

RESILIENCE:

FINDING WHOLENESS IN MINISTRY
BY WAY OF THE CROSS

STUDY:

Caring for Your Pastor

Small Group Participant's Guide

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Grand Rapids
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Cornerstone University

Caring for Your Pastor

OVERVIEW

The goal of this study is to help church leadership teams (boards, staff-parish relations committees, etc.) understand how to care for their pastors and ministry staff well. Leadership teams can incorporate this six-lesson study into regularly scheduled meetings or engage most of the lessons in a retreat setting.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this study, learners will be able to

- + Describe the local church's role in caring for its pastors and ministry staff;
- + Evaluate their expectations of their pastors and ministry staff in light of Scripture;
- + Identify systems and structures within the church that can potentially erode the wellbeing of its pastor and ministry staff;
- + Examine the ways the church currently supports the wellbeing of its pastors and ministry staff; and
- + Make a plan for supporting the wellbeing of their pastors and ministry staff.

LESSONS

- + Defining Wellbeing
- + Pastoral Wellbeing
- + Great Expectations
- + Community for Pastors
- + Confidants and Allies
- + A New Plan

MATERIALS NEEDED

- + Internet access for videos
- + Computer, projector, and/or speakers to show videos
- + Whiteboard, poster board, or large sticky notes
- + Dry erase or bold markers



Defining Wellbeing

LESSON OVERVIEW

In this lesson, you will reflect on your understanding of wellbeing and compare it to a researcher's definition.

SCRIPTURE MEDITATION: JOHN 10:10

SMALL GROUP ACTIVITY

Divide into small groups of 3-4 people. With your small group, try to come up with a definition of 'wellbeing.' Write your definition on a large sticky-note or poster to share with the group.

Wellbeing is _____
_____.

- + After hearing other groups' definitions, what common themes do you observe ?

- + What do you think contributes to a person's sense of wellbeing?

A DEFINITION OF WELLBEING

In his book, *Flourishing in Ministry: How to Cultivate Clergy Wellbeing*, University of Notre Dame professor Matt Bloom writes about wellbeing:



Caring for Your Pastor

“Wellness is typically used for our physical health, while wellbeing is used for our psychological, social, and spiritual health. Wellness is about a healthy body and mind; wellbeing is about a flourishing life.”¹

What does Bloom’s definition add to what we’ve already discussed about wellbeing? What comes to mind when you hear the phrase, “a flourishing life”?

VIDEO

Watch the video, “Four Components of Wellbeing.” Dr. Matt Bloom offers a research-based framework for understanding wellbeing.

LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION

- + In the video, Dr. Bloom described four components of wellbeing. What were they?
- + In what ways do these four components of wellbeing relate to the definitions and lists we generated earlier?
- + What resonated for you in how Dr. Bloom described wellbeing?
- + What did his framework add to your understanding of wellbeing?

¹ Bloom, M. (2019). *Flourishing in ministry: How to cultivate clergy wellbeing*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, p. 2.



Pastoral Wellbeing

LESSON OVERVIEW

In this lesson, you will consider the distinctives of pastoral wellbeing.

SCRIPTURE MEDITATION: MATTHEW 14:13-21

LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION

In the last lesson, we defined “wellbeing” and considered researcher Matt Bloom’s definition. In this lesson, we’ll focus more specifically on pastors’ wellbeing.

- + Are pastors unique in what contributes to and erodes their wellbeing? Why or why not?

- + Why does a pastor’s wellbeing matter?

VIDEO

Watch the video, “Why Pastoral Wellbeing Matters,” in which Dr. Matt Bloom describes why he believes pastors’ wellbeing matters.



Caring for Your Pastor

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

After watching the video, discuss the following questions in small groups of 3-4 people.

- + Do you agree with what Bloom said about the importance of pastors' wellbeing? Why or why not?
- + Share an example, positive or negative, of how a pastors' wellbeing has affected their church and/or their community.

PASTORAL WELLBEING SURVEY

Complete the survey on the following page. This is not a scientific survey; therefore, it should not be used to measure your pastor's/pastors' wellbeing or your church's care for your pastor's/pastors' wellbeing. Rather, the purpose of this survey is to stimulate thinking and start conversations.



Pastoral Wellbeing Survey

For each of the questions below, indicate your response by placing a mark on the continuum.

1. How much does your church leadership team know about your pastor's/pastors' wellbeing?

Nothing -----Everything

2. How often does your church leadership team talk with your pastor(s) about their sense of wellbeing?

Never -----Frequently

3. How do you think your pastor is doing in terms of daily wellbeing?

Very Poorly -----Very Well

4. How do you think your pastor is doing in terms of resilience?

Very Poorly -----Very Well

5. How do you think your pastor is doing in terms of authenticity?

Very Poorly -----Very Well

6. How do you think your pastor is doing in terms of thriving?

Very Poorly -----Very Well

7. How would you rate your church on its care for your pastor's/pastors' wellbeing?

Very Poor -----Very Good

8. How would you rate your church as an ecosystem of wellbeing for your pastor?

Very Poor -----Very Good



Caring for Your Pastor

SMALL GROUP ACTIVITY

In your small group, discuss your survey responses. Then, work as a group to grade your church on being an ecosystem of wellbeing for your pastor. Fill out the report card below with a grade (A to F). You will share your report card with the large group.

Report Card

Church Name: _____

We understand the four dimensions of wellbeing.

We have a good sense of our pastor's level of wellbeing.

Our church provides an ecosystem of care for our pastor.

We know how to support the wellbeing of our pastor.



Caring for Your Pastor

LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION

Each group will share its report card. Then, respond to the following questions:

- + What do we already know about pastoral wellbeing?
- + What do we wonder about pastoral wellbeing?
- + What do we need to learn about pastoral wellbeing?



Great Expectations

LESSON OVERVIEW

In this lesson, you will compare the expectations you have for your pastor with what Scripture says about the role of the pastor.

SCRIPTURE MEDITATION: ROMANS 12:3-8

LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION

What do you expect your pastor to know, be, and do? Make a list in response to each question below.

- + What do you expect your pastor to know?

- + What sort of person do you expect your pastor to be?

- + What do you expect your pastor to do?

What are your initial impressions of these lists?



Caring for Your Pastor

SMALL GROUP SCRIPTURE STUDY

Divide into small groups of 3-4 people. Study the passages listed below. As you read each passage, consider the following questions:

- + In what way does this passage pertain to the work of pastors?
- + What does this passage say of what a pastor should know?
- + What does this passage say about what sort of person a pastor should be?
- + What does this passage say about what a pastor should do?

Passages:

- + Micah 3:1-12
- + Acts 6:1-7
- + Acts 20:28-31
- + Ephesians 4:11-13
- + 1 Timothy 3:1-13
- + 1 Timothy 3:14-4:16
- + Titus 1:5-9
- + 1 Peter 5:1-4

NOTES:



Caring for Your Pastor

LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION

Small groups will share what they learned from their Scripture study. Then, the group will respond to the following question:

- + What did you notice as you listened to what each group discovered?
- + What common themes did you observe?

VIDEO

Watch the video, “Pastoral Expectations,” in which Pastor Walter Gibson explains the challenge of meeting the church’s expectations.

LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION

- + In what ways might a church’s unhealthy or unrealistic expectations of its pastor erode the pastor’s wellbeing?
- + If we examine the list we made at the beginning—what we expect our pastor to know, be, and do—what have we listed that seems unhealthy or unrealistic in light of what we’ve seen in Scripture?



Caring for Your Pastor

LEARNING LOG

Complete the following to reflect on and apply what you learned in this lesson.

In his book, *Flourishing in Ministry: How to Cultivate Clergy Wellbeing*, Dr. Matt Bloom states that one aspect of a pastor's daily wellbeing is called "competencies-duties alignment." This "refers to whether a pastor has the knowledge, skills, abilities, and experience needed to undertake the duties of the particular pastoral role the pastor currently fills."²

- + Do you know what your pastor's duties are?

- + How many of your pastor's duties are specified in a job description?

- + How many of your pastor's duties come from the church's expectations?

² Bloom, M. (2019). *Flourishing in ministry: How to cultivate clergy wellbeing*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, p. 9.



Community for Pastors

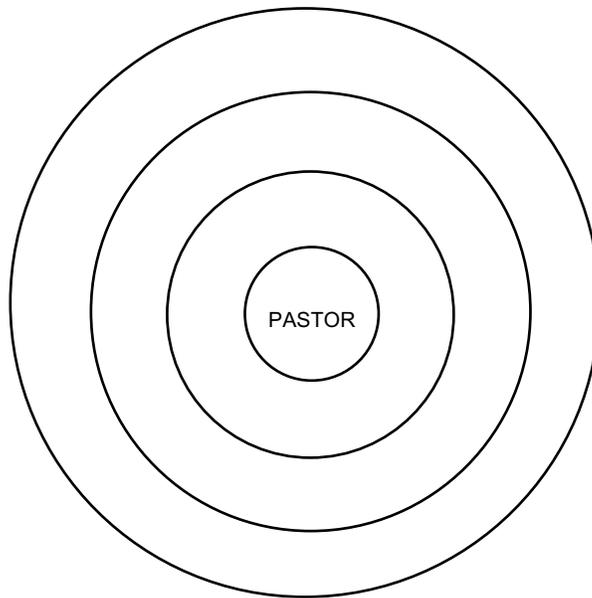
LESSON OVERVIEW

In this lesson, you will learn why community is important for pastoral wellbeing and what types of community are beneficial.

SCRIPTURE MEDITATION: PROVERBS 27:17

INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITY

What sort of community does a pastor need to maintain a sense of wellbeing? What sort of relationships are beneficial? Use the concentric circles below to identify people and groups who might comprise a pastor's community.





Caring for Your Pastor

VIDEO

Watch the video, “The Pastor’s Community,” in which Dr. Chuck DeGroat describes the type of community pastors need in order to thrive.

LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION

Discuss and apply what Dr. DeGroat said in the video by responding to the following questions.

- + According to Dr. DeGroat, why is community important for pastors?
- + Why do you think it's difficult for pastors to develop community?
- + What sort of community does the pastor need?
- + Reflect on your diagram of the pastor’s community. How many of you included a coach, spiritual director, therapist, and/or trusted friend?
- + To what extent does your church allow time and space for your pastor to meet with a coach, spiritual director, therapist, and/or trusted friend?
- + To what extent does your church provide resources (health insurance, stipend, time away, etc.) for seeing a coach, spiritual director or therapist? For meeting with trusted friends or clergy colleagues?

SMALL GROUP ACTIVITY

Divide into small groups of 3-4 individuals. Read the paragraphs below. Highlight or underline any ideas that you find important. Then, respond to the questions that follow.

In his research, Dr. Matt Bloom has investigated the role of congregational culture on the pastor’s wellbeing. He reports, “We find that churches which create a strong, positive culture of inclusion, one that brings pastors in the same circle of acceptance, compassion, and care in which they include all parishioners, also foster very high levels of well-being among the clergy that serve and lead them. Strong, positive relationships with the



Caring for Your Pastor

congregation a pastor serves seem to be among the most important determinants of well-being.”³

A healthy sense of community within the congregation can enhance pastoral wellbeing. However, unhealthy community can erode pastoral wellbeing. Bloom shares, “Another consistent finding in our research is that one of the most potent and damaging factors for pastors’ wellbeing is mistreatment by parishioners.”⁴

- + How do you respond to the research findings that the culture of community and inclusion within the church can affect the wellbeing of the pastor?
- + What are some ways that your church demonstrates acceptance of and care for your pastor?
- + Based on the description above, how well does your church community foster the wellbeing of your pastor?

Very Poor Poor Fair Well Very Well

³ The Flourishing in Ministry Project. 2013. “Flourishing in ministry: Emerging research insights on the well-being of pastors.” Mendoza College of Business, University of Notre Dame, p. 24.

⁴ Bloom, *Flourishing*, p. 88.



Confidants and Allies

LESSON OVERVIEW

In this lesson, you will learn about two types of people a pastor needs as part of their community.

SCRIPTURE MEDITATION: 2 TIMOTHY 3:10-4:8

INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITY

Using the table below, do the following:

- + Make a list of the people to whom you can tell anything.
- + Make a list of the people whose support you need to lead effectively within the church or at work.
- + Circle the names of the people who are on both lists.

| People to whom I can tell anything | People whose support I need to lead |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| | |

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Divide into small groups of 3-4 individuals. Share your responses to the following questions:

- + Which of your lists is longer? Why do you think that is?
- + What are the benefits of having people who appear on both lists?
- + What are the dangers?

READING

The people to whom you can tell anything, those are your confidants. The people whose support you need to lead effectively, those are your allies.

Read the article, “Allies and Confidants: Fighting Loneliness and Finding Friendships.”⁵ As you read, think about the role of confidants and allies in your life as well as in your pastor’s life.

ALLIES AND CONFIDANTS: FIGHTING LONELINESS AND FINDING FRIENDSHIPS

The loneliness of pastoral ministry. That’s what surprised Bob Burns when he and his team were conducting the research for *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us About Surviving and Thriving*. Burns is the Spiritual Formation Pastor at Church of the Good Shepherd in Durham, N.C., and one of our speakers at this year’s Talking Points conference. Actually, it wasn’t a surprise, he later qualified. Rather, it merely reinforced something he already knew to be true: Pastors can experience profound loneliness in ministry.

Even though pastors face considerable loneliness in ministry, they need close, personal relationships. According to Burns and his colleagues Donald C. Guthrie and Tasha D. Chapman, close, personal relationships are vital to our spiritual formation. These relationships offer space for accountability and encouragement as we seek to become more like Christ. Unfortunately, pastors

⁵ Herr, M. 2020. “Allies and confidants: Fighting loneliness and finding friendships.”
<https://www.cornerstone.edu/blog-post/allies-and-confidants-fighting-loneliness-and-finding-friendships/>.



Caring for Your Pastor

struggle to develop these sorts of relationships: “Finding and forming intimate friendships, in which ‘iron sharpens iron’ (Proverbs 27:17) is often a frightening and elusive challenge for pastors.”⁶

Burns, Chapman and Guthrie draw on the work of Ronald A. Heifetz and Marty Linsky to describe why finding and developing these friendships can be particularly difficult for pastors. In their book *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading*, Heifetz and Linsky differentiate between a leader’s allies and confidants. “Allies are people who share many of your values, or at least your strategy, and operate across some organizational or factional boundary. Because they cross a boundary, they cannot always be loyal to you; they have other ties to honor.”⁷

Allies can be a tremendous gift. They can work with you to build support for an idea or a program. They can help you attend to your blind spots.

“Pastors are constantly working with allies,” according to Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie.⁸ They can find allies on the elder board or leadership team and even in a children’s Sunday school class. “Yet pastors are always calculating—consciously and unconsciously—whether these allies in the congregation could or should be party to their more personal concerns.” Pastors have to choose whether or not to allow their allies to be their confidants.

Confidants, according to Heifetz and Linsky, are those people to whom you can bare your soul precisely because “they have few, if any, conflicting loyalties.”⁹ They are “people you can confide without having your revelations spill back into the work arena.”¹⁰

When I interviewed Roy Yanke of PIR Ministries, he stated that, for pastors, “sharing too much can become ammunition for an exit, but every pastor needs to find those advocates he or she can share with.” Treating an ally as a confidant has risks—even for ministry families.

In one church in which my husband pastored, I developed a close friendship with a female member of the congregation. She understood me. She listened. She felt safe. And so I treated her as a confidant. But our relationship changed a bit when she became part of the church leadership team. Her position on the leadership team meant that her loyalties had shifted; she was now responsible for oversight of our congregation. I wanted to be able to confide in her still—especially about some

⁶ Burns, B., Chapman, T. D., and Guthrie, D. C. (2013). *Resilient ministry: What pastors told us about surviving and thriving*. Downers Grove: IVP, p. 42.

⁷ Heifetz, R. A. and Linsky, M. *Leadership on the line: Staying alive through the dangers of leading*. Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, p. 199.

⁸ Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient*, p. 42.

⁹ Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership*, p. 199.

¹⁰ Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership*, p. 200.



Caring for Your Pastor

of my church-related struggles—but I wondered whether she would relay my grievances and hurts to others.

Some pastors can successfully turn to allies for accountability, as Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie share in their book. This was certainly true for my husband and another pastor on staff who formed a deep relationship and continue to spur one another to godliness through mutual accountability. But, as the authors note, this cannot always be the case.

Pastors and ministry leaders, as well as their spouses, need confidants. Burns, Chapman and Guthrie rightly ask, “To whom can pastors go to get pastored?”¹¹ Perhaps it’s a pastor of another congregation, a spiritual director, or a therapist. Perhaps it’s a good friend from seminary or a cherished professor.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Return to your small group. Share your responses to the following questions:

- + Why is it important for your pastor to have confidants?
- + Why is it important for your pastor to have allies?
- + What is the danger of a pastor having both confidants and allies within the church?

INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION

Consider the scales below. Indicate where you are on the spectrum of being your pastor’s confidant or ally.

Not an ally ----- Strong ally

Not a confidant ----- Trusted confidant

¹¹ Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient*, p. 43.



Caring for Your Pastor

LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION

Conclude this lesson with a large group discussion based on the following question:

- + Based on what you have learned in this lesson, how can you encourage your pastor to develop relationships with both confidants and allies?



A New Plan

LESSON OVERVIEW

In this lesson, you will learn about two types of people a pastor needs as part of their community.

SCRIPTURE MEDITATION: 1 THESSALONIANS 5:12-24

SPECIAL NOTE

Assign one member of the leadership team or staff-parish relations committee to interview your pastor. A sample interview guide is provided in the resources for this unit.

Try to create an environment in which the pastor feels safe to share without fear of reprisal. Also, be sure to ask permission to share a summary of the interview with the leadership team.

Sample Interview Guide - Pastor

- + Introduction: Thank you for joining me today. Our leadership team has been taking a class on how to care for you better, and we would like to ask you some questions as we consider new ways that we can care for you (and your family).
- + As you reflect on your role here, what aspects of your work bring you joy?
- + What sorts of support or resources do you need in order to do your job well?
- + How would you describe the expectations that our congregation puts on you? To what extent do these expectations match what you were hired to do?
- + How would you describe the level of acceptance, compassion, and care you receive from the congregation?
- + How can we support you in making sure you have adequate time and resources for rest and renewal?



Caring for Your Pastor

- + What changes, if any, to your compensation package might enhance your wellbeing?
- + What else can we do to support your wellbeing (and that of your family)?

REPORT

If the pastor grants permission, the individual who interviewed the pastor will give a 5-10 minute summary of key insights from the interview.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Divide into small groups of 3-4 individuals. Share your responses to following questions:

- + What did you expect to hear from the pastor?
- + What surprised you?
- + In what ways does what you heard in the report intersect with other themes you've learned in previous lessons?
- + What action should the church take in light of what you heard in the report? (Each group will share one idea.)

LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION

Ask each group to share one action step from their discussion. Record the action steps on a large sticky note or whiteboard. Then, consider the following questions:

- + What common themes, if any, do we notice among these action steps?
- + If we had to prioritize them, which would be the most important one?
- + If we had to rank them in terms of feasibility, which could we implement as soon as possible?
- + Which require more discussion, planning, or resources?



Caring for Your Pastor

LARGE GROUP ACTIVITY

As a group, make a new plan for caring for your pastor. You may use the worksheet on the next page to develop your plan. This worksheet is also available as a PDF document so that you can develop and present the plan to your pastor.

In your plan, include a start date for each action step, describe the specific action you will take, and explain how and when you will follow-up with your pastor to discuss the effectiveness of that action step.



Caring for Our Pastor: A New Plan

To: _____

Because we value your role in our congregation and in our community, we want to honor you by taking the following steps to promote your wellbeing.

ACTION STEP:

Start Date:

Action:

Follow-up Plan:

ACTION STEP

Start Date:

Action:

Follow-up Plan:



Caring for Your Pastor

ACTION STEP

Start Date:

Action:

Follow-up Plan:

ACTION STEP

Start Date:

Action:

Follow-up Plan: