating relational depth with God, preparedness for preaching by immersion in God’s word, and the ability to compassionately listen to others without hurry.

Busy to Contemplative, Anxiety to Peace

In *Canoeing the Mountains*, Tod Bolsinger, the pastor, leadership coach, and practical theologian whose works are helpful in understanding adaptive leadership, writes, “Chronic anxiety is present when the threats of the past continue to hold power even though the system is no longer in danger.”¹⁴ These anxieties create conflicts in any leadership team—in any organized people group. In addition, the organization itself, as a group of people, carries its own past wounds and anxieties, creating new anxieties and

¹² Dan Allender, *Leading With a Limp: Take Full Advantage of Your Most Powerful Weakness* (New York, NY: Waterbrook, 2006), 127.

¹³ Allender, 128.

¹⁴ Tod Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2015), 144.

conflict for a leadership team. In *A Failure of Nerve*, Edwin Friedman, the rabbi, family therapist, and leadership consultant whose works have reshaped how congregational leaders understand emotional systems and organizational dynamics, writes, “When anxiety reaches certain thresholds, the instinctual, reptilian systems can take over the other set of controls and override the steering of the cortex.”¹⁵ Anxiety can begin to control the leader’s thinking, creating toxicity in the leadership team. This is why leaders must engage the anxiety itself and its source when at all possible. Developing the ability to not only become aware of anxiety but also to calmly navigate through it is a hallmark of a well-differentiated leader. Friedman writes that the well-differentiated leader is:

Someone who has clarity about his or her own life goals and, therefore, someone who is less likely to become lost in the anxious emotional process swirling about. I mean someone who can separate while remaining connected and, therefore, can maintain a modifying, non-anxious, and sometimes challenging presence.¹⁶

Christians understand the lack of differentiation as a lack of clarity concerning their identity in Christ. Identity in Christ fosters increasing differentiation within the leader, thus making the leader more resilient. This learning process is not easy and builds through many practices.

The Foundation and Motivation of Love

Ministry leaders primarily live out of, and in service to, the message of the gospel (2 Corinthians 5:18-20). The gospel message is rooted in the promise that while people

¹⁵ Edwin H. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix* (New York: Church Publishing, 2017), 128.

¹⁶ Friedman, 15-16.

are more broken than they originally thought, all people are more loved by God in Jesus than they dare dream (Romans 5:8, Ephesians 2:4-5, 1 John 3:1). As Peter Scazzero, pastor and author whose works have shaped how modern Christians understand spiritual maturity and emotional health, writes, “The gospel says you are more sinful and flawed than you ever dared believe, yet you are more accepted and loved than you ever dared hope because Jesus lived and died in your place.”¹⁷

While ministry leaders are called to be deliverers of the gospel promise (Matthew 28:18-20, 2 Corinthians 5:18-20), remembering their identity in Christ as the lavishly loved children of God is the leader's primary spiritual practice and their way forward. The book *Resilient Ministry* explores how pastors over-identify with their calling ministry. One pastor said, “Being a pastor is not just what I do—it is very much who I am.”¹⁸ *Resilient Ministry* encourages ministry leaders by offering them the reminder that, “Before you were called to be a shepherd, you were called to be a lamb.”¹⁹

James Kouzes and Barry Posner, in their seminal text on leadership and business, tell leaders to ask how they can make extraordinary things happen in their organizations. However, after twelve chapters of research-based findings for extraordinary leadership practices, they conclude their findings by stating, “You don't have to look up for leadership. You don't have to look out for leadership. You only have to look inward.”²⁰

¹⁷ Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church: A Strategy for Discipleship that Actually Changes Lives* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 83.

¹⁸ Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 15.

¹⁹ Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 21.

²⁰ James Kouzes and Barry Posner, *The Leadership Challenge: How to Make Extraordinary Things Happen in Organizations* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2017), 295.

They suggest that the way to be an extraordinary leader at any level in an organization is to begin looking inward. They conclude their leadership insights with the singular call to love:

Of all the things that sustain a leader over time, love is the most lasting. It's hard to imagine leaders getting up day after day, putting in the long hours and hard work it takes to make extraordinary things happen, without having their hearts in it. The best-kept secret of successful leaders is love; staying in love with leading, with the people who do the work, with what their organizations provide, and with those who honor the organization by using its products and services. Leadership is not an affair of the head. Leadership is an affair of the heart.²¹

Ministry leaders are sustained in leadership over time by loving the gospel message, purpose, and people. Being told to love has never helped a human love. People need help learning how to love the things Kouzes and Posner consider paramount. The gospel speaks to this problem: “We love because he first loved us (1 John 4:19).” Only a message and culture of limitless love can create a leader of resilience to faithfully and lovingly withstand the demands of ministry over a long period of time. The more alive a leader comes to God's love for them, the more equipped they become to love and lead through all seasons of leadership.

Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, leadership scholars associated with Harvard University, in their text *Leadership on the Line*, call leaders to distinguish their self from their role. They write, “Confusing role with self is a trap.”²² Leaders need a stronger anchor for their identity than simply the role they serve. Heifetz and Linsky conclude that

²¹ Kouzes and Posner, 313.

²² Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Change* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2017), 188.

leaders take organizations through change by maintaining a “sacred heart.”²³ They state that the problem all leaders eventually come to is when they exercise leadership as an expression of their aliveness. They offer this loving warning to leaders: “But your life juice—your creativity and daring, your curiosity and eagerness to question, your compassion and love for people—can seep away daily as you get beat up, put down, or silenced.”²⁴ They further state that, “The most difficult work of leadership involves learning to experience distress without numbing yourself. The virtue of the sacred heart lies in the courage to maintain your innocence and wonder, your doubt and curiosity, and your compassion and love through moments of despair.” They conclude the core truth that sustains a leader—what makes the leader resilient—is a sacred heart. Heifetz and Linsky write that the sacred heart is the way to the open heart, leadership void of cynicism, arrogance, and callousness.²⁵ The sacred heart is leadership filled with innocence, curiosity, and compassion.²⁶

Thus, in summary, according to Kouzes and Posner, the best-kept secret for leaders is the motivation of love and according to Heifetz and Linsky, the only way to stay alive through leadership is with a sacred heart. Therefore, weary leaders desiring to flourish must ask, “How do I become a person of love leading a ministry?” Chuck Miller, the pastor and adjunct professor at Azusa Pacific University and Fuller Theological Seminary, writes in *The Spiritual Formation of Leaders*, “This one-on-one time with the

²³ Heifetz and Linsky, 225.

²⁴ Heifetz and Linsky, 225.

²⁵ Heifetz and Linsky, 226.

²⁶ Heifetz and Linsky, 230.

Lord, this abiding alone with our God, is crucial to our spiritual health, our spiritual growth, and, yes, the effectiveness of our leadership.”²⁷ Ministry leaders and their leadership's pace and practices should reflect their values, and their ultimate value must be communion with God, in God's presence, through intentional contemplative time. By the grace of God, all ministry leaders get to live in the truth: “I come as one known by God.”²⁸ Therefore, as the leaders aims to nourish their soul in God's presence, their personhood is centered, and their leadership is affected. The leader's and leadership team's health and resilience will come from the movement of “busy activity to slowed-down spirituality.”²⁹

Leaders must prioritize being with God *before* doing for God. Scazzerro writes, “Bearing fruit requires slowing down enough to give Jesus direct access to every aspect of our lives and leadership.”³⁰ Every leader is different in terms of what contemplative practices usher them into the soul room, yet the principle applies to all. In the quiet of pace, calendar, and solitude, the leader is ministered to by God.

This study will endeavor to discover which of these contemplative practices fosters resilience in the leader and leadership team. Ministry leaders need to ask: where do they find soul relief and soul replenishment? What contemplative practices help them remember the great wealth of my identity in Jesus? Ministry leadership teams need to

²⁷ Chuck Miller, *The Spiritual Formation of Leaders: Integrating Spiritual Formation and Leadership Development* (Xulon Press, 2007), 104.

²⁸ Miller, 104.

²⁹ Scazzerro, 17.

³⁰ Scazzerro, 118.

ask: What contemplative practices help the team gaze upon Jesus *before* working for Jesus? What practices unite the team and develop leadership resilience?

Purpose Statement

The dichotomy of role expectations versus reality, the busyness of ministry activity, the presence of anxieties stemming from past wounds, and the difficulty of living from a secure identity in Christ interact within the ministry leader so that proactive measures must be taken to create resilience in ministry leadership. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate how ministry leaders prioritize contemplative practices to foster resilient leadership. To learn these contemplative practices, seven senior pastors have been interviewed concerning their understanding and benefit from contemplative practices, both personally and with their leadership team. The following research questions were used to direct the inquiry:

Research Questions

1. How do ministry leaders understand contemplative practices?
 - a. For themselves?
 - b. For the ministry leadership team?
2. What contemplative practices have ministry leaders found helpful?
3. What contemplative team practices have been helpful to the ministry leadership team?
4. How do contemplative practices create resilience?
 - a. The leader?
 - b. The leadership team?

Vital to the interview processes and qualitative analysis is the ministry leader's (interviewee) understanding of contemplative practice and methods of utilizing such practices as an individual and with their leadership team.

Significance of this Study

This study has significance to ministry leaders in churches with full-time staff leadership teams. As well, the study has significance to ministry leaders who feel the burden of ministry busyness, deterioration of faithfulness or joy in their ministry, and inability to form a ministry leadership team with healthy practices. The study will help leaders consider contemplative practices beneficial to their personal spiritual walk while also training leaders to lead a leadership team using contemplative practices. The following literature review and qualitative research, via interviews with senior pastors, will establish an understanding of contemplative practices used by the individual leader *to discover* what contemplative practices foster leadership resilience in use with a leadership team.

Definition of Terms

In this study, key terms are defined as follows:

Senior pastor – the full-time lead shepherd who holds the highest level of authority for the given local church that is on the church staff.

Ministry leader – any ministry leader with pastoral responsibility, serving full-time in a church environment, most likely leading a team of staff or laypeople.

Leadership team – the team of people, either staff or laypeople, that works as a group to shepherd a larger group of people into the body of Christ.

Contemplative practices – any life or spiritual practices that aid in the slowing down of the leader(s) for a greater gaze upon Jesus, connection to beloved identity in Christ, and reflection upon one's heart, life, and work circumstances.

Leadership resilience – sustained leadership where the leader is characterized by health and effectiveness in ministry and in core areas of life.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Busyness gives dedicated people a sense of wholeness, but it is a counterproductive path, especially for ministry leaders, because it diminishes the meaningfulness of all they do. Brian Croft and Ronnie Martin, pastors and authors of *The Unhurried Pastor* write:

One of the problems that our crowded task-lists present is a loss of margin and space. When we find ourselves going from something to another without a minute to stop and to breathe, we can begin to operate like machines—which would be fantastic if God had designed us as machines. But he didn't. God created us as human beings, who lack, intentionally, the mechanized ability to continue working *ad infinitum*, without rest or reflection.³¹

Therefore, ministry leaders must resist believing they can or should work constantly like a machine and instead integrate contemplative practices into their pace of life, marking out times for soul-replenishing activities. Richard Swenson, a medical doctor frustrated with the busy Western culture wrote in his book, *Margin*:

We must have some room to breathe. We need freedom to think and permission to heal. Our relationships are being starved to death by velocity. No one has the time to listen, let alone love. Our children lay wounded on the ground, run over by our high-speed good intentions. Is God now pro-exhaustion? Doesn't He lead people beside the still waters anymore? Who plundered those wide-open spaces of the past, and how can we get them back? There are no fallow lands for our emotions to lie down and rest in.³²

³¹ Brian Croft and Ronnie Martin, *The Unhurried Pastor: Redefining Productivity for a More Sustainable Ministry* (New Malden, UK: The Good Book Company, 2024), 77.

³² Richard A. Swenson, *Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves to Overloaded Lives* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2004), 20.

In *The Contemplative Pastor*, Peterson writes, “I mark out the times for prayer, for reading, for leisure, for the silence and solitude of which creative work—prayer, preaching, and listening—can issue.”³³ He continues:

Most people, most of the time, are not in crisis. If pastoral work is to represent the gospel and develop a life of faith in the actual circumstances of life, it must learn to be at home and what novelist William Golding has termed “the ordinary universe”—the everyday things in people's lives—getting kids off to school, deciding what to have for dinner, dealing with the daily droning complaints of work associates, watching the nightly news on TV, making small talk at coffee break.³⁴

The pastoral ministry of presence requires an unhurried spirit so that pastors can patiently fellowship with people instead of using them for their own personal agendas. As people experience pastors being with them and loving them in the ordinary, they can open up to the pastor about their struggles and trust the pastor when moments of crisis emerge. At times ministry leaders must make decisions quickly in a crisis, but that quickened pace should not be the norm for the ministry leader. If crisis management becomes the normal pace of ministry, ministry leadership falters. The falter occurs not because of the crisis but because of the frantic, non-contemplative schedule of the ministry leader. Croft and Martin diagnose the difficulty in maintaining an unhurried heart:

We pastors have an incredibly difficult time receiving the meal that Jesus offers to us in his word, even though we are constantly encouraging others to partake of it as much as possible. This is where we need humility to recognize not only that we need the food of Jesus's word as much as our people but that we need to receive and partake of it all the more. In the dizzying push and pull of pastoral life, coming under the constant instruction of God's word is the way in which our hearts will remain pliable toward God in God's people.³⁵

³³ Peterson, 23.

³⁴ Peterson, 112.

³⁵ Croft, 39.

These writers conclude that as organizational demands push ministry leaders toward a faster pace, they must foster a contemplative pace filled with contemplative practices. Doing so will allow the leader to receive Spirit-guided support as a beloved son or daughter of God.

The following literature analysis chapter shall include:

1. Resilience in ministry
2. Biblical analysis of Jesus' contemplative practices and the Law Gospel Distinction in relationship to contemplative practices
3. Contemplative practices of leaders, namely prayer and solitude
4. Emotional health benefits of contemplative practices
5. Organizational health benefits of contemplative practices

Resilience in Ministry

Ministry leadership requires a spirit and practice of adaptability, welcoming needed change for the benefit of the organization, and yet, "People push back when you disturb the personal institutional equilibrium they know."³⁶ In *Leadership on the Line*, Heifetz and Linsky state that leadership is difficult as leaders guide organizations into the future: disrupting unneeded or harmful norms, unearthing and addressing conflict, and creating sustainable change for maximum development. Heifetz and Linsky present that leadership is an adaptive process, making a situation or community better than its current status.³⁷ The adaptive leadership reality demands resilience in the leader. So, what is resilient leadership given the demands of ministry leadership?

³⁶ Heifetz and Linsky, 2.

³⁷ Heifetz and Linsky, 13.

The authors of *Resilient Ministry* equate ministry resilience with fruitfulness, writing, “Fruitfulness includes a measure of faithfulness and a measure of success— valuing both but preferring neither.”³⁸ Therefore, resilience is the ability to be faithful (and at times successful), and thus fruitful, over time.

As to contemplate Jesus’ ministry leadership, Jesus encountered constant difficulties with opposition and his own followers. Yet, Jesus faithfully lived out his calling as Savior (John 13:1) and in surrender to the will of the Father, Jesus was faithful to the end goal of his leadership, the cross (Luke 22:42). Jesus’ fruit as a leader is seen in his sustained ability to be faithful over time to an end goal. As well, Paul summarizes his own leadership by stating his faithfulness over time, as he wrote to Timothy, “For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith (2 Timothy 4:6-7).” Therefore, both Jesus and Paul exemplify resilient leadership as faithfulness over time.

The authors of *Resilient Ministry* further the understanding of resilient leadership to include health in five core areas of a leader’s life: spiritual formation, self-care, emotional and cultural intelligence, marriage and family, and leadership and management.³⁹ The authors’ seven years of research found that ministry leaders who are healthy in those five core areas tend to not only survive ministry, but thrive through it.⁴⁰

³⁸ Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 13.

³⁹ Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 18-29.

⁴⁰ Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 7.

Therefore, resilient leadership is sustained leadership where the leader is characterized by health and effectiveness in ministry and in core areas of life.

Biblical Analysis: Jesus' Contemplative Practices

Men and women in the community of faith seek to pattern life after Jesus' example, "to mimic Christ" as Paul counseled (1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 3:17; 4:9; 1 Cor. 4:16; 1 Thess. 1:6; 2 Thess. 3:7). Les Hardin, a New Testament professor at Florida Christian College, wrote in the *Stone-Campbell Journal*, "At the center of any decidedly Christian spirituality lies consideration of the spirituality of Jesus himself."⁴¹ He states that being spiritual manifests itself in daily, mundane, practical, tangible ways, and therefore asks, "What did Jesus do on a regular basis to foster practical partnership with the Spirit?"⁴² Hardin answers that question by stating, "Prayer takes a prominent position in Jesus' routine spirituality."⁴³ In the New Testament Jesus prayed in the early morning (Mark 1:35-37; Luke 4:42) and sometimes in the evening (Mark 6:45-46; Luke 6:12; John 6:15). Therefore, for the Christian and the Christian leader, Jesus models how to live out his faith, and in that modeling, he constantly demonstrates contemplative practices.

Hardin also encourages Christians with how Jesus prayed: "His own prayers were simple and honest, requesting guidance, interceding for his disciples, and struggling with obedience to the Father's will."⁴⁴ Jesus' prayer life undergirds his life of obedience.

⁴¹ Leslie T Hardin, "The Quest for the Spiritual Jesus: Jesus and the Spiritual Disciplines," *Stone-Campbell Journal* 15, no. 2 (Fall 2012): 221, EBSCOhost (ATLA Religion Database).

⁴² Hardin, 221.

⁴³ Hardin, 221.

⁴⁴ Hardin, 221.

Hardin writes, “The Gospels relate that he was fasting (Matthew 4:2; Luke 4:2), which naturally included prayer, and probably for the sake of dealing with the constant barrage of temptation.”⁴⁵ As well, John mentions the Galileans attempting to force Jesus into becoming king (John 6:14-15), after which Jesus retreats to the mountainside to pray (Matthew 14:22-23; Mark 6:45-46). The pattern in Jesus’ life is clear – live and minister, then retreat and pray.

The literature review on the practice and person of Jesus will include a biblical examination of the contemplative practice of Jesus and an examination of the Law Gospel Distinction as it relates to contemplative practices.

Contemplative Practices of Jesus

The life of Jesus is filled with contemplative practices for leaders to observe and follow. Alan Fadling, author and spiritual director whose work focuses on helping people reimagine lives of constant hurry, writes in *An Unhurried Life*, “In Mark 1:35, I see Jesus being very intentional about his relationship with God the Father. But his own followers didn't understand his priorities, and they interrupted him with the urgent demands and expectations of the crowd around them.”⁴⁶ Jesus taught through his example the necessity of solitary communion with the Heavenly Father.

⁴⁵ Hardin, 221.

⁴⁶ Alan Fadling, *An Unhurried Life: Following Jesus’ Rhythms of Work and Rest*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 94.

In Luke 4:42 at daybreak Jesus goes to a solitary place. Fadling notes, “Jesus seemed to have a habit of beginning his day alone with his Father in prayer.”⁴⁷ Again, in Luke 5:16, Jesus breaks away to practice solitude with the Father. L. Paul Jensen, professor at Fuller Theological Seminary, in his book *Subversive Spirituality: Transforming Mission through the Collapse of Space and Time*, notes the verb “withdraw” in Luke 5:16 indicates this was Jesus’ pattern.⁴⁸ Luke does use the word “often” to describe Jesus’ practice. Fadling expounds on this idea as he notes that consistent communion with the father in prayer was a regular part of his daily life.⁴⁹ Priest, professor, and spiritual writer Henri Nouwen confirms the importance of solitary prayer for Jesus, and more so for ministry leaders:

It's in the midst of a busy schedule of activities—healing, suffering people, casting out devils, responding to impatient disciples, traveling from town to town, and preaching from synagogue to synagogue—we find these quiet words: “in the morning, long before dawn, he got up and left the house, and went off to a lonely place and prayed there.” The more I read this nearly silent sentence locked in between the loud words of action, the more I have the sense that the secret of Jesus's ministry is hidden in that lonely place where he went to pray, early in the morning, long before dawn... and the lonely place Jesus finds the courage to follow God's will and not his own; To speak God's words and not his own; To do God's work and not his own. It is in the lonely place where Jesus enters into intimacy with the father, that his ministry is born.⁵⁰

Jesus not only modeled solitude and prayer early in the morning, but he also pursued solitude in the night hours (Mark 6:46-47, Luke 6:12-13). Fadling writes,

⁴⁷ Fadling, *Unhurried Life*, 95.

⁴⁸ L. Paul Jensen, *Subversive Spirituality: Transforming Mission through the Collapse of Space and Time* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2009), 86.

⁴⁹ Fadling, *Unhurried Life*, 95.

⁵⁰ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Spiritual Formation: Following the Movements of the Spirit* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2010), 20.

“According to Luke, Jesus left behind the community of followers, went to a mountainside and spent an unhurried night in prayerful communion with the father.”⁵¹ It’s important to note that Jesus chose the Twelve the day after one of these nights spent in prayer. Jesus withdrew to solitary prayer not only for communion with the Father but also for discernment from the Father. In summary, Jensen writes, “Jesus frequented solitary places... he sought solitude on his way to the Jordan, in the wilderness, on a mountain, on a hill next to the sea, and in a garden near Jerusalem. Luke's reference to the Garden of Gethsemane as ‘the place’ (*ho topos*) where Jesus prayed (Luke 22:40) may indicate this as one of his regular places of retreat.”⁵²

Carolyn Osiek, New Testament professor at the Brite Divinity School, writes in *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* about the word meaning of “room” in Matthew 6:6. In this verse Jesus teaches, “But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” This word “room” is also translated as closet, chamber, inner room, and private room. Osiek states the word is used three times in the New Testament.⁵³ She shows that the Christian is called to retreat for prayer, presumably into some sort of private room.⁵⁴ In Matthew 24:26, the word “room” is an open and remote place, something like a desert. In Luke 12:3, the word “room” connotes an open, flat place on a roof used for sleeping in the summer and for drying objects. In both Matthew 24 and Luke 12, the word is not so

⁵¹ Fadling, 97; Luke 6:12-13 (ESV).

⁵² Jensen, 90.

⁵³ Carolyn Osiek, “When You Pray, Go into Your ταμεῖον (Matthew 6:6): But Why?” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 70, no. 4 (2008): 723, EBSCOhost (ATLA Religion Database).

⁵⁴ Osiek, 723.

much private as it is remote. The final occurrence is in Luke 12:24, where the word means something like a storehouse.

Osiek also examined additional ancient and classical texts for information on residential real estate and the terms of different rooms. She concludes that the term “room” communicates a place of safety and secrecy, where a Christian could retreat to “to be one’s deepest self and commune at least with one’s muse.”⁵⁵ She concludes that prayer is personal, “the place for intimate encounter with God,”⁵⁶ and she encourages Christians toward solitary prayer with God, as the room becomes a metaphor for the heart of Christians, and “therefore, that it becomes in some exegesis a metaphor for the human heart, a secret chamber that is accessible anywhere by the one in whom it dwells.”⁵⁷

Law Gospel Distinction Relating to Contemplative Practices

Martin Luther, the great Reformer of the 1500s, whose writing launched the Protestant church, writes, “The truth of the Gospel is this, that our righteousness comes by faith alone, without the works of the Law. ... The true Gospel, however, is this: Works or love are not the ornament or perfection of faith; but faith itself is a gift of God, a work of God in our hearts, which justifies us because it takes hold of Christ as the Savior.”⁵⁸ In his “Sermon on the Distinction between Law and Gospel,” Luther teaches, “The Law makes demands of things that we are to do; it insists on works that we are to perform in

⁵⁵ Osiek, 736.

⁵⁶ Osiek, 737.

⁵⁷ Osiek, 740.

⁵⁸ Martin Luther, “Lectures on Galatians (1535),” Chapters 1–4, in *Luther’s Works*, vol. 26 (St. Louis: Concordia, 1963), 88.

the service of God and our fellow human beings. In the Gospel, however, we are summoned to a distribution of rich alms that we are to receive and take: the loving-kindness of God and eternal salvation.”⁵⁹ Therefore, the Christian faith can be fully understood only when one distinguishes between the law and the gospel.

Law in the Bible is any word of demand that shows what people should be and do, thus revealing humanity’s shortcomings. The law reveals the differential between who people should be and who people are. Paul addresses this differential in Galatians: “Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. But the scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.”⁶⁰ This differential between the ideal (holy demand) and the actual (humanity’s sinfulness) does not require helpful tips for living or any other demand that puts people to work. According to Paul, the law simply does not have that power.

People need the law, but people must understand its limits. French theologian Theodore Beza, who played a major role in the Protestant Reformation, said, “Ignorance of this distinction between Law and Gospel is one of the principal sources of the abuses which corrupted and still corrupts Christianity.”⁶¹ Jesus is the believer’s actual righteousness; as Paul writes, “And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is

⁵⁹ Martin Luther, “Sermon on the Distinction between the Law and the Gospel,” in C. F. W. Walther, *Law & Gospel: How to Read and Apply the Bible* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2010), 23–24.

⁶⁰ Galatians. 3:21-22

⁶¹ Theodore Beza, *The Christian Faith*, trans. James Clark (East Sussex, UK: Focus Christian Ministries Trust), 40.

written, ‘Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.’”⁶² A believer’s justification is by grace alone through faith alone because of Christ alone. God isn’t keeping score on the believer any longer.

Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.⁶³

The Law Gospel Distinction is the teaching Luther recovered from the moralistic church in the 1500s. This teaching begs believers, as Paul does in the New Testament, to refuse to add law back to the gospel. Moral principles and to-do lists don’t make a believer a better Christian and can never free a person from guilt, shame, or the burden of performance. Rather, moral principles and to-do lists used as justification will in time act as law, condemning believers who fail to live out its demands. Or the pendulum may swing the opposite way, having believers suddenly feel good about their spiritual progress— and creating self-righteous pride.

Paul’s theology teaches that people should make godly decisions based in the hope of the gospel, yet they should remain humbled by the struggles in their hearts. Believers turn to the grace of God known in Jesus for their acceptance, justification, and validation. This journey turns one’s focus from one’s own life (merits, etc.) to Christ’s life and God’s one-way unconditional love. In Paul’s letters in the New Testament, he inspires Christians toward godliness repeatedly, reminding them of the grace of God. He communicates what the mystery of godliness is, calling Christians to be godly, and then

⁶² 1 Corinthians 1:30-31

⁶³ Romans 10:1-4

reminding them of the gospel so that they might remember that positionally in Jesus, they are already godly, even while still becoming godly. In Titus, Paul writes that grace is more than forgiveness, that it doesn't pardon and quit, but it inspires and empowers.

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.⁶⁴

The saving grace of God known through Jesus transforms. God's love, known in Jesus, changes the human heart and births the new-life desire for obedience, even while heart struggle continues against sin. Peter writes in his second letter:

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁶⁵

This passage appears to be a list of things believers should be, and the letter could easily feel like a to-do list or condemnation for not living as taught. While these traits are good and holy, and thus worth following, no believer can follow them perfectly. People need the call, yet the demand is not enough to create the change. The Apostle Paul was

⁶⁴ Titus 2:11-14

⁶⁵ 2 Peter 1:3-8

not shy regarding the shortcomings he knew within himself. He wrote Romans after being a Christian for some time.

But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.⁶⁶

This sort of honesty is the beginning of Christianity, true godliness, and love.

Looking back to the list in 2 Peter 1:5-7, believers know they should be godly, so why do they not always move in this direction? Peter continues in verse 9, "For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins."⁶⁷ Believers lack these traits when they forget the grace of God known in Jesus Christ.

Grace-centeredness (or gospel-centeredness) does not focus on being unkind or impure or unloving. It teaches how a believer becomes holy like Jesus. 1 Peter 1 roots Christians in God's grace while calling them to be holy.

⁶⁶ Romans 5:15-21

⁶⁷ 2 Peter 1:9

Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.⁶⁸

There is no balance between grace and obedience but rather an order, for the New Testament teaches a vine produces fruit. Verses 13, 18, and 21 clearly speak of the beginning and end of the holiness. Believers do not progress through a holiness list but rather implement faith and rest in Jesus’ righteousness, knowing they are godly even when in heart or in deed they are ungodly. This gospel hope creates a peaceful heart at rest, a secure heart that loves God and people.

To revisit Paul’s instruction to Titus:

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.⁶⁹

This passage communicates that Jesus gives humanity salvation and empowers transformation. Paul states in verses 11 and 12 that the grace of God brings salvation and

⁶⁸ 1 Peter 1:13-21

⁶⁹ Titus 2:11-14

trains believers toward godliness, and so, God's love is not a result of a person's transformed life. Rather, God's love is the source of transforming lives. In the article "The Cure of Souls," Cambridge theological professor Simeon Zahl summarizes four theories of change.⁷⁰ To summarize:

Theory of Change #1: The Sacramental Participation Approach. This theory says: Christians take the sacraments to be holy and able to become godly. In this approach, the sacraments don't just symbolize something but actually change souls.

Theory of Change #2: The Christian Information Approach. This theory says: The Bible contains instructions for life, therefore as a Christian knows the Bible and what to do, the Christian will change.

Theory of Change #3: The Pentecostal and Charismatic Approach. This theory says: The next experience is more important than the last, so move from experience to experience. And through emotional worship experiences, the Christian will be changed.

Theory of Change #4: The Augustinian Approach (which Zahl supports). This theory says: People need more than information and experiences. People need the Holy Spirit to meet them in their nothingness, to create the change.

Zahl explains:

The human will is helped to achieve righteousness in this way: [human beings] receive the Holy Spirit so that there arises in their minds a delight in and a love for that highest and immutable good that is God, even now while they walk by faith, not yet by sight. By this [love] given to them like the pledge of a gratuitous gift, they are set afire with the desire to cling to the creator.⁷¹

Zahl states that the heart must be engaged by God's gift to believers. A person's stubborn heart then must surrender into God's love and power. Sanctification happens as

⁷⁰ Simeon Zahl, "How Do People Actually Change? The Cure of Souls and Theory of Change in Christian Ministry," *Mockingbird Magazine*, May 19, 2022. <https://mbird.com/the-magazine/the-cure-of-souls/>

⁷¹ Zahl, "How Do People Change?"

they grow deeper in their justification in Christ. Pastor, professor, and author Dane Ortlund explains this in his book *Deeper*:

Christian growth is, among other things, growth in sensing just how impoverished and powerless we are in our own strength...how hollow and futile our efforts to grow spiritually are on our own steam.... The point in all this is that we must come face-to-face with who we really are, left to our own steam. Christian salvation is not assistance. It is resurrection. The Gospel does not take our good and complete us with God's help; the gospel tells us we are dead and helpless, unable to contribute anything to our rescue but the sin that requires it. Christian salvation is not enhancing, it is resurrecting.⁷²

Believers grow as they grow deeper in Jesus. They practice contemplative practices because of God's love, not for God's love. Therefore, the contemplative practices of Christians and especially Christian leaders are not activities of merit or law earning love but activities of grace, remembering the grace already given.

Contemplative Practices for Leaders

Three pastoral ministry professors from California Baptist University, Thomas V. Frederick, Yvonne Thai, and Scott Dunbar, address pastoral burnout in their article, "Coping with Pastoral Burnout Using Christian Contemplative Practices." They write, "Burnout is becoming an increasing concern for the office of the pastor. Burnout in the pastorate is derived from inter-role conflict, suggesting that pastors are uniquely situated to experience an increased risk of burnout as they express their vocation in a community alongside their family."⁷³ Pastors, they say, attempt to live their personal and family life

⁷² Dane C. Ortlund, *Deeper: Real Change for Real Sinners* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 39.

⁷³ Thomas V. Frederick, Yvonne Thai, and Scott Dunbar, "Coping with Pastoral Burnout Using Christian Contemplative Practices," *Religions* 12, no. 6 (May 24, 2021): Article 378, 1 1. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12060378>.

alongside pastoring with the congregation. This dynamic of “inter-role conflict” creates ongoing emotional exhaustion for the pastor.

However, Christian contemplative practices develop the emotional resources pastors need to cope with burnout. Burnout creates “employee turnover, neglect, depression, unhappiness, isolation, health problems, attempted suicide, diminished satisfaction and achievement, poor work performance, and substance abuse.”⁷⁴ It becomes dangerous as “ministry satisfaction” no longer makes up for the ongoing “emotional exhaustion.”⁷⁵ In *The Emotionally Healthy Leader*, pastor and author Scazzero writes, “The emotionally unhealthy leader is someone who operates in a continuous state of emotional and spiritual deficit, lacking emotional maturity and a ‘being with God’ sufficient to sustain their ‘doing for God.’”⁷⁶ To live a deeply transformed life in leadership, leaders slow life down for loving union, deeper communion with Christ, and emotional health. Nouwen, in his profound book on Christian leadership, *In the Name of Jesus*, urges leaders toward a contemplative life:

Their leadership must be rooted in the permanent, intimate relationship with the Incarnate word, Jesus, and they need to find there the source for their words, advice, and guidance. Through the discipline of contemplative prayer, Christian leaders have to learn to listen again and again to the voice of love and to find there the wisdom and courage to address whatever issue presents itself to them.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Frederick, 2 1.

⁷⁵ Frederick, 5 1.

⁷⁶ Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader*, 25.

⁷⁷ Henri Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1989), 45.

Nouwen sees the ability to lead and serve with a loving Christlikeness as dependent upon the leader being defined and at peace before leading or serving. This dependence begins with a relationship with Christ and continues with a relationship with Christ. Nouwen warns leaders who lead and serve without rootedness in God:

Dealing with burning issues without being rooted in a deep personal relationship with God easily leads to divisiveness because, before we know it our sense of self is caught up in our opinion about a given subject. But when we are securely rooted in personal intimacy with the source of life, it will be possible to remain flexible without being relativistic, convinced without being rigid, willing to confront without being offensive, gentle and forgiving without being soft, and true witnesses without being manipulative.⁷⁸

To Nouwen, the ongoing connection to Christ is best practiced through contemplative practices. In *The Way of the Heart*, Nouwen sets forth three key contemplative practices for people to connect with God: solitude, silence, and prayer.

The literature review to follow will include:

1. The Importance of Contemplative Practices.
2. Henri Nouwen on Solitude and Prayer.
3. The Practice of Sabbath.

The Importance of Contemplative Practices

The Apostle Paul calls Christians toward a contemplative pace, away from the anxious hurry of life. Paul writes, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”⁷⁹

The entirety of Psalm 42 reflects on a person’s need of God amidst overwhelm: “As a

⁷⁸ Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*, 45.

⁷⁹ Philippians 4:6

deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.”⁸⁰

Tish Harrison Warren, Anglican priest and author, writes in *Liturgy of the Ordinary* that all Christians live in a daily liturgy as they organize their lives through routine. She connects identity in Jesus to how a person shapes their days, “As Christians, we wake each morning as those who are baptized. We are united with Christ in the approval of the father's spoken over us. We are marked from our first waking moment by an identity that is given to us by grace: an identity that is deeper and more real than any other identity we will don that day.”⁸¹ Warren writes how easy it is for Christians, much less leaders, to end up with days of constant bombardment, entertainment, and stimulation. She encourages Christians to slow down as she writes:

As busy, practical, hurried, and distracted people, we develop habits of inattention and miss these tiny theophanies in our day. But if we were really fully alive and whole, no pleasure would be too ordinary or commonplace to stir up adoration. I have to learn the habits of adoration intentionally—to get out of my head and stop to notice the colors in my daughter's eyes or the sound of rain on our back porch. Part of me—the taskmaster general and my brain—can feel guilty about the moments when I slowed down to enjoy the beauty around me.⁸²

Tilden Edwards, an Episcopal priest, spiritual director, and founder of the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation writes, “By contemplative I mean attention to our direct, loving, receptive, trusting presence for God. This attention includes the desire to be present through and beyond our images, thoughts and feelings... it is our deepest human

⁸⁰ Psalm 41:1-2

⁸¹ Tish Harrison Warren, *Liturgy of the Ordinary: Sacred Practices in Everyday Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 19.

⁸² Warren, 136.

home and calling; All other homes and callings derive their authenticity from it.”⁸³

Warren agrees as she writes, “We learn to rest by practice, by routine, over time, period. This is true of our bodies, our minds, and our souls, which are always intertwined... And in our workaholic, image-barraged, over-caffeinated, entertainment-addicted, and supercharged culture, submission to our creatureliness is a necessary and often overlooked part of discipleship.”⁸⁴

Nancy Eggert, an author, attorney, and Lutheran minister known for her interdisciplinary approach to leadership and spirituality, writes of the contemplative way as a state of awareness: “The contemplative state of awareness can be described as an open, available, attentive presence to what is going on both internally and externally. The contemplative state of awareness is also something that ordinary people, who may not define themselves as contemplatives, experience, even if for brief moments.”⁸⁵ Therefore, the leader must create margin moments.

As the leader's calendar fills, blocking out time, and holding to it, for slowing down through walking, praying, sitting, breathing, or any activity helps the leader be at rest and replenish. Leaders can have standing appointments with themselves. The practice calls leaders away from pleasing people and into calls of remembrance, gratitude, and maturity.⁸⁶ Fadling writes, “I like to describe spiritual leadership as living a grace-paced

⁸³ Tilden Edwards, *Living in the Presence: Spiritual Exercises to Open Our Lives to the Awareness of God* (New York: HarperCollins, 1971), 2.

⁸⁴ Warren, 152.

⁸⁵ Nancy J Eggert, *Contemplative Leadership for Entrepreneurial Organizations: Paradigms, Metaphors, and Wicked Problems* (Westport, CT: Quorum Books, 1998), 107.

⁸⁶ Allender, 60.

life in the midst of a driven culture; living at a vital, life giving, peaceful pace while remaining engaged and active in the Kingdom work Jesus began here on this earth.”⁸⁷ In *Ready, Set, Slow*, Lee Holden, a Buddhist teacher and life coach, writes to many high achievers what so many Christians know to be true:

Nobody wants to rush around like a headless chicken, yet this is how modern life tends to feel. What we actually want to do is to slow down, savor the beautiful moments of life, create more of them, and make them last as long as possible. We all want to relax more, stress less, and live in a state of inner peace. We all want to create more special moments in time where the beauty of the moment unfolds, blossoms into presence, connection, and bliss. We want to drink the sweet nectar of life and live it to the max, in full health, with vibrant energy, enthusiasm, love, joy, and happiness. And that requires a different pace, which requires slowing down.⁸⁸

Holden, writing from a Buddhist point of view, diagnoses the same problem: hurry. He states, “Slowing down doesn’t equate with laziness and sloth; rather it fuels our endeavors in a way that stress never could.”⁸⁹ He cites the American Institute of Stress:⁹⁰

- 33 percent of people report suffering regularly from extreme stress
- 48 percent of people can’t sleep properly because of stress
- 73 percent of people see major impacts on their mental health caused by stress
- 77 percent of people have stress that directly affects their physical health

Croft and Martin comment on this calling to contemplation: “As pastors, we need to continually adjust our vision by resetting our gaze on the shepherd of our souls. This is how we embrace our humanity.”⁹¹ Fadling expounds on Psalm 46:10, which calls people

⁸⁷ Fadling, *Unhurried Life*, 16.

⁸⁸ Lee Holden, *Ready, Set, Slow: How to Improve Your Energy, Health, and Relationships Through the Power of Slow* (Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2025), 2.

⁸⁹ Holden, 2.

⁹⁰ Holden, 29.

⁹¹ Croft, 43.

to be still and remember God: “This isn't the songwriter talking with us about God. This is God speaking to our very hearts and souls. This is God and his power and peace inviting us to be encouraged by his presence. When our anxiety would provoke us to frantic activity, God would invite us to stop and look to him. ‘Be still. Remember Me.’”⁹² Therefore, ministry leaders first gaze upon the Great Shepherd, Jesus, before leaders turn their attention to the calling and logistics of leading his sheep, the church.

Pastor, professor, and author Chuck Miller in *The Spiritual Formation of Leaders* teaches leadership through two “rooms.” The Soul Room is the place of spiritual formation, while the Leadership Room is the place people learn and focus on leading. Many leaders create an unnecessary dichotomy, choosing between the two, when they need both. Miller writes, “God wants my lingering in the Soul Room to continually energize my impact in the Leadership Room.”⁹³ Richard Foster agrees as he writes of the need for contemplative pace in his seminal book, *Celebration of Discipline*: “If we hope to move beyond the superficialities of our culture, including our religious culture, we must be willing to go down into the recreating silence says, into the inner world of contemplation.”⁹⁴ Therefore, the Leadership Room (for development and practice of leadership) is an extension of the Soul Room (for relationship and connection to Christ).

Miller is calling the leader into communion with God, looking to him in daily personal and organizational problems. From the place of soul connection, leaders move to

⁹² Alan Fadling, *A Non-Anxious Life: Experiencing the Peace of God's Presence* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2024), 153.

⁹³ Chuck Miller, *The Spiritual Formation of Leaders: Integrating Spiritual Formation and Leadership Development* (Xulon Press, 2007), 13.

⁹⁴ Richard Foster, *Celebration of Disciplines: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 1978), 15.

strategies and implications. Miller explains, “What happens in the Soul Room spills into the Leadership Room. What happens in the Leadership Room is brought into the Soul Room. This biblical leadership process is a two-room process.”⁹⁵ The purpose of slowing down for loving union is to remember leaders are at their core the beloved of God, not just leaders. The authors of *Resilient Ministry* write, “Our Christian doing must flow from an outpouring of our being.”⁹⁶ Miller expounds on this idea: “Many people make the mistake of going into Christian leadership in order to establish their identity. They feel—consciously or unconsciously—that becoming a leader will make them someone important, give their days meaning, and cause them to feel good about themselves.”⁹⁷ Drawing from the Soul Room, leaders can care for people and not just use them.

At first, when a leader begins to transition from an anxious pace to a more peaceful pace, the leader will most likely become unsettled. Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, in *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us*, writes, “Sadly, everything about us works against slowing down. Our compulsion to produce and not waste time invades the space God gave us to rest.”⁹⁸ Zack Eswine, pastor and author of *The Imperfect Pastor*, explains, “When Jesus begins to rescue us from trying to fix it all, know it all, be everywhere for all as fast and as famously as possible, we find ourselves in a hard spot... The absence of movement unsettles us. A kind of spiritual detox sets in.”⁹⁹ Jesus reveals what a heart for the Heavenly Father practices. Eswine calls this the

⁹⁵ Miller, 24.

⁹⁶ Burns, Guthrie, and Chapman, *Resilient Ministry*, 50.

⁹⁷ Miller, 90.

⁹⁸ Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 43.

“Sabbath heart,” a heart content with what Paul commands: “Aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs (1 Thessalonians 4:11).”¹⁰⁰ Eswine writes, “A Sabbath heart describes an inner life pursuing rest in him. We don't fear the loss of worldly attention only because we enjoy company with true treasure. His attention is enough. His holding all things together is our trust.”¹⁰¹ Eswine continues, “An ambition for quiet leads us to learn how to behold God. Quiet beholding changes our pace. A pace conducive to the conditions we face can help us a great deal, because anxieties are coming.”¹⁰² Therefore, the leader aims to behold Jesus more.

Solitude

Calhoun, whose work focuses on spiritual formation, writes, “Through slowing we intentionally develop margins in our lives that leave us open to the present moment. Slowing ourselves down doesn't happen automatically. We may need to incorporate some practices that make us conscious of our haste.”¹⁰³ Nouwen writes of the slowing down experience as he writes of the solitude experience of St. Anthony:

The shell of his superficial securities was cracked, and the abyss of iniquity was opened to him. But he came out of this trial victorious —not because of his own willpower or ascetic exploits, but because of his unconditional surrender to the lordship of Jesus Christ. When he emerged

⁹⁹ Zack Eswine, *The Imperfect Pastor: Discovering Joy in Our Limitations through a Daily Apprenticeship with Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 135.

¹⁰⁰ Eswine, 141.

¹⁰¹ Eswine, 141.

¹⁰² Eswine, 169.

¹⁰³ Calhoun, 89.

from a solitude, people recognized in him the qualities of an authentic healthy man, whole body and soul.¹⁰⁴

Calhoun continues, “Doing is important. But eventually we come to the end of doing. Tasks get done sooner or later. Experiences end for better or for worse. But we never come to the end of a ‘being.’ Being is a mystery that originated in the God who says, ‘I am who I am.’ Knowing God or another human being completely will always be beyond what we can know. But through contemplation, intimacy with God and others can grow.”¹⁰⁵ Calhoun and Nouwen’s point is the same, as Nouwen writes that solitude is the “furnace in which this transformation takes place.”¹⁰⁶ The transformation that must take place for the leader is a move from a compulsive minister to a settled one. Nouwen warns that a pastor’s context is a “network of domination and manipulation in which we can easily get entangled and lose our soul.”¹⁰⁷ The leaders’ pursuit is to be more deeply molded by Christ than the world in which they live. Yet all leaders live in this dangerously busy world, constantly creating a compulsiveness in the leader. Nouwen describes the battle of the leader:

Compulsive is indeed the best adjective for the false self. It points to the need for ongoing and increasing affirmation. Who am I? I am the one who is liked, praised, admired, disliked, hated, or despised. Whether I am a pianist, a businessman, or a minister, what matters is how I am perceived by my world. Being busy is a good thing, then I must be busy period if having money is a sign of real freedom, then I must claim my money. If knowing many people proves my importance, I will have to make the necessary contacts. The compulsion manifests itself in the lurking fear of

¹⁰⁴ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart: The Spirituality of the Desert Fathers and Mothers* (San Francisco, CA: Harper One, 2009), 10.

¹⁰⁵ Calhoun, 55.

¹⁰⁶ Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 10.

¹⁰⁷ Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 11.

failing in this steady urge to prevent this by gathering more of the same—more work, more money, more friends.¹⁰⁸

He adds that anger and greed are the two main enemies of spiritual life and the fuel for such compulsions. Greed flares up as one desires something more or new. And anger flares, passively or aggressively, as a leader does not get what he wants or the challenges in front of him seem overwhelming. Nouwen's solution is for the leader to enter the place of solitude.¹⁰⁹ Solitude is the ongoing practice, in short periods and longer multiday periods, of getting alone as to remind oneself who one is in Jesus and who one is not in the world. He writes:

In solitude I get rid of my scaffolding: no friends to talk with, no telephone calls to make, no meetings to attend, no music to entertain, notebooks to distract, just me—naked, vulnerable, weak, sinful, deprived, broken—nothing. It is in this nothingness that I have to face in my solitude, that nothingness so dreadful that everything in me wants to run to my friends, my work, and my distractions so that I can forget my nothingness and make myself believe that I am worth something.¹¹⁰

This is the point where leaders become painfully aware of how they have been reliant upon the world for definition. It is also the point of rescue as they are reminded of their wholeness in Christ. Only in the grace of God, walking in Christ, can they enter solitude and face such realities, trusting they will not be crushed but loved even more by Jesus in this weakness. Nouwen writes, “He (Christ) is our true self; we can slowly let our compulsions melt away and begin to experience the freedom of the children of God.”¹¹¹ Godly leaders are not defined by anything in the world but by Christ himself,

¹⁰⁸ Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 13.

¹⁰⁹ Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 14.

¹¹⁰ Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 15.

¹¹¹ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World* (New York: Crossroad, 2002), 45.

who claims them as God's son or daughter as they lead. In *The Spirit of Disciplines*, Dallas Willard writes:

Solitude frees us, actually. This above all explains its primacy and priority among the disciplines. The normal course of day-to-day human interactions locks us into patterns of feeling, thought, and action that are geared to a world set against God. Nothing but solitude can allow the development of a freedom from the ingrained behaviors that hinder or integration into God's order.¹¹²

This secure identity, which only God gives, heals the heart and empowers a life of loving others. Nouwen explains, "Compassion is the fruit of solitude and the basis of all ministry."¹¹³ Yet compassion is difficult as it "requires the inner disposition to go with others to the place where they are weak, vulnerable, lonely, and broken."¹¹⁴ Therefore, only the settled leader can effectively and compassionately minister at peace over time.

Practicing Solitude

Interestingly, work cultures that promote intermittent renewal during the workday and workweek see greater commitment and more productivity.¹¹⁵ The brain simply needs breaks. Without these breaks for renewal, people turn to artificial means of energy, which long term creates even more problems. In a culture hostile to rest, and the reality that work will always creep into personal life, leaders must fight to schedule blocks of time

¹¹² Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 160.

¹¹³ Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 24.

¹¹⁴ Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 25.

¹¹⁵ Loehr and Schwartz, 30.

for renewal. By recognizing the need for renewal and participating in practices of slowness, the leader can be replenished.

In *Invitation to Solitude and Silence*, Ruth Haley Barton, a teacher whose work focuses on spiritual formation, argues that many Christians are operating in a weary state. This is not a “good tired” but a “dangerous tired,” which needs a pace-of-life transformation through spiritual practices. Barton writes, “We all need a place to be a child, no matter how old we are. Young children who have been well cared for seem to have an instinctual trust and the unconditional acceptance of those who love them, and so they're able to let down and relax when they need to.”¹¹⁶ Foster agrees with Barton as he writes, “We can cultivate an inner solitude and silence that sets us free from loneliness and fear. Loneliness is inner emptiness. Solitude is inner fulfillment. Solitude is more a state of mind and heart than it is a place. There is a solitude of the heart that can be maintained at all times.”¹¹⁷ He continues, “There is the freedom to be alone, not in order to be away from people but in order to hear the divine Whisper better.”¹¹⁸ While all people need a place to be “a child,” as Barton writes, Thomas Merton wisely communicates how individual the practice must be:

Not everybody will be called to a life outside the social framework, but everyone in the contemplative life will at one time or other want more solitude, for a temporary period at least... Each one should make his own adjustment. This is the job of the contemplative. The contemplative should be a mature enough person to use what he or she needs of each different resource of the contemplative life.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Ruth Haley Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence: Experiencing God's Transforming Presence* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 77.

¹¹⁷ Foster, 96.

¹¹⁸ Foster, 97.

¹¹⁹ Thomas Merton, “The Solitary Life” (Published by the Trustees of the Merton Legacy Trust, 1969), 215.

Merton continues, “Everything tends to be a two-edged sword—solitude and society both have two aspects. Our social life can help us get to God, or it can be a hindrance; And our solitary life can help us get to God or it can become a hindrance. Each one of us has to recognize where the dividing line comes, because it is different for each person.”¹²⁰ The practice of silence is part of the practice of solitude but also extends into daily life. The leader, like all people, is constantly surrounded by noise and words. The scriptures are clear that the more one speaks, the more likely one is to sin (James 3:2, Psalm 39:1). Therefore, there's goodness in silence becoming a way of relating to others.

Croft and Martin write, “Silence exposes the soul. Ugly things surfaced that I was not ready to face. At one stage it felt as though I had imploded. But God, and his Amazing Grace, met me in a sweet, powerful way and began a healing journey that has brought a consistent peace in my soul.”¹²¹ He goes on to write, “This pursuit of silence takes the care of your soul to another level for it exposes how much you need noise, people, business, and distraction. It will reveal how hurried you really are, and what exactly you are running from.”¹²² At first silence is often experienced as anxiousness, but in time the leader will find the anxiousness transforming to a peaceful silence, as leaders remember their identity in Jesus. Barton writes:

Settle into a comfortable physical position and take three deep breaths -- inhale deeply and exhale slowly. As you breathe and become quiet, allow that which is usually unknown and unnamed within you to surface. Notice the dynamics that are drawing you deeper into solitude and silence at this time in your life. What is happening inside you and in your relationship

¹²⁰ Merton, 216.

¹²¹ Croft, 129.

¹²² Croft, 134.

with God right now that seems to be inviting you into solitude and silence?... Allow these inner experiences and dynamics to come to the surface; Feel them, name them, sit with them, express them to God if you wish.¹²³

In solitude and silence, leaders can release the tight grip of control; they can release their own agendas, asking to receive God's loving care. In this way solitude and silence are not the end in and of themselves but a means to the end—surrender and relationship with the Heavenly Father. Barton gives practical tips for solitude and silence:¹²⁴

1. Identify your sacred space and time.
2. Begin with a modest goal.
3. Settle into a comfortable yet alert physical position.
4. Ask God to give you a simple prayer that expresses your openness and desire for God.
5. Close your time in silence with a prayer of gratitude for God's presence with you or pray the Lord's prayer.
6. Resist the urge to judge yourself or your experiences in silence.

Barton writes how the goodness of solitude and silence fills the leader's cup so that when others express their needs, the leader can engage from wholeness and fullness. “Something about the process of having our emptiness filled in solitude eventually does enable us to engage with those around us on the basis of fullness rather than need.”¹²⁵

This slowing down into solitude will look different for different leaders, as their life and personality dictate. Slowing down for reflection usually includes a daily, weekly, and seasonal practice of solitude and a break from work and demand.

¹²³ Barton, 33.

¹²⁴ Barton, 40.

¹²⁵ Barton, 128.

Foster writes of several ways to practice solitude, including “little solitudes” throughout a given day, developing a quiet place to withdraw to, finding a place outdoors, living an entire day without words, and several times a year withdrawing for half of a day.¹²⁶ Fadling writes of the value of a day of rest per week, the keeping of a sabbath:

The Sabbath is God's antidote for our hurried, harried pace of life, and gives us the unhurried one-and-seven rhythm woven into the very fabric of creation. That 7th day is a space for us to enter into needed recovery (and perhaps go through the inevitable withdrawals) from the hurry, drivenness and workaholism that plagues so many of our lives, families, communities and organizations.¹²⁷

The value of sabbath-keeping (slowing down) helps leaders gain perspective, and awareness becomes possible as the leader receives the gifts of their limits.¹²⁸ Leaders can lead well by connecting the care of their schedules to their well-being, family, and faith community culture. Leaders often functionally stop, but the hum of activity continues inside their hearts and minds. Scazzero explains that leaders are often terrified to stop because of what they might see.¹²⁹ He gives leaders two great promises, “God’s primary work for me as a leader is to trust in Jesus.”¹³⁰ And, “I do nothing productive, and yet I am utterly loved.”¹³¹ He explains the weekly sabbath to be a day of the week for rest, delight, and contemplating God.¹³² A weekly and seasonal sabbath is the built-in reminder that leaders are finite and need rest. It renews the heart and body.

¹²⁶ Foster, 107.

¹²⁷ Fadling, *Unhurried Life*, 112.

¹²⁸ Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader*, 151.

¹²⁹ Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader*, 144.

¹³⁰ Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader*, 164.

¹³¹ Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader*, 169.

¹³² Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader*, 144.

Sabbath is first about the restless heart coming to peace and then about the physical body finding wholeness. Leaders need to break from some things to not do them but also need to step into new activities to do restful things.¹³³ Practicing sabbath helps leaders see there is always something else to do but a better decision must be made—one to rest. In the rest, leaders realize they are smaller than they thought, and the world continues to go on without them.

In *The Common Rule*, Justin Earley gives insight into forming a daily life of purpose and rest. He writes, “If we wake every morning to social media, we will be formed in its lens on life and all the envy and self-righteousness that goes with that.”¹³⁴ Earley continues, “Cultivating the habit of Scripture before phone means looking in the right place to ask who you are.”¹³⁵ This time in the Soul Room is a refusal of the tyranny of the urgent in favor of the peace of God’s promises.

Prayer

As for a definition of prayer, practical theology professor Edmund Clowney, in his article, “A Biblical Theology of Prayer,” writes, “Prayer, and the biblical context, is always a response to the God who has made himself known. Further, it is a reverent response.”¹³⁶ He explains, “Prayer is steeped in the awareness, often in all filled

¹³³ Justin Earley, *The Common Rule: Habits of Purpose for an Age of Distraction* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2019), 149.

¹³⁴ Earley, 90.

¹³⁵ Earley, 91.

¹³⁶ Edmund P Clowney, “A Biblical Theology of Prayer.” *Beginning with Moses*, 1990, 3. <http://www.beginningwithmoses.org/articles/btprayer.pdf>

awareness, of the presence of God.”¹³⁷ For Clowney, this reverence in all is connected to the creatureliness of the leader. The leader, or any human being as creature, is addressing the Creator. Willard writes, “Prayer is conversing, communicating with God. When we pray, we talk to God, aloud or within our thoughts...prayer almost always involves other disciplines and spiritual activities if it is to go well, especially study, meditation, and worship, and often solitude and fasting as well.”¹³⁸ Therefore, the leader rests in humble reverence to receive from the Creator. Nouwen concludes with the supernatural effects of solitary prayer:

It is this restful heart that will attract those who are groping to find their way through this life. When we have found our rest in God, we can do nothing other than minister. God's rest will be visible wherever we go and whoever we meet. And before we speak any words, the spirit of God, praying in us, will make his presence known and gather people into a new body, the body of Christ himself.¹³⁹

Croft and Martin describe this process: “It's like water in the garden of our soul. It's doing something beneath the surface of our being that we can't always see but that we trust is going to produce something lovely—as long as we don't break our habit of consistent watering.”¹⁴⁰ They motivate ministry leaders to pray, as prayer is how a person experiences the peace of God, becomes protected from anxiety and is led toward joy (Philippian 4:4-7). The authors also encourage leaders to pray as God is listening (John

¹³⁷ Clowney, 4.

¹³⁸ Willard, 184.

¹³⁹ Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 90.

¹⁴⁰ Croft, 91.

9:31) and hears prayers and to confess sins and be conformed to God's will (James 4:8).¹⁴¹

Nouwen writes:

Through contemplative prayer we can keep ourselves from being pulled from one urgent issue to another and from becoming strangers to our own heart and God's heart... Contemplative prayer deepens in us the knowledge that we are already free, that we have already found a place dwell, that we already belong to God, and even though everything and everyone around us keeps suggesting the opposite.¹⁴²

As a leader talks to God, prayer leads to rest. Nouwen continues, "Thus the prayer of the heart is the prayer of truth. It unmask the many illusions about ourselves and about God and leads us into the true relationship of the sinner to the merciful God."¹⁴³ Noting the New Testament command to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17), Nouwen writes, "The literal translation of the words 'pray always' is 'come to rest.'"¹⁴⁴ Leaders are free to voice frustrations, remember their identity, voice requests, surrender difficulties, and learn to grow silent to listen to God. In this way prayer is always an act of the heart.

Practicing Prayer

Michael Casey, a contemporary monk and teacher, in his essay, "Thomas Merton Within a Tradition of Prayer," encourages his readers, saying, "There is an acceptance of

¹⁴¹ Croft, 92.

¹⁴² Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*, 43.

¹⁴³ Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 76.

¹⁴⁴ Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 64.

the fact that different things work for different people and a recognition that an individual changes, so that what may be suitable for him at one stage of his life may be entirely unsatisfactory at other times.... Prayer grows out of life.”¹⁴⁵ Nouwen uses this same open-handedness, rather than formulaic rigor, when he describes the practice of prayer with three simple descriptions.¹⁴⁶

1. The prayer of the heart is nurtured by short, simple prayers. The prayer can be as simple, yet profound as, “Lord, help.”
2. The prayer of the heart is unceasing. The leader can pray such a prayer, all day, as if breath.
3. The prayer of the heart is all-inclusive. The prayer can be comprised of any and all parts of life, as God cares to hear the concerns and anxieties of his children.

In *Resilient Ministry*, the authors write that prayer brings “clarity, perspective, and emotional calm.”¹⁴⁷ Leaders often cling and worry and ambitiously drive ahead with little awareness. Both tendencies need a practice of slowing down, praying, and surrendering. These practices can be connected to the slow pace and posture of Mary in Luke 10. David Frenette, author of “Present to Presence: The Contemplative Practice of Attention/Intention” and spiritual director who leads contemplative retreats, expounds on Mary and Martha as he writes, “We easily get distracted by our own inner noise and then feel distracted about being distracted. We are lost in the past or concerned about the future. Hence, we are alienated from the present, from ourselves, from the living presence of God, and from the ability to really be present to another person.”¹⁴⁸ Practices of

¹⁴⁵ Michael Casey, “Merton Within a Tradition of Prayer,” *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 13, no 4 (1978).

¹⁴⁶ Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 64.

¹⁴⁷ Burns, Guthrie, and Chapman, *Resilient Ministry*, 117.

¹⁴⁸ Frenette.

journaling, walking, and reflecting on past experiences can become great ways for the leader to learn and gain awareness.

Ortlund encourages the Christian to make the Bible an ongoing, central spiritual practice and contemplation, “So as you seek to grow in Christ by becoming a deeper human, accept and embrace the truth that you will go deeper with Christ no further than you go into Scripture.”¹⁴⁹ He goes on to say, “We take in the life-giving words of God, and we breathe them back out to God in prayer.”¹⁵⁰ In this way Ortlund views scripture and prayer as one. The two are mutually dependent. He explains, “We can easily think of these two disciplines as independent activities. We read the Bible, and we pray. But the most effective way to pray is to turn your Bible reading into prayer. And the best way to read the Bible is prayerfully.”¹⁵¹ Ortlund's practical advice is to approach prayer as the child approaches a father, not overcomplicating prayer but speaking to God just as children do to their dad.¹⁵² The contemplative pace in prayer can be experienced through the prayer practices of centering prayer (Lectio Divina), the daily examen, meditation, designing the day into four parts, and practicing the presence.

Shannon Smythe, professor at Seattle Pacific University, in *Theology Today*, writes of the goodness of centering prayer. “Christian meditation and contemplative prayer are Spirit-led *kenotic* practices that empower the loss of our Judas life and the

¹⁴⁹ Ortlund, 151.

¹⁵⁰ Ortlund, 152.

¹⁵¹ Ortlund, 152.

¹⁵² Ortlund, 153.

finding of our paradoxical Pauline life.”¹⁵³ Smythe states that centering prayer, one type of contemplative prayer, is a repetitive work of the Spirit that makes a Christological event “present in surprising and un-anticipatable ways.”¹⁵⁴ She encourages the Christian toward daily centering prayer to grow more aware of insecurities and rest all the more in the full security of God.

In the article “Coping with Pastoral Burnout: Using Christian Contemplative Practices,” three professors at California Baptist University write, “Centering prayer is a four-step process that encourages pastors to surrender to God's active, loving presence in all experiences, both positive and negative.”¹⁵⁵ Centering prayer fosters an inner silence surrendering to God and his active love and presence. First, practitioners identify a sacred word and allow this sacred word to be their desire and intent to engage with God. Second, practitioners allow this sacred word to move around in their awareness of current reality. This is the practitioner allowing God and his word to attend to their inner life. As the mind wanders, practitioners allow the sacred word to return as the focal point, returning to God's active and loving presence. In this process, the third moment begins as negative experiences. Practitioners surrender these negative experiences in confession and communication to God. Finally in the fourth moment, practitioners release the experience as God speaking and working in their inner life to affect their current context. This entire process of contemplation can take around twenty minutes of focused attention on the

¹⁵³ Shannon Nicole Smythe, “The Way of Divine and Human Handing-Over: Pauline Apocalyptic, Centering Prayer, and Vulnerable Solidarity,” *Theology Today* 75, no. 2 (Summer 2018): 85. DOI: [10.1177/0040573618763576](https://doi.org/10.1177/0040573618763576).

¹⁵⁴ Smythe, 86.

¹⁵⁵ Frederick, 8 1.

scripture, a sacred word, and the contemplative process to allow God to use that word.¹⁵⁶ Foster explains, “Whereas the study of scripture centers on exegesis, the meditation of scripture centers on internalizing and personalizing the passage. The written Word becomes a living word addressed to you.”¹⁵⁷

Lectio Divina, as a particular method of centering prayer, also takes around twenty minutes. The leader can sit in a comfortable position, upright and relaxed. The leader says a brief welcoming prayer to God's active love being present during the scripture reading. Participants then enter a relaxed state, allowing their breathing to slow. A scripture is then read allowing the leader to engage the imagination and enter the scripture, asking questions like, “How does hearing these words make you feel?”

The Daily Examen is another contemplative prayer practice. California Baptist University professors write, “The (daily) examen focuses on the individual's intentions, motivations, and attitudes in the present and how these subjective experiences align with God's intentions.”¹⁵⁸ The process for using the examen comes from Ignatian spirituality and can be summed up in the following five steps, usually practiced in the evening, often in prayerful journaling:

1. Become aware of God's presence.
2. Review the day with gratitude.
3. Pay attention to your emotions.
4. Choose one feature of the day and pray from it.
5. Look toward tomorrow.

¹⁵⁶ Frederick, 9 1.

¹⁵⁷ Foster, 29.

¹⁵⁸ Frederick, 9 1.

Meditation is another way to practice contemplative prayer. It is simply a contemplative practice of focusing one's attention and affection on Jesus and the Word of God. It is the filling of one's thoughts and hearts with Christ's presence and teaching. Meditation may be gained through memorization or simply the reciting of a key verse or biblical thought. In this practice the truth given from God works its way into the leader's mind and heart. Clowney notes, "The psalms move easily from meditation to prayer and from prayer to meditation. The psalmist addresses both his God and his soul."¹⁵⁹ He summarizes the process and purpose of Christian meditation as he writes:

Christian meditation, then, cannot be reduced to a system of spiritual exercises, a kind of yoga for the sanctification of the spirit. The words given to the Christian for meditation are all the words of scripture... the wisdom that is gained is meditation in God's wisdom, revealing his works and his name. That applies to everything we think or do. The love in which the Christian abides in meditation is the love of God—his love that we are given to know by the Holy Spirit, a love that quickens our love to him. Yet our love is not measured by the intensity of our experience but by the genuineness of our desire to see God glorified. This love will burst into praise, singing of God's ways and of his name. Meditation is not so much a distinct art as a way of living before God, a reflective dimension of meaning and all of our experience.¹⁶⁰

Meditation was familiar to the authors of scripture as Clowney writes:

The Bible uses two different Hebrew words to convey the idea of meditation, and together they are used some 58 times. These words have various meanings: listening to God's word, reflecting on God's works, rehearsing God's deeds, ruminating on God's law, and more. In each case there is a stress upon changed behavior as a result of our encounter with the living God.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ Edmund P Clowney, *Christian Meditation: What the Bible Teaches About Meditation and Spiritual Exercises* (Vancouver, Canada: Regent College Publishing, 1979), 24.

¹⁶⁰ Clowney, *Christian Meditation*, 93.

¹⁶¹ Clowney, *Christian Meditation*, 15.

Meditation gives leaders emotional and spiritual space for Christ to work in their heart. Eswine writes of the work Christ can do in a leader's heart as the leader thinks of the day comprised of "four portions," or four parts that make up a given day.¹⁶²

First: The Grace of Morning. Jesus prayed in the morning (Mark 1:35), walked in the morning (Matthew 21:18), and taught in the morning (John 8:2). The psalmist also speaks how joy comes in the morning (Psalm 30:5) as people give praise and thanksgiving that God has carried them through the night (Psalm 59:16). Therefore, the morning calls Christians to rejoice in the new day, new mercies, and pray to God for the day to come. The morning is filled with God's goodness and possibilities in the new day to come. Eswine writes, "We rise; God's love is here! We pray; God's guidance is with us! We hope again and cry out anew; God is overcoming the darkness!"¹⁶³

Second: Noonday Wisdom. The noonday, the middle part of a given day, is filled with decision-making in jobs, circumstances, and relationships. By afternoon fatigue has set in. In John 4 Jesus breaks from his journey to receive a cup of water. He speaks of the noonday as "the burden of the day and the scorching heat."¹⁶⁴ Since work is fatiguing, people must take "these questions of the day to his throne of grace and there finding hope, the afternoon seems to be the time of illumination in which our intention to lean on that grace is sifted and the true objects of our hope take off their masks."¹⁶⁵ If the morning calls people to rejoice, the afternoon humbles them into their need of God.

¹⁶² Eswine, 172.

¹⁶³ Eswine, 174.

¹⁶⁴ Matthew 20:12

¹⁶⁵ Eswine, 175.

Third: Evening Hospitality. The psalms speak of the evening as a shadow time (Psalm 59:6-7; 102:11; 104:23). The burden of the afternoon has created questions and coarse moods. If the leader does not handle the burdens of the afternoon, taking them to the Lord in surrender, the leader will journey into the evening hours unable to extend compassion to friends and family. The leader will be too busy in the heart and mind, frustrated in what was done or undone, questioning and re-living the day.

Lastly, fourth: Solitude and the Night Watches. The psalmist speaks of the night as a time of waiting on the Lord. “My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips, when I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night.”¹⁶⁶ The night is a time of solitude. Jesus often used the night as times of prayer (Luke 6:12). Eswine writes, “One purpose for our bed and the night is to ponder in our hearts what troubles us and to speak such things to God. Sleep results. Sleep is a sabbath-like act. We rest from everything and leave it all for God's keeping while we lie motionless in the world for a while.”¹⁶⁷

Brother Lawrence, known for his ongoing contemplation with the Lord, wrote the renowned book *The Practice of the Presence of God*. He writes:

“All we have to do is to recognize God as being intimately present with us. Then we may speak directly to Him every time we need to ask for help, to know His will and moments of uncertainty, and to do whatever He wants us to do in a way that pleases Him. We should offer our work to Him before we begin and thank Him afterward for the privilege of having done it for His sake. This continuous conversation should also include praising and loving God incessantly for his infinite goodness and perfection.”¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ Psalm 63:5-6

¹⁶⁷ Eswine, 178.

¹⁶⁸ Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God* (New York, NY: Image Books, 1977), 23.

Brother Lawrence encourages ongoing simple prayers, as “lengthy prayers encourage wandering thoughts.”¹⁶⁹ He summarizes the goodness of such ongoing communion with God: “There is no sweeter manner of living in the world than continuous communion with God.”¹⁷⁰

Importance of Contemplation for Emotional Health in Leadership

The range of demands on a ministry leader is vast. This reality compels leaders to be committed to their organizational health and emotional health. Travis Bradberry and Jean Greaves discovered a similar truth and write in *Emotional Intelligence 2.0*, “Of all the people we’ve studied at work, we have found that 90 percent of high performers are also high in EQ.”¹⁷¹ Emotional intelligence in the workplace is a major factor in a leader’s success and effectiveness. Therefore, a leader who desires to have effective, resilient leadership will set out to grow in emotional intelligence.

Emotional Intelligence Through Self-Awareness

When leaders are blind to their emotional life, they easily reduce people to objects that either enhance or limit their agenda. This makes empathy impossible. And yet without empathy, leadership is impossible. Everyone around the leader will see the limitations of the leader, but the leader will be blind to them. In *Leadership and Self-*

¹⁶⁹ Lawrence, 46.

¹⁷⁰ Lawrence, 33.

¹⁷¹ Travis Bradberry and Jean Greaves, *Emotional Intelligence 2.0* (San Diego, CA: TalentSmart, 2009), 19.

Deception, the Arbinger Institute states, “The bigger problem was that I couldn’t see that I had a problem.”¹⁷² In this book, the idea of being inside and outside the box translates into people being unaware or aware of the problems they create by their limitations, issues, and low emotional intelligence. Being unaware, or in the box, means leaders continue to lead without concern for the problems they are causing. In *The Power of Full Engagement*, Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz write, “Whatever we fail to notice and acknowledge, we tend to act out.”¹⁷³ Yet Christian leaders can face the truth about their full selves because their entire selves are already loved and accepted by God. Their failure and shortcomings are known, and yet the limitation is not their real identity. Christian leaders are free to face the truth as they are humbled, loved, and open.

Leaders live from a particular history and carry baggage like all other people—what happens to a person in the past usually does not stay in the past. Bradberry and Greaves explain, “Your reaction to your triggers is shaped by your personal history, which includes your experience with similar situations.”¹⁷⁴ A past trauma creates a wound, and triggers are formed, where emotions are awakened upon a particular set of stimuli. The more the leader is unaware of these triggers and emotions, the more the leader is held hostage by them. This often manifests through anxiety, aggression, fear, and other negative motives and behaviors. The more the leader slows down to become

¹⁷² Arbinger Institute, *Leadership and Self-Deception: Getting Out of the Box* (Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2000), 15.

¹⁷³ Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz, *The Power of Full Engagement: Managing Energy, Not Time, Is the Key to High Performance and Personal Renewal* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 2003), 152.

¹⁷⁴ Bradberry and Greaves, 15.

aware the emotion is present and what is causing the emotion, the more the leader can heal and move progress in greater emotional health.

Bradberry and Greaves present four emotional intelligence skills: self-awareness (what I see), self-management (what I do), social awareness (what I see), and relationship management (what I do).¹⁷⁵ Self-awareness and self-management are personal competencies while social awareness and relationship management are social competencies. Leaders must grow in seeing themselves and then understanding and adapting in how they relate to others—what they do.

Through self-awareness, leaders can help make sense of their emotions by facing the discomfort of the negative emotions they are feeling. Bradberry and Greaves explain, “Self-awareness is your ability to accurately perceive your own emotions at the moment and understand your tendencies across situations.”¹⁷⁶ Therefore, curiosity becomes a leader's best friend as the leader ponders the cause of various emotional responses.

With self-awareness, leaders see what they do well, why they do it, what motivates and fulfills them, and how they affect others. In this way, self-awareness leads to self-management. Bradberry and Greaves explain, “Self-management is your ability to use your awareness of your emotions to stay flexible and direct your behavior positively.”¹⁷⁷ Through self-management, the leader can correct harmful behavior and grow in helpful behavior. Growing awareness of behaviors toward others, relationships, and the effects of the self on others is known as social awareness. Bradberry and Greaves

¹⁷⁵ Bradberry and Greaves, 22.

¹⁷⁶ Bradberry and Greaves, 23.

¹⁷⁷ Bradberry and Greaves, 29.

expound, "Social awareness is your ability to accurately pick up on emotions in other people and understand what is going on with them."¹⁷⁸

Social awareness allows leaders to exercise empathy toward someone and reveal it through their behavior in reaction to a person's present state of being. Leaders learn to listen and observe, stop talking, and learn from those around them. Then the leader can begin to manage the relationship in a meaningful way. This is known as relationship management. Bradberry and Greaves comment, "Relationship management is your ability to use your awareness of your own emotions and those of others to manage interactions successfully."¹⁷⁹ It allows leaders to connect with people and keep them connected. Its greatest challenge comes when the leader defaults into unhealthy emotions, patterns, thinking, behaving, and relating.

It is the leader's job to be aware of the emotional system in the organization, to guide it toward more excellent health. With increased emotional health in a system, the organization becomes more capable of enduring conflict, problems, and differences. Thus, the leader must become a reasonable observer. This observation requires the leader to slow down and observe the organization without being emotionally caught up, or enmeshed, in the system. In *Creating a Healthier Church*, Ronald Richardson, a pastor, counselor, and theologian, writes, "No one ever achieves total objectivity or can get completely outside of this reactive cycle. No one ever gets totally outside of their own

¹⁷⁸ Bradberry and Greaves, 36.

¹⁷⁹ Bradberry and Greaves, 43.

emotional system.”¹⁸⁰ Yet becoming more observant helps the leader grow in health while aiding the organization in moving toward health.

Part of emotional intelligence includes addressing anxiety. Anxiety is a perceived threat. A leader’s anxiety results from family stories, idols, and present circumstances. Chronic anxiety is an elevated response to something that is not real or acute. The leader must first manage personal anxiety to lead others in managing their anxiety. Many people feel under threat when there is conflict or a lack of steadiness in a system. Richardson writes, “Family systems theory calls the sense of threat that people, or systems, experience anxiety.”¹⁸¹ This anxiety is not a panic attack but is everyday chronic anxiety below the surface of awareness and affects how a leader functions on a given day. Anxiety is less tangible than fear and a little more abstract, so the ability to determine its source can be difficult. It is often rooted in a deeper issue than the given event. Anxiety shows itself anytime a person feels a lack of control.

Anxiety shows itself in people and in organizations. An organization can perceive different events as threatening even when the events are not actually threatening. Organizations that thrive have leaders who can stay balanced and feel safe amid various events. The more anxiety in a system, the more reactivity there is within relationships in the system. Therefore, Richardson writes, “the greater the calming effect they (the leader) will have on the whole congregation. The more threatened and unsafe the leaders feel generally (chronic anxiety), the more the whole congregation can be disrupted.”¹⁸² In

¹⁸⁰ Ronald Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church: Family Systems Theory, Leadership and Congregational Life* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), 37.

¹⁸¹ Richardson, 42.

¹⁸² Richardson, 43.

Becoming a Conflict Competent Leader, Tim Flanagan and Craig Runde explain this by writing, “Conflict competence is the ability to develop and use cognitive, emotional, and behavioral skills that enhance productive outcomes of conflict while reducing the likelihood of escalation or harm.”¹⁸³

A growing, effective leader learns to face conflict and utilize three key steps: cool down, reflect, and engage constructively. Self-awareness and emotional intelligence are critical to all three steps. The conflict-competent leader gauges emotions so that feelings do not dominate or scatter thinking. The leader engages in greater self-awareness of reactions to the conflict to self-manage and then socially manage it properly.

The Movement from Self-Awareness to Self-Management

The more aware leaders become of not just the eruption, but the emotion underneath it, they can grow aware beforehand and manage a better response. In this way, leaders can grow in self-awareness and thus self-management. Bradberry and Greaves write, “The more you understand how your emotions ripple outward, the better equipped you’ll be to choose the type of ripples that you want to create.”¹⁸⁴ This is why the journey of emotional intelligence matters to the leader and the organization, because there are always ripples. And to know these emotions and the root of the emotions, leaders must lean into the emotion and discomfort even if it means coming face to face with an uncomfortable reality.

¹⁸³ Craig Runde and Tim A. Flanagan, *Becoming a Conflict Competent Leader: How You and Your Organization Can Manage Conflict Effectively* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass 2013), 8.

¹⁸⁴ Bradberry and Greaves, 67.

Leaders growing to understand how anxiety functions in themselves can help others move toward healing and greater awareness of their counterproductive leadership tendencies. In states of high anxiety leaders should ask: “What is the threat in my life? Is that threat real or a distortion of reality?” Chronically anxious leaders can find relief in growing in awareness of these feelings and the distinction between what is real and what is perceived on a given day. Oftentimes the leader’s awareness that there is no immediate threat can result in telling themselves that they are not under any real significant threat and move forward in a calm peaceful state.

In *The Leader’s Journey*, the authors write, “Less-anxious leaders and less-reactive congregations make better, more thoughtful decisions as they bear witness to the gospel, conduct their business, and care for one another.”¹⁸⁵ Also, in *The Leader’s Journey*, the authors list ways to grow in awareness: name the feeling, own the feeling, get curious about the feeling, distinguish if the feeling is based in truth or an assumption, and preach truth to yourself.¹⁸⁶ As moments of anxiety surface, the leader must clarify before responding, breathe and count, then wait to respond or ask for time out.¹⁸⁷

The strategies for self-management are centered around concepts of slowing down: reflection, learning from experiences and others, choosing joy and gratitude, and refusing self-condemnation. These goals hint at the leader's calling toward greater self-care to better lead. The more the leader is aware, attuned, steady, calm, and encouraging, the more people flourish and desire to move the ministry forward.

¹⁸⁵ Herrington, 91.

¹⁸⁶ Herrington, 83.

¹⁸⁷ Herrington, 87.

The Differentiated Leader

This distinction between the Beloved identity and the leader role gives the leader a greater chance of differentiating anxiety inside the ministry. The source of the differentiation for the ministry leader is rootedness in Christ. Edwin Friedman, a rabbi, counselor, and leadership consultant, writes, “A leader must separate his or her own emotional being from that of his or her followers while still remaining connected.”¹⁸⁸ The differentiated leader grows in capacity for evaluation, adaptive changes for ministry health, and pursuing people in love, even when people are difficult. Friedman writes, “Stress is due to becoming responsible for the relationships of others.”¹⁸⁹ This stress of taking on others' responsibilities, or even their emotions, leads to greater anxiety in the leader. Part of a leader's differentiation is to be connected to their concern without taking responsibility for something that is not theirs to carry. As leaders grow to be separate but connected, rooted in a definition of the self beyond their ministry, leaders can serve the ministry without being taken hostage by it. In this way, leaders learn to lead without causing more anxiety in the system.

Ministry leaders are already securely accepted and worthy in Christ as the Beloved of God. There is nothing left for the leader to add. Heifetz and Linsky state, “Distinguishing yourself from your role is just as important with regard to praise as it is to criticism.”¹⁹⁰ Attacks can send a leader into despair and self-doubt, while praise can

¹⁸⁸ Friedman, 20.

¹⁸⁹ Friedman, 207.

¹⁹⁰ Heifetz and Linsky, 190.

send the leader into the disillusionment of grandiosity. Leadership mistakes are made in the confusion of identity and moments of lacking differentiation. The distinction of being beloved while leading secures and anchors the leader. The question becomes, how does the leader continue to remember that which is already true about them, that they are secure in Jesus as God's beloved and called to differentiate while remaining connected?

Relationship Management for Resonance

The emotional intelligence journey takes the leader from self-awareness to self-management to social awareness and relationship management. Once leaders are aware and managing themselves, they can begin to manage, or lead, those around them. In *Primal Leadership*, the overarching premise states, "The fundamental task of leaders, we argue, is to prime good feeling in those they lead. That occurs when a leader creates resonance—a reservoir of positivity that frees the best in people. At its root, then, the primal job of leadership is emotional."¹⁹¹ Resonance is a by-product of emotional intelligence. So, the gift of resonance comes from emotional awareness and growth.

Without awareness of the leader's own emotions and those of others, the leader will overlook issues in the team, community, and people. Without awareness, the leader will abreact and not relate well. Leaders may not even know why they are not being productive or why they overreacted. As they become aware of their own emotions, they can manage themselves and become aware of others, to lead others. Social awareness results, as empathy is now possible.

¹⁹¹ Richard E. Boyatzis, Daniel Goleman, and Annie McKee, *Primal Leadership: Unleashing the Power of Emotional Intelligence* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2013), XIIIV.

Leaders must be on the healing path and grow their awareness of their emotions to avoid overreacting to others. One conflict or wound triggers the next conflict or wound, and the cycle continues. Richardson encourages leaders, “The key for church leaders is to slow down this process before it gets out of control.”¹⁹² The leader does not tell people to be calm—the leader brings calmness to the system, situation, and relationships.

The higher the level of differentiation in a church, the more the church can maintain a sense of connection between parishioners while allowing for differences. This will enable parishioners to have a loving concern for each other and grow in love. It also allows the church to focus on its values and vision as a purpose rather than constantly dealing with inner conflict. Richardson exhorts those who lead in settings of close interpersonal relationships, “The critical issue in this kind of closeness is the ability to maintain a sense of self, and being in charge of the self, while in close emotional contact with others.”¹⁹³ Such leadership allows a greater ability to process conflict, communicate clearly, and collaborate, with each person emotionally responsible in the process. For a leader, this is the normative goal and stance for healthy leadership.

Organizational Benefits of Contemplative Practices

The call to be a pastor, truly a shepherd, is a call to be in service to people for the church’s benefit and praise. Such a calling stands in wonderful opposition to ministry done for the benefit to a ministry leader’s ego. Love is matched with competence as the leader leads. In *Resilient Ministry*, the authors outline five main tasks of the leader:

¹⁹² Richardson, 50.

¹⁹³ Richardson, 108.

modeling, shepherding, managing expectations, supervising conflict, and planning.¹⁹⁴ But shepherding is not simply a task. The ministry leader is a shepherd. All other tasks fall under the call to shepherd—to care for the souls of people, as a shepherd does sheep. This distinction places the leader as a shepherd, and not a hero, and in the place of love with competence, rather than competence alone.

Pace in Communication and Conflict

The leader's job is to remain steady through conflict and crisis. Taking heat and remaining steady are accomplished only by differentiation. Under heat leaders will want to abreact, distance, and blame, but leaders are called to a steadiness that allows the system anxiety to be reduced to a healthy level. In *The Leader's Journey*, the authors write, "The least mature members among us begin to attract most of our attention."¹⁹⁵ In religious settings, this is exaggerated, as faith communities can often be uncomfortable with conflict or a member being unhappy. In *The Leader's Journey*, two forces are cited at work in relationships: togetherness and independence.¹⁹⁶ Intimacy is known through togetherness, and stability is known through healthy independence. People are connected yet differentiated. Religious communities often assume the need for connection at all costs, which creates a lack of independence and an unhealthy emotional culture.

Richardson writes, "Any two-person relationship exists within a network of other relationships. It is difficult for any two people to maintain a one-to-one relationship for

¹⁹⁴ Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 225-247.

¹⁹⁵ Herrington, 41.

¹⁹⁶ Herrington, 130.

any period. The more differentiated they are, the longer two people can maintain a one-to-one relationship with just each other, even in conflict, without distancing or bringing in a third party.”¹⁹⁷ Anxiety in a system will increase the presence of third parties in any existing relationship. Leaders must grow in their knowledge and awareness of triangles to understand what occurs in a group. This ever-increasing awareness can equip the leader to deal with anxiety or what is happening under the surface.

The leader must grow to understand the ministry as a series of relationships, connecting triangles of three people who are all linked together making the greater whole.¹⁹⁸ Unhealthy triangulation occurs as one person is emotionally hijacked by another person’s concern or interest regarding a third party. Thus, the leader must ask followers to engage with each other without enlisting a third party into their interest to gather influence. The two originating people need to work out the anxiety as best they can. The leader participates in the triangle in a calm non-anxious manner. This strategy keeps the anxiety in the system to a minimum. The leader is not reacting or fixing but observing and assisting. For church leaders, “You need to be able to identify the triangles in the congregation that you are involved in and change your participation in them.”¹⁹⁹ This change of behavior, not to fix a given person but to change how the relationship is occurring, can improve the organization overall.

Triangles generally serve two purposes, “(1) absorbing anxiety, and (2) covering over basic differences and conflicts in an emotional system.”²⁰⁰ Triangles always exist

¹⁹⁷ Richardson, 115.

¹⁹⁸ Herrington, 60.

¹⁹⁹ Richardson, 115.

²⁰⁰ Richardson, 116.

and can serve to lower anxiety until a person, usually the one under stress or pressure, uses the triangle to manipulate the third person. The leader must avoid getting pulled into a conflict between the other two. The leader must call the stressed person to acknowledge their responsibility in the conflict and ask the stressed person to communicate directly with the third person. The leader can also host a conversation where the two parties directly communicate.

As the leadership grows in emotional health, leading in a non-anxious calm manner, the living system becomes healthier and less anxious. Richardson describes the job of an effective leader as aiming to “down the level of anxiety in the emotional system of the congregation... They do this primarily by managing their own anxiety, and then, secondarily, by staying in meaningful contact with other key players in the situation. They do not tell others to be calm. They simply bring their own calmness to the situation.”²⁰¹ The wise, compassionate leader becomes attuned to what the system is afraid of losing and rightly navigates the people through needed adaptive changes.

One of the most significant challenges any leader faces is the need for more directness from the followers. Richardson writes, "In healthier relationship systems, people do not spend their time with each other focusing negatively on an absent third person."²⁰² Healthy people build a one-to-one relationship, focusing the conversation on their own life experiences or the mutual relationship of the two people present. A common way for an organization to create false intimacy in a relationship is to create a

²⁰¹ Richardson, 51.

²⁰² Richardson, 128.

third-party enemy. By making an enemy, there is a false closeness that develops while managing to avoid any genuine openness about themselves. Therefore, a leader should always take note of their role in a system and direct conversations toward those present and not those absent. The leader refuses to become the middleman between two other parties in these instances.

The politics of ministry can be exhausting to a leader. Leaders must grow to know how people's interests and wounds affect the larger group. In *Resilient Ministry*, the authors note, "The individuals in our congregations influence each other and the whole far more than we imagine."²⁰³ They set forth four key questions for a leader's consideration upon a change:

- Whose interests are at stake in this decision?
- What are the various interests?
- What do the stakeholders have to gain or lose?
- How will the various interests be represented at the planning table?²⁰⁴

One aligned, calm, and peaceful person can be powerful for the vision of the community, and one wounded person can create dissension and difficulty. The leader "listens to the song beneath the words"²⁰⁵ to learn what is going on in someone's heart, underneath the person's opinions and concerns. Leaders do this to discover the best way to address fears, conflicts, and people's interests to best move people toward the vision. Leaders must learn who holds influence and gain wisdom from their perspective without

²⁰³ Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 205.

²⁰⁴ Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 220.

²⁰⁵ Heifetz and Linsky, 55.

being bound to them. Learning to disappoint people at a rate they can endure is how a leader makes their way through adaptive changes.

Conflict always exists in groups, so the leader's call is to limit the anxiety that causes conflict and address conflict as it arises. Sometimes the necessary change will create conflict. Heifetz and Linsky give helpful ways for leaders to navigate through conflict: create a holding environment (a safe space and method to voice concerns), control the temperature (raise and lower heat/stress of change at a healthy rate as people in time embrace the needed change), and maintain healthy emotional responses through the conflict and communication.²⁰⁶

This brings the leader back to the importance of being well-differentiated with a calm, non-anxious presence. Friedman writes, "Leaders are able, by their well-defined presence, to regulate the systemic anxiety in the relationship system they are leading and to inhibit the invasiveness of those factions which would preempt its agenda."²⁰⁷

Friedman calls the leader to "start with conviction, stay calm, stay connected, and stay the course."²⁰⁸ Leaders must be grounded in identity in Christ, clear on the values and vision of the ministry, and remain calm as they courageously lead through change.

Conflict will arise, but the leader must remain connected while differentiated, actively listening, and navigating the community through adaptive changes.

As conflict is a difference of values or principles, the leader must lead and live slowly enough to grow aware of the underlying values and principles fueling a conflict.

²⁰⁶ Heifetz, 102-122.

²⁰⁷ Friedman, 146.

²⁰⁸ Friedman, 128.

Cooling down to a slower pace of leadership is vital as conflict causes survival instincts to kick in due to the sense of threat.²⁰⁹ This sense of threat is not always a real threat, which is the journey of the leader to cool down and understand oneself and the abreaction within the conflict inside of themselves.

The leader must grow aware of the hot topics of stakeholders and the organization. Runde and Flanagan write, “When they (hot topics) are pushed, it is quite likely that the person will attribute negative motives to the other person and become angry with that person, perhaps in ways that will lead him or her to overreact and set off the retaliatory cycle.”²¹⁰ Leaders must also slow down to become aware of their hot topics or buttons. As a leader, Runde notes, “If you are able to sense your reactions early on, we recommend labeling the hot button.... This alerts you to what is happening and can allow you to start using techniques that help you cool down.”²¹¹

While the speed of conflict can increase quickly, the leader must slow the pace of communication and processing down to be more careful and make better decisions. Without slowing down, the leader will stay in an abreacting emotional state, where clear thinking is limited and the ability to understand the underlying motives of others and themselves is restricted. Slowing down to reflect on the underlying motives of the people involved in the conflict, considering their perspective, and seeing the bigger picture and organizational effect is vital to moving toward resolution.

²⁰⁹ Flanagan and Runde, 67.

²¹⁰ Flanagan and Runde, 73.

²¹¹ Flanagan and Runde, 75.

In *Crucial Conversations*, Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, and Al Switzler state that the leader has three choices when facing crucial conversations: avoiding them, facing them and handling them poorly, or facing them and handling them well.²¹² They write, “If you handle even a seemingly insignificant conversation poorly, you establish a pattern of behavior that shows up in all of your crucial conversations.”²¹³ This is not to burden the leader but to help the leader understand the significance of interactions with others. This necessitates the calling for leaders to slow down to ensure their heart is settled before entering relationships.

The settling of the heart provides the foundation and security to enter tough conversations rather than flee or fight in the face of conflict. The more a leader fights or shows resistance in crucial conversations, the fewer people who want to be around or follow them. Therefore, the leader must lead, relate, and build an organization that can talk openly about high-stakes, emotional, and controversial topics.²¹⁴

Differing interests, values, and opinions in people groups, including ministries and churches, means conflict will always exist as groups work together. In *The Politics of Ministry*, Bob Burns, Tasha Chapman, and Donald Guthrie write, “Ministry means working with people. And people have conflicting interests. These interests lead people to act in certain ways. So, whenever people get together, they will be negotiating their interests.”²¹⁵ Thus, ministry leaders must know how politics work within people groups.

²¹² Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, and Al Switzler, *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes are High* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 2002), 3.

²¹³ Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, and Switzler, 3.

²¹⁴ Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, and Switzler, 9.

²¹⁵ Bob Burns, Tasha D. Chapman, and Donald C. Guthrie, *The Politics of Ministry: Navigating Power Dynamics and Negotiating Interests*. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2019), 5.

The authors continue, “Politics is the art of getting things done with others.”²¹⁶ Therefore, any time leaders are with others, working toward a common goal, politics will occur as the people deal with each other and negotiate their interests. The leader and the church must be equipped to process conflict in the best way.

In *Becoming a Conflict Competent Leader*, Craig Runde and Tim Flanagan state that people have five conflict styles: competing, avoiding, accommodating, compromising, and finally, collaborating. In the healthiest style of collaboration, each person gives the other a high level of interest.²¹⁷ The leader aims to move toward collaboration to gain the most significant good from each conflict and provide team-created solutions for the church. Runde and Flanagan suggest that the leader take a passive approach toward conflict resolution by practicing reflective thinking, delayed response, and adaptation.²¹⁸ These passive approaches toward conflict can be executed in solitude. A more active approach is characterized by seeing the conflict through another person's perspective, creating solutions with others, expressing emotions, and humbly reaching out to the other people in the conflict.²¹⁹ Both passive and active approaches to conflict require leaders to slow down and remember they are secure in Christ, because this security equips the leader to be non-defensive within the relationship and conflict.

²¹⁶ Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Politics of Ministry*, 5.

²¹⁷ Flanagan and Runde, 49.

²¹⁸ Flanagan and Runde, 55.

²¹⁹ Flanagan and Runde, 55.

Pacing Decision Making and Organizational Change

The necessity for adaptability combined with people's opposition leaves many leaders weary, reactive, and frustrated. So, where is the leader's hope? How might leaders flourish in the wearying adaptive process? Heifetz and Linsky write, "People push back when you disturb the personal institutional equilibrium they know."²²⁰ They differentiate between technical changes and adaptive changes. Technical problems can be met with current know-how applied to the situation, while adaptive problems are changes that require learning new ways, adjusting expectations, negotiating frustration and anger, and requiring time and trust.²²¹ The gospel message never changes, yet the organization around that message, and subsequent values, require an ongoing adaptive process for the organization to move forward. Heifetz and Linsky call this process transformative change. "For transformative change to be sustainable, it not only has to take root in its own culture but also has to successfully engage its changing environment."²²² Ministry leadership is the calling to shepherd people through changes toward a better outcome.

Values are embedded in the formation of ministries. As leaders differentiate, learning to not simply appease the most anxious person, the leader will begin the journey toward value-based decision making. Value-based decision making is founded upon the shared values of those in the organization. Kouzes and Posner write, "Shared values are the foundation for building productive and genuine working relationships."²²³ These

²²⁰ Heifetz and Linsky, 2.

²²¹ Heifetz and Linsky, 15.

²²² Heifetz and Linsky, 14.

²²³ Kouzes and Posner, 61.

shared values create the basis for decision making so decisions are not in abreaction to a given person, or group of people's anxiousness, but rooted in the core values of the organization. Value-based decision making brings steadiness to one's leadership.

While decisions should be sound and value-based, decisions must also be paced at a speed at which people can absorb them.²²⁴ Leaders should not raise the heat in the organization to the point of a problem.²²⁵ They pace decisions, and they also pace engagement toward a problem. They allow an issue to develop so the organization has time to see the problem, become prepared for a change, learn, and adapt. The leader's job is to create this way for people to see and understand the problem without creating a target on their backs in the process. Leaders diagnose the changes needed and help people see the need, and experience the pain with them, without causing additional problems. Thus, leaders also investigate concerns before a change to help people see the future.

Contemplative Pace for Feedback and Reflection

Leaders lose accurate information as people curve their thoughts and data, giving only partial information, to please the leader or limit the displeasure of the leader. *Primal Leadership* notes, "The higher up the leader climbs, the less accurate his self-assessment is likely to be."²²⁶ Over time this limits the leader's ability to accurately self-assess or make decisions. This is known as the "CEO disease."²²⁷ This problem worsens regarding

²²⁴ Heifetz and Linsky, 116-117.

²²⁵ Heifetz and Linsky, 108.

²²⁶ Boyatzis, Goleman, and McKee, 92.

²²⁷ Boyatzis, Goleman, and McKee, 92.

the leader's performance,²²⁸ and thus, the higher up the leader is, the more they need reliable feedback methods about themselves, their team, and their organization.

Writing from a Catholic background and perspective, Catholic University of America professor Merylann Schuttloffel, in her article “Contemplative Leadership Practices,” agrees with Holden. “Contemplative practice is based on a reflective model of leadership grounded in metacognition. It is intended to encourage Catholic school leaders to think about their own thinking regarding their decision-making processes and outcomes.”²²⁹ Schuttloffel writes of the three methods of reflection: technical, interpretive, and critical. She writes, “Technical reflection provides a description of what is going on in this situation. Interpretive reflection asks the question, what does it mean or, what message does it send? Finally, critical reflection requires school leaders to consider personal values, beliefs, and philosophy as they think about why they think the way they do.”²³⁰

Summary: The Good of Contemplative Pace and Practice

The call to be a pastor is a call to love and shepherd people, creating a spiritually and emotionally healthy culture, in which the church staff serve and the church thrives. The literature research repeatedly speaks to the good of contemplative pace and practices for the benefit of a ministry leader’s spiritual walk with Jesus and emotional health. This

²²⁸ Boyatzis, Goleman, and McKee, 92.

²²⁹ Merylann J. Schuttloffel, *Contemplative Leadership That Creates a Culture of Continuous Improvement*. (Washington, DC: National Catholic Educational Association, 2008), 82.

²³⁰ Schuttloffel, 83.

unhurried normative pace of life, filled with spiritual practices that slow the leader down, also benefits the church as a system of relationships and an organization that aims to run in peace with progress.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to investigate how ministry leaders prioritize contemplative practices to foster resilient leadership. In doing so, senior pastors will establish a definition of contemplative practice and articulate specific contemplative practices beneficial to themselves and their staff. Therefore, a qualitative study was proposed to discover what contemplative practices are being used by senior pastors for their personal well-being and their leadership team. The following research questions guided the qualitative research:

1. How do ministry leaders understand contemplative practices
 - a. For themselves?
 - b. For the ministry leadership team?
2. What contemplative practices have ministry leaders found helpful?
3. What contemplative team practices have been helpful to the ministry leadership team?
4. How do contemplative practices create resilience in
 - a. The leader?
 - b. The leadership team?

The methodology used for this paper is qualitative research executed through interviews. Each interview will be mined for meaning and application by seeking to understand how senior pastors understand and benefit from contemplative practices in their personal life and with their leadership team. Seven pastors have been selected who were senior pastors while exercising contemplative practices themselves and

implementing contemplative practices with their leadership team. Given the complexity of leading a team of people, qualitative research by interview is a preferred method to glean beneficial contemplative practices for leadership teams.

Design of the Study

Data will be collected by interviewing, transcribing, and analyzing the information and reflections shared by the senior pastors. The interview will aim to discover how and what the leader experienced and thought in the use of contemplative practices. The goal is to capture how the senior pastor felt, thought, behaved, and interpreted in the use of contemplative practices.

In *The Ethnographic Interview*, James Spradley describes the qualitative research method:

I want to understand the world from your point of view. I want to know what you know in the way you know it. I want to understand the meaning of your experience, to walk in your shoes, to feel things as you feel them, to explain things as you explain them. Will you become my teacher and help me understand?²³¹

Spradley describes the approach of the qualitative research method for learning from senior pastors who have upheld contemplative practices under the demands of senior pastoring while also implementing contemplative practices in their leadership team. What did they experience? What worked, and what didn't work? And how do they view the use of contemplative practices after a season of using them with their leadership team?

²³¹ J.P. Spradley, *The Ethnographic Interview* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2016), 34.

Each senior pastor interview will use the same protocol questions while maintaining a semi-formal method to allow for needed deviation based on the pastor's reflections. The interview questions aim to understand a pastor's thinking about contemplative practices and their benefit to a group of people who work together. The goal is not to ask the questions in a particular order but to mine experiences and lessons. This method will allow the interview to be specific enough to get needed information and flexible enough to allow the senior pastor to share freely of his experience. The interviews will be captured into transcription through the Otter Application on an iPhone and then analyzed through the constant comparative method. The data, principles, and applications from the interviews will be paired with the literature review to form conclusions. In *Qualitative Research*, Sharan Merriam writes:

...the researcher begins with a particular incident from an interview, field notes, or document and compares it with another incident in the same data set or another set. These comparisons lead to tentative categories that are then compared to each other and other instances. Comparisons are constantly made within and between levels of conceptualization until a theory can be formulated.²³²

As mentioned, the interviewees are senior pastors at the time of writing. These pastors are leading churches with at least staff teams of three or more staff while also leading an elder or leadership board that governs the church. The study selected seven thoughtful, experienced pastors who have experienced a range of ministry and staff settings, utilizing contemplative practices for their soul's benefit in Jesus and the leadership team's good.

²³² Sharan B. Merriam and Elizabeth J. Tisdell, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2016), 199.

Participant Sample Selection

This research required participants who were able to communicate in depth about the use of contemplative practices for the good of the leader and the leadership team. To gain data on best practices, the participants self-reported to the researcher that they had more than five years of experience as senior pastors while leading a staff of at least three staff members and a board of elders. Therefore, the purposeful study sample consisted of a selection of people from the population of evangelical Protestant pastors who have led multiple-person staff teams for more than five years.

Participants were chosen for variation of ministry experience to provide for the greatest transdisciplinary analysis possible. Participants were chosen to provide differences in understanding and application of contemplative practices. They also varied in church size and denominational affiliation, though all confess to being evangelical Christians with a full embrace, or high respect, to Reformed theology. Six of the seven pastors lead in Presbyterian or Anglican contexts, while one pastor leads in a non-denominational church which has pastors from a variety of theological backgrounds. The final study was conducted through personal interviews with the seven pastors.

Pastors were invited to participate via an introductory email and invitation. All expressed interest and gave written informed consent to participate. In addition, each participant signed a “Research Participant Consent Form” to respect and protect the human rights of the participants. The Human Rights Risk Level Assessment is “minimal” to “no risk,” according to the Seminary IRB Guidelines. The following is a sample of this consent form:

**RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM
FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS**

I agree to participate in the research which is being conducted by Russ Masterson to investigate contemplative practices for leaders for the Doctor of Ministry degree program at Covenant Theological Seminary. I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary. I can withdraw my consent at any time without penalty and have the results of the participation, to the extent that they can be identified as mine, returned to me, removed from the research records, and/or destroyed.

The following points have been explained to me:

- 1) The purpose of this study is to investigate how ministry leaders prioritize contemplative practices to foster resilient leadership.
- 2) Potential benefits of the research may include a deeper understanding of contemplative practices, how they benefit a leader and/or leadership teams, and possible contemplative practices to implement in a leader's life and the leadership team (as a communal practice).
- 3) The research process will include literature review on the topic and qualitative research done through interviewing seven senior pastors.
- 4) Participants in this research will discuss their understanding and experience with contemplative practices as a leader and using them with their leadership team (staff).
- 5) Potential discomforts or stresses:
- 6) Potential risks: Minimal.
- 7) Any information that I provide will be held in strict confidence. At no time will my name be reported along with my responses. The data gathered for this research is confidential and will not be released in any individually identifiable form without my prior consent, unless otherwise required by law. Audiotapes or videotapes of interviews will be erased following the completion of the dissertation. By my signature, I am giving informed consent for the use of my responses in this research project.
- 8) Limits of Privacy: I understand that, by law, the researcher cannot keep information confidential if it involves abuse of a child or vulnerable adult, or plans for a person to harm themselves or to hurt someone else.
- 9) The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the study.

Printed Name and Signature of Researcher

Date

Printed Name and Signature of Participant

Date

Please sign both copies. Keep one. Return the other to the researcher. Thank you.

Research at Covenant Theological Seminary which involves human participants is overseen by the Institutional Review Board. Questions or problems regarding your rights as a participant should be addressed to: Director, Doctor of Ministry; Covenant Theological Seminary; 12330 Conway Road; St. Louis, MO 63141; Phone (314) 434-4044.

Having completed the IRB requirements for human rights in research and the risk assessment in the Covenant Theological Seminary's "Dissertation Notebook," the Human Rights Risk Level Assessment is "no risk" according to the Seminary IRB guidelines.

Data Collection

This study utilized semi-structured interviews for primary data gathering. The open-ended nature of interview questions facilitates the ability to build upon participant responses to complex issues to explore them more thoroughly. The semi-structured interview process permitted "is a mix of more or less structured questions," which allows for the question to be "more flexibly worded" so the researcher can draw out how participants define the issue in their own personal way.²³³ These methods allow the researcher to identify common understandings, themes, and implications across the variation of participants.

The initial interview protocol categories were established from the literature. These categories helped create the interview protocol questions. The researcher performed a pilot test of the interview protocol to evaluate the questions for clarity and usefulness in eliciting relevant data. The researcher interviewed seven senior pastors for forty-five to sixty minutes each. Prior to the interview, the participants received and read the interview questions. By conducting two interviews over the course of three weeks, the researcher completed the data gathering in three weeks. Directly after each interview, the researcher wrote field notes with observations of the interview.

²³³ Merriam, 90.

The interview protocol contained the following questions:

1. How do you define contemplative practice?
2. What's the role of contemplative practices for
 - a. The leader?
 - b. The leadership team?
3. What has been your journey as a leader with contemplative practices?
4. Can you tell me a time when you found contemplative practices were helpful?
5. In what other ways have you seen contemplative practices benefit leadership?
6. In what ways do you encourage contemplative practices of your staff/leaders?
7. When was a time when not having contemplative team practices hindered the leadership team?
8. How have you woven contemplative practices into the leadership team?
9. In what ways have you seen contemplative practices benefit your leadership team?
 - a. The leader?
 - b. The leadership team?
10. How do you understand leadership resilience?
11. How have you seen contemplative practices help build your leadership resilience?
12. How have you seen contemplative practices help build your leadership team's resilience?
13. What have I not asked you that you would like to share?

14. Finally, who else do you know that practices this with contemplative practices in team settings?

Data Analysis

As soon as possible, and always within one week of each meeting, the researcher read through the transcript created by the Otter transcription application. The research utilized the constant comparison method of routinely analyzing the data throughout the interview process. As Merriam writes, this method provided for the ongoing revision, clarification, and evaluation of the resultant data categories.²³⁴ When the interviews and observation notes were fully transcribed, they were coded and analyzed using the constant comparison method. The analysis focused on discovering and identifying (1) common understanding, themes, and patterns of contemplative practices and (2) common application of contemplative practices with a leadership team.

Researcher Position

As the researcher is the primary instrument for collecting and analyzing the data, awareness of who the researcher is remains important to understand any possible bias or preconceived theoretical positions.²³⁵ The researcher, born in 1979, is a senior pastor of a non-denominational evangelical Anglican church that he founded twelve years ago in Marietta, Georgia, twenty minutes north of Atlanta. This church has grown from six adults to over 400 adults, with 200 children and youth, seven elders, and a team of six

²³⁴ Merriam, 30.

²³⁵ Merriam, 249.

staff members. The researcher formerly worked at a large non-denominational evangelical Anglican church of 3,000 people as an associate pastor. The researcher holds to the tenets of the orthodox Christian faith with a Reformed view of the scriptures.

The personal experience of the researcher motivated a rigorous literature review and qualitative study as the issue of contemplative practices is of personal value. The researcher observed his former senior pastor creating a contemplative pace to his own personal life, filled with contemplative practices while serving at the larger church. Yet contemplative practices were never implemented into the staff team rhythms. After the first five years of founding a church, the researcher found himself burning out and in need of a new way to walk with Jesus, study and preach, and lead the church. This season of ministry burnout created an interest in personal contemplative practices. As the staff of the researcher's church has grown, his desire to foster a staff culture of contemplative pace and practice has grown, as well as an interest in how contemplative practices can be communal for the leadership team.

Study Limitations

Due to limited resources and time, this study is limited by its sample size and sample scope. As stated in the previous section, participants interviewed for this research were limited to those who are serving, or who have served, in the role of senior pastor in a Reformed theology evangelical church. As stated in the previous section, participants were purposefully sampled, and therefore, the results are not formally generalizable.²³⁶

²³⁶ Merriam, 96.

Further research is needed to broaden the participant selection to include pastors of other theological backgrounds to make conclusions about how contemplative practices are understood and practiced in their given church. Some of the study's findings may be generalized to similar Reformed evangelical church leaders and leadership teams.

Readers who desire to generalize some of the particular aspects of these conclusions on contemplative practices for leaders and leadership teams should test those aspects in their context. As with all qualitative studies, readers bear the responsibility to determine what can be appropriately applied to their context. The results of this study may also have implications for the general spiritual health of leaders.

Chapter 4

Findings

This study endeavored to discover how (and which) contemplative practices foster resilience in the leader and leadership team. Interviews with senior pastors were conducted to investigate how ministry leaders prioritize contemplative practices to foster resilient leadership. To learn, seven senior pastors have been interviewed concerning their understanding and benefit from contemplative practices, both personally and with their leadership team.

Interviews were conducted making use of two means: six audio calls and one Zoom video conference call. The researcher took notes during the interviews as the researcher utilized the interview protocol questions. The researcher also recorded the calls on the Otter Application (on iPhone and Mac), which provided transcription of the interview. The transcriptions were analyzed looking for patterns and themes related to the study's research questions:

1. How do ministry leaders understand contemplative practices?
 - a. For themselves?
 - b. For the ministry leadership team?
2. What contemplative practices have ministry leaders found helpful?
3. What contemplative team practices have been helpful to the ministry leadership team?
4. How do contemplative practices create resilience?
 - a. The leader?

b. The leadership team?

As mentioned, the purpose of this study is to investigate how ministry leaders prioritize contemplative practices to foster resilient leadership.

Introduction to Research Participants

The researcher selected seven senior pastors to participate in this study on contemplative practice and practice. All personal names, church names, and identifiable participant information have been changed to protect the interviewee's identity.

Participant #1 – Pastor Daniel

Daniel is a senior pastor of a 1,500-person non-denominational church. Daniel planted the church in 2006 with thirty adults. Daniel has twenty-two staff on his team. Daniel has been the senior pastor of the church for nineteen years of ministry.

Participant #2 – Pastor Klay

Klay is the senior pastor of a 2,000-person Anglican church. Klay planted the church with a group of people twenty-three years ago and has been its only senior pastor. The church has forty-one staff.

Participant #3 – Pastor Matt

Matt is a senior pastor of a 5,000-person PCA (Presbyterian Church of America) church. The church is thirty-four years old, created out of a church split which launched a new church with 2,000 people gathering on the first Sunday. Matt came on staff in 2003 as the youth pastor, serving in that role for five years before transitioning to senior pastor for the past seventeen years.

Participant #4 – Pastor Ted

Ted is the senior pastor of a 1,500-person PCA church. The church has twenty-five staff and was started in 2003. Ted came on staff at the church directly out of seminary as the young adult pastor. He served in that role for four years and then worked an eighteen-month interim position before transitioning to senior pastor for the past thirteen years.

Participate #5 – Pastor Trey

Trey is the senior pastor of an 1,800-person PCA church. The church has forty people on staff. Trey came on staff in 2010, serving as an assistant pastor, then associate, and has been the senior pastor for eight years.

Participate #6 – Pastor William

William is the senior pastor of a 1,000-person PCA church. The church has twenty-five people on staff. William started the church in 2002 and has been the senior pastor for the entirety of the church's twenty-three-year existence.

Participate #7 – Pastor Zed

Zed is the senior pastor of a 450-person PCA church. The church has three people on staff and was started in 1982. Zed was the fourth senior pastor in six years when he became senior pastor seventeen years ago.

In summary, all the research participants were serving as senior pastors at the time of their interview. They had served as senior pastor as few as eight years and as many as twenty-three years. The seven churches they lead range in church size from 450 to 5,000, with staff teams ranging from three to ninety.

Definition of Personal Contemplative Practices

The first research question asked was, “How do ministry leaders understand contemplative practices?” The researcher noted each participants’ response included the idea of intentional slowing down into postures of receptivity before the Lord. Each of their answers ranged in application but are best summarized by Pastor Zed who paired contemplative practices with the word “behold.” Pastor Zed noted, “I think of the word ‘behold.’ ‘Behold’ means to step back, quiet, pay attention, listen.”

Pastor Zed spoke of his discovery of contemplative practices when his life and ministry fell apart after his wife left him and their family. He discovered the way God normatively works in people’s lives, saying, “Usually, God does things in a slow, mostly overlooked way over a long period of time. We’re not opposed to him doing a big thing fast, but normally he works at a different pace.” Pastor Zed spoke of the pressure to speed up and conform to the frantic pace of the world, while Jesus was teaching him a way of life and loving others that slowed him down.

Pastor Trey agreed with this slowing down idea, explaining, “Contemplative practices are intentional ways that we slow down to be present with God and with what’s happening inside of us, present with what’s happening around us.” Across the interviews, contemplative practices were consistently described as an intentional slowing down to be receptive to God’s presence and work. Each participant verbalized this differently, but they all explained how contemplative practices slow leaders down, help them process their emotions, and place them in receptivity to the Lord.

When Pastor Daniel was asked to define contemplative practices, he spoke of a channel of grace. He commented:

We would call it a channel of grace—any activity that puts us in a position to receive the grace of God into our life...the visual we use is a river and a riverbed: a riverbed without water is just a ditch, and water without the bed is just a flood, and we need both. And so, we would say these practices are the riverbed for the water of God's grace to flow into our lives.

By slowing down, the leader acknowledges God can do more in the leader's rest than the leader can create apart from God. It is a remembrance that God continues to work even when a leader is resting. Pastor Daniel spoke of the driving rhythms of ministry life, living Sunday to Sunday. Contemplative practices allow the staff and leaders to rhythm beyond that frantic pattern. He spoke of the trust needed within the practice of slowing down. He explained, "Contemplative practices are actually active expressions of trust because we're saying, 'God, we're trusting you to work when we're not, and we're trusting that you are accomplishing.' That's the benefit, to slow you down and trust God." He related that this slowing down and trust is countercultural and counterintuitive compared to the drive to produce more and speed up.

Pastor Ted speaks of formation practices when he thinks of these channels of grace in contemplative practices. He explained the process of contemplative practices affecting other areas of Christian life:

My definition would be those practices that allow for us to more fully meditate upon God's Word and then respond to his Word with our own words, which is our worship. And then everything we do reverberates, or flows, out of that...study, retreat, tithing, sacrificial giving, fasting and moderation, spiritual direction.

These formative practices build a root system for the leader's heart. The practices create a life where the leader reflects and receives more than they preach and teach.

Pastor Klay summarized contemplative practices as anything that slows a person down.

He spoke about himself while he commented, "I'm not drawn to the contemplative way of

life.... So, I think contemplative practices feel like a really important addition to me, because I don't want to just sit and quiet and contemplate God in the universe all day. So, practices get me into those spaces.” As a leader and pastor of a church, he said he found he was praying and reading a lot, but it was mostly intellectual. He noted, “I realized I'm not as grounded as I want to be, I'm not as peaceful as I want to be. I think there's an invitation into some silence and solitude.” At this realization of lack of peace and “un-groundedness,” Pastor Klay began to intentionally slow down within his days, weeks, and years of ministry.

Pastor William spoke of the good of contemplative practices when asked to define them. He said:

.... [the good] about contemplative practices is getting the gospel deeper into my own heart. It's about learning and pondering. It's about chewing on these things that are good for my soul, as well as making more meaning, more usefulness for ministry. So, I think if I were not consistently pursuing contemplative practices, I wouldn't have much to give people. I would just be recycling.

In summary, the participants related that there is a risk to ministering from an empty interior, a heart busy but not whole. Pastor Williams called this “recycling,” where the leader is no longer receiving grace but attempting to continue to dispense or mediate grace. They showed that while the truth of what the leader is speaking (the grace or gospel itself) is as true as ever, leading while not receiving will eventually bring the leader to exhaustion. Reflecting Pastor Zed's one word definition of “behold,” the participants' reflections are summarized well as a quieting of oneself through intentional slowing down to receive from the Lord. This receiving is about rest and attention more than production.

Key Personal Contemplative Practices

The second research question asked was, “What contemplative practices have ministry leaders found helpful?” The aim was to discover what, and how, senior pastors are practicing contemplation on a regular basis, trying to understand how a leader is slowing down on a regular basis. Pastor Klay summarized well the leader’s need for contemplation using his journey with personal contemplative practices:

I needed it (to slow down) in order to stay in this thing for the long haul, mechanisms to attend to my emotional and subterranean life, and that is really when silence and solitude and these solo retreats became a much more significant part of my life...I think I stayed in ministry in part because I had pretty strong scaffolding of spiritual practice but realized that even those things weren't going to keep me from hitting the wall. When I hit the wall, I've been able to incorporate some more of what we would consider to be basic, truly foundational contemplative practices around silence and solitude.

Klay’s comments illustrate that contemplative practices are not a luxury but can be a response to burnout and emotional depletion or a proactive method to prevent burnout and emotional depletion. Solitude and silence with the Lord provide pathways for inner healing, restoration, and build resilience to lead.

Pastor Matt spoke of the contemplative pace nurtured among his staff, saying:

I think there is a God-given calling and design to live a certain way and to be in this constant, frantic, urgent, gotta get it all done. Our posture is not right, and so, with the size of our church, . . . we pay attention to which ministries are at an intense moment...I use this phrase a lot. Workaholism is just another form of laziness.

Pastor Matt reframes over-working as avoidance, not increased faithfulness. The leader is avoiding trusting God and his interior life. For Matt, contemplative pacing is a faithful pathway set against the pastoral self-justification of busyness.

Daily Practice

The researcher noted a consistent general structure of a workday: slow, intentional mornings leading to afternoons filled with people, meetings, and follow-up or task-oriented work. In the slow, intentional mornings, each participant practiced contemplation with silence and solitude, Word and prayer, always being present.

Pastor Daniel explained his prayer practice, where he arrives at church in the early morning and spends forty-five minutes to an hour in prayer in the sanctuary. He said he listens to worship music and uses the Lord's prayer as structure as he prays aloud. He commented:

I would say that for me, is the most grounding thing that I do. I have enough of a prayer structure with the Lord's Prayer practice...And I would say that for me, particularly, I'm not always aware of my emotions, and so that time in the morning, it's a space where I can process. So, ...it's the place in particular where I process my heart.

For Pastor Daniel his prayer time is the place he brings his thoughts and emotions to the Lord, to grow in emotional awareness and be an integrated person.

Pastor Trey spoke of his early morning routine:

I use an app called "Freedom" that shuts me off from technology, because I will read the news and just get sucked into it and waste my morning. So, this app allows me to schedule time where the internet is cut off from all my devices, so I can just open the Word first thing in the morning. I typically try to do that from 4:00 to 6:30, time in the Word, journaling and prayer.

Pastor Trey's use of technology aided his contemplative practice. As he noted, without this aid, he would be pulled into distraction, an intentional resistance to distraction.

Pastor William spoke of a similar beginning to his day, perhaps a half hour to an hour and half of time with the Lord. He noted:

My wife and I might be in the same room. Or, I might be at the cemetery, which is a place I've been going to for years. It's a place of prayer and contemplation for me. There's scripture reading, there's prayer, there's journaling, there's just sitting in silence before the Lord. My wife and I both, I don't know if we put it on a clock so much, but silence and solitude is a big part of how we engage with the Lord.

For William, the space he inhabits aids his contemplative practice. Finding a place to become quiet, without distraction, is crucial to the leader.

Pastor Ted spoke of the goodness of the Psalms, particularly the Paraclete Psalter, to structure devotional times, reading a psalm in a reflective manner. He said:

They (Psalms) give you words to say. They give you emotions to feel. They give you a framework by which to understand and see the world anew, and I needed that because so much of life, particularly in the Presbyterian world, it's just so highly cognitivist and rational, even rationalistic.... And so, like the Benedictine approach to one's spiritual life, your primary work is prayer... and then other aspects of your life are intertwined into that.... It helped me understand and try and embody that prayer really is the foundation from which my study and my physical life flow, whether physical labor, or even the way in which I engage in my body, with food, with alcohol, whatever else may be taking care of my body that it has to begin with prayer and these other aspects are intertwined into it, and not vice versa.

Ted is using the Psalms as transformational more than informational. He uses the Psalms in a contemplative manner to reflect, engaging the heart and mind. This is a step beyond informational study, not just reading and doing with God but being with God within the experience of truth.

When asked how much the participant guards this daily time with the Lord from becoming study or sermon preparation time, each participant handled the issue differently, but everyone knew the temptation to turn all daily devotional and prayer time into a productivity time for sermon or church work. Pastor William explained:

Somewhere early on, that became really clear -- that I wasn't just doing ministry and calling it devotion, right? So, I pursue him (Jesus) personally, but the lines blur. When I'm reading scripture for my own soul, and I run across something that is relevant for my sermon on Sunday. I'm not going to try to block that out of my mind. Sometimes I'll think, this is something somebody else needs to hear... So, you don't get overly legalistic with the boundary. I don't think trying to draw an artificial wall between them is possible.

William went on to explain the importance of the senior pastor being a fellow practitioner, not just a preacher. He said, "I come to the Scriptures, and the Christian life, as a Christian. And I don't commend anything to anybody else that I don't need myself."

Pastor Klay, an Anglican, mentioned the goodness of the Daily Lectionary to provide devotional structure to mornings, noting:

I start my day on my couch, with a cup of coffee in my hand, and I read with an eye toward opening my heart up to receiving insight from God that would ground me into my day. I oftentimes in that same space will engage in the prayer of examine concerning the previous day, to quiet my heart, engage in gratitude, and then reflect on what St. Ignatius would call consolation and desolation. Engage in some repentance and then ask God to meet me as I step into my day. I've always wanted to be a person committed to evening prayer, but usually by the time I get to the end of my day, I'm just tired.

This comment about being tired by Pastor Klay was honest and in the real experience of the ministry leader. His point was that when the day is over, and it is okay

to be finished with intentionality, even contemplative intentionality, and be with your family, have fun, or watch a television show.

Prayer Throughout the Day

When asked to elaborate on the way in which they pray, the participants offered several different models. Pastor Zed offered using the Lord's prayer and using each line of the prayer for a day of the week to guide prayer thoughts and reflections. He also said he prefers to structure the day into four portions, pausing to pray (perhaps for thirty seconds or thirty minutes) within each portion of the day. Pastor Trey spoke of a similar prayer practice that creates five prayer times a day: upon waking, before breakfast, before lunch, before dinner, and before bed. He explained how he uses the Psalms as a prayer guide:

I open up to the Psalms. And I add 30 Psalms. So, Psalm 1, Psalm 31, Psalm 61, Psalm 91, Psalm 121, and then over the course of 30 days, you go through the whole Psalter...It's difficult to maintain that throughout the whole year. (So) now I do it for a month or two. I do it as so long as I'm feeling like it's life giving.

Pastor Zed said that he begins the day by thanking the Lord for sustaining him and his family through the night and committing the day to the Lord. The second portion of the day is before lunchtime as the cares of the world have crept in. He said he likes to pause to pray or pray on the way to his lunch appointment, casting his cares and temptations upon the Lord, and committing to work for the Lord. At the end of the workday, before transitioning to home and family life, Zed said he pauses to let the day

go to the Lord, acknowledging everything left undone, and asking the Lord to help him transition to family life. In the evening as he moves toward sleep, he said he prays that the Lord allow him to fully let go of control and rest. Zed explained a recent day when he attempted to work late into the day, thinking, “I can get this done. And I started trying to do that. And then I just realized resistance is futile. I need to meet with the Lord. I have to pause and talk to the Lord. And so, I needed that forty minutes at the end of that particular day to talk to him about everything in the day.”

Walking

Seven years into pastoring, Pastor Daniel found himself in the busyness of ministry and leadership. After a trip to Scotland, where he drank tea and woke up early each morning to walk, Daniel returned home and began to drink tea and take contemplative walks. He explained:

I drink the tea in the morning and evening. You can't drink it fast. You have to let it steep, and you have to let it cool. It forces me to slow down and reflect. And then I walk. My pace changes with the season, but my goal is not to sweat. It's not exercise. It's a prayer walk. I'm walking really, really slowly, so I don't sweat. So that's kind of, in my mind, doing something intentionally with the Lord.

When asked about the effect of personal daily practice, Pastor Daniel spoke of the space it built in his heart and life. He noted:

It's built space into my life, because I can only do so much when I am walking, so I don't call people. I don't listen to anything. There are times where I'm thinking about my sermon. And there are other times where I'm praying about what I'm seeing. And there are other times where I'm intentionally bringing a bigger thought before the Lord.

Pastor Daniel's walking demonstrates contemplation in movement. The movement helps calm the leader, while allowing the leader to practice prayer and reflection.

Solo Workdays

A consistent theme within the responses was the practice of solo half-days or solo days within the work week. These days were not considered a day off or part of their weekly days off or paid time off. These solo days were part of their workday. Pastor Matt explained:

I began to take on a rhythm where the first day of the week (Monday) became what I call the solo day. It wasn't my day off at all. It was the most important workday... I did nothing but pray, meditate, journal. I never go to my office...I may go to the coffee shop, where I won't see anybody. I know I can get pretty easily bored with scenery. So, I may just move around on my bike and go somewhere, a number of different places. It's consistent with whatever Bible reading plan the Lord led me to do.

Pastor Matt said he uses this time for his personal relationship with the Lord, meditating upon a particular passage, journaling his thoughts and emotions about the weekend and ministry, and sitting to listen to the Lord. Matt said this time is not "sermon prep," but it is the ultimate "sermon breath" as it fills his soul. The idea of taking a solo day was passed from Matt to the other pastors on his staff, taking a day or half day within the work week.

Pastor Zed said he uses a similar practice, taking a solo day every month, going somewhere he can walk, pray, read, reflect, have coffee, and a lunch. Zed commented on his regular solo day:

I'm not doing emails; I'm not looking at and taking calls. I'm not making tasks. I'm not doing...I have to cast my cares upon the Lord, because he cares for me. And I have to name these things, write them down. I write them down and then set it aside, and I'm handing that to the Lord. The first thing that happens is all the things that I'm anxious about come to the surface. So that's where it has to begin, casting my cares and then clearing that away.

Pastor Matt and Zed said their solo days act as an interruptive practice that disrupts their otherwise busy schedules. They structured it into their week, or month, so that it can create time for reflection and give life.

Weekly Sabbath

For the participants, a weekly sabbath was different from a solo day. A weekly sabbath was a complete break from ministry to recreate, build relationships, and be restored. The participants treated this day as a break from any connection to ministry life and work. Pastor Williams commented on his weekly sabbath:

My wife and I practice sabbath on Friday...reading, scripture, prayer, silence, solitude, those are all parts of how we practice sabbath. We start our days the same way. We just have more freedom to linger there, and then, when we get up from our time of contemplation, we don't go to work. We'll take a ride, or go on a mountain bike ride, or sit by the pool, or read a novel out loud, or get together with friends.

When asked how he treats his phone and people reaching out to him on his weekly sabbath, Pastor William noted the use of Apple iPhone focus modes where the phone will allow only certain people to reach you.

Regularly Retreating: Retreats and Sabbaticals

Retreating was another practice most of participants spoke of as life enriching. These retreats ranged from solo overnights to ministry cohort retreats to groups of friends getting away for a few days. It also included more seldom, longer sabbatical practice. Pastor Ted spoke of his quarterly solo retreat and annual ministry cohort retreat. Pastor Klay said he retreats quarterly for three or four days to a cabin in the mountains for reflection. He noted this retreat was not paid time off, but workdays designated as retreat, which is part of his vocation. He commented on how he constructs his solo retreat:

I ride my mountain bike up there. I'm outside a whole lot. And those times are really grounding for me...I do a little bit of study, but I really try not to turn those into big output, study retreats. They are more just quiet, grounding, contemplative space, and I try to do everything with an open-ended agenda, because I don't have anybody but me to feed and to engage in those times. If you had asked me ten years ago, "Would you love doing multiple solo retreats a year?" I would have said, "Hell no, right?" Yeah, I love those times. They have become super life-giving for me.

When asked what had changed from ten years ago, Pastor Klay recalled his first experiences with solo retreats and how he learned what works best for him. He said:

I think I wore myself out. I externalized to the very end of myself and realized that I had to figure out a way to be renewed and replenished. I remember the first couple of times I tried ...my anxiety became very palpable. Every unanswered thought or email or to do came to my brain, but now I feel less inclined that way. I'm learning how to be alone. I used

to think that the only way to do silence and solitude was to sit in a Zen-like state with no stimulation. And I've learned that for myself, the best day on a solo retreat means I get up at my normal time...have an unhurried coffee in the morning, and then I get outside. Solo days for me are going to almost always involve some sort of nature exposure. Then, I can have some good, unhurried, unstructured time in the afternoon where I'm either reading or resting in a way that feels recreational, like true recreation. But if I'm just trying to sit still all day, it just doesn't work; the anxiety in me kicks in, and it becomes detrimental.

Pastor Trey said he takes solo retreats twice a year for a week to a monastery across the country. His countenance lifted as he spoke of this retreat practice:

It's total silence and solitude. There's no cell connection out there. There's no Wi Fi. I have a little place by myself, and it's the most meaningful time of the year for me, every year. My wife encourages me, saying, "I can tell you need to go." It's my favorite place on the planet, because it's the only place where I'm totally disconnected. And I can be silent.

When asked what was going on inside his heart during these solo retreats, Pastor Trey said:

I'm slowed down...The whole journey there, I'm not watching movies on this flight. It's a time to get my journal out. Start thinking about what I want to see, what's happening inside me. What do I want to see God do over this time away, or what do I feel like I need him to do? What are some things I want to be intentionally thinking about? I'm journaling all that stuff. I get there; I land. Usually takes two or three hours to drive to the monastery from the from the airport, and I drive really slowly to slow myself down.

Pastor Trey also spoke of fasting. It was the only time a participant mentioned fasting as a contemplative practice. He said, "I found the fasting helps me to slow down better than anything." He said he fasts on his journey to the monastery and extends the fast until he senses he has slowed down out of his normative productive nature. He said, "So once I slowed down, I can tell, because I'm opening my Bible, and I'm actually able

to linger, and I'm not speeding through it. Feel like I'm able to take the load off and listen.” During this retreat Trey said he spends time reading and listening to the Lord. He said he spends half the week engaging with the Lord and then uses the second part of the week to plan sermons for the upcoming season.

Sabbaticals

Several participants spoke of the benefit of sabbaticals – several months off from ministry every five to seven years. Pastor Matt noted that their pastoral staff and senior directors receive one sabbatical every five years, for three months. He was clear that there was no expectation that anything be produced during that time. He said there is no report due to the church, elders, or supervisor. The church simply expects the months away to be restorative.

Pastor William said that he has taken two extended sabbaticals, and in both cases, he left deflated and came back restored, more energized, and more creative in ministry. Each of his sabbaticals was six months long and eight years apart.

For all the participants, the sabbatical practice functioned as long term restoration, helping to heal the accumulated effects of vocational ministry. The participants noted the importance of restorative activities during their sabbaticals: activities that bring healing, energy, and life to their souls — a commitment to being over doing.

Summary

The participants consistently framed their personal contemplative practices as intentional movements to slow down and receive from God, apart from serving God. The underlying theme aligned with Pastor Zed's one word definition of contemplation: "behold." Several participants noted that this slowing down to behold is countercultural compared to the normative pace of ministry. All the participants spoke of personal contemplative practices as life-giving, intentional acts against the busyness of ministry, and the method by which they either were restored out of burnout and emotional depletion or the way in which they avoid burnout and emotional depletion. As a group, the participants described their practices as restful, restorative, formative, and the way to continue to minister from a place of inner flourishing.

Key Communal (or Team) Contemplative Practices

The third research question asked, "What contemplative team practices have been helpful to the ministry leadership team?" The aim was to discover what, and how, senior pastors are leading their ministry teams in contemplative practices and intentionally slowing down their teams. Pastor Daniel explained the importance of praying and worshipping together. "Those things help frame what we're doing beyond just strategy. We listen together. We need direction. We're not just coming up with our own ideas. So, I would say, just like an individual is formed through those practices, a team would be formed through the same practices." Daniel's comments reveal a shift in leadership from functional to formative – practicing prayer as a means to get beyond busyness and strategy to listen for the Lord's leading for their ministry.

Daniel said he has discovered the same benefits of contemplative practices for an individual can be experienced as a team. This discovery has led Pastor Daniel to implement communal contemplative practices and weave contemplative practices into the team's ongoing work life. Daniel commented on the experience of leading his staff to take rest and sabbath:

When we started doing it, I was trying to encourage people around rest and sabbath, and nobody was doing it, because they felt like they had so much to do. So, I just started saying, "Well, now it's part of your job. You don't have a choice." And that, overtime, has changed our staff culture... I can say if we had not slowed down, we would have burned down a lot of people.

Pastor Daniel said he experienced the restorative aspect of contemplative practices, then implemented the practices into his staff culture and began to see the same restorative benefit for his staff. For Daniel, this implementation was a step from mere encouragement to a new church (or systemic) rhythm. Pastor Zed summarized this shift from busyness to contemplative pace and practice, also seen in Pastor Daniel's leadership, by stating that this pastoral leadership decision increased efficiency, because the highest work value (speed) was replaced with reliance on the Holy Spirit.

Regular Communal Worship and Prayer

All the participants referenced a weekly worship and/or prayer gathering with their staff. Pastor Klay explained how he thinks about these times as a way to begin each week:

We want our staff meetings to be places where we are looking toward God together. And that's true for the part-time bookkeeper to the senior pastor. We decided to calibrate our hearts so that we don't start our week with business. We start our week with God, stories, updates, praying together, and then singing the doxology. And I found that to be a really sweet time

for our team. It puts everyone on the same page, and it's spiritual. It's not like we're get jumping in first thing on a Monday and trying to solve problems.

Klay said that his church staff rhythm frames the workweek with communal worship, rather than a long to-do list. The staff chooses spiritual alignment before practical tasks to meet goal. As a team, they remember the privilege to work on things that matter. Pastor Daniel mentioned their Tuesday morning prayer meeting as expected but not required, noting, "We always meet together on Tuesday mornings for prayer: 6:30 am to 7:00 am is contemplative, so silent prayer with communion. And then from 7:00 am to 7:30 am we pray together." As well, Pastor Daniel said he has a separate required monthly chapel time for all staff, which contains worship, prayer, silence, and listening. Pastor Ted noted the same practice of weekly prayer, even daily prayer for church staff to optionally join. "We have morning prayer, Monday through Friday at 9:30 am. All are welcome, but it's typically just staff that go. I ask all the staff who have a meeting on Tuesday to come before that meeting, and then I ask them to come one other morning per week.... Pastors lead it, and it's an adapted and edited version of the Book of Common Prayer." Ted's approach embeds contemplative practice into a daily schedule for his staff, encouraging and structuring contemplative pace and practice as part of the church staff's work week.

Pastor Zed commented on how he leads his staff meetings and elder meetings with worship and prayer as the center. He said he uses contemplative scripture reading as to transform meetings from transactional to relational and spiritual.

I lead a session, and at times, I'll lead my staff through Lectio Divina, where the first time through is just you observing... and a second reading through one phrase or one word to meditate upon, to think deeply upon.

Zed said he will also lead slow readings of scripture with pauses and quiet between readings read by people in the meeting, teaching his leader to grow comfortable with silence and listening, while meditating on scripture. He noted:

We read it, and then we pause so someone else reads it again. So, we hear it out loud again, and we pause and pray. And then we say, "Okay, we're going to be comfortable with quiet." We meditate like that together and then discuss what we're seeing in the passage. And then we ask, "How would that shape us tonight in our task as elders (leaders)?"

Pastor Matt recalled how he leads their staff Monday morning standing meeting. He explained, "Every week, on Monday morning at 9:05, we have what we call the 'Monday Morning Fix,' and it's awesome. We play off that word, and we have twenty minutes to twenty-five minutes together just to set our eyes (to fix) on the mission. What are we really all about? It's most important that we're abiding in Christ." This "Monday Morning Fix" structures communal reflection to anchor the staff in Christ, resisting the pull of busy pragmatic ministry. As a large church staff, he said, they are also creating fellowship over breakfast and coffee, rotating which department is in charge. Pastor Trey agreed with using a Monday morning kickoff, and he leads his staff every other week in a breakfast, devotional, prayer, and share meeting. He elaborated:

Nobody's allowed to talk about what's not going right. We only talk about what is going right. So, we just go around the room and share stories about how we've seen God at work and the staff and in our lives personally. We have everybody there, and it's just a feel-good meeting. We turn away, and we feel good. I feel good every time.

For Trey and his staff, the meeting fosters reflection and gratitude, before moving into the tasks of fixing problems. They noted how this practice creates joy and unity.

Pastor Matt said that his large church staff knows that the first hour of work, from 8:30 am to 9:30 am, is given to the Lord; all staff are expected to have their devotional and prayer time during that hour. This intentionality for team gathering times and personal times with the Lord creates a culture of intentional slowing down, even while the world and ministry work pushes them to speed up. Pastor Matt said he is constantly reminding the staff they are God's beloved sons and daughters. He explained:

That's our identity. And we have one identity that's permanent and one identity that's primary, and they're the same thing, but the only permanent primary identity, that's a big deal. The second one is, I asked the question all the time, what does this church need most from you? And the answer is, your abiding relationship with Jesus Christ. So, when you neglect that, you're you are neglecting the thing that we need most, and that's what you need most from me.

Pastor Matt is clear with this staff that the thing he needs most from them is their abiding in Christ. So, the leadership and supervisors have been trained to always inquire how they and the church can help a given staff member enrich their abiding in Christ. Pastor Matt showed how his emphasis on abiding reminds the staff that ministry flows from being, not doing.

When speaking of regular team prayer and worship, the pastors redefined job expectation and success to be connected to spiritual life with Jesus, not just functional work for Jesus. They revealed how the reoccurring themes of quiet, listening, prayer,

worship, gratitude, and identity root the staff in communion with Jesus, not just efficiency working through ministry tasks.

Rest Days and Retreats

Most of the participants said that they give their staff a regular day or half day for rest and renewal, and also retreat weeks, which are not paid time off. These rest days are regularly scheduled into the work week or month. Their staff is expected to find a place to be renewed for a half day or full day. The staff members are given the freedom to hike or sit in a coffee shop, some practice that removes them from their regular work and study to be with the Lord.

Pastor Matt commented on how this is implemented in the staff:

Maybe they'll go to arboretum, or somewhere it's really pretty, to go sit alone for the next two hours. And maybe you need to sleep. Take a nap. If you need to get out, maybe you need a mixture of sleep and meditation. We just give them the freedom to say, "Hey, what we're talking about is not passive." It's hard work, to surrender to that and to trust the Lord in this. But it is transformative.

Matt said that he reframes the time as an active trust in Jesus, a discipline which requires and builds trust in God. These silent rest days, personally practiced, can also be practiced as a team. Pastor William agreed and noted that he, and their staff, take a day a month for personal soul care. He said, "I need a day off where I just stare at a wall or go out on a long bike ride or something like that. So, there's not a lot of structure around it." For William, unstructured rest creates renewal as an openness to God's presence is valued over an agenda or productivity.

Pastor Matt said that he has been leading his staff on silent retreats for ten years. These are church-wide silent retreats that the staff are required to attend. He noted, “Those are life changing, because you have a significant amount of time to be alone with the Lord with nothing but a Bible, not even a study Bible, just the Bible and a journal and that's amazing. And so that's something we encourage our staff to do regularly.” Pastor Matt said he also leads his senior staff on a two-day retreat every two months. Pastor Ted said he also leads regular staff (and elder) retreats. His session retreats yearly, he said, with the pastors going a few days early for additional retreating time. He said they use these days away to fellowship, reflect, pray, and discern the next few months as a church. Matt concluded that he has discovered the benefit of retreating from regular work to slow down, get silent, listen, and see the ministry from a contemplative place.

The participants revealed that rest days and retreats develop contemplative formation through absence from the normal routine. The discipline of stepping away to be renewed in the Lord and see the ministry from a fresh perspective create healthy leaders as burnout subsides and ministry work is remembered and practiced as holy work.

Church-Wide Rest Months

Only Pastor Zed mentioned the practice of church-wide resting months. Zed said that he has taken the good of contemplation and rest and applied it to the entire church and church calendar. Pastor Zed said he established three months a year (May, August, and December) as resting months, where all of the small groups and Bible studies break from weekly meetings. Zed said, “We can pause in order to keep going.”

The paradox of contemplative pacing was evident in Zed's leadership, as renewal and progress require intentional pausing. He said the concern from staff and leaders was the loss of volunteers during these times. The fear was if they gave people a break, they would never come back. But Zed said they found the opposite effect: as they gave people a break, they were renewed to return and serve afresh.

Contemplative Practices in Staff Expectations (HR Policy)

Both Pastor Matt and Pastor Klay spoke of the importance of contemplative practices for staff. So much so, they said they have woven expectations into their job requirements and HR policies. Pastor Matt explained that if his staff does not take their vacation days to get away and be restored, then they are not eligible for a raise the next year. Pastor Matt said that time away from the ministry is so vital to the ministry, he is willing to create HR policies that motivate the staff to not become workaholics. Thus, Matt concluded, he is stewarding the value of rest for his staff through organizational policy.

Pastor Klay agreed and commented on how they have used HR policy to encourage their people toward restorative practices, saying, "We also encourage people toward retreat. We have a flexible PTO (paid time off) policy... and we have tried to create HR policies that would (help) people to step back and be renewed and recreate." Pastor Klay related how he values renewal over constant output. He noted one way the church has attempted to codify this value is to give enough flexibility with PTO where people can take many breaks and retreats during the year. He said, "We give plenty of

PTO. What we want (our staff) to have to explain why they didn't use their PTO.” He said he wants his people to be very committed to taking their time off.

Summary

In summary, each of the participants had discovered, and were still discovering, ways to implement the goodness of contemplative practices into the team dynamic through communal practices and permission for personal practice within their role. The consistent pattern emerged: contemplative pace and practice does not just form individuals but can also form leadership teams. Pastor Zed noted his experience as he personally led staff and elders in practices that slowed them down from business type meetings to meetings that paused as to move forward. Zed said, “When I first started trying to do these things, I had no idea what I was doing, you know, like just sort of finding our way. And there's a lot of impatience, like impatience of guys checking watches or legs are bouncing up and down.”

Contemplative Practices for Leadership Resilience

The fourth research question was, “How do contemplative practices create resilience (for the leader and for the leadership team)?” The aim was to discover what ways the participants have seen contemplative practices create leadership resilience in themselves and their leadership teams. Pastor Zed has adopted a key phrase for his staff and church which summarizes each of the participant’s responses, “We have to pause as to keep going.”

Resilience

The participants were quick and joyous in the speaking of the resilience they have experienced through contemplative practices. They spoke of the benefit of longevity in ministry, the ability to lead through negative events, and to recover from the range of emotions that ministry places on the leader. Pastor Daniel defined leadership resilience thus:

I would say it's the capacity to bounce back like a ball hitting the ground. It deforms, and then as it comes up off the ground, it goes back to a sphere. And to me, that's a picture of resilience. Can you bounce back? You're going to get banged around. You're going to get beat up. Do you return to your original shape, or do you wind up staying deformed?

Pastor Daniel assumed leadership will “bang” a leader around and have a negative impact upon the leader, as the leader absorbs criticism, crisis events, and emotional strain. For him, leadership is not the avoidance of the impact but learning to bounce back to a healthy and whole self, a return to a secure identity in Christ outside of ministry productivity and events.

Pastor Klay similarly viewed resilience as elasticity and the ability to bounce back. He explained:

I think more now of resilience in terms of elasticity... a sense of being malleable, a sense of being flexible, like you would imagine, a flexible body that is also strong. It bounces back from injury. There's a soul equivalent there. I think of resilience in my own life, the ability to navigate through complexity without losing my sense of being present, or if I do lose it, being able to recover that sense of being grounded and present relatively quickly.

For Klay this benefit of “bouncing back” developed as he learned to care for his inner self. His thinking on resilience expands Daniel’s thoughts on “bouncing back” to include a flexibility during the event itself. Thus, Klay commented, “So much of resilience for me involves self-awareness, tending to my whole person, so that I don't lose the plot....to be awake to the state of your soul.” Klay spoke how this ability has been helpful when he is down or a difficult email arrives. His contemplative practices created a resilience through being connected to the ministry without being enmeshed and overreactive to it.

Pastor Matt’s comments on resilience include slowing down enough to remember one’s ministry calling. He explained:

There are some incredible highs we get to experience, and some very, very dark lows. The mixture of praise and criticism. It's just going to be moments when you're thinking, “I don't want to do this anymore. Why would I want to do this? You know? Or I want to do this, I just don't want to do it here anymore.” Resilience comes from that sense that... I'm called, and if I'm called, I am going to be sustained, and God's going to give me everything that I need. But to have that resilience, I have to spend time with him. I have to be in contemplation.

Pastor Matt acknowledged that leaders would undergo highs and lows, praise and criticism, and he stated that contemplative practices can help the leader to remember one’s initial and foundational calling to ministry.

Three participants spoke of the positive implications for staff longevity (not leaving the church or ministry). Pastor Matt related how giving the people time to abide in Jesus created this longevity.

I definitely think giving them (the staff) the freedom to abide, to have that kind of time and space, lets our people know that there's no shame in saying, "I'm depressed, or I'm tired, or I'm overwhelmed by anxiety; I need help."...And so that freedom has helped people say, "This is a place I want to be. I like serving here."

Matt said his church and organizational culture of emotional freedom create a place of safety for the staff to lead and experience the range of ministry emotions. It has created a sustainable pace and healthy culture for staff to work.

Pastor William spoke of his journey with near burnout and the way contemplative practices aided in creating the resilience needed to stay in the ministry.

I've flirted with burnout and maybe entered into the early stages of burnout multiple times...I have not flamed out or dropped out. I'll say that having two long sabbaticals was certainly critical to pulling me back from what could have been breaking burnout.

William's comments underscore a danger often reported by participants: burnout, or near burnout. All of them reported that contemplative practices rescued them from quitting.

Summary

The interviews revealed a consistent theme: contemplative practices—including personal and communal—function as a grace-centered means for longevity and health in ministry. This resilience was formed as the leader and team were continually reminded of their identity in Christ (rather than their ministry position), which created a secure personhood (and foundation) to minister from. This remembrance of identity is a posture of receiving from God rather than just doing (or serving) for God, which in turn fostered a peace and steadiness over time. In addition, contemplative practices created slow,

intentional pacing, which allowed the leader and team (through relationship with Christ and reflection on events and emotions) to recover from the highs and lows of ministry.

Summary of Findings

Across the participant interviews, contemplative practices were understood as an intentional slowing down to live in a posture of receiving from God. The posture of rest and beholding became a central theme as participants described the ways they lead contemplatively. The participants all framed their practices as purposeful steps away from the hurried world and hurried ministry. Pastor Zed best described contemplative leadership with the word, “behold.” The range of contemplative practices, from weekly staff practices to rest days to retreats, interrupted the trajectory of burnout to encourage ministry as holy work that needs ongoing practices of restoration.

This beholding created a slower-paced life to know God and reflect upon events and emotions. The participants framed this slowing down as an act of trust, as ministry focus unwinds, and the leader grows nearer to Christ, pausing to reflect on ministry happenings and sorting through the feelings a leader experiences. They related how these slowing down communal practices move a leadership team beyond task-drivenness and into listening to God, spiritual formation, and a creativity and harmony in tune with the Heavenly Father and his fellow leaders. They recalled how contemplation grounds the leader in grace (dependence on the Holy Spirit) rather than human production, which then God used to create a healthier, steady, resilient leader. Therefore, they revealed how contemplative pace and practice in leadership are not escapes from ministry calling but the best way to live out a ministry calling.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Recommendation

The purpose of this study was to investigate how ministry leaders prioritize contemplative practices to foster resilient leadership. To learn these contemplative practices, seven senior pastors were interviewed concerning their understanding and benefit from contemplative practices, both personally and with their leadership team. The following research questions guided the qualitative research:

1. How do ministry leaders understand contemplative practices?
 - a. For themselves?
 - b. For the ministry leadership team?
2. What contemplative practices have ministry leaders found helpful?
3. What contemplative team practices have been helpful to the ministry leadership team?
4. How do contemplative practices create resilience?
 - a. The leader?
 - b. The leadership team?

Summary of the Study and Findings

This study also reviewed relevant literature in five key areas:

1. Resilience in ministry leadership
2. Biblical analysis of Jesus' contemplative practices and the Law Gospel Distinction in relationship to contemplative practices
3. Contemplative practices of leaders, namely prayer and solitude

4. Emotional health benefits of contemplative practices
5. Organizational health benefits of contemplative practices

The study then analyzed interview data from seven senior pastors engaged in contemplative practice and practice for themselves, their ministry team, and their church. I will analyze the findings of this literature and qualitative research, using the same five key areas of discussion used in the literature review. This discussion will be followed by implications for ministry leadership: twelve principles of unhurried (contemplative) ministry leadership. The analysis and implications assume a ministry leader is the reader.

Resilience in Ministry

The authors of *Resilient Ministry* equate resilience with fruitfulness and state, “Fruitfulness includes a measure of faithfulness and a measure of success—valuing both but preferring neither.”²³⁷ Therefore, resilience is the ability to be faithful (and at times successful), and thus fruitful, over time. Jesus’ fruit as a leader is seen in his sustained ability to be faithful over time to an end goal, the cross (Luke 22:42). Paul summarizes his own leadership by stating his faithfulness over time, as he wrote to Timothy, “For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith (2 Timothy 4:6-7).” Therefore, both Jesus and Paul exemplify resilient leadership as faithfulness over time.

²³⁷ Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 13.

The authors of *Resilient Ministry* further the understanding of resilient leadership to include health in core areas of a leader's life: spiritual formation, self-care, emotional and cultural intelligence, marriage and family, and leadership and management.²³⁸ The authors' seven years of research found that ministry leaders who are healthy in those five core areas tend to not only survive ministry, but thrive through it.²³⁹ Therefore, resilient leadership is sustained leadership where the leader is characterized by health and effectiveness in ministry and in core areas of life.

Contemplative Practices and the Law Gospel Distinction

The literature review demonstrated that Jesus himself led through contemplative pace and practice. Brian Croft and Ronnie Martin, pastors and authors of *The Unhurried Pastor* write:

One of the problems that our crowded task-lists present is a loss of margin and space. When we find ourselves going from something to another without a minute to stop and to breathe, we can begin to operate like machines—which would be fantastic if God had designed us as machines. But he didn't. God created us as human beings, who lack, intentionally, the mechanized ability to continue working *ad infinitum*, without rest or reflection.²⁴⁰

Therefore, we must resist a life and ministry of constant work and embrace a life and ministry of contemplative pace and practice, intentionally developing and scheduling contemplative pacing into our days and weeks. We discovered how prayer is routine

²³⁸ Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 18-29.

²³⁹ Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 7.

²⁴⁰ Croft, 77.

spirituality for Jesus, noting in the New Testament that Jesus prayed in the early morning (Mark 1:35-37; Luke 4:42) and sometimes in the evening (Mark 6:45-46; Luke 6:12; John 6:15). Jesus models leadership using contemplative pace and practice through prayer. Pastor Zed spoke of a leader's pressure to speed up and conform to the frantic pace of the world. While I feel this pressure everyday as a leader, Jesus is calling me, and each of us, to a way of life and ministry of slowing down – unhurried ministry leadership. I quoted Henri Nouwen throughout the research (and will below) as his love of Jesus, commitment to lead like Jesus, and the contemplative life have been inspiring to me. Nouwen confirms Jesus' practice and encourages us toward the same ministry:

It's in the midst of a busy schedule of activities—healing, suffering people, casting out devils, responding to impatient disciples, traveling from town to town, and preaching from synagogue to synagogue—we find these quiet words: “in the morning, long before dawn, he got up and left the house, and went off to a lonely place and prayed there.” The more I read this nearly silent sentence locked in between the loud words of action, the more I have the sense that the secret of Jesus's ministry is hidden in that lonely place where he went to pray, early in the morning, long before dawn... and the lonely place Jesus finds the courage to follow God's will and not his own; To speak God's words and not his own; To do God's work and not his own. It is in the lonely place where Jesus enters into intimacy with the father, that his ministry is born.²⁴¹

This pattern of communion with the Father was for Jesus' own soul and in service to the leadership task before him. This is a model and biblical encouragement to minister in the same manner. Yet anytime Jesus is used as an example, without remembering Jesus is primarily our Savior, the possibility of legalism arises. Luther preached and wrote against the dangers of such works-righteousness in the 1500s: “The truth of the Gospel is this, that our righteousness comes by faith alone, without the works of the Law. ... The

²⁴¹ Nouwen, *Spiritual Formation*, 20.

true Gospel, however, is this: Works or love are not the ornament or perfection of faith; but faith itself is a gift of God, a work of God in our hearts, which justifies us because it takes hold of Christ as the Savior.”²⁴² We look to Jesus as an example, but only through the knowledge that we will be imperfect living up to his example and must live resting in Jesus as our Savior. The Apostle Paul teaches how trusting in Christ (his grace to us) changes who we are for Christ (and thus our life and leadership). Paul writes:

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.²⁴³

This passage communicates that Jesus gives us salvation and empowers our transformation. We must remember that God’s love is not a result of our amazing leadership abilities or resume. Rather, God’s love is the source of our lives and leadership, and the source of our contemplative pace and practices. Therefore, we grow as we grow deeper in Jesus. This point was highlighted to me as Pastor Zed summarized contemplative practices with the word “behold.” He said, “‘Behold’ means to step back, quiet, pay attention, listen.” My role as a leader is to do just that – step back, become quiet, pay attention, and listen to Jesus.

²⁴² Luther, 88.

²⁴³ Titus 2:11-14

Contemplative Practices of Prayer and Solitude

Christian contemplative practices develop the emotional resources we need to cope with burnout. In *The Emotionally Healthy Leader* (a book that became more important to me as my research progressed), Scazzero writes, “The emotionally unhealthy leader is someone who operates in a continuous state of emotional and spiritual deficit, lacking emotional maturity and a “being with God” sufficient to sustain their “doing for God.”²⁴⁴ To live a deeply transformed life in leadership, we slow our lives down for loving union, deeper communion with Christ, and emotional health. Nouwen urges us toward a contemplative life in his leadership book, *In the Name of Jesus*:

Their leadership must be rooted in the permanent, intimate relationship with the Incarnate word, Jesus, and they need to find there the source for their words, advice, and guidance. Through the discipline of contemplative prayer, Christian leaders have to learn to listen again and again to the voice of love and to find there the wisdom and courage to address whatever issue presents itself to them.²⁴⁵

I was encouraged throughout the research interviews as all the pastors shaped their daily workdays similarly: slow, intentional mornings leading to afternoons filled with people, meetings, and follow-up or task-oriented work. In the slow, intentional mornings, each participant practiced contemplation with silence and solitude, Word and prayer, always being present. For me, it reinforced the point that we must be at peace in Christ before leading and serving people for Christ.

²⁴⁴ Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader*, 25.

²⁴⁵ Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*, 45.

We can look at Nouwen's recommendation to solitude, silence, and prayer for practices to be rooted and resting in Jesus as they lead God's people. Nouwen writes of the slowing down experience as he writes of the solitude experience of St. Anthony:

The shell of his superficial securities was cracked, and the abyss of iniquity was opened to him. But he came out of this trial victorious—not because of his own willpower or ascetic exploits, but because of his unconditional surrender to the lordship of Jesus Christ. When he emerged from a solitude, people recognized in him the qualities of an authentic healthy man, whole body and soul.²⁴⁶

The transformation that must take place in us is a move from a compulsive minister to a settled one. It is worthy to note that this practice of solitude and prayer for each of the research participants looked different. They all prioritized contemplative pace and practice, prayer itself, yet how they practiced the slow intentional communion with the Lord differed based on personality and what each one enjoyed in being with Jesus, while the priority of solitude with Jesus reigned. Let's remember again Nouwen's word on solitude:

In solitude I get rid of my scaffolding: no friends to talk with, no telephone calls to make, no meetings to attend, no music to entertain, notebooks to distract, just me—naked, vulnerable, weak, sinful, deprived, broken—nothing. It is in this nothingness that I have to face in my solitude, that nothingness so dreadful that everything in me wants to run to my friends, my work, and my distractions so that I can forget my nothingness and make myself believe that I am worth something.²⁴⁷

This is the point where we become painfully aware of how we have been reliant upon the world for definition. It is also the point of rescue as we are reminded of our wholeness in Christ. We are not defined by anything in the world but by Christ himself,

²⁴⁶ Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 10.

²⁴⁷ Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 15.

who claims us as God's son or daughter as we lead. This secure identity, which only God gives, heals our hearts and empowers a life of loving others. Therefore, only the settled leader can effectively and compassionately minister at peace over time.

Upon reflecting on the research interviews, commenting on prayer and other practices, I return to the conclusion that prayer is formative process which builds roots from our fragile hearts to the secure and strong heart of God. This life-giving connection should create a life where we seek times of slowness, reflection, and receiving from God, not just increased moments of preaching, teaching, and leading God's people.

Emotional Health Benefits of Contemplative Practices

When we are blind to our emotional life, we easily reduce people to objects that enhance or limit our agendas. Pastor Klay helped me see that contemplative practices are not a luxury but a way of life, a proactive method to prevent burnout and emotional depletion. Pastor Trey connected slowing down to growing aware of what is going on inside of us as he noted, "Contemplative practices are intentional ways that we slow down to be present with God and with what's happening inside of us, present with what's happening around us." We can face the truth about our full selves because our entire selves are already loved and accepted by God.

We live from a particular history, filled with wounds that can create abreactions. A past trauma creates a wound, and triggers are formed, where emotions are awakened upon a particular set of stimuli. The more we are unaware of these triggers and emotions, the more we are held hostage by them. This often manifests through anxiety, aggression, fear, and other negative motives and behaviors. The more we slow down to become

aware an emotion is present, and what is causing it, the more we can heal and move forward. Through self-awareness, we can make sense of our emotions by facing the discomfort of our negative emotions.

I resonate with the research participants that there is a risk of ministering from an empty interior. Early in my pastorate, I was unaware of the ways my childhood and ongoing issues with anxiety were fueling an unhealthy pace, desire for recognition, and an inability to sit with people in their pain. I needed to grow in the distinction of my beloved identity in Christ and my leader role, which holds anxious emotions. Friedman writes, “A leader must separate his or her own emotional being from that of his or her followers while still remaining connected.”²⁴⁸ For years, I was a good preacher, but I was not a good leader or pastor, because I was not a differentiated leader. We must learn to be connected to people yet separate, rooted in a definition of the self beyond ministry. In this way, we learn to lead without causing more anxiety in the system. Such emotionally healthy leadership allows a greater ability to process conflict, communicate, and collaborate, while each person takes emotional responsibility in the process.

Organizational Health Benefits of Contemplative Practices

We must grow to understand ministry as a series of relationships, triangles of people linked together making the greater whole.²⁴⁹ Unhealthy triangulation occurs as one person is emotionally hijacked by another person’s concern or interest regarding a third party. Thus, we must ask followers to engage with each other without enlisting a

²⁴⁸ Friedman, 20.

²⁴⁹ Herrington, 60.

third party into their interest to gather influence. The two originating people need to work out the anxiety as best they can. We participate in the triangle in a calm non-anxious manner. This is organizationally healthy leadership, by an emotionally healthy leader.

This research has helped me see my church with fresh eyes to lead and love, but to do so from increased places of contemplation and peace. Friedman writes, “Leaders are able, by their well-defined presence, to regulate the systemic anxiety in the relationship system they are leading and to inhibit the invasiveness of those factions which would preempt its agenda.”²⁵⁰ He calls the leader to “start with conviction, stay calm, stay connected, and stay the course.”²⁵¹ For me, being a leader is exhausting due to the nature of caring for a people-oriented organization and thus a network of triangles.

Pastor Matt spoke how a contemplative pace for his staff has allowed for space and places of safety for the staff to acknowledge the range of emotions we experience as leaders. I was impacted by his words on how much he feels his staff’s health and tenure is due to creating a staff contemplative pace and practice.

The interviews revealed a consistent theme: contemplative practices—including personal and communal—function as a grace-centered means for longevity and health in ministry. Therefore, we have a calling to live such a life and create a staff culture and practice where the staff can live such a life. We should take note of the research finding from the research participants: contemplative practices created slow, intentional pacing, which allowed the leader and team (through relationship with Christ and reflection on events and emotions) to recover from the highs and lows of ministry. The unhurried pace

²⁵⁰ Friedman, 146.

²⁵¹ Friedman, 128.

of leading, filled with spiritual practices that slow us down, benefits the church as a system of relationships and an organization that desires to operate in peace with progress.

Recommendations for Practice:

Twelve Principles of Unhurried Ministry Leadership

What follows are twelve principles of unhurried (contemplative) ministry leadership for a ministry leader to put into action given the above summary. The following plan is stated as twelve principles, moving from the leader's heart to the leader's life and practices, then on to the leadership team and organizational structure.

The Leader's Heart ->

The Leader's Life and Practice ->

The Ministry Team ->

The Organizational Structure

The principles begin with the health and heart of the leader before the team and organization because of their normative progression. Leaders will most likely find some principles more challenging than others based on their own journey and ministry settings. I challenge the leader to progress through the principles one at a time, building a foundation of self with Christ, then a ministry team walking with Christ, and lastly to an organization structured to support a contemplative pace and practice of both the leader and team.

My own journey as a leader has followed this progression as I faced my own near burnout and disillusionment with ministry when I was overidentifying my own heart and self with ministry, exhausting myself with the demand (and emotional complexity) without living in the resources (and pace) of Jesus to serve. This near burnout led me to a

greater dependence on Jesus for my definition and the creation of a pattern of life and ministry that felt healthy and sustainable for me as God's beloved. This journey of living as God's son (my identity), apart from being a pastor (my role), has fueled how I want to lead my staff (have them flourish as people and team members) and how I want to learn to structure the church I lead. My hope is that other leaders as well will join me in this journey of unhurried ministry leadership. Below are the twelve principles of unhurried ministry leadership.

The Leader's Heart

Principle #1: Our Identity as God's Beloved

Leaders must know their identity in Christ beyond their ministry role.

Remembering identity in Christ as the lavishly loved children of God is the leader's spiritual practice and way forward. As *Resilient Ministry* states, "Before you were called to be a shepherd, you were called to be a lamb."²⁵² Leaders, growing in their identity in Christ (apart from any leadership role), will create the growth of increasing differentiation from the burdens of that role, thus making them a more secure child of God, more emotionally healthy person, and more resilient leader. They must ask themselves, "What does my church need of me?" And amongst many possible legitimate answers must be the primary answer, "My church needs me to abide with Jesus." Yet, their motivation is beyond what their church needs, as it is also what their heart and family needs of them. Therefore, we set ourselves on the journey to discover how

²⁵² Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 21.

wealthy of an identity we have as God's children. And our lives (daily, weekly, and routine) take shape by what practices help us remember the great wealth of my identity in Jesus. What contemplative practices help the team gaze upon Jesus *before* working for Jesus? This secure identity as God's beloved, which only God gives, heals the heart and empowers a life of loving others.

Principle #2: We Slow Down to Heal

The leader must slow down to move toward greater emotional health. Too many leaders are serving and teaching without having properly processed childhood wounds, losses, pains, abuses, and disappointments that are part of their narratives and persons. Without this processing, privately and with proper guides and counselors, the wound (and abreacting from the pain) will inevitably reveal itself in your family relationships, friendships, and ministry. The more leaders slow down to become aware of the emotions they are experiencing, and what is causing the emotion, the more they can heal from the originating event and move forward. I encourage all leaders to find a trusted mentor, or counselor, and begin to process how they are feeling and what they have been through.

The Leader's Life and Practices

Principle #3: We Slowly Begin the Day

The leader should begin the workday in communion with the Heavenly Father. The length and method of this communion is not vital, but the communion itself is vital. We see in the New Testament that Jesus prayed in the morning (Mark 1:35), walked in the morning (Matthew 21:18), and taught in the morning (John 8:2). The psalmist

reminds us that joy comes in the morning (Psalm 30:5). The morning calls leaders to rejoice into the new day where there are opportunities and possibilities. The leader must find connection with the Heavenly Father in the morning before moving on to connect with ministry and other people. The research participants spoke of varying ways of communion: from quiet times, singing, reading scripture, walking, meditative prayer, and journaling, to name a few. It does not matter how leaders practice this communion as long as they create slow, intentional mornings, with contemplation: silence and solitude, Word and prayer, always being present. Finding a place to become quiet, without distraction, is crucial to remembering who we are in Jesus before we go on to become the leader we have been called to be for Jesus.

Principle #4: We Break from the Week with Sabbath

The leader should weekly sabbath from the busyness of life and ministry. This twenty-four-hour break from work and ministry is a complete break from the tasks and relationships of ministry. Leaders should set aside their laptops and work bags and place boundaries on the cell phone as they limit their time to personal restoration and family and friend relationships. This is a complete break to remember we are more than our ministry. It is a time to be restored through spiritual practices (for the sake of soul, not ministry) and activities that bring life (whether it be to watch movies, go for a hike, or linger at a coffee shop). Most ministry leaders will find their sabbath most easily practiced on Monday, Friday, or Saturday based on personal preference, but I highly suggest Friday as sabbath, Saturday as family day, with a work week of Sunday through Thursday.

Principle #5: We Retreat from the Busyness

Leaders should regularly retreat from ministry and the busyness of life, beyond the weekly sabbath. Retreating should be part of their ongoing work rhythm, including solo retreating on a regularly basis: weekly, monthly, or by semester as part of their ministry, not a break or vacation from ministry. Every ministry leader's retreating will look different, but the goal is a mix of solo and joint retreating (with other ministry leaders), which creates space for reflection upon the ministry and brings soul relief and restoration. A healthy retreat practice to consider would be weekly half-day retreats, monthly full days, and semester multi-day retreats. These times are blocked out within ministry work life. We cannot wait for retreating to fit into our schedule, as our schedule will continue to be filled up with ministry tasks and relationships. We, as the ministry leaders, have to block out these times and days and protect them for the good of our soul and ministry.

A longer sabbatical should be considered every five to seven years for pastors, for a range of two to six months based on ministry responsibility. This sabbatical is designed as a restorative period for the pastor and his family to bring relief to the long-term accumulated effects of vocational ministry. The pastor will need to work hard equipping others, and the church will need to be prepared, to create a season where nothing will be needed from the pastor. The goal of all sabbaticals is a restored, more energetic, and creative pastor upon return.

Principle #6: We Control Our Calendar

Leaders should control their calendars, as opposed to being controlled by the demands of others. The calendars of ministry leaders quickly fill with church activity, parishioner needs, staff assistance, and family responsibilities. But we must take responsibility and control of our calendar: daily, weekly, and seasonal scheduling. We leave room for emergencies and people's needs, blocking out meetings and times for proper study and contemplative practices. The urgency of ministry and the world will not give us these reflection and contemplative times – we must block them out and protect them. It is good and legitimate for the leader to protect these times simply by saying, “I’m so sorry. I cannot meet then. I have another appointment. Can we find another time?”

We must create the values and boundaries for our own calendars. Nobody else will do this for us. If we are too busy – it is time to take control of our calendar. If we use assistants to help, our values and boundaries for when and what sorts of meetings are appropriate in what places must be clear to them. For instance, I do not take breakfast meetings, because I protect my slow, intentional mornings. I also normally meet only with staff members after lunch and parishioners in the late morning, afternoon, or on Sundays. This calendar protection is not selfish – it protects the multiple roles and tasks of a leader. The practice calls us away from pleasing people and into calls of remembrance, gratitude, and maturity.

The Ministry Team

Principle #7: We Create an Intentional Pace for Sustained Ministry

The leader should create proper pacing for the ministry team. This pacing is created by stated expectations upon ministry responsibilities and church gatherings required upon the staff. As well, pacing is created by example as ministry leaders demonstrate what is expected by their own calendaring and pacing. The staff will always take note from the ministry leader above them to what is normative in the church culture. We, as leaders, should also inquire upon staff members as to how they are doing in regard to principles 1 through 6 above.

Principle #8: We Host Gatherings and Retreats

The leader should create ongoing gatherings and retreats which slow the ministry team down to remember and reflect. They can be weekly and monthly gatherings, focusing on vision alignment, worship, and prayer. Semester or yearly silent and staff-bonding retreats should be utilized to restore the ministry team, reflect upon the ministry, and bond the team together. The church staff and culture will dictate the details of these gatherings and retreats, but the ministry leader must intentionally place (and budget for) weekly, monthly, semester, and yearly times for retreating and gathering beyond the week-to-week tasks of ministry life.

Principle #9: We Lead Intentional Meetings

Leaders should intentionally lead meetings by beginning any gatherings of staff and leaders with meaningful times before moving into task-oriented conversations. As I

began this research, I started to shape the beginning of staff and elder meetings with intentional contemplative and meaningful times. I rotate contemplative prayer, guided prayer, scripture meditation, guided silence, and prayer walks as means to slow us down to connect with Jesus, our emotions, and what is true and meaningful about us and our church. I have found that a devotional moment or teaching moment is not the same as a participatory spiritual exercise together. So, I always open our meetings with a “slowing down” exercise. This always leads to better conversations, and we tend to process through difficult issues quicker.

Please note the meeting structures in Appendixes 1 through 5:

- Appendix 1: Weekly All-Staff Meeting
- Appendix 2: Monthly All-Staff Meeting
- Appendix 3: Quarterly Staff Conversations
- Appendix 4: Annual Staff Reviews
- Appendix 5: Monthly Elder Meeting

These are the meeting structures I developed with my elder-governed, six-staff member church. It is possible these same structures will work for others, but also likely adjustments will need to be made based on their church’s governance, staff size, and church values. The structures give them a gift, as they do not have to create a meeting plan before each meeting. The meeting structures guide them as they lead – allowing them to spend less time preparing for the meeting. The structures guide the meetings and pull out what needs to be addressed and discussed.

The Organizational Structure

Principle #10: We Create an Intentional Pace of Ministry for the Church

The leader should create proper pacing for the church as a whole. This pacing is created by weekly event pacing, and semester and annual event spacing. The leader should pace events out that will require, or target, the same people group within the church. The intentional pacing of events, communication, and change slowly create a culture of busyness or health. Is a change rushed or is it slowly implemented giving the church time to adapt? Do parishioners feel they need to be at all church events to be a meaningful church member? Is there silent pressure to be at all events, or can parishioners opt into which events feed their souls in their growth, fellowship, and service? This unhurried culture will be created by how the ministry and leadership team communicates church events, schedules church events, participates in church events, and implements changes to the church. The church will take note from the staff and church leaders to what is normative in the church culture as they control the church calendar, communication, change, and reveal expectations through guilt-free communications and their own personal pacing of attendance of events.

Principle #11: We Structure the Contemplative (HR Policies and Job Descriptions)

The leader should structure the expectations of unhurried ministry using job descriptions and Human Resource policies. Each ministry staff member job description should always begin with a job responsibility to abide in Christ through ongoing spiritual practices that restore soul and connection to Jesus. In my church's job descriptions, we use the wording, "personal practice of reflection, prayer, and rooting deeper in the great

wealth of identity you have in Jesus.” As well, job descriptions should note time given to the staff member for solo days, retreats, and sabbaticals. HR policies can further strengthen the culture of being unhurried as supervisors check on the state of staff members solo days, retreats, and sabbaticals. As well, staff members can be required to practice the solo days, retreats, and sabbaticals, or the given staff member will not be eligible for a monetary raise upon annual review.

Principle #12: We Codify the Contemplative (Staff and Leadership Handbooks)

The leader should embed the importance of unhurried ministry life in the literature of the church, namely the staff and leadership handbook (as well as the meeting agendas as discussed above). By codifying contemplative values and practices in the handbooks, ministry leaders further develop a culture of being with Jesus, not just doing for Jesus. This practical step of integration ensures contemplative pace and practice will not be left up to the personality or subjectivity of the given staff person (or supervisor) but is guided and protected in the church’s identity. In my church’s staff handbook, we have a section entitled “Church Staff Heart and Life” which details biblical values and interpersonal skills that are a priority for our staff members. The section begins with the sentence, “Our hope is you continue a personal practice of reflection, prayer, and rooting deeper in the great wealth of identity you have in Jesus.” Also, in our Elder Handbook, which we use to onboard new elders, there is a section entitled “Leading by Grace,” which states:

As one of our core values states, we grow in the grace of God by living more deeply in the great wealth of our beloved identity in Jesus Christ, as we know it through Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. The Holy Spirit uses this deepening to heal and transform us. This is a rest from our self-reliant

striving as to know a spiritual growth that occurs only by God's work in our lives. This growth in grace is a lifelong process filled with imperfection and grace, confession and peace.

God's Word is applied by the Holy Spirit and is the agent of change in our lives. As such, small groups focus on deepening faith. This is primarily achieved by studying the Scriptures together. Gospel relating and growth helps us not fall into the trap of performing or pretending – “looking good on Sunday.” We need to be known and loved. Growth by grace is aided by reading and teaching the scriptures understanding how indicatives and imperatives work in the scriptures. And imperative is what we are called to be or do. However, all imperatives to us are empowered by indicatives to us – who we are already deemed by God in Christ.

Therefore, the elders lead, shepherd, and govern by use of God's promises in Jesus to relieve and change people's hearts, trusting the Holy Spirit to work in the life of the church without the leadership resorting to pressure and manipulation.

Lastly, in our elder handbook we state how elder meetings should be led experienced by stating a meeting structure that begins with the heart and then moves to the practical:

Elder Meeting Agenda Guide: The monthly elder meeting aims to be two hours long.

1. First 15 minutes: devotional led by an elder. It is valuable for the senior pastor to pick one book for the elders to read through each year: each month an elder summarize a chapter for devotion.
2. Next 15 minutes: connection to the heart of the church by sharing what has been encouraging, in regard to the church, to the elder's heart.
3. Next 30 minutes: review main congregational care concerns and have prayer time for church and care concerns. This prayer time can be as a group or prayer walk around the building.
4. Second hour: review the finances of the church, any important church business or ministry issues placed on the agenda earlier in the week by an elder.

Summary

The twelve principles of unhurried (contemplative) ministry leadership are principles to put into action, values which have real ministry implications for leaders. My hope is they move from heart to team to organization, moving from a secured and healthy heart to love and serve their teams and church as they have been called. I do not have unhurried ministry leadership conquered, and I hope they discover more principles to put into action in ministry. We are on this journey together, building a foundation of self with Christ, then a ministry team walking with Christ, and lastly to an organization structured to support a contemplative pace and practice of both the leader and team.

Recommendations for Further Research

First, further research is needed to analyze which contemplative practices produce what effects in the ministry leader. Do different contemplative practices create different results in the ministry leader, or do all contemplative practices create the same results? Do particular personality profiles of a leader react differently to different contemplative practices? This study would inform the ministry leader as to which practice to implement at specific points of life and ministry.

Second, further research is needed to analyze which contemplative practices exercised as a ministry team create what results in the given team. Do different contemplative practices create different results in the ministry team, or do all contemplative practices create the same results? This study would inform ministry leaders as to which practice to implement, given the needs of their ministry team.

Third, further research is needed as to how to embed contemplative practices in ministry teams across different church sizes and church denominations. This study would inform ministry leaders given their context of church size and denomination.

Epilogue

Personal Reflection on Doctorate Program and Dissertation

This epilogue is outside the formal research framework of the preceding chapters, offering personal reflections that, while not empirically substantiated, have been deeply formative for me in the course of studying and reflecting upon this work. While reading *The Contemplative Pastor*, the Eugene Peterson quote, which I have at the beginning of this dissertation, hit me like a semitruck. Peterson wrote,

He doesn't hold an oar; He doesn't perspire, he doesn't shout. He is languid in the crash in the cursing. This man is the harpooner, quiet and poised, waiting. And then this sentence: "To ensure the greatest efficiency in the dart, the harpooners of this world must start to their feet out of idleness, and not out of toil."²⁵³

The image of the quiet harpooner stands in opposition to how I often feel throughout a given week. I love to be the leader who rows an oar, perspires, and while I do not shout aloud, my inner life is often shouting. My schedule is not always busy, but I live and lead from a set of anxieties and fears that create a busyness of heart. The idea of being a leader who is quiet and poised and waiting has been growing in me for many years. The Covenant doctorate program and this dissertation furthered the desire to be a contemplative, unhurried leader.

I was challenged by the literature reviews as I read the mountain of research supporting being a contemplative leader. Yet, I can know all the research and still my heart is hurried. Early in the doctorate program, within the semester on emotional intelligence, I became aware of consistent anxiety in my inner life. I always knew I was

²⁵³ Peterson, 24.

anxious, but while reading a list of characteristics of anxiety disorders, I was alarmed at how many described my heart and life. I grew more aware of my fear of lack of provision (and its roots in my childhood trauma), racing thoughts, inability to get my worry under control, and my deep desire for things to be comfortable. This awareness has helped me see the importance of slowing down, keeping a pace of grace schedule, acknowledging and speaking my anxieties, and growing curious when I react with anxiety upon a particular issue or event. This growth has me beholding Jesus more, in quiet mornings, weekly hikes, and solo fishing days. And my heart longs for more of His peace and time in His presence.

As well, the research interviews were enlightening to me. These pastors were from a variety of churches around the country and a variety of congregation sizes. They also had a range of personality types. I was encouraged by how each of these pastors was working out being a contemplative leader within their context and personality. None of the leaders were the same in how they practice a pace of grace or spiritual practices, yet all of them do practice. I remember finishing my call with one pastor and wishing it wasn't over, because this one pastor spoke so well of how he simply walks with Jesus through each day. He intentionally gives time to Jesus throughout the day to speak his concerns, worries, and fears. I now think differently about my day and how I can fit moments of connection with Christ within a day comprised of activities and duties.

I often skip the quiet moments, whether that be prayer, Scripture reading, or meditation, to finish the sermon or clear the inbox. The effect of this is a heart that is okay but not settled, living but not at peace, and thriving in Christ's presence. I see more clearly how ministry is endlessly needy and demands to be at the top of my heart and

time. I need to embrace the ebb and flow of ministry, with a heart in love with Jesus and my family, with time and emotional presence given to Jesus and my family, as I serve the ministry, but do not need it to define me. The influence of the classes, research, and writing has me desiring to be a better leader, in the way of unhurried, contemplative pace and practice. I have my leadership faults, but I desire to be a wholehearted leader, walking with Jesus, while being fully present and loving with my wife and children. After four years of study, and around one hundred books and resources read, one word remains as I move on from this dissertation...*Behold*. Behold Jesus.

Appendix 1: Weekly All-Staff Meeting

Weekly Practice:

Week 1: Contemplative Prayer

Week 2: Staff Training

Week 3: Sanctuary Prayer / Prayer walk outside (as part of longer monthly meeting)

Week 4: Prayer Walk in ministry spaces

Week 5: What is a recent ministry disappointment sticking to you? What is an encouraging you heart in your ministry – a story or trend?

Group Time:

1. Care and Prayer

1. Are you aware of any congregational care needs?
2. Personal prayer needs / Prayers for our church.

2. Review Sunday

1. What went well? What can we celebrate? What encouraged you?
2. What didn't go well? What needs to change?

3. Review Calendar for month

1. Church wide: what is coming up?
2. What needs to be done?
3. What do you need of each other?
4. Your ministry: what is coming up?
5. What needs to be done?
6. What do you need of each other?

4. Sunday Calendar and Role Review

1. Worship / Teaching:
2. Welcome and announcements:
3. Scripture Reader:
4. Communion liturgy:
5. Communion 2nd pastor:
6. Pastor up front for prayer after service:
7. Emergency staff:
8. Elder on Call: 915: _____ 11am
9. Welcome table: 915: _____ 11am _____

One on One time: who needs to meet one on one?

Appendix 2: Monthly All-Staff Meeting

1. Book Discussion: (a book is chosen each year for the staff to read together)
 1. What were 2-3 points / insights that resonated with you for your ministry?
 2. What were 2-3 points / insights that resonated with you in regard to how you lead?
 3. What were 2-3 points that resonated with you that apply to our church or staff as a whole?
2. Highlights:
 1. Personal
 2. Ministry (something you felt proud of)
3. Ministry Update: general update from each person, from past few Sundays.
4. Ministry Development
 1. What area in our church do you see in need of development?
 2. Are there any action steps needed to be taken at this time?

(Any issues discovered in sections 1-4 will be moved to section 5)

5. Issues: Identify/Discuss/Resolve (IDS) – (This is not complaining!) This is raising issues, between us or our church, for discussion, development, and resolution. So we can work better together, serve our people, and move our church forward.
6. Conclude - Recap any to-dos for next meeting.

Appendix 3: Quarterly Staff Conversation

Staff Member:

Date:

Church Core Values					
Grace	Worship	Spiritual Growth	Community	Mission	
+ +/-	+ +/-	+ +/-	+ +/-	+ +/-	
-	-	-	-	-	

Staff member to rate and explain how the church is doing on the above church values. What's working? What's not working?

Staff Values					
Parishioner Focused	Kind and Helpful	Execute Work	Trustworthy	Excellent and Beautiful	Subject Matter Expert
+ +/-	+ +/-	+ +/-	+ +/-	+ +/-	+ +/-
-	-	-	-	-	-

Supervisor to rate and explain how staff member is doing on the above staff values. What's working? What's not working?

Deeper Discussion:

“What’s working” Questions:

- Do you feel appreciated for the work you do?
- Do you have the tools you need to do your job?
- Are expectations between us clear?

“What’s not working” Questions:

- Do you see anything we are doing that is off mission?
- Do you see anything that frustrates you?
- What do you wish you could spend more time on?
- What do you need from me?

Appendix 4: Staff Member Annual Review

Compensation Review to be handled in separate meeting.
Give the below questions to staff member before meeting.

Staff member feedback to supervisor:

1. How might I, or the elders, help you better do your job?
2. What areas of your job are the most stressful?
3. What areas do you think you could develop in the fulfillment of your role?
4. What in our church do you see that is an issue?
5. What do you want in terms of career three years from now, five years from now?
6. Anything else you want to talk about.

Supervisor feedback to staff member:

Areas of Strengths:

Areas of Development:

Appendix 5: Monthly Elder Meeting

Date:

Attendees:

About our meetings:

- We are not a business but have to discuss some business things.
- Always leave room for God to move.
- Need an environment speak freely, discuss, pray, come to a consensus.
- Each voice is needed to come to united decisions.
- Spirit-led, value-based decisions (not emotional abreaction to an event or given person).
- What said / how decisions made stay in meetings – “We made the decision to...”

Devotion (led by Elder):

Gratitude: Regarding the church: What is encouraging your heart?

Congregational Care Concerns:

Babies born:

Upcoming Due Dates:

Prayer:

Agenda Items:

Next Meetings:

Elder Devotion Rotation:

Bibliography

- Allender, Dan. *Leading with a Limp: Take Full Advantage of Your Most Powerful Weakness*. New York, NY: Waterbrook, 2006.
- Arbinger Institute. *Leadership and Self-Deception: Getting Out of the Box*. Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2000.
- Barton, Ruth Haley. *Invitation to Solitude and Silence: Experiencing God's Transforming Presence*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010.
- Beza, Theodore. *The Christian Faith*. Translated by James Clark. East Sussex, UK: Focus Christian Ministries Trust.
- Boland, Patrick. *The Contemplative Leader: Uncover the Power of Presence and Connection*. Dallas, TX: Matt Holt Books, 2024.
- Bolsinger, Tod Bolsinger. *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Unchartered Territory*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2015.
- Boyatzis, Richard E. Daniel Goleman, and Annie McKee. *Primal Leadership: Unleashing the Power of Emotional Intelligence*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2013.
- Bradberry, Travis and Jean Greaves. *Emotional Intelligence 2.0*. San Diego, CA: TalentSmart, 2009.
- Brother Lawrence. *The Practice of the Presence of God*. New York, NY: Image Books, 1977.
- Butler, Sarah A. *Caring Ministry: A Contemplative Approach to Pastoral Care*. New York, NY: Continuum, 1999.
- Burns, Bob, Tasha D. Chapman, and Donald C. Guthrie. *The Politics of Ministry: Navigating Power Dynamics and Negotiating Interests*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2019.
- Burns, Bob, Tasha D. Chapman, and Donald C. Guthrie. *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us About Surviving and Thriving*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Press, 2013.
- Byargeon, Rick. "Echoes of Wisdom in the Lord's Prayer." *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 41, no. 3. (September 1998): 353-365.
- Calhoun, Adele Ahlberg. *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015.

- Casey, Michael. "Merton Within a Tradition of Prayer." *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 13, no 4 (1978): 372–378.
- Chandler, Diane J. "The Impact of Pastors' Spiritual Practices on Burnout." *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 64, no. 2 (June 2010): 6.1–6.9.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/154230501006400206>.
- Clowney, Edmund P. "A Biblical Theology of Prayer." In *Teach Us to Pray: Prayer in the Bible and the World*, edited by D.A. Carson, 136-176. Exeter: Paternoster; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1990.
- *Christian Meditation: What the Bible Teaches About Meditation and Spiritual Exercises*. Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing, 1979.
- Covey, Stephen M.R. *The Speed of Trust: The One Thing that Changes Everything*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2006.
- Croft, Brian, and Ronnie Martin. *The Unhurried Pastor: Redefining Productivity for a More Sustainable Ministry*. New Malden, UK: The Good Book Company, 2024.
- Dura-Vila, Gloria and Gerard Leavy. "Solitude Among Contemplative Cloistered Nuns and Monks: Conceptualization, Coping, and Benefits of Spiritually Motivated Solitude." *Mental Health, Religion and Culture* 20, no. 1 (2017): 45-60.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13674676.2017.1322049>.
- Earley, Justin. *The Common Rule: Habits of Purpose for an Age of Distraction*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2019.
- Edwards, Tilden. *Living in the Presence: Spiritual Exercises to Open Our Lives to the Awareness of God*. New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1971.
- Eggert, Nancy J. *Contemplative Leadership for Entrepreneurial Organizations: Paradigms, Metaphors, and Wicked Problems*. Westport, CT: Quorum Books, 1998.
- Eswine, Zack. *The Imperfect Pastor: Discovering Joy in Our Limitations through a Daily Apprenticeship with Jesus*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015.
- Fadling, Alan. *A Non-Anxious Life: Experiencing the Peace of God's Presence*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2024.
- *An Unhurried Life: Following Jesus' Rhythms of Work and Rest*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2024.
- Foster, Richard. *Celebration of Disciplines: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 1978.

- Frederick, Thomas V., Yvonne Thai, and Scott Dunbar. "Coping with Pastoral Burnout Using Christian Contemplative Practices." *Religions* 12, no. 6 (May 24, 2021): Article 378. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12060378>.
- Frenette, David. "Present to Presence: The Contemplative Practice of Attention/Intention." *Sewanee Theological Review* 53, no. 3 (Pentecost 2010): 285–300. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v53i3.2701>.
- Friedman, Edwin H. *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*. New York, NY: Church Publishing, 2017.
- Foster, Richard J. *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1988.
- Goetz, Peggy. "The Speed of Love." *Reformed Journal*, April 29, 2017. <https://reformedjournal.com/2017/04/29/the-speed-of-love/>.
- Grandy, Gina, and Martyna Śliwa. "Contemplative Leadership: The Possibilities for the Ethics of Leadership Theory and Practice." *Journal of Business Ethics* 143, no. 3 (July 2017): 423–40. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-015-2802-2>
- Greig, Jason Reimer. "The Slow Journey Towards Beatitude: Disability in L'Arche and Staying Human in High-Speed Society." *Journal of Moral Theology* 6, no. SI2 (2017): 180–205. <https://jmt.scholasticahq.com/article/11376-the-slow-journey-towards-beatitude-disability-in-l-arche-and-staying-human-in-high-speed-society>.
- Hardin, Leslie T. "The Quest for the Spiritual Jesus: Jesus and the Spiritual Disciplines." *Stone–Campbell Journal* 15, no. 2 (Fall 2012): 217–27, EBSCOhost (ATLA Religion Database).
- Heifetz, Ronald and Marty Linsky. *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Change*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2017.
- Herrington, Jim, Trisha Taylor, and R. Robert Creech. *The Leader's Journey: Accepting the Call to Personal and Congregational Transformation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academics, 2003.
- Hoge, Dean and Jacqueline Wenger. *Pastors in Transition: Why Clergy Leave Local Ministry*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005.
- Holden, Lee. *Ready, Set, Slow: How to Improve Your Energy, Health, and Relationships Through the Power of Slow*. Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2025.
- Honoré, Carl. *The Slow Fix: Solve Problems, Work Smarter, and Live Better in a Fast World*. New York, NY: Harper One, 2013.

- Jensen, L. Paul. *Subversive Spirituality: Transforming Mission through the Collapse of Space and Time*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2009.
- Kalinowski, Caesar. *Small Is Big, Slow Is Fast: Living and Leading Your Family and Community on God's Mission*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014.
- Kouzes, James and Barry Posner. *The Leadership Challenge: How to Make Extraordinary Things Happen in Organizations*. Hoboken, NY: John Wiley & Sons, 2017.
- Laytham, Brent. ““But If... By the Spirit’: Reading Matthew’s Lord’s Prayer as Spirit Christology.” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 12, no. 1 (2018): 24-38. Doi: 10.5325/jtheointe.12.1.0024
- Lencioni, Patrick. *The Advantage: Why Organizational Health Trumps Everything Else in Business*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2012.
- Loehr, Jim and Tony Schwartz. *The Power of Full Engagement: Managing Energy, Not Time, Is the Key to High Performance and Personal Renewal*. New York, NY: The Free Press, 2003.
- Luther, Martin. Luther Works. Vol. 26, *Lectures on Galatians (1535), Chapters 1–4*. St. Louis: Concordia, 1963.
- “Sermon on the Distinction between the Law and the Gospel”. In *Law & Gospel: How to Read and Apply the Bible*, edited by C. F. W. Walther, 23–24. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2010.
- Merriam, Sharan B., and Elizabeth J. Tisdell. *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2016.
- Merton, Thomas. “The Solitary Life.” Published by the Trustees of the Merton Legacy Trust, 1969.
- Miller, Chuck. *The Spiritual Formation of Leaders: Integrating Spiritual Formation and Leadership Development*. Xulon Press, 2007.
- Neumann, James. “Thy Will Be Done: Jesus’s Passion in the Lord’s Prayer.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 138, no. 1 (2019): 161-82.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.15699/jbl.1381.2019.524397>
- Newport, Cal. *Slow Productivity: The Lost Art of Accomplishment Without Burnout*. New York, NY: Portfolio, 2024.
- Nouwen, Henri J. M. *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership*. New York, NY: Crossroad, 1989.

- *Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World*. New York: Crossroad, 2002.
- *Spiritual Formation: Following the Movements of the Spirit*. San Francisco: HarperOne, 2010.
- *The Way of the Heart: The Spirituality of the Desert Fathers and Mothers*. San Francisco, CA: Harper One, 2009.
- Ortlund, Dane. *Deeper: Real Change for Real Sinners*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021.
- Osiek, Carolyn. "When You Pray, Go into Your ταμει̅ον (Matthew 6:6): But Why?" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 70, no. 4 (2008): 723-740. EBSCOhost (ATLA Religion Database).
- Patterson, Kerry, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, and Al Switzler. *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes are High*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 2002.
- Peterson, Eugene H. *The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993.
- Pontefract, Dan. *Open to Think: Slow Down, Think Creatively, and Make Better Decisions*. Vancouver, BC: Page Two Books, 2018.
- Rajski, Piotr. "Finding God in the Silence: Contemplative Prayer and Therapy." *Journal of Religion and Health* 42, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 181-190.
<https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1024883316917>.
- Richardson, Jane Marie. "A Solitary, Contemplative Life Today." *The Way* 59, no. 2 (2004): 46–53. <https://www.theway.org.uk/back/s059Richardson.pdf>.
- Richardson, Ronald. *Creating a Healthier Church: Family Systems Theory, Leadership and Congregational Life*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996.
- Root, Andrew. *The Congregation in a Secular Age: Keeping Sacred Time against the Speed of Modern Life*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021.
- Runde, Craig E. and Tim A. Flanagan. *Becoming a Conflict Competent Leader: How You and Your Organization Can Manage Conflict Effectively*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2013.
- Samushonga, Hartness M. "Distinguishing Between the Pastor and the Superhero: God on Burnout and Self-care." *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 31, no. 2 (2020): 1–16.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10649867.2020.1748919>.

- Scazzero, Peter. *The Emotionally Healthy Church: A Strategy for Discipleship that Actually Changes Lives*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010.
- *The Emotionally Healthy Leader: How Transforming Your Inner Life Will Deeply Transform Your Church, Team, and the World*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Reflective, 2015.
- Schuttloffel, Merylan "Mimi" J. "Contemplative Leadership Practice: The Influences of Character on Catholic School Leadership." *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice* 17, no. 1 (September 2013): 81–103.
<https://doi.org/10.15365/joce.1701052013>.
- *Contemplative Leadership That Creates a Culture of Continuous Improvement*. Washington, DC: National Catholic Educational Association, 2008.
- Smythe, Shannon Nicole. "The Way of Divine and Human Handing-Over: Pauline Apocalyptic, Centering Prayer, and Vulnerable Solidarity." *Theology Today* 75, no. 2 (Summer 2018): 123–42.
DOI: [10.1177/0040573618763576](https://doi.org/10.1177/0040573618763576).
- Spradley, J P. *The Ethnographic Interview*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2016.
- Steinke, Peter L. *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times: Being Calm and Courageous No Matter What*. Herndon, VA: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006.
- Sweeney, James. "The Priority of Prayer in Colossians 4:2-4." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159 (July-September 2002): 318-333.
- Swenson, Richard A. *Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves to Overloaded Lives*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2004.
- van der Steen, Barbara, Joke W. van Saane, and Gerda van Dijk. "Leadership Reflective Practices: Adaptive Challenges, Slow Questions and Meaningful Relations in Fluid and Accelerated Times." *Journal of Studies in Social Sciences and Humanities* 7, no. 3 (September 2021): 233–41.
<https://doaj.org/article/4cab6dc0db1f400ba8aae95c37b53644>.
- Warren, Tish Harrison. *Liturgy of the Ordinary: Sacred Practices in Everyday Life*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016.
- Wessels, François. "Getting to Why? Contemplative Practice as Reflection on Intentionality." *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 71, no. 1 (2015): 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v71i1.2701>.
- Willard, Dallas. *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*. San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco, 2009.

Zahl, Simeon. "How Do People Actually Change? The Cure of Souls and Theory of Change in Christian Ministry." *Mockingbird Magazine*, May 19, 2022.
<https://mbird.com/the-magazine/the-cure-of-souls/>