

# Reasons for Attrition Among Pastors QUALITATIVE REPORT

Pastor Protection Research Study



## Reasons for Attrition Among Pastors Qualitative Report

This qualitative study is part of a multi-phase pastor protection research project designed to discover why pastors leave the ministry. The objective for the qualitative phase was to identify the factors that challenge pastors and lead to leaving the ministry, as well as to identify healthy interventions that help pastors survive and thrive until retirement. The study was sponsored by the North American Mission Board (NAMB) and Richard Dockins, MD.

A steering team reviewed the methodology, provided guidance on the topic guide, and suggested experts. Many thanks go to Adam Mason, David Self, and Richard Dockins from Houston's First Baptist, Kathy Litton, Richie Stanley, and Kim Robinson from NAMB, and Melissa Haas from Hope Quest Ministries.

LifeWay Research compiled a list of individual experts and ministries who work with pastors who are facing significant struggles or failures. In-depth telephone interviews were conducted with 16 individuals experienced in pastoral care among those leaving or considering leaving the ministry. Eight broad areas of inquiry included:

- Conflict in the church
- Burnout
- Moral lapse
- Illness
- Change in calling
- Family issues
- Poor fit with church(es)
- Lack of preparation for the job

Each interviewee responded to questions in the two areas with which they had the most experience. Experts were also asked for additional topics that may lead to pastors leaving the ministry.

The following experts were interviewed between December 2014 and January 2015.

1. H.B. London- President of H.B. London Ministries and Pastor to Pastors Emeritus, Focus on the Family
2. Adam Mason- Minister of Counseling Services, Houston's First Baptist Church
3. Jared Pingleton- Director, Counseling Services, Focus on the Family
4. James Eubanks- Director of Counseling, First Baptist Church Woodstock, Georgia
5. Donald Hicks- President, Church Health Solutions
6. Richard Krejcir- Director, Into Thy Word Ministries
7. Jamie Johns- Corporate Chaplain, Houston, TX
8. Melissa Haas- Direct of Support Groups, Hope Quest Ministries
9. Gary Sweeten- Co-Founder, Sweeten Life Systems
10. Ken Swetland- Sr. Professor of Ministry, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

11. Kathy Litton- National Consultant for Ministry to Pastors' Wives, North American Mission Board
12. Lance Witt- President, Replenish Ministries
13. Mike MacKenzie- Clinical Director, Marble Retreat
14. Chuck Shoemake- Director of Care Ministries, The Foursquare Church
15. Kari MacKenzie- Executive Director, Marble Retreat
16. Troy Haas- Director of Restoration Ministries, First Baptist Church Woodstock, Georgia

## **Introduction**

Each year, people leave the pastorate. In many cases, this is a voluntary move, such as retirement or moving to another ministry position. Unfortunately, there are other cases where pastors leave the ministry, never to return. These pastors leave the ministry due to circumstances concerning their families, the demands of the position, or personal moral lapses. This report will identify and explore circumstances and factors that lead to an exit from ministry.

Certain overarching themes emerge from this research. These themes which are summarized below surfaced multiple times throughout the interviews and are foundational influences on many of the decisions and practices made by the pastors and the churches. These themes will be revisited throughout the report as they relate to the other factors that are discussed.

### ***Demands and Expectations***

The pastorate is a demanding position. Churches often have a preconceived set of expectations to place upon the pastor. These may be legitimate expectations, or they may be unrealistic expectations. Either way, they increase the pressure and stress of being a pastor.

Pastors often place expectations upon themselves. They may want to preach a certain style or lead the church a certain way. Or they may not want to make anyone in the church feel let down. These expectations added with those from the church may cause a pastor to consider leaving the ministry.

### ***Need for Fulfillment***

Human beings need to be fulfilled. This need can be met through someone's marriage, friendships, work, or hobbies. In the case of a pastor, the need for fulfillment may not be met, either at home or at work. This may cause the pastor to look for other sources of fulfillment, some that may damage the pastor's personal and professional life, the end result being an exit from the ministry.

### ***Spiritual and Emotional Health***

Due to the demands of the ministry and their personal lives, pastors may neglect their own spiritual and emotional health. They may not set aside devotional time to spend with God. They may fail to take time to nurture their spiritual health. They can also neglect their emotional health by not taking time off to rest from their work or taking a personal sabbath. By neglecting their spiritual and emotional health, pastors may become more vulnerable to circumstances that could jeopardize their ministry.

## Factors that Contribute to Attrition

Pastors leave the ministry, either voluntarily or involuntarily. At the core, there may be an underlying issue, such as spiritual health or insecurity. These issues often go unchecked and may manifest in another form, such as burnout or a moral lapse. One or more factors may lead the pastor to leave the ministry, and these factors are often interrelated.

Pastors are often reluctant to seek help addressing these factors or the underlying issues. The culture in most churches does not permit pastors to easily admit weaknesses. Resources are not always available or offered to pastors to address these factors. However, there are tangible things that churches can do to protect and build up their pastor.

### BURNOUT

Burnout is one of the more common factors that cause a pastor to leave the ministry. The stress of the ministry may lead a pastor to resign and discourage the pastor from seeking another church. The demands and expectations may be more than the pastor can handle.

Symptoms of burnout often resemble those of clinical depression. A pastor's energy level may be affected. A pastor may begin to react differently to people, becoming irritable or frustrated easily. Pastors could also isolate themselves from other people.

- “Burnout can look a lot like clinical depression. Issues of being apathetic, distance from God, distance with family relationships. These are symptoms not only of burnout but as I said also overlap into symptoms of depression.” (Eubanks)
- “They begin to really show signs of being irritated with people rather than loving people. They end up feeling that the people are just frustrating, just another thing on their to-do list. They’ll isolate themselves because people become so draining. So often the symptoms for burnout look a lot like, from a clinical perspective, like depression.” (K. MacKenzie)
- “Well, I think loss of motivation, discouragement, and depression, loss of passion or enthusiasm for the ministry. I think increased anxiety is a sign.” (Witt)
- “Lack of feeling of joy and satisfaction in their work. They don’t see their own effectiveness even though some of them were so highly effective. I’m not enjoying my job anymore, my ministry anymore. I’m not feeling satisfaction in it. I’m not appreciating other things in life anymore. I just feel drained all the time.” (M. MacKenzie)
- “The isolation that is so endemic of the pastorate, that so many pastors have a tough time being vulnerable because of the shame that wow, my church is only at this and I look over here at First Church of the whatever across town and they’re booming and thriving. And, you know, I just feel like a failure.” (Pingleton)

There are multiple root causes that may lead to burnout. Pastors may be spiritually immature. Pastors may attempt to protect their image by meeting the expectations of the church. Pastors may feel inadequate for the position.

- “One is people pleasing. I think [for] a lot of pastors, we’re trying to keep everybody happy and content. So we often violate our own kind of limits and live as though we don’t have any limits which I think is another piece of this equation – which is bad theology. I think a lot of pastors have been sort of trained in the ‘burnout for Jesus’ mentality.” (Witt)
- “Burnout is just the end result of the inevitable, the real issue resides within the pastor and on some level it may also reside in an unhealthy environment in the church that may have unrealistic expectations and demands upon the pastor.” (Eubanks)
- “The fact that often the needs of a ministry position are greater than our ability to meet all those needs and, therefore, it’s hard to prioritize what to focus on because the needs are so great. And, how do you prioritize some of those needs of ministry at times. And then the inadequacy or feelings of insecurity that get stirred up as a result of that.” (K. MacKenzie)
- “I think we way underestimate the pastor’s involvement in trauma of people that he cares for and I think we way underestimate, I guess I would even say like post-traumatic stress.” (Shoemake)
- “It could be just over work, over responsibility. Not being able to maintain a healthy schedule for whatever reason.” (Litton)
- “Doing too much for too long without any breaks. Just living on adrenaline, you know. Cranking a sermon out on Saturday because I’ve been busy all week with other fires I’m putting out.” (M. MacKenzie)

Measures can be taken to prevent burnout. Changes to a pastor’s schedule or responsibilities may be able to address this. But the situation may be more severe and require the help of a professional counselor.

- “The ability to set some boundaries and be able to notice your own limits and know that you do have limits, accepting your limits. Not choosing the process I think pastors have to go through is recognizing that it’s okay to have limitations and I do have limitations.” (K. MacKenzie)
- “Firmly insist to recharge, recreate, and reconnect because again, as we all know, pastors, one of the burnout factors is that you give and you give and you give until you give out.” (Pingleton)
- “Respecting your Sabbath and respecting their vacation time. In other words that means taking it always.” (M. MacKenzie)
- “Things like personal retreats, solitude, times away where you can think and reflect and pray. To me, that’s crucial. I think more pastors need some life-giving friendships where they’re not the pastor and they’re not on, but actually friendships that replenish their life and fill them up.” (Witt)
- “Burnout is prevented by a pastor regulating his resources, his resources of time and energy, and when one isn’t regulating those resources there’s a reason for it. Typically it is revolving around the inability to say no.” (Eubanks)

In many cases, pastors are able to rebound from burnout. This requires rest and time away from the pastorate, as well as a different approach to job responsibilities. In addition to rest, the pastor must also address underlying issues that caused the burnout.

- “With the right rest and time and refreshment – physical, but more importantly spiritual and mental refreshment – a pastor, yes, can easily rebound. The circle is to not going back to doing it the same way.” (M. MacKenzie)
- “They can rebound from it if they deal with the underlying issues. He needs to understand what brought it on and make the changes that contributed to the onset of it.” (Eubanks)
- “It depends on how severe the burnout is. So I think a pastor often has to learn some new habits and he has to develop some new convictions.” (Witt)

## MORAL LAPSE

Another factor for a pastor leaving the ministry is a moral lapse. Common moral lapses include extramarital affairs and other sexual sins. Drug and alcohol abuse can also be counted under this factor. Moral lapses may also encompass integrity issues such as lying, abuse of power, or financial mismanagement.

A moral lapse can be rooted in a pastor’s need for self fulfillment. It can begin as the fulfillment of an emotional need and escalate to the fulfillment of a physical need. Often, pastors are trying to fill a void in their life, and the fulfillment may take numerous forms.

- “Many of the moral failures are found in trying to fill a void in their lives. But where there is a vacuum in a pastor’s life, he’s gonna fill it with something because he needs some kind of fulfillment. And many times that fulfillment is a result of feeling empty and dried up spiritually.” (London)
- “Affairs begin as an emotional bond and then through the emotional bond affairs escalate into the physical. Their needs for affirmation or approval or for comfort, acceptance. And it’s just a matter of time until it becomes sexual at that point.” (Witt)
- “You’ve got characterological issues. So one of the predispositions, if you will, the predisposition to narcissism. The predisposition to a culture of entitlement that’s present within the person.” (Mason)
- “Pastors often feel like they are not rewarded properly. That makes them vulnerable. But they’re either not getting enough salary or they’re not getting enough ‘atta boy’s,’ nice comments from people in the church. And so they may, then, be vulnerable to somebody who makes themselves available to them and before you know it, they’re involved in a relationship that is sinful and destructive.” (Swetland)
- “Moral failings are going to come out if there are really weak character issues.” (Litton)

Many times, moral lapses go unnoticed by those working with the pastor or the pastor’s family. Though difficult to detect, early signs that a moral lapse may emerge do exist. The pastor may become defensive when asked about certain situations. The pastor may be spending an unusual amount of time away from the office.

- “I think a big one is hiding, lying, justifying . Various hiding behaviors are happening or lying behaviors whether that’s to the spouse or to the staff, those are early warning signs. Covering, really covering up.” (K. MacKenzie)

- “Insecure leaders who need affirmation to feel okay about themselves. Who get defensive or hurt or critical of others have kind of defensive angry reactions if they are criticized.” (M. Haas)
- “But conflict in the home is one that can be kept secret for a while. Two is the lack of preparation for the sermons on Sunday or for what he’s doing. Three is that he takes a lot of time away from the office. Four is that he might be spending too much time alone with one person in the church or one person outside of the church that leads to an emotional affair.” (London)

Moral lapses may result from a pastor counseling a church member, especially one of the opposite sex. Limitations on how often a pastor counsels someone may be an effective preventive step. The pastor’s marriage is also an important piece to preventing a moral lapse.

- “People on a ministerial staff shouldn’t meet with a person more than once or twice. If there’s an issue that is longer than that, that’s beyond a pastoral care or spiritual direction issue, that needs to be referred to either an outside counselor or an in-house counselor if you have it.” (Mason)
- “Keep working on their own marriage to make sure that the delight of their hearts is with their spouse, that they’re not looking around because they just can’t believe how God has blessed them so with a happy spouse and a happy marriage.” (Swetland)
- “Accountability for themselves and accountability in very broad definition, a sense of do you counsel somebody from the opposite sex when there’s not somebody else in your office.” (Mason)

Churches and denominations can take measures to help prevent moral lapses. This may require a culture change within the church, viewing the pastor as a real person who faces temptation. Another measure would be for the church to offer pastors the help they need, such as marriage or personal counseling.

- “I think there has to be a cultural shift away from this notion that a pastor can’t struggle. I think if there was more openness that the churches in general communicated to their pastor, ‘Hey, we know you have clay feet just like everyone else, so we want you to get any help you need, any time you need it, and maybe even providing the resources for it and that it’s okay.’” (Eubanks)
- “They can have the kind of policies and guidelines that help protect the pastor from sticky situations. Providing accountability in terms of having people in place that the pastor can refer to when he has a situation that he feels could put him in danger or make him vulnerable.” (M. Haas)
- “The understanding that this can happen anywhere and to build into conversations with the minister or with the candidate at their church of what kind of systems that might help them build an atmosphere of accountability” (Litton)
- “Keep insisting and encouraging the pastor to have an accountability partner, a soul brother, a soul sister, somebody that they meet with regularly.” (Swetland)
- “So I just think keeping your pastor happy. Surrounding him with people who pray for him and encourage him.” (London)



When seeking help, confidentiality is crucial. For this reason, pastors turn to licensed counselors. Recovery may be possible within the church, but in most cases the pastor may be best served to seek counsel outside of the church, even outside of town.

- “The variable may very well be that it is such a deep part of their personality and their own sense of self that they really need to get some professional counseling to deal with that.” (Swetland)
- “Licensed counselors will lose their license and lose their careers if they break confidentiality. Many will find someone in my next town or in the next church who is licensed, who I can have the confidence of knowing this person will lose their career if they repeat what I say to them and I’m going to let myself trust them.” (Eubanks)
- “I think it would probably in most cases take someone from the outside that’s not caught up in the emotions of the local church sense of betrayal and disappointment and all those things that might be in place there.” (Litton)
- “Find a counselor outside of your own hometown that you could go and confide in. Two, you need to call organizations that care for pastors that have a resource list of pastor care.” (London)

## CONFLICT IN THE CHURCH

Conflict within the church is also a factor that causes pastors to leave the ministry. Common conflicts range from doctrinal differences to differences in leadership style. Different expectations on the part of the pastor or the church may also lead to conflict.

- “I think that some of the conflict is between the pastor and the deacon or deacons. It can be a conflict between the pastor and the patriarch or the matriarch of the church, or some would say church boss.” (Hicks)
- “Often it’s their leadership style. Whether it’s they have conflict with associate pastors who are not appreciating their leadership style or whether it’s people above them like a board of directors or elder board or whatever it may be in that particular church is not liking the way that they’re leading the church.” (M. MacKenzie)
- “Change – where the pastor’s trying to lead the church to a more contemporary, relevant, breaking out of some of the traditions. That’s not how we do this or how we’ve done this in the past.” (Witt)
- “Differing expectations for what the pastor sees as his or her gifting and calling and the skill set with what the congregation had expected that he or she would be doing. The doctrinal differences of pastors that went into the church, having done what they thought was a pretty thorough job of understanding the doctrine of the church.” (Swetland)

Certain character issues make pastors vulnerable to conflict. Insecurity may cause a pastor to be vulnerable to conflict. Lack of personal and spiritual maturity could also contribute to a pastor’s vulnerability.

- “I call it the ostrich complex. They put their head in the sand when conflict comes out and hopes it gets over before they come out. I see that pastors refuse to deal with the conflict.” (Hicks)
- “Lack of maturity and when I say that I mean personal maturity. So then spiritual maturity in that they’re insecure. And in that insecurity are trying to control things more than they maybe need to or trying to avoid conflict because they don’t handle it well because it threatens their own sense of wellbeing.” (M. MacKenzie)
- “A lack of emotional health to be able to deal with that and handle the stress and the criticism of it.” (Witt)
- “Pastors tend to be people who have a high need to be liked, be loved, to be appreciated. They’re people that are afraid that people are not going to like them, love them.” (Swetland)

The cause of a conflict may be an underlying issue, such as insecurity. Insecurity may influence how a pastor approaches conflict, either by taking control of it or avoiding it. Another cause could be that the person does not understand the responsibilities that go along with the office of pastor.

- “When a pastor is insecure or not sure of their calling, not sure of their abilities, they’re afraid people are going to reject them, and if they’re in the middle of a conflict then, they’re afraid that they could come out on the losing end of that and so they’re not going to get involved. Sometimes, then, if a person is thinking down the road, their own family security, their own financial security is at stake there. So instead of seeing it objectively and really seeing it as a possibility for growth in ministry and help encourage them to become stronger as a result of conflict, they tend to hide from it out of a sense of their own insecurity and fear of what’s going to happen down the road if they get involved.” (Swetland)
- “They have developed a certain way of coping with that insecurity whether it’s having a lot of control or whether it’s avoiding. [These] are a couple of big ones. And then that leads to troubles for them in their leadership.” (M. MacKenzie)
- “Not understanding who they are as a pastor. What is my responsibility? How do I need to handle this? And a lack of using biblical guidelines in church discipline.” (Hicks)

Pastors can approach how they and their churches handle conflict in different ways. Pastors can teach and prepare their churches to prevent and/or resolve conflict. However, pastors may avoid conflict and never address the source of it.

- “I think that the goal should be to learn how to resolve conflict. Learn the skills to resolve conflict in a healthy way where there’s reconciliation and love.” (Witt)
- “There are definitely classes you can take on dealing with conflict in leadership. There are programs out there that you can self-educate and use as steps to guide you through. I also think going to counseling is a great thing. Or having a coach where you can have a venue where you can know some of the personal issues that you bring into conflict.” (M. MacKenzie)

- “You never avoid conflict. Any time I’ve seen a pastor avoid conflict it just gets worse and worse. I think it’s about prevention and intervention. A good way to do the prevention part for example is to teach the church about how to handle conflict biblically.” (Hicks)
- “One can prepare for conflict by understanding the conflict and the fact that it’s going to happen. We need to be working with pastors to help them prepare for handling conflicts so that they feel more confident, understand the dynamics of conflict, and get in there and begin the work toward resolution.” (Swetland)
- “And conflict is not bad. Destructive conflict is.” (Hicks)

## POOR FIT WITH THE CHURCH

A pastor is not always a good fit with a particular church. Several factors may contribute to this poor fit, such as the demographics of the church or the pastor’s personality. The pastor may not have any experience ministering in a specific context, which ranges from church size to geographical culture.

- “They come into a congregation and they have not had any experience with that size or the way the church is organized and how it’s run traditionally. The unwritten rules in a church are much stronger than the written theological or constitutional rules.” (Sweeten)
- “One of the first things would be demographics. A young pastor in a congregation that’s primarily in an older community with older members. Personality factors, different churches have different personalities. A poor fit might be in terms of skill or experience.” (T. Haas)
- “Unbiblical expectations on a congregation’s part would be right near the top of my concerns. No man can meet them and I think that many have failed at trying, only to realize they never should have even tried. So I think the CEO model denies a biblical ecclesiology and just makes it inevitable a poor fit.” (Johns)
- “Contextualization. I think in contextualization you have to look at who you are and if you’re married, who your wife is, and your family and how you will be able to contextualize into a new ministry area and how everyone’s going to fit into that.” (Hicks)

Warning signs exist that a pastor is a poor fit. There may be a lack of interest in the church’s history or an absence of friendships. The pastor may have unrealistic expectations about bringing change to the church.

- “Not building close relationships with people within the church. Not having an interest in the church and its history. I think it’s also important in that the pastor’s wife and family are onboard moving to that new church and that they feel a camaraderie, they feel a calling to that church and that city as well.” (Hicks)
- “The pastor is a change agent and very often filled with idealistic notions about how easy change is and listens to great sermons by internationally famous people and all and watches them on television and it looks like all you’ve got to do is stand up there.” (Sweeten)

- “The measurables are going to be trending downward: the satisfaction trending downward, dissatisfaction upward, communication problems, a sense of disconnection, staff leaving.” (T. Haas)
- “After personal failures, deep, frustrating, agonizing defeats many will decide I can’t do this anymore. I can’t do this. And oftentimes it’s I cannot do this. It’s me. Oftentimes, as well, it is I see environment and I cannot change this.” (Johns)

Churches and pastors can be better prepared to find “better fit.” The church may need to be more honest about who it is and what type of personality its pastor needs to have. The pastor may need to get out of the church office and build relationships and friendships with people in the church.

- “They need to get out in the real world, play golf with real people, have friends who are not necessarily Christian or church people and don’t come across always as the clergy. So they need to be – and that’s before they ever take the church.” (Sweeten)
- “I think the key thing there is that the church needs to know who they really are. Not what they want to be, but what they really have been and what they currently are. The members of the pastor search committee are not just politically correct people but people across the spectrum that are spiritually mature and also have a pulse of the church of where it’s been and where it is and where people desire for it to go.” (Hicks)
- “But I think the state of our churches, generally speaking, is such that finding a majority that could get an under-shepherd that might be God’s choice, that might come and stay for a while is extremely difficult.” (Johns)
- “Looking at history, the personalities involved. . . I think a much deeper look at personality and some of those more personality-driven aspects of leadership would be very important to making sure you do not have this lack of fit problem.” (T. Haas)
- “Have a written contract or covenant agreement. A pastor covenant that basically says what I’m going to do for the church, what the church is going to do for me and what we’re going to do together.” (Hicks)

If it is determined that a pastor is not working well, there needs to be a plan to approach this, preferably one that is gracious and handles the situation respectfully. If the pastor’s personality is different from the previous pastor’s, it may involve a discussion with church leadership on how to address it.

- “Then try to find somebody to sit down with the pastor and say, this is not working. And we need to find some face-saving way for both of us to separate, help you find something else.” (Sweeten)
- “I think the pastor would be best served by sitting down with the church leadership and walking through that I’m different from the [previous] pastor and I’m realizing that more and more. He was deeply loved and I’m very different from him personality-wise. How can we work through this? How can we find a way through this?” (T. Haas)
- “But one would hope that, you know, one would have, biblically anyway, a group of men, elders, in which there would be a transparent, sort of ongoing conversation about everything. That’s the only way. So grace can be afforded by one who knows the

grace of our Lord. That only happens in human relationships as one apprehends our grace and apprehends the blessing of being a brother to a brother. “ (Johns)

## FAMILY ISSUES

A pastor’s family may be the reason for leaving the ministry. Marital conflict can be a result of pastors giving ministry priority over their spouses. A pastor’s children may feel neglected in favor of the church.

- “If marital conflict starts happening around church responsibilities or wives become resentful of ministry or hurt in ministry and she is unable to support her husband, then it sets up an internal conflict for him that is going to be very difficult to manage. The internal conflict of course is ‘What is my priority?’ I feel called to ministry, my wife is hurting, who – what do I choose?” (M. Haas)
- “I think in terms of children, when kids start acting out I think there’s a couple of reasons why guys in the ministry think. . . shame or feelings of failure that their children really act out in pretty significant ways. They may feel like they’re not qualified to minister because they can’t take care of their own house or their children are struggling so much.” (M. Haas)
- “The family begins to realize that the ministry is hazardous to their family health and even spirituality because the church is so toxic or so contentious that it dribbles down into the home. And it creates a disconnect for the spouse and the kids to the point to where they don’t even like going to church anymore as a result of that. They want to leave. The other thing is that the younger pastors, their wives see how hard they work and how difficult it is and they just say, ‘We’re not going to allow the church to destroy our marriage or our family.’” (London)
- “Churches don’t understand the demands that parents have to kids and so they’re so demanding on the pastor that the pastor does not have proper time to spend with his spouse or the children. And then I think the other thing is when a pastor is so involved in pastoring and the demands of the church are so hard that he doesn’t have time to properly communicate and fulfill his role as a husband and a father.” (London)
- “In other words, the church or the ministry is getting all of the attention that the wife would like to have. And she ends up resenting some things. And the thing is it’s like her best friend, too. She likes the church, too. But she gets into a conflict. And I see that often. It builds up over the years, over the time and finally explodes somewhere.” (Shoemaker)

Certain signs may signal a pastor’s marriage or family is being affected. A pastor’s spouse may be absent from church activities or events. The pastor may be dedicating an unnecessary amount of time to ministry duties. Children may be resentful towards the church.

- “If I’m noticing that my pastor’s wife is not involved at all in any of the ministry opportunities, not that she is ultra involved because that’s equally unhealthy but she is

- completely absent from church activities, ministry events, church functions, probably be a big red flag for me that something's not right in Kansas.” (M. Haas)
- “The pastor never takes a break, never takes a sabbatical. He’s at the church all the time. He’s always visiting hospitals. If church members or a friend notices that he’s out more than he’s home, that’s going to be a red flag.” (M. Haas)
  - “The spouse’s lack of interest or lack of attendance in things that have to do with church events or church things. I think wherever there would be even just little hints of conflict that it’s a little bit more public, I don’t mean public pulpit-wise, but just that would just kind of stir in their relating within the church framework that people can begin to see it or sense it.” (Shoemake)
  - “You’re so busy doing the pastor thing that you don’t ever deal with the unresolved conflict in the home. And pastors’ homes are no different than laymen’s homes with the exception is they don’t have weekends to recoup.” (London)
  - “Elementary children typically aren’t acting out in ways that are going to signal red flags, not till kids get to adolescence that they have enough autonomy that you’re going to start really seeing what has been happening all along. And that is resentment over the time that dad spends in ministry, feeling un-valuable, insignificant, not mattering, others matter more, that kind of thing. Unfortunately that’s happening all along, but we normally don’t see it, the results, until kids reach adolescence.” (M. Haas)

There are actions that pastors can take to protect their marriages and families. One is to set healthy boundaries on the amount of time spent at church. Another is to set aside time with no distractions to spend with the family.

- “I think there needs to be an awareness of, he really does need the discipline of spending whatever is the key to his marriage – and I think each one of them are different. . . There are certain things they can do together that, both of them would say ‘Yes, our marriage thrives or flourishes when these things are a part of all of that.’” (Shoemake)
- “I think healthy boundaries around time that he spends in church, around his time for starters. Healthy boundaries in terms of his relationship to church members, especially women. And no ongoing counseling relationships with women.” (M. Haas)
- “I think also intentionality about maintaining connection in the marriage, going on dates, spending time together, taking time out, prioritizing the wives, not always being on 24 hour call, delegating to another minister or deacon or somebody so that you’re not always on, that you get some uninterrupted time with your spouse.” (M. Haas)
- “First of all, there needs to be a real commitment to the relationship, that the relationship [with the spouse] becomes the most important relationship. I think the second thing is that they need to communicate and, if the problems arise, they need to relate to them and do whatever they can to solve them or it’ll become like a festering wound. I think the third thing is that they need down time. They need time to be away. They need time to recover. They need time just to get away and relax and many churches do not give their pastors that extra time if they’re working 20 hours a day or whatever the case may be.” (London)
- “Time, quality time, undistracted time is absolutely necessary. Just like dad turns off phone to be with mom. Dad turns off phone to be with kids. So that when they’re at a

game or doing something together, he doesn't get a phone call that takes him away. Have authentic conversations with children about weaknesses and failures, personal weaknesses and failures so that they don't feel from dad the same pressure they might feel from church members to be perfect." (M. Haas)

Churches can also take measures to help protect a pastor's spouse or family. Realistic expectations need to be established, especially concerning family time and ministry related responsibilities. Another measure is to make sure the pastor's family feels loved by the church.

- "Have realistic expectations for pastors and their families: provide paid vacations and time away, church members filling in the gap for emergency situations, hospital visits, not expecting pastor or his family to do everything, partnering with him." (M. Haas)
- "I think every church needs a clergy support group, whose main objective it is to keep their pastor and his family healthy, well fed, well housed, make sure their automobiles are safe to drive with proper tires. They need to make sure that they pay them adequately. When a pastor is not paid properly, most of his time is spent trying to figure out how he's going to support his family. As a result of that, the pastor left. A well cared for pastor will be a well organized and dedicated servant of his people." (London)
- "Some groups have pastoral relations committee. There needs to be somebody church-wise, I think the church, itself, needs to have a certain sense of ways they can help in the care and well-being of the pastor and family." (Shoemake)

## List of Factors Identified by Experts that Relate to Attrition

### CONFLICT IN THE CHURCH

#### Common conflicts

- Conflict between pastors and deacon(s) or elder(s)
- Conflict between pastor and church patriarch/matriarch
- Misunderstanding of church structure
- Conflict over leadership style
- Pastor unprepared to deal with conflict
- Pastor trying to lead church in change
- Differing expectations
- Doctrinal differences

#### Character issues that make pastor vulnerable to conflict

- Insecurity
- Refusal to deal with conflict
- Not understanding who they are in Christ
- Not understanding who they are as a pastor
- Lack of spiritual maturity and personal maturity
- Emotional health of the leader
- High need to be liked, loved, and appreciated
- Not having a good self image
- Afraid people are not going to like them or love them

#### Causes of conflict

- Church may not know how to handle conflict
- Lack of church discipline
- Pastor and church are not prepared for conflict
- Not dealing with conflict biblically
- Church views pastor as a trouble maker
- Have not dealt with issues in their own life
- Hide from conflict
- Worried about family security and financial security

#### Recommendations on how to address or prepare for conflict

- Conflict prevention and conflict intervention; Galatians 6:1
- Learn how to resolve conflict; learn the skills to resolve conflict in a healthy way
- Culture of peacemaking has to be set as an example by the pastor
- Can prepare for conflict by understanding it and the fact it is going to happen
- Teach church how to handle conflict
- Take a course or attend a workshop on handling conflict in leadership
- Never avoid conflict, but in some cases avoidance may be appropriate
- Be mentored or receive counseling



- Pastor and those in leadership need to listen to the people carefully for signs of conflict
- Pastor can meet with elders/deacons and get their take on what people are concerned about

## MORAL LAPSE

### Common moral lapses

- Extramarital affairs, either inside or outside the church
- Sexual sin
- Addiction to pornography
- Financial mismanagement and dishonesty
- Drug and alcohol addiction
- Integrity issues, such as lying to cover up a failure
- Abuse of power
- Seeking fulfillment

### Issues that can lead to an extramarital affair

- Pastor not happy in marriage relationship; communication is not good in the marriage
- Pastor counseling someone of the opposite sex leads to inappropriate physical relationship
- Character issues such as a predisposition to narcissism or a culture of entitlement
- Affairs often begin as emotionally based and become physical
- The other person begins to fulfill emotional needs (affirmation, acceptance) and moves to sexual
- The need for affirmation; trying to fill a void in the pastor's life
- Pastor feels not rewarded properly: financially, encouraged, appreciated
- Unresolved conflict at home
- No accountability
- Very limited time spent alone with the Lord

### Warning signs

- Hiding, lying, justifying, covering up
- Defensiveness when asked about situation
- Minister is unhealthy and unprepared
- In some cases, the minister may have been a predator
- Pastors is not resting well
- Neglecting spiritual disciplines
- Conflict in the home
- Lack of preparation for the sermons or for work
- Taking a lot of time away from the office
- Spending too much time with one person, inside or outside of the church

### Measures pastors can take to prevent moral lapses

- Pastor works on own marriage

- Ministerial staff should not meet with a person more than once or twice; beyond that refer to a counselor
- Pastor does not need to feel responsibility to fix the issue
- Pastor understanding role in counseling
- Accountability when counseling someone of the opposite sex (not alone, window in the door of the office, secretary outside the door, etc.)
- Month long sabbatical once a year for full-time minister
- Continuing education

What churches and denominations can do to prevent moral lapses?

- Cultural shift from idea that pastor cannot struggle
- Create atmosphere of healthy confession, repentance, and healing
- Move away from a culture of image management
- Policies and guidelines to protect pastor from dangerous situations
- Have systems in place to protect pastor
- Openness from the church to get pastor whatever help is needed: marriage counseling, personal counseling, etc.
- Have a more healthy culture to realize that people can get help and be freed from situation
- Make sure pastor does not burn out
- Check on pastor to see if they are taking breaks, resting, doing ok emotionally
- Providing accountability by having people that the pastor can refer to
- Insisting and encouraging the pastor to have an accountability partner; someone who can share everything in confidence
- Seminaries doing a better job teaching pastors how to balance their lives spiritually, emotionally, relationally
- Pastor having mentorship that would create accountability
- Provide help with marriage enrichment
- Sometimes pastors won't turn to denominations because they are afraid denominations will side with the church

The need for accountability

- Pastor may travel long distance for counseling away from church
- Important to be inside the church so pastor can model community
- Culture of spiritual formation can help lead to accountability inside the church
- Mentor can help pastor; mentor may need to be an older and more mature pastor
- When looking for mentor, find someone with similar interests
- Pastor may distrust other pastors; may be afraid to talk because may be a sermon example
- Mentorship must be honest accountability, not just a good fellowship time

What kind of help should pastor get?

- Professional counselors; licensed counselor will lose license and career if break confidentiality
- Counselor outside of the town
- Help from outside the church that is not caught in the situation

- Pastor needs to reach out to someone they trust
- An organization that supports pastors
- Should not always go to a mission director or denominational leader; their responsibility may be to the denomination and not to the pastor

## BURNOUT

### Symptoms of burnout

- Burnout can look like clinical depression
- Fatigue, difficulty concentrating, being apathetic, distance from God, distance with family relationships
- Forgetfulness, losing things, being lethargic, feeling overwhelmed
- Isolation
- Being irritated with people; feeling people are frustrating
- Lack of investment in their ministry
- Discouraged about their work
- Low motivation for anything; loss of motivation
- Lack of joy, not just in ministry
- Emotional and physical exhaustion
- Spiritual depletion
- Compassion fatigue
- Workload; not setting clear boundaries
- Lack of nurturing & reinvesting in their marriage

### Root causes of burnout

- Emotional and spiritual immaturity
- Spiritual formation, spiritual practices and healthy souls have been pushed aside
- Weak leadership
- Traumatic situations, emotionally draining situations
- Lack of preparation
- Performance oriented, need to succeed, affirmation of other people, needing to be viewed as right
- Pastor compelled to protect image; feel must appear perfect
- Feeling of inadequacy; feel like a failure
- Have very few deep, true friendships
- Expectations from church (external) and from pastor (internal)
- Demands of the job are greater than ability to meet those demands
- Fear of being judged or rejected by the church
- Health issues
- Doing too much for too long without any breaks
- Disillusionment with ministry
- Size of church has different issues that still contribute to burnout

### Measures to prevent burnout

- Pastor regulates resources (time & energy)

- Ability to set boundaries, notice and accept limits
- Spending personal time with God; rest for the soul
- Pastor comes to terms with what success in ministry means
- Pastor has willingness to say no to some expectations
- Having a hobby
- Taking a Sabbath, taking time off and resting
- Take time to “unplug” from church
- Personal retreats
- Life-giving friendships
- Have a supporting group
- Revisit calling
- Pastors have to own their own personal health
- Firmly insist that pastor recharge, recreate, and reconnect
- Denominations can cultivate relationships
- Congregation can bless and benefit the pastor

#### When and how a church should get involved

- Church can provide assurance that it supports the pastor and wants to get help
- Assure pastor that job is not in jeopardy
- Church should get involved the day a pastor is hired
- Make sure pastor takes time off and has reasonable job description
- Church must come alongside the pastor graciously and lovingly
- Want to come alongside to help

#### Pastor rebounding from burnout

- Pastor can rebound but must understand what brought on burnout and deal with underlying issues
- Pastor can rebound with rest, time, and refreshment
- Pastor can rebound but must learn new habits and develop new convictions
- Many pastors do not return to ministry due to effects on spouse and children
- Pastor may have to learn limits, both physically and emotionally

#### POOR FIT WITH THE CHURCH

##### Ways pastor can be a poor fit

- Lack of contextualization/not understanding the local culture
- Preaching style
- Leadership style
- No experience with the way a particular church is organized and run
- Not knowing the “unwritten rules” of a church
- Unbiblical expectations on a church’s part
- CEO model makes for a poor fit
- Different leadership styles, temperaments, and personality types

### Symptoms that there is not a good fit

- Not building close relationships within church
- No interest in the church and its history
- No affection or affinity for the community
- Family not onboard with moving to new church
- Does not understand the church's history or environment
- Believes can bring about change by preaching like a famous pastor
- Personal failures, agonizing defeats
- Pastor "not a good fit" is usually a generic reason for asking pastor to leave
- Church does not always have biblical reason; act because of "hurt feelings"

### Ways churches and pastors can be better prepared to find pastor that is a good fit

- Church needs to know who it really is
- Pastor search committee must be in tune with the church and where it wants to go
- A written contract/covenant between church and the pastor
- Set realistic expectations for what you need as a church and what you want
- Church more familiar with biblical description of pastor or "under shepherd," biblical model
- Pastor can be involved in the "real world"; have friends who are not necessarily church people

### Actions to take if a pastor is not a good fit

- Find a face-saving way to separate; help pastor find something else
- Bring in church consultant
- Leadership in church has transparent, ongoing conversations; graciously
- Relate properly to each other in the Lord

## LACK OF PREPARATION

### Problems caused by a lack of preparation

- No preparation in how to handle relationships, deal with conflict, deal with differences
- Little emphasis on the people side of the ministry
- Lack of practical preparation in Bible colleges and seminaries
- Failure

### Symptoms pastor is not prepared

- Trying to fit in with modern America
- No longer committed to reading Scripture

### Essential skills

- Public speaking skills and basics of the Gospel
- Listening skills, problem solving, conflict management
- None, other than the call of God
- Develop our personalities through the Holy Spirit

## Recommendations

- Take courses on interpersonal skills
- Become involved in real life with people
- Wisdom and counsel of other people; mentorship

## FAMILY ISSUES

### Ways that a pastor's family may cause the pastor to leave the ministry

- Weak marriage
- Conflict in the family
- Spouse become resentful of ministry and unable to support spouse
- Family realizes that ministry is hazardous to family health; creates disconnect between the spouse and kids and the church
- Children acting out
- Pastor may feel unqualified for ministry because can't take care of home
- Feel like family is in a fishbowl
- Church is so demanding of pastor; does not spend proper time with spouse or children
- Spending too much time in ministry and not enough time ministering to family
- Physical health: lack of insurance or access to healthcare

### Signs that family issues may lead to leaving the ministry

- Pastor's spouse not involved at all in ministry opportunities; absent from church activities
- Pastor spending too much time at church; always out (visiting hospitals, etc) more than at home
- Signs harder to detect with children; don't act out much until adolescence
- Spouse's lack of interest in or attendance at church

### Actions crucial to protecting pastor's marriage

- Healthy boundaries around time spent at church
- Healthy boundaries around relationships to church members or church staff, especially opposite sex
- Maintaining connection in the marriage: dates, time together, delegating to other staff members
- Spending time doing whatever is key to the marriage, things they both enjoy doing

### Actions crucial to protecting pastor's family

- Be at child's activities and be involved with kids
- Quality, undistracted time with kids; turn off phone
- Having authentic conversations with children about weaknesses and failures
- Help kids not feel pressure from dad that they may feel from the church
- Real commitment to the relationship with spouse; must be the most important relationship
- Communication
- Listen to the spouse talk about what is going on in the family, especially with the children

What can churches do differently?

- Realistic expectations for pastors and their families
- Paid vacations and time away; not expecting pastor or pastor's family to do everything
- Leadership prays for pastor's family, affirm them, and encourage them
- Make sure counseling is available to pastor and pastor's family
- Have a "clergy support group" whose main objective is to keep pastor and family healthy
- Pay the pastor adequately so pastor is not spending time trying to figure out how to support family
- Pastoral relations committee
- Give the pastor and spouse a break; time to get away