

Finishing Well

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As a pastor, it is an honor to have a privilege serving Christ that has an eternal significance on people. It is my conviction that finishing well in the pastoral ministry must at least be preceded by effective leadership. Though leadership development takes time, first and foremost every leader's aim is to develop maturity in character and love for God. Effective leadership is not merely the size of congregation or the growing budget they operate, but by being faithful to the pastor's task: that is to finish what delights the Lord.

A good understanding of pastoral ministry and having a pastoral philosophy of ministry helps in fulfilling and discharging God given responsibilities in leading a church. With these responsibilities in leading people, the Lord's promise comes to mind in Matthew 16:18, "*And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*"¹

The Lord promised to build and to bless the church. Although all believers were called to salvation and to live in obedience to God's will, He also extends His call to others for vocational ministry as leaders and pastors. There are several factors that affects finishing well. It is important to identify them and its influences in order for a pastor to stay on track. Transitioning process is an important part in continuing the Lord's purpose for His people. That includes helping to find a successor or at least facilitate a smooth exit with someone taking his role. Leadership is hard work but at the end, there are benefits and rewards.

I. Few Leaders Finish Well

Paul Sohn a blogger, discussed on this topic of leadership using Robert Clinton's materials. He discloses Clinton's observation that few leaders finish well. He shares Clinton's six characteristics of individuals who finished well:

1. They maintain a personal vibrant relationship with God right up to the end. Daniel is the classic O.T. leader who exemplifies this. In the N.T., Peter, Paul and John all demonstrate this.

2. They maintain a learning posture and can learn from various kinds of sources— life especially. Daniel is the classic O.T. leader who exemplifies this. See Daniel chapter nine for a late in life illustration of one who continues to study and learn from the Scriptures. Paul and Peter are the classic N.T. leaders with a learning posture (see 2Pe 3:18 and 2Ti 4:13).

3. They manifest Christ-likeness in character as evidenced by the fruit of the Spirit in their lives. Daniel is the classic O.T. leader who exemplifies godliness (See the summary references to him in Eze 14:14,20). In the N.T. note the evidence of character transformation in Paul's life (2Ti 2:24 and an illustration of it—the book of Phm). These were men who over a lifetime moved from strong personalities with roughness in their leadership styles to strong personalities with gentleness in their leadership styles.

¹English Standard Version (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2001). All references will be from the ESV unless otherwise noted

4. Truth is lived out in their lives so that convictions and promises of God are seen to be real. Joshua's statement about God's promises never having failed him in his closing speech demonstrate this characteristic of someone believing God and staking his life on God's truth (Jos 23:14).

5. They leave behind one or more ultimate contributions. In a study on legacies left behind by effective leaders who finished well I have identified the following categories: saint, practitioners, mentors, public rhetoricians, pioneers, crusaders, artists, founder, stabilizer, researchers, writers, promoters.

6. They walk with a growing awareness of a sense of destiny and see some or all of it fulfilled. A sense of destiny is an inner conviction arising from an experience or a series of experiences in which there is a growing sense of awareness that God has His hand on a leader in a special way for special purposes. Over a lifetime a leader is prepared by God for a destiny, receives guidance toward that destiny, and increasingly completes that destiny. No Biblical leader who accomplished much for God failed to have a sense of destiny, one that usually grew over his/her lifetime.²

Dr. Clinton used biblical leaders in the bible in his research. He says Daniel and Paul both exhibited almost all of the six characteristics he mentioned and it seems leaders who finished well showed evidence of having them. Similarly another writer, Ken Boa posted at "The Navigators" website: **7 Characteristics to Help You Finish Well**. I included on this paper Boa's comments on each characteristics for better insights:

1. Intimacy with Christ

Our highest calling is to grow in our knowledge of Christ and to make Him known to others. Does our desire to know Christ exceed all other aspirations? If not, whatever is taking His place in the center of our affections must yield to Him if we are to know the joy of bearing spiritual fruit. A key secret of those who finish well is to focus more on loving Jesus than on avoiding sin. The more we love Jesus, the more we will learn to put our confidence in Him alone.

2. Fidelity in the Spiritual Disciplines

Spiritual disciplines such as prayer, fellowship, study, worship, and submission are not ends in themselves, but means to the end of intimacy with Christ and spiritual formation. When left to itself, however, any one of these disciplines tends to decline and decay. An infusion of directed intentionality and effort is necessary to sustain order and growth and to bring repeated times of personal renewal.

3. A Biblical Perspective on the Circumstances of Life

Part of the purpose of our suffering and trials is to drive us to dependence on God alone. God responds by revealing more of Himself to us. This knowledge increases our faith and our capacity to trust His character and His promises through the times we do not understand His

² "6 Characteristics of Leaders Who Finish Well, Bobby Clinton," Paul Sohn, December 19, 2014, accessed December 4, 2017, <http://paulsohn.org/6-characteristics-of-leaders-who-finish-well-2/>.

purposes and His ways. When we view our circumstances in light of God's character instead of God's character in light of our circumstances, we come to see that God is never indifferent to us, and that He uses suffering for our good so we will be more fully united to Christ.

4. A Teachable, Responsive, Humble, and Obedient Spirit

Those who finish well maintain an ongoing learning posture through the seasons of their lives. Humility and responsive obedience are the keys to maintaining a teachable spirit.

Humility is the disposition in which we displace self through the enthronement of Christ in our lives and realize that all of life is about trust in God. Obedience is the application of biblical faith in that which is not seen, and that which is not yet. As we mature in Christ, we learn to trust God's character and promises in spite of ambiguity or trials.

5. A Clear Sense of Personal Purpose and Calling

God has called each of us to a purposeful journey sustained by faithfulness and growing hope. This calling or vocation transcends our occupations and endures beyond the end of our careers. As we seek the Lord's guidance in developing a personal vision and clarity of mission, we move beyond the level of tasks and accomplishments to the level of the purpose for which we were created.

6. Healthy Relationships with Resourceful People

Relationships such as spiritual mentoring, servant leadership, and personal and group accountability are valuable resources that encourage, equip, and exhort. People who finish well do not do so without the caring support of other growing members of the body of Christ. These relationships help us to increase in intimacy with Christ, maintain the needed disciplines, clarify our long-term perspective, sustain a teachable attitude, and develop our purpose and calling.

7. Ongoing Ministry Investment in the Lives of Others

Spirit-filled living requires us to discover and develop the spiritual gifts we have received and exercise them through the Spirit's power for the edification of others. Believers who finish well are marked by ongoing outreach and sacrificial ministry for the good of other people.

Those who squander the resources, gifts, experiences, and hard-learned insights God has given them by no longer investing them in the lives of others soon wither and withdraw.³

Both authors give us vital points in how a leader can last and finish well in the ministry. Although finishing well applies to all as God calls every believer to service and obedient living, pastoral ministry is a call to selected people to serve as leaders in the church. Having an intimate personal relationship with Christ is at the top of their lists. It is significant in the life of a leader that intimacy with God is the key secret in maintaining their love for Him and his ministry. All the remaining characteristics given by both authors to finish well are the outcomes of a leader's

³"7 Characteristics to Help You Finish Well," Ken Boa, January 31, 2006, accessed December 4, 2017, <https://www.navigators.org/characteristics-help-finish-well/>

yielded heart to God such as humility, obedience, godly character, loving people, and other spiritual fruits that would lead a pastor to the right direction of finishing well.

Paul Sohn wrote this statistics: Bobby Clinton who has studied biblical leaders makes a poignant observation that few leaders finish well. There are around 800 or so leaders mentioned in the Bible. There are about 100 who have data that helps you interpret their leadership. About 50 of these have enough data for evaluation of their finish. About one in three finished well. Anecdotal evidence from today indicates that this ratio is probably generous. Probably less than one in three are finishing well today.⁴

Clinton offers an insight to what he calls “Negative Preparation.” He says, “God often prepares someone to accept the next steps of guidance by first allowing them to go through negative experiences during their present development phase.... it involves God’s use of events, people, conflict, persecution, and experiences that focus on the negative, in order to free a person from the present situation to enter the next phase of development with revitalized interest... may include problems in a marriage relationship, a crisis in job or ministry, conflict with other Christian workers, dissatisfaction with one’s inner-life or present role, difficulties with children, tough living conditions, isolation, and limiting restrictions that thwart sphere of influence development.”⁵

It is God’s grace that He brought us into the ministry and it is also His grace to allow us to go through painful processes to make us better leaders. It is His desire to bring maturity in our character and even to move us on to something we might not otherwise choose.

II. WHAT IS PASTORAL MINISTRY?

The call of God to pastoral ministry as a vocation is different from God’s call to salvation and even not a call to serve Him which is given to all Believers. It is a call to selected leaders to serve in Christian leadership. Pastoral ministry is a unique divine calling given by God to Believers to be ministers of His Word and to become servants of God’s church. It is my strong conviction that our pastoral ministry should start from God’s calling. Therefore entering into this vocation, a pastor must really seek God’s guidance and affirmations. It is affirmation from God and from people. Our Lord used the imagery of a shepherd to describe a pastor, a person who tends the flock of God. It is an appropriate imagery, subsequently a shepherd leads, feeds, comforts, nurtures, corrects and protects his sheep. A pastoral ministry is servanthood.

A pastor is called into ministry to help accomplish God’s purpose for the church. With that in mind, if I plan to finish well, I dare not to enter my pastoral ministry with preconceived ideas or personal agenda which is a sure formula to fail.

The writer of Hebrews, quoting Exodus 25:40 reminds us that we have a model to follow, “They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, “See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain.” (Hebrews 8:5). We’re not to become an Old Testament

⁴Paul Sohn, “6 Characteristics of Leaders Who Finish Well, Bobby Clinton.”

⁵Clinton, Robert J., *The Making of a Leader*. Colorado Springs, Co: Navpress, 1988, 134-136.

priest, but we are to be careful following the Scriptural guidance in leading the flock. It is an important instruction here that the pastor's approach to ministry must be defined by Scriptures and should remain God-focused.

a. Ministry Philosophy

A pastor cannot lead successfully if he cannot identify and spell out the purpose of the church he leads. The Apostle Paul reminded Timothy, *"I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth"* (1 Timothy 3:14-15). This philosophy of ministry becomes a guide and a map to keep a pastor on track. It will also provide correction and encouragement when the task becomes a burden.

Every pastor must have a ministry philosophy. It is vital for a pastor to understand what they are to accomplish in ministry. Pastoral ministry exist to fulfill the purpose of the church. Paul told Timothy regarding his role in the church, *"I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth."* (1 Timothy 3:14-15). A pastor's ministry philosophy help a pastor in planning and doing God's work that was entrusted to him. It becomes a map to keep him on track, to be on course on his plans and actions. When the work of ministry becomes a burden, it is easy to be discouraged and be tempted to resign, thus abandoning his God given role.

Robert Clinton affirms this important aspect in ministry, **"Leaders with good ministry philosophies usually finish well....**Leaders must be able to see God working in events and people, and in situations around them. They must recognize God's work in their own lives. A discerning leader is a leader with a solid ministry philosophy. The ministry philosophy pattern is essential for effective leadership that will carry through to the end. Not all leaders finish well."⁶ Having a biblical philosophy in ministry will surely help a pastor to understand and fulfill divine purposes for the church. It will align plans and actions faithfully to the divine course and not from other influences like the winds of social change.

Ministry philosophy prevents lack of direction. Paul said it best when he says *"So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air"* (1 Corinthians 9:26). So with guided direction in doing the ministry, it also prevents burn out for a pastor, maximizing time, energy and giftedness. By having direction then, it assures effectiveness and confidence to do well in the work of ministry.

When a pastor does ministry without having a ministry philosophy, more likely it guarantees failures. No matter how much effort goes into a pastor's service, but if not faithful to the task given by the Scriptures, a pastor cannot finish well. Paul says, *"Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful"* (1 Corinthians 4:2).

⁶ Clinton, Robert J., *The Making of a Leader*. Colorado Springs, Co: Navpress, 1988, 201.

Having a clear biblical philosophy guides a pastor in achieving the overall purpose of the church. Then, he can understand his role in the church and properly accomplish his task. Gene Gets put it this way:

“Anyone who attempts to formulate a biblical philosophy of the ministry and develop a contemporary strategy, a methodology that stands foursquare on the scriptural foundations, must ask and answer a very fundamental question. Why does the church exist? Put in another way, what is its ultimate purpose? Why has God left it in the world in the first place?”⁷

Planning to finish well includes having biblical philosophy so that biblical principles can provide guidance in general. Churches have different culture and context, but Scriptures is not lacking in illustrations of how the early church functioned to accomplish their goal. These three basic purposes of the church serves as guiding markers: Exaltation, Evangelism and Edification.

b. It is God’s calling, not a career

Pastors are doing God’s work in the church not only because they have a seminary degree or they were suggested or recommended after completing an assessment for church work but it is God’s calling. Derek J. Prime wrote in his book with Allister Begg:

“The ministry of under-shepherds and teachers is not simply a job. Rather it is a vocation, the answering of a specific call from God. It is the highest calling in Christian service.”⁸

We are all called by God for Christian service, but pastoral ministry is a huge responsibility that requires exhorting and reproofing on Christ’s behalf. Leaders will stand before God and give account of our stewardship.

Paul clearly states this truth in 1 Corinthians 4:1-5:

“This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.”

In reality, doing pastoral work requires help from God. There have been many instances that the challenge in doing pastoral ministry is too great. There are expectations to be met in leading a church, weekly sermons to prepare and other duties that requires time and presence. Having thoughts like feeling unworthy and unqualified of such a sacred task, sometimes brings discouragement to a pastor. Yet the claim of the Apostle Paul can encourage those who were set aside for this calling in 2 Corinthians 4:7, *“But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.”* This verse clearly helps us to realize God’s work through us.

⁷ Getz, Gene, *Sharpening the Focus of the Church*. Chicago: Moody, 1974, 21.

⁸ Derek J. Prime, Allister Begg. *On Being A Pastor*. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2004, 17.

It is very important for a pastor to understand that this calling is from God, a vocation and not a career. A pastor cannot serve effectively without identifying, clarifying and even simplifying and executing the purposes of the church he leads. Beeke and Slachter identified this reality which often contributes to discouragement of a pastor: “One reason pastors become discouraged is the lack of clarity regarding their calling.”⁹

I’ve seen failures in ministry which usually a result of “Status Quo” because congregation and former leaders have given them a different expectations. Beeke and Slachter gives the pastor three things on what God called them to do:

1. God calls you to serve Christ for His pleasure and glory.
2. God calls you to care for the spiritual needs of men.
3. God calls you to preach His Word and nothing but His Word.¹⁰

I would add to this list the responsibility of a pastor, and in particular a solo pastor to provide leadership to church leaders and members in fulfilling their mission as a church. The pastor understands his part in leading the church by utilising God’s gifts within the members of the body of Christ. It is not an easy task, but pastors are called to lead and empowers gifted people in the church.

c. Pastors listens to God’s voice

Pastoral ministry is not merely having professional credentials or expertise. Rather, pastors who are called by God must able to hear and heed the call of God like Moses. It simply requires an honest discernment of God’s voice, the right voice. Not only some kind of desires to be in the church ministry or own aspirations, whatever reasons it may be, but it is dependent upon the heart of the pastor after he listens to the voice. God’s voice can be clearly discerned through the guidance of Scriptures. Insights and advices can come from mentors who have known well their spiritual journey.

Just like Moses when he heard God calling him to free the slaves in Egypt. ‘*But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?”*’ He said, “*But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.*”’ (Exodus 3:11-12).

Moses is no different from a pastor. He asked God, who was he to do such a task? What if his people don’t follow? To add, he knew that he was not a public speaker. But it was sufficient enough for Moses to hear, “But I will be with you...”. What really matter for pastors who are called by God to do pastoral ministry is to trust God like Moses that He is the one calling them for specific ministry.

⁹ Beeke, Joel R., Terry D. Slachter. *Encouragement for Today’s Pastor: Help from the Puritans*. Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2013, 107.

¹⁰ Beeke, Joel R., Terry D. Slachter. *Encouragement for Today’s Pastor: Help from the Puritans*. Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2013, 107.

III. STAYING ON TRACK

A plan to finish well is like driving to a certain destination. Starting from point A, where pastoral ministry starts, and ends in point B where ministry ends and had passed the torch to the next leader. That should be the plan and must stay on track. Fred Smith commented, “A leader should never try to lead without first being captivated by a vision.”¹¹ It is important to have a clear vision and people must share that vision. If captivated by that vision, it energizes the pastor and will remain committed to arrive on that point of preferred destination.

If there seems to be only less 33% who will finish well, then the question will be: What are reasons why leaders fail to finish well? What are the factors that will help them? The following aspects affect the outcome of the leader’s ministry processes that determines success:

a. Ego and Discouragement

A leader can make a wrong turn and not stay on course. Moral issues has been common failures to church leaders today. Fred Smith says “impressive –looking leaders can veer into the ditch for a couple of reasons: They can start out humbly, with right purposes, but get diverted into ego trips. Secondly, they can be sidetracked by small failures (they become discouraged).”¹²

It is human nature to enjoy initial successes in the ministry that could lead to ego trips. Although it gives a confident feeling of good leadership, but could lead to downfall if not checked.

It is important to build good relationships with people we serve. Humility and honesty are qualities needed in leadership which makes people more understanding and forgiving. In reality, pastors are shepherds. A shepherd of the flock has a heart for people. He loves his people and his concern is to bring them closer to God. He has compassion for them which builds mutual love and respect. Discouragement can derail a leader. If church people would easily give up on the pastor’s leadership after some failures, it will be difficult to continue his role.

b. Intimacy with God

Intimacy with God should be first and foremost amongst the necessary qualifications of becoming a successful pastor. We have been entrusted to bring people to a loving relationship with God, it is reasonably expected that a pastor should live such life.

Acknowledging that our ministry is from God and for Him, our spiritual condition is the engine as to the car. With the proper maintenance of the engine, making sure it is running on all cylinders, allows us to reach our destination with no hassle and trouble. Often we lose heart, if our perspective in ministry is not from His word. J. Oswald Sanders asks, “How did Paul rise above discouragement and never lose heart?”¹³

¹¹ Smith, Fred and Marshall B. Shelley ed., *Learning to Lead: Bringing Out the Best in People* (Waco, Texas: 1986), Vol. 5,151–182, CTi.

¹² Smith, Fred and Marshall B. Shelley ed., *Learning To Lead*, vol. 5, 167.

¹³ Sanders, Oswald J., *Enjoying Intimacy with God*. Chicago: Discovery House Publishers, 2000, 131.

He says it was God who entrusted us this pastoral ministry: We lose heart when we lose the sense of wonder at the surpassing superiority of the ministry entrusted to us. *“We have been entrusted with this commission”* (NEB). We are not self-appointed or self-made men. *“Our adequacy is from God, who is also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant.”* (2 Corinthians 3:5-6).¹⁴

Paul assures us in Galatians 6:9 that we should not give up because there is an assurance of harvest, *“And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.”* The key for a fruitful Christian life is being attached to the vine, as John wrote Jesus words in John 15:5, *“I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”* It is through abiding in Christ that we can produce His fruit in ministry. Our intimacy with God will always find ourselves abiding in Him. If the promise is fruit bearing then a pastor must maintain his intimacy with God.

A fitting statement from R. Clinton regarding the inner-life growth of a leader: *“...a godly leader is a person with God-given capacity and God-given responsibility to influence specific groups of God’s people toward His purposes for the group. Inner-life growth testing focuses on developing capacity and responsibility in a leader. Character is foundational if a leader is to influence people for God’s purposes.”*¹

Intimacy with God should be on the top of the list if a leader have to stay spiritually healthy and would stay on track into finishing well. Maintaining a heart that is submitted to God can only happen with a loving fellowship with the Lord. Proverbs 4:23-27 gives us biblical wisdom and practical insight on maintaining our course, *“Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life. (24) Put away from you crooked speech, and put devious talk far from you. (25) Let your eyes look directly forward, and your gaze be straight before you. (26) Ponder the path of your feet; then all your ways will be sure. (27) Do not swerve to the right or to the left; turn your foot away from evil.”* Our hearts influences our thinking, emotions and will and thus, must be guarded for it affects our speech (verse 24), sight (verse 25) and conduct (verses 26-27).

c. Staying Healthy

Being healthy in a general sense, includes all aspects of the pastor’s life. Physical exercise has its place but God is more concerned with the spiritual health of the inner man than the physical. Apostle Paul counseled Timothy with these words, *“Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come”* (1 Timothy 4:7-8). Pastors must be healthy physically, mentally, emotionally and socially which is an important part of Pastor’s role in the church. Staying healthy includes maintaining a pastor’s loving heart. Hughes writes this reality, *“A pastor’s heart can also be undermined by criticism and opposition. Unfortunately, criticism just goes with the pastoral turf.*

¹⁴ Ibid. 131.

We can't escape it."¹⁵ Acknowledging that pastors can also make mistakes, criticisms that we receive maybe accurate which is indispensable to learning and growth. Moreover, these criticisms we bring home may affect wives or the whole family more intensely than pastors. A healthy pastor's ministry and family life must be balanced and guarded.

A healthy heart must be accompanied by a healthy physical body. By having physical limitations, a leader could be restricted to some functions needed to meet his church's expectations in his ministry. Being a pastor in a small church, I learned to plan my week carefully to meet the weekly responsibilities, which includes added non-pastoral duties in the church office such as doing weekly program bulletins and other secretarial works.

In the book "Resilient Ministry", the three authors asserts that pacing our life to last longer is more than physical health. They are all sports enthusiast but the self-care needed for a leader includes three vital areas: social, intellectual and physical aspects of our lives.¹⁶ I would consider emotional and moral health of a leader can be added to their list.

The need for having a healthy social life cannot be compromised. They say, all leaders can experience deep loneliness and they need friends in the community they serve. According to these authors, in order to counteract the loneliness of ministry leadership. Pastors must be intentional in developing relationships. Intellectual self-care is the second aspect of pastor's self-care. It has to do with keeping one's mind fresh with opportunities to reflect, learn, and explore creatively and imaginatively. Secondly, it focused on the establishment of boundaries and the use of time to mirror personal values and priorities. In their conversations in summits around this topic, they discovered a real concern on use of time. They say wise leaders take large enough breaks to become fully refreshed. Sabbaticals are also not built into most pastor's calendar. It is a short-term investment for long-term strength. The wise use of vacations, study leaves and sabbaticals provide a measure of rest and it must be carefully planned. From their study, they have concluded best practices in pastoral physical care. First, pastors need to increase their level of physical activity. Second, pastors seek peer support in their exercise routines. Thirdly, awareness of problems and changes in nutrition habits are important elements of physical self-care. They conclude: Self-care is an important but neglected aspect of pastoral life. Self-care is not selfish. It is necessary part of staying involved in fruitful ministry for a lifetime.¹⁷

There are times in the year that I have experienced heavy demands on my time and energy to do the work of a pastor. On top of a pastor's daily tasks in the ministry, there are other works to be done. Like for example planning and organizing meetings. The needed leadership responsibilities like meetings with leaders and their committees could already be exhausting if not managed wisely. H. B. Charles Jr. gives this testimony: "In the crucible of my schedule, I often neglect to maintain a healthy diet and exercise regimen. But the social media posts of exercising pastors challenge me to "get in," as they say. Robert Murray McCheyne was a

¹⁵ Cedar, Paul A. Kent Hughes and Ben Patterson, *Mastering the Pastoral Role*, Portland: Multnomah Press, 1991, 145.

¹⁶ Burns, Bob, Tasha Chapman and Donald Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors told us about Surviving and Thriving*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013, 80.

¹⁷ Burns et al., *Resilient Ministry*, 81-100.

preacher, pastor, and poet who ministered at the St. Peters Church in Dundee, Scotland, until he died at age twenty nine from typhus. Reportedly McCheyne said, ‘God gave me a message and a horse. I have killed the horse. Oh, what shall I do with the message?’ Of course, the message will continue to go forth without us. But we should be faithful stewards of our bodies so we can be faithful stewards of our opportunity to herald the Word of God.”¹⁸

Eugene H. Peterson shared his experience after he and wife went on a sabbatical year: “We had been away from our congregation for twelve months, a sabbatical year, and we were on our way back. It had been a wonderful year, soaking in the silence, gulping down great drafts of high-country air. Could we handle the transition from the solitude of the Montana Rockies to the traffic of Maryland?....When we left the monastery, the Montana sabbatical year was, as we had intended in our praying, behind us emotionally as well as geographically. Three days later we arrived in Maryland, focused and explosive with energy.”¹⁹

This is a great insight for me what Peterson had written. I longed for a stretch of time for restoration. Pastors should benefit from a structured sabbatical leave like he did:

“Everything I had hoped for came to pass: I returned with more energy than I can remember having since I was fifteen years old. I have always (with occasional, but brief, lapses) enjoyed being a pastor. But never this much. The experience of my maturity was now coupled with the energy of my youth, a combination I had not thought possible. The parts of pastoral work I had done out of duty before, just because somebody had to do them, I now embraced with delight. I felt deep reservoirs within me, capacious and free flowing. I felt great margins of leisure around everything I did—conversations, meetings, letter writing, telephone calls. I felt I would never again be in a hurry. The sabbatical had done its work. A benefit I had not counted on was a change in the congregation. They were refreshed and confident in a way I had not observed before. One of the dangers of a long-term pastorate is the development of neurotic dependencies between pastor and people. I had worried about that from time to time: Was it healthy of me to stay in this congregation for so long? Had I taken the place of God for them?”²⁰

I agree with taking Sabbatical whatever shape and form, because burn out is real especially for under-shepherds. Rest and leisure helps our effectiveness. Pastor’s spiritual effectiveness has some connections to his physical effectiveness. Having good health definitely helps the ministry of a pastor. Maintaining healthy body, mind and relationship with others for sure will give success and longevity, and this is required if a pastor is desiring to finish well.

Finishing well does not discontinue after retiring from ministry. God had used pastors after retirement usually in their denominations by coaching younger leaders. For many retired pastors, health is not an issue if managed well. Morris M. Schnore from Waterloo, Ontario writes “The results clearly suggest that for most retirees stopping work does not bring on an identity

¹⁸ Charles, H.B. Jr., *On Pastoring: A Short Guide to Living, Leading, and Ministering as a Pastor*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2016, 27-28.

¹⁹ Peterson, E. H., *The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction* (Waco, Texas: 1989), Vol.17, 149, 151, CTi.

²⁰ Ibid. 156-157.

crisis or other negative consequences, except for a decrease in income...it was found that retirees were happier and more satisfied with their lives than middle-aged workers. Although aging is associated with a decline in physical health, no evidence was found that retirement has deleterious on health. In fact, almost one-half (43 percent) of retirees reported that their health had improved since their retirement.”²¹

With advance health approach today, we are seeing more seniors who are still working even over 65. It is a valuable gift to the kingdom of God our experienced pastors who would become mentors to the younger ones with godly wisdom and discernment.

d. Keep an Eye on the Destination

When I shoot the ball in playing basketball, I just don't shoot it without aiming on the basketball hoop. When I play basketball, my goal and the rest of the team, is to shoot the ball and score. Smith and Shelley commented, “A leader should never try to lead without first being captivated by a vision. Paul never lost the vision of his divine appointment to be an apostle to the Gentiles.”²² There will be barriers and helps in reaching the destination of finishing well. But a pastor must keep his focus where he is going.

IV. Finishing Well Is Planning Well

The authors of “Resilient Ministry” did some research and facilitate continuing education for pastors addressing pastoral resilience. In one of their Pastors Summit, they tried to define ministry excellence. They said, “Our culture often identifies it by certain markers of success. These markers range from the numbers who attend worship services to the state of church's finances to the popular programs a church creates and sponsors.... Others, however, reject the idea of defining ministry excellence by these standards of success. They often counter by using the criteria of leadership faithfulness. Excellence is viewed as a pastor who remains committed over time. But we questioned whether the ability to ‘hang in there’ and endure is a helpful way to judge ministry excellence.... After much discussion, we concluded a better measure was found in the idea of fruitfulness.”²³

At the end of the pastoral ministry, what counts is the impact we have in the people we ministered and the results which is the fruit of our labor. Planning well includes knowing what God wants us to accomplish. It is no other than God's purpose for the church. It should also be based on our calling which I have discussed earlier in this paper. Ministry philosophy becomes an important vehicle to serve as our guide directing our path to finish well.

It is good to be reminded that retirement can be planned as best as we can, but yet anticipated future could change. C. W. Brister states, “Persons who have given up employment discover many avenues, not just one path, on the road to retirement. Retirement is both a point on life's journey and a process, ending only at one's death. Leaving employment is usually an anticipated event or series of events, but it can happen in an unplanned, chaotic manner, through

²¹ Schnore, Morris M., *Retirement: Bane or Blessing?*. Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1985, 60.

²² Smith, Fred and Marshall B. Shelley ed., *Learning To Lead*, vol. 5, 169.

²³ Burns et al., *Resilient Ministry*, 13.

accidents, adversities, and historic changes.”²⁴ This reality brings out the need for pastors to pursue better planning and to be open to God’s working as He changes our path.

V. Transition to Retirement

One of the most important responsibilities the church leaders and pastors have is to lead the church through a healthy succession transition. I consider that the current pastor must lead the church in providing a smooth transition of the new pastor. The pastor and church leaders must work together carefully and prayerfully to see what the church will look like in the future. Jules Z. Willing commented that the reluctance of the working executive to think about retirement is due for failure. One of his findings reveals that retirement failures generally related to the suddenness of the transition. He says, “The common-sense remedy would seem to be to find ways to enter retirement gradually or partially.”²⁵

His study on those executive who had exited early without preparation usually experienced stress in their transitioning. As a matter of fact he finds “The people I know who have had the fewest problems are usually those who only partially retired before they stopped working altogether.”²⁶

Church leaders must be encouraged to have a healthy succession transition. A clear biblical example of this is when Moses was asked to lay hands on and bless Joshua as his successor in Numbers 27:22-23 after following God’s direction, “*And Moses did as the Lord commanded him. He took Joshua and made him stand before Eleazar the priest and the whole congregation, and he laid his hands on him and commissioned him as the Lord directed through Moses.*” A healthy transition can be guided by getting help and counsel from the denomination.

The value of having a transition period is to have a continuity of leadership, at least in carrying on the church’s vision. It will also provide an ample time to groom the next qualified leader. In the New Testament, Paul outlined character qualities for Timothy and Titus. These qualities can be used to evaluate the next new pastor.

a. Preparing for Successor

By having a good picture of my leadership life line in the church, mentoring does not come only at the end but even at the beginning of the ministry. Although as the pastor comes closer to his retirement, it suddenly becomes a priority in his lists.

Equipping, teaching and modelling are biblically instructed by God to believers and indirectly in doing it, a leader is doing mentoring to his people, Hebrews 13:7, “*Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.*” There is a need for Godly models in the church and who else should start

²⁴ Brister, C.W., *Spiritual Wisdom for Successful Retirement: Living Forward*. New York: The Haworth Pastoral Press, 2006, 19.

²⁵ Willing, Jules, Z., *The Reality of Retirement: The Inner Experience of Becoming a Retired Person*. New York: Morrow, 1981, 187.

²⁶ Ibid. 189.

being one? Pastors are reproducing themselves and when they are doing it in the course of their ministry, they are preparing leaders to follow their path. It is an ideal process of succession for the church to produce their next leader. The senior pastor who is retiring plays an important role in guiding and discipling his young leaders. He can also help the successor by providing a reasonable period for effective transition.

b. Health before Retirement

I discussed the importance of having a healthy life in general earlier on this paper. McDonald and Wanner reported in their survey from Statistic Canada research in 1980 for men aged 55 to 64 that the major reason cited for labour force withdrawal was health problems. They also added that early retirement in Quebec was related to poor health for men in the private sector and was associated with work-related stress and financial adequacy among men in the public sector. Women in the public sector were studied, and their early retirement was associated with both poor health and being married.²⁷

This survey was done over three decades ago in 1982 and I will be surprised if it is different today. I conclude then that staying healthy until retirement is a major factor in finishing well, and definitely will affect future plan of staying active in doing something after retirement. In planning to finish well, the pastor's health is significantly important in meeting the physical demands of ministry both present and beyond retirement.

VI. Rewards of being a Pastor

Who of us pastors has never been tempted to lose heart? We lose heart when we lose the sense of wonder on the superiority of the ministry entrusted to us! This is a strong statement by the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:1, *"Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart."* Pastoral ministry is hard work but very rewarding at the end. Hard to deny that numerous times I had felt stressed. I had sensed that my leadership is not yielding fruits and plans that I'm convinced will work did not go through. But there are many highs than lows. For the fact that many people's lives were changed, different ministries and projects were started and accomplished using people in the church, it is gratifying.

I like the parting words of Fred Smith in his book "Learning To Lead", he says "A worthy goal for an aging leader is to learn to give up the power, the day-to-day responsibility, and become a shepherd of shepherds. The point is not to usurp positions but to mentor younger people and simply say, "I'm available."²⁸ Finishing well in the pastoral ministry does not end after retirement, it is the pastor's life.

The greatest reward for pastors as they reach the finish line in pastoral ministry is how they became partners with Jesus in fulfilling the "Great Commission" he commanded all to do: *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age"* (Matthew 28:18-20).

²⁷ McDonald, P. Lynn and Richard A. Wanner, *Retirement in Canada*, Toronto: Butterworths, 1990, 63.

²⁸ Smith, Fred and Marshall B. Shelley ed., *Learning To Lead*, vol. 5, 181.

VII. Conclusion

A pastor's challenge to finish well is something we must take heed. Pastors who finish well according to Clinton, displays six characteristics which certainly can be useful markers to be observed. I mentioned in this paper that pastoral ministry is hard work and it needs perseverance. An important reminder from Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 9:27, "*But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.*"

It has been a joy in writing this paper as it relates to my pastoral ministry at Living Word Christian Church. It also had given me a great anticipation to see what God will bring in the future in the church that I love, with His grace and strength producing a healthy growing congregation.

Ultimately, echoing Paul's words:

2 Timothy 4:6-8, "*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. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.*"

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