A Phenomenological Study of Pastoral Accountability in Covenant Community

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Abstract

Most pastors and clergy minister from a place of a perceived divine calling and persist through the myriad of challenges of ministry, regardless of the personal toll that it takes on them. This tireless working can drive them to a place of poor emotional and mental health, which can ultimately affect themselves and their families in a negative way. The need for an effective peer support structure is imperative, and understanding the needs of local pastors can help build that support. Many ministers feel isolated in their efforts and could benefit greatly from a peer group where they could safely be themselves. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine and explore the experiences of ministers involved in a covenant accountability group and how they benefit mentally, socially, and spiritually. Interviewing pastors who had shared experiences in dealing with the various challenges of ministry while being consistently involved in covenant accountability relationships offered valuable information in overcoming the complex challenges of pastoral ministry. Ten interviews were conducted with pastors involved in a covenant accountability group, and the collected data were analyzed using qualitative methods. Three distinct categories arose from themes that came from the collected data regarding the experience of pastors involved in a covenant accountability group: atmosphere, relationships, and personal growth. Additional research is suggested in three different areas in assisting to build a viable pastors network: spousal input, geographical research, and long-term research.

Keywords: pastors, accountability groups, care for pastors, pastors peer groups, self-care for pastors

Dedication

This dissertation dedication is threefold: first, it is dedicated to Dr. Adrian Manley, who sadly passed away in 2021. Dr. Manley first told me of the Organizational Leadership Ph.D. program that was starting at Southeastern College, and he was an inspiration and encouragement to me throughout the entire program. Dr. Manley was a dear friend who is sorely missed. Second, this dissertation is dedicated to my daughter Abbey, with whom I will have the joy of graduating together. Abbey has been a great encouragement to me (especially helpful with my quantitative statistics class), and we have helped push each other together to get to the finish line. Lastly, this dissertation is dedicated to my joy, my love, my wife, Monique. Without her gentle encouragement and motivations, I would not have finished. Monique has been—and continues to be—a great source of strength and support for me.

Acknowledgements

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

Ministers and clergy face a great deal of occupational stress, which can result in psychological distress (Miles & Proeschold-Bell, 2012). The occupational stress and strains of the rigors of day-to-day ministry can also lead to negative physical and mental health outcomes (Miles & Proeschold-Bell, 2012). Pastors often face emotional collapse or breakdown as a result of constant stress and high levels of anxiety and the nature of their constant attending to the needs of their congregations and communities (Abernethy et al., 2016). Focusing exclusively on the needs of others and not taking time for maintaining personal mental, spiritual, emotional, and physical health can lead to disastrous consequences. In 2013, Pastor Teddy Parker—a 42-year-old pastor of an 800-member church in Macon, Georgia, and father of two—died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound in front of his home as the members of his church waited for him to arrive and preach on Sunday morning (Christianity Today, 2013). In 2018, Andrew Stoecklin—father of three and lead pastor of Inland Hills Church in Chino, California—took his own life. Andrew had been suffering from depression and anxiety (Church Leaders, 2018). On September 9, 2019, Jarrid Wilson—pastor of megachurch Harvest Christian Fellowship, author, and father of two—died by suicide at 30 years old (NBC News, 2019). As a mental health advocate and co-founder of a nonprofit mental health organization, Wilson often spoke on depression and mental illness. On May 7, 2020, Darrin Patrick—founding pastor of Seacoast Church, author, and father of four—died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound (Carson, 2020). As these tragic examples illustrate, pastoring can be an intense combination of role strains and higher calling, often putting their mental health at risk (Proeschold-Bell et al., 2013); yet, this is a rarely researched issue that can have significant impacts on churches, communities, and even nations (Salwen et al., 2017). Indeed, clergy's mental health and their coping responses have rarely been the focus of psychological research (Meek et al., 2003).

The importance of maintaining personal mental health is evident given the comprehensive responsibilities that clergy carry, such as providing guidance and direction, affirming moral values, supporting families, community development, counseling, visitation for the hospitalized and homebound, and meeting the needs

of the poor, along with long hours and making substantial personal sacrifice (Trihub et al., 2010). Pastors are often play a crucial role in supporting the emotional well-being of their parishioners, who hold their ministers in high esteem and look to them for solace when suffering from mental or emotional distress (Bledsoe et al., 2013). Unrealistic expectations can play a major role in stress and burnout among clergy, as many struggle with feelings of inadequacy, stress, and frustration in meeting ministry goals (Proeschold-Bell et al., 2011). The professional minister is expected to be the embodiment of the moral ideals of their community as they meet the expectations of their congregations (Hamilton, 2012). Increasing researchers have revealed that pastors standing in the gap of multifaceted needs of the underserved and impoverished and ministering to those suffering from human-engineered injustice are at high risk for burnout, which may diminish their capacity to attend to their communities and their congregations (Abernethy et al., 2016). In their attempts to ensure the spiritual well-being of their congregations, ministers often neglect their own emotional and mental well-being and become unaware of the potentially detrimental effects of burnout (Terry & Cunningham, 2021). Burnout among clergy can be symptomized by emotional exhaustion, low satisfaction, discouragement, and feelings of being drained, which are often fueled by a desire to please others, compassion, guilt or shame, and/or an inability to separate themselves from their work role (Barnard & Curry, 2012).

The consequences of ministers suffering from burnout and moral injury obtained from working with difficult situations can affect parishioners and communities alike, and scholars have cited the need for additional research on this matter (Carey et al., 2016). Some researchers have explored the nature and effects of clergy burnout; however, little attention has been paid to the internal psychological dynamics encompassing the social expectations of the clergy role (Beebe, 2007). There is limited understanding of the association between religiousness and depression (Smith et al., 2003). Although researchers have discovered high rates of depression in ministers, the comparison of depression between clergy and other helping professionals is virtually unknown (Adams & Hough, 2017). There is growing literature on burnout and stress among ministers,

but few studies exist regarding anxiety and depression among clergy (Proeschold-Bell et al., 2011). The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the preventative measure of covenantal accountability as a meaningful deterrent to moral failure, depression, and burnout in ministers. The results of the current study on covenantal accountability can further enhance the understanding of support strategies for improving psychological and mental health of professional clergy and the potential effectiveness of their ministries (see Francis et al., 2013).

Statement of the Problem

Pastors have been found to be prone to occupational burnout and emotional exhaustion as a result of their ministry work (Faucett et al., 2013). According to the Fuller Institute, 50% of pastors feel unable to meet the demands of their jobs, 61% of pastors were forced to leave by their congregation, and 250 clergy are leaving the ministry each month (Dance, 2019; Maxwell, 2019). Ministers often become involved in pastoral peer groups to help cope with the stress of ministry, but few scholars have assessed whether pastoral peer groups can be effective in minimizing the stress of occupational ministry (Miles & Proeschold-Bell, 2012). These pastoral peer groups can be of several types, but are similar in that they bring clergy together to yield solutions from interaction concerning common sets of challenges (Miles & Proeschold-Bell, 2012). While a substantial amount of research has been devoted to identifying the tasks of occupational ministers, little has been done regarding the effectiveness of pastoral peer groups in managing of their roles (DeShon, 2010). Indeed, there are few articles detailing evaluation or accountability programs specific to clergy and a lack of published information on clergy mental and physical health (Wallace et al., 2012). There is a dearth of research studies dealing with pastoral anxiety and depression among clergy and the role of peer groups and accountability (Proeschold-Bell et al., 2011).

There are significant gaps in the literature concerning the effectiveness of pastoral peer groups and pastoral accountability in reference to ministers being in authentic covenant with each other. Covenant is an ancient concept, with its basis found in biblical literature; however, there is little research done on covenant connection between clergy and their peers in occupational ministry. With the lack

of research on the impact of a covenantal accountability in the context of a pastoral peer group setting, the current researcher sought to explore this impact.

Purpose of the Research

Those serving in clergy roles are prone to emotional, spiritual, cognitive, and physical deficits related to concentrated efforts in meeting their ministerial obligations (Holaday et al., 2001). Many ministers feel isolated in their efforts and could benefit greatly from a peer group where they could safely be themselves. The purpose of this study was to examine how ministers involved in a covenant accountability group can benefit mentally, socially, and spiritually. The researcher used qualitative means to interview pastors who have been involved in a peer group for over 5 years to investigate the possibility of a relationship between clergy peer groups and clergy health and overall well-being. The researcher also explored the experience of covenant accountability and its effects on ministers and their peer relationships.

Research Questions

Clergy are prone to burnout, depression, emotional fatigue, poor health, unrealistic expectations, feelings of isolation, and even suicidal thoughts. Researchers have shown that these feelings have a negative effect on clergy's ministerial career, health, and the functioning of their congregations (Frenk et al., 2013). Ministers who experience burnout can have a loss of energy, commitment, and motivation, which could ultimately perpetuate their exodus from ministry altogether (Muse et al., 2016). Clergy peer groups can play a significant part of the overall health and well-being of the minister; therefore, a healthy leader will produce healthy congregations (Sixbey, 2014). Through this study, the researcher sought an understanding of what a covenant accountability group is and how it influences attending members. The guiding research questions of this study were as follows:

RQ1: How is accountability understood from a covenantal perspective?

RQ2: How do regularly attending members perceive their experience of a covenant accountability group?

RQ3: What do ministers perceive to be the benefits of regular participation in a covenant peer group?

RQ4: In what ways (if at all) do regularly attending members of a covenant accountability peer group perceive a decrease in feelings of depression, burnout, and isolation from being a part of the group? If so, in what aspects of the covenantal accountability peer group serve to address these feelings?

Significance of the Research

Christian clergy in the U.S. and abroad have been reported to have rates of depression three times greater than that of the general population due to lack of social support (Edwards et al., 2020). The occupational role strains of clergy puts them at high mental health risk, along with the pressures of several extrinsic demands, low job satisfaction, and financial stress (Proeschold-Bell et al., 2013). A mental health toll can be taken on ministers as a result of their constant engagement with others in emotionally exhausting contexts (Francis et al., 2019). For example, 65% of surveyed Assemblies of God ministers were found to be suffering from burnout (Visker et al., 2017). Ministers who find themselves suffering from emotional burnout, high stress, and depression are at risk of unethical behaviors and abusing their authority (Haug, 1999). Scholars have indicated, however, that clergy find benefit and improvement in their mental health through participation in peer support groups (Miles & Proeschold-Bell, 2013). Blodgett (2011) posited that by regularly meeting in peer groups for continuing education and support, clergy are seeing a decrease in loneliness across all denominations. Holistic connections with others in either one-on-one, peer groups, or retreat-based contribute to positive clergy mental health (Wallace et al., 2012). One of the challenges of peer support groups among ministers is that these groups can cause feelings of competitiveness and vulnerability, causing difficulties for some pastors to connect (McMinn et al., 2005). A covenant community of peers could potentially decrease these feelings of competitiveness and vulnerability, as a covenant is a binding agreement among all parties for mutual benefit; therefore, in context, a covenant community exists as a binding group dedicated for mutual benefit (Lomasky, 2011).

The toll of high ministry stress on ministers and their spouses is also evident, which can impact their relationship in a negative way (Rowatt, 2001). Although the marriage relationship between clergy and their spouses is an important coping mechanism for the stressors of ministry, these stressors present a unique challenge due to the nature of pastoral work (McMinn et al., 2005). Ministry can place heavy occupational strains and demands on the minister and their family's resources, which diminishes satisfaction within the interfamily relationships (Morris & Blanton, 1994). While ministers are serving their communities supporting individuals through personal crisis, death and illnesses, counseling, working long hours, the needs of their spouses and families may often go unaddressed (Darling et al., 2004). A benefit of authentic covenant community is the ability for other clergy peers to offer practical and spiritual help to ministers and their spouses in times of difficulty, which could preserve their marriages (Brewster, 2014).

Pastoral stress can affect the quality of family life, creating difficulties with intrusive expectations upon their spouses and their children (Lee & Iverson-Gilbert, 2003). Children of clergy members experience the stress of ministry while undergoing their formative years, often under the expectations of pious congregations, which exacerbates personal frustration in them as they are unable to adequately voice their pain (Hardy, 2001). Children with a minister as a parent find the quality of their family time, ability to be oneself, intimacy with each of their parents, and relationships with others impacted by the ministry of the parent (Anderson, 1998). Clergy families face the same issues of nonclergy families; however, the unique aspects of a minister's family life affect the way these issues are experienced (Wilson, 2010). A ministerial peer support group such as a covenant community can foster a lived theology, impacting values and beliefs, which can ultimately improve the ministers' relationships with their families (Doehring, 2013).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study was threefold: biblical covenant, pastoral peer groups, and pastoral accountability. In this section, the researcher explains the intersection of the three concepts in this framework.

Biblical Covenant

Understanding biblical covenant in context to accountability peer groups comes from the concept of *berit* of the Sinaitic Covenant, in which not only were the Jewish people in covenant with God to obey the commands of God, but in covenant with each other to be held responsible for one another's actions (Schiffman, 1987). In this context, biblical covenant also involves behaviors expected of each party involved in relationship to each other (Walton, 2019). Entering into covenant with someone for the sake of accountability can transcend values and boundaries and create reciprocal community (Freeman, 1980).

Pastoral Peer Groups

Clergy across many denominations are discovering the practice of meeting on a consistent basis with their clergy peers for support and continuing education, as well as discovering resources to help them combat feelings of loneliness, depression, and burnout (Sixbey, 2014). Pastoral peer groups provide a safe place where a pastor can find intellectual and spiritual support along with mutual accountability (White, 2010). Most pastoral peer groups are closed groups that provide opportunities for reflection at a relational, psychological, and spiritual level (Gubi, 2016).

Pastoral Accountability

Harvey (2018) posited four essential concepts for pastoral accountability: intentionality, self-disclosure, approachability, and appeal. Accountability and assessment have prominent roles in personal reform (Linn, 2000). Authentic accountability can produce a different senses of self and of one's relationships to others (Roberts, 1991). Accountability is essential to a pastor, and having a sense of safety in a group of peers covenanting together can produce positive outcomes.

Methodology

The current researcher employed phenomenological methods to evaluate the effectiveness of covenant community accountability on ministers who have been involved in a pastoral fellowship in central Florida. In phenomenological research, scholars theorize the meaning of a shared experience by interpreting data through in-depth interviewing (Neubauer et al., 2019; Vandermause & Fleming, 2011). The researcher anticipated that interviewing ministers who have shared experience in dealing with the various challenges of ministry would offer valuable information by understanding the essence of the experience in order to help ministers overcome depression. By conducting interviews with individuals who share a particular experience, an explanation as well as a description of the shared experience can be achieved from the different perspectives (Roberts, 2013). In this study, 10 interviews with pastors were conducted, and the results were analyzed to explore the impact on the mental well-being of ministers who regularly attend a covenant community accountability peer group.

Participants

The participants in this study included ministers and clergy of a pastoral fellowship in central Florida who volunteered to participate in an interview. The participants were required to be involved in this association for a minimum of 5 years and have been in full-time ministry for a minimum of 10 years. The interviews were conducted face-to-face either through the video conferencing platform Zoom, or physically one-on-one. The participants were asked to sign a consent form before the interviews commenced. Any identifying information related to the participants was kept confidential.

Data Collection

Englander (2012) posited that the main data collection procedure closely associated with qualitative research was an interview. The goal of the interview with selected pastors was to attain a detailed, first-person account of the participants' personal experiences regarding a central phenomenon (see Chattaraman et al., 2012). To understand the experiences of pastors who attend

covenant community groups, a one-on-on interviews were conducted with 10 full-time senior pastors from different churches and denominations. Each interview was conducted using an a researcher-developed protocol of 13 questions. Each question was designed to explore contributing factors of depression and burnout, as well as the impact of consistent involvement in a covenant community group for the purpose of practical and tangible possible steps towards a satisfying and fulfilling ministry tenure. Follow-up interviews would have been conducted with the participants if necessary. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and coded for analysis by hand and using MAXQDA2020 software.

Before the interviews commenced, the participants received, completed, and signed an informed consent form. The participants were assured of their complete anonymity and the possibility of terminating the interview if the participant felt any emotional discomfort in any way. As effective communication was witnessed through verbal and nonverbal cues, the researcher took notes to record observations of each participant's nonverbal communication (Baugh et al., 2020). The data were collected through interviews with pastors and ministers involved with a pastors' association in central Florida.

Data Analysis

The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using qualitative methods. During data analysis, the researcher reviewed the transcripts several times and then coded them using the four methods presented by Saldaña and Omasta (2016): in vivo coding, process coding, values coding, and emotion coding. The coding of the transcripts was conducted by hand coding and using MAXQDA2020 software. During coding, the researcher used participants' own language to discover reoccurring themes; identify participants' actions, reactions, and interactions; reveal participants' values, attitudes, and beliefs; and define the emotions and emotional states of the participants as they experienced the central phenomenon. As the data were revealed, they were triangulated by validating the data against other interviews and observations to discover consistency, thus validating the credibility of the presented themes as well as describing the essence of the phenomenon (Cypress, 2018). The researcher then gave the data a textual

description defining "what happened," a structural description defining "how the phenomenon was experienced," and finally a composite description of the essence of the phenomenon. The essential invariant structure was then outlined in accordance with the guiding research questions of this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Scope and Limitations

The scope of this research study was the members of a pastors' peer group located in central Florida. The limitations of this study consisted primarily of the study's focus on one geographical location, as other pastors in different areas may have different experiences. The researcher also only recruited senior pastors who have been regular participants of the pastors' association and not those who have not been involved with this specific group. The findings of this study only reflect the experiences of pastors who have participated and been involved with the pastors' group for a minimum of 5 years.

Definition of Terms

In this section, the researcher provides clarification for the meaning and application of several commonly used terms. There are several varieties of ministerial peer groups that exist, along with different understandings of accountability. The terms and definitions that follow clarify the meaning of each term in the context of this study.

Accountability

In this study, accountability referred to the understanding of two or more individuals being accountable to one another for the purpose of maintaining and improving their quality of life and ministry. Accountability reflects the willingness of all parties involved to be authentic and transparent. Accountability has measurement and evaluation systems, along with rewards and punishments (Han & Perry, 2020).

Burnout

Burnout is the condition of emotional and physical exhaustion ministers experience from being overwhelmed with ministry. Burnout also involves clergy becoming overwhelmingly exhausted through excessive demands on their strength, resources, and energy (Baugess, 2002; Randall, 2013). Burnout is a common condition of pastors and has a direct impact on their professional satisfaction (Doolittle, 2010).

Community

In the context of this study, this described a group of individuals committed to one another with like goals, shared values, and passions (Romero & Harris, 2019). Community was also correlated to covenant accountability.

Covenant

In this study, covenant referred to an understanding of biblical covenant, which describes the context of two or more individuals entering into a formal covenantal relationship for mutual benefit and support (Knoppers, 1996). This understanding of covenant was defined at length in this study and correlated in context to authentic accountability.

Depression

Clergy statistically suffer more with depression then others involved in different professions (Proeschold-Bell et al., 2013). In this study, depression referred to the sense of the general feeling of hopelessness, discouragement, and inadequacy that ministers can feel as a result of being overwhelmed with the demands of ministry.

Isolation

In this research study, isolation referred to the sense of loneliness and isolation common among ministers connected to the unique demands and occupational hazards associated with full-time ministry (Staley et al., 2013). Many ministers feel isolated because of an inability to trust or continuous perceived betrayal by trusted congregants.

Pastor

A pastor is one who shepherds and serves a congregation (Shadden, 2019). In this study, this term referred to ministers or clergy that have a minimum of 10 years of full-time pastoring experience. The term also referred to the senior pastor of a church and congregation. These ministers are primarily pastors but may also have other responsibilities, such as denominational positions and/or extension ministries.

Summary

Ministers have many unique challenges in ministry involving boundary violations, high expectations, time demands, frequent relocations, low financial compensation, and social isolation (Staley et al., 2013). Because of these challenges, ministers can struggle with personal mental health, difficulties in their marriage relationships, and challenges with their relationships with their children. Trihub et al. (2010) stated that clergy are the most trusted professionals in modern society, reaching an average of over 120 million people each week. As they are perceived as examples, it is important that pastors manage themselves well, including in terms of their mental health. When ministers begin to be overcome by stress, depression, and burnout, it is important for not only themselves, but also their families and their congregations, for them to seek out help in overcoming these challenges. Regular involvement with a covenant community can encourage ministers in overcoming their day-to-day challenges with ministry. Sixbey (2014) posited that involvement with covenant community accountability peer groups can improve pastors' general life and career satisfaction, and the current researcher aimed to explore the effect of such involvement.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

Churches serve multiple functions in communities and for their members, such as providing direction and guidance, social connections, and meeting the basic needs for the poor; in these tasks, pastors tend to be the most prominent and visible people responsible (Trihub et al., 2010). Pastoring can face multiple challenges such as stress, frustration, loneliness, isolation, constant time demands, and marital conflict (Hall, 1997). There are substantial demands upon pastors' energy and time, as they are expected to serve in roles including preacher, administrator, counselor, teacher, and fundraiser constantly (Weaver et al., 2002). Excessive bureaucracy, difficult parishioners, personal sacrifice, and rigid work schedules can also contribute to clergy disillusionment (Grosch & Olsen, 2000). Pastoring also places stress on the ministers family and spouses, creating loneliness from lack of family privacy, spouse being on constant call, and frequent moves (Hall, 1997; Warner & Carter, 1984). These stresses can affect pastor's mental health and significantly affect their churches and congregations (Little et al., 2007). Researchers have shown that these stresses and complications also place the pastor at high risk for occupational burnout (Visker et al., 2017). In fact, research has shown that pastors exhibited higher rates of occupational distress then the national average (Shaw et al., 2021). Pastors are required to extend constant care and compassion, which can cause emotional exhaustion, resulting in an inability to feel empathy and compassion fatigue (Mathieu, 2007). Unfortunately, many pastors experience a lack of denominational and organizational support, perceiving church growth to be the primary emphasis of denominational leaders.

Many pastors do not seek out denominational help with mental health issues in fear of conveying professional incompetence, lack of faith, or weakness (Meek et al., 2003). Clergy frequently neglect their own personal well-being in their efforts to ensure the spiritual and mental well-being of their parishioners, placing them at high risk for moral failures, substance abuse, and broken marriages (Terry & Cunningham, 2020). A potential contributing solution to clergy well-being is involvement in a covenant peer group where healthy accountability standards are practiced from a position of authentic concern and compassion. In this study, the

researcher explored the need for pastoral accountability, the potential benefits of involvement in a pastor peer group, and a practical understanding of biblical covenant. Pastoral challenges such as depression and burnout and their effects on the minister's families was also reviewed in this study as well.

Pastoral Challenges

Pastoral ministry presents many unique challenges, as the minister can be called upon to serve simultaneously as a mentor, caregiver, leader, preacher, negotiator, administrator, manager, counselor, spiritual director, social worker, teacher, and community leader (Miles & Proeschold-Bell, 2012). In attempting to fulfil these multiple roles, clergy can easily succumb to depression and burnout which can cause negative consequences on themselves and their families. Pastors play a crucial role in communities by promoting well-being and often stand in the gap for impoverished and underserved individuals and in doing so, it is important they maintain a level of personal mental, emotional, and physical health (Abernethy et al., 2016). The following studies represented the challenges of ministry and their implications for this study.

Depression

Smith et al. (2003) conducted a study to identify published and unpublished studies examining if symptoms of depression were associated with religious involvement. Three techniques were used for this study: first, electric databases were searched using the terms depress, affective disorder, mood, affect, religion, spirit, church, mosque, synagogue, temple, worship, and pray. Second, the reference sections of reviews and studies meeting the search criteria were examined; third, solicitation letters were sent to authors who had published three or more articles on the topic. After the data were gathered, meta-analyses and ANOVAs were used to create random effect models and examine the influence of potential moderating variables. These authors discovered that religiousness is a strong correlate of depressive symptoms that applies across different ethnic, gender, and age groups. The implication for this study was the fact that appearing

religious or being religious factors strongly in causing depressive symptoms, which could explain why pastors are given to depression.

Edwards et al. (2020) conducted a study of existing literature to identify studies measuring spiritual well-being, depression, and social support in clergy and to synthesize the findings to discuss recommendations and potential future research. After a search of three major databases using relevant search terms, 13 studies were identified that included a total sample of 11,448 clergy. The data from this study was analyzed using Psychometrica software which standardized effect sizes across the 13 studies. The results of this study revealed rates of depression increase in clergy with negative social support and negative religious appraisals; however, clergy with high rates of social support and high rates of religious appraisal reported lower rates of depression. The implication for this study was the fact of the great need for clergy to have strong, positive social support and positive religious appraisals so as not to be encumbered with depression.

As pastors are under pressure to give an appearance of being religious in all things even if they are personally struggling, this effort to maintain a perception can cause depression and depressive symptoms. Clergy are seen as leaders in their perspective communities, with responsibilities to care for people in their vulnerable moments; if they are experiencing depression, they are less able to provide support for those under their care (Milstein et al., 2020). Unfortunately, as perception is important for many pastors, conceptualization of depression and its symptoms are often either ignored or are addressed from a religious perspective (Jang et al., 2017). For a pastor to not be encumbered by depression, a strong positive support system as well as consistent positive accountability are needed.

Burnout

Barnard and Curry (2012) conducted a study to examine whether pastors' desire to please others, their ability to differentiate themselves from their roles, their ability to be self-compassionate, and their shame or guilt orientation uniquely predicted variation in the phenomenon of clergy burnout. Four hundred and thirty-five United Methodist Church ministers from the southern United States were invited to participate in a survey implementing the Scale of Emotional Exhaustion

in Ministry scale and the Satisfaction in Ministry Scale, with 69 valid responses returned. The data from these surveys was analyzed using hierarchical regressions. The results of this survey revealed that pastors who exercise high levels of self-compassion were less likely to experience burnout, and that pastors consistently feel high levels of emotional exhaustion which is a major factor contributing to burnout. The implication for this study was the identification of factors that contribute to clergy burnout as well as factors that can help pastors avoid ministry burnout altogether.

Adams and Hough (2017) utilized the Maslach Burnout Inventory's three measures of burnout to compare clergy burnout against other labor and emotional intensive occupations such as police, emergency personnel, counselors, teachers, and social workers. The clergy occupation and burnout contributors were discussed at length, as well as a working definition of burnout among helping professions. Eighty-four studies were discovered under the predetermined criteria and the burnout scores of clergy was compared to the additional occupations. The results of this study revealed that clergy burnout is moderate compared to police and emergency services but worse compared to counselors; however, given the nature of their work, clergy experience a greater sense of self-efficacy in what they do because of their faith and ministry fulfillment. The implication for this study was the degree of burnout clergy experience when dealing with role overload, stress, and emotional fatigue.

Francis et al. (2013) published a study which assessed the effectiveness of five support strategies operated by the Presbyterian Church to minimize levels of clergy burnout: minister peer groups, study leave, spiritual directors, sabbaticals, and ministry mentors. Seven hundred and forty-four randomly sampled Presbyterian clergy serving in a parish responded to and completed a questionnaire for this study which measured work-related psychological health, personality, and support strategies. The results of the study indicated that none of the five support strategies lowered levels of emotional exhaustion or burnout significantly; however, two of the five support strategies enhanced levels of ministry satisfaction. Higher levels of ministry satisfaction were enhanced, according to this study, by

taking a study leave and having a consistent mentor in ministry, thus improving the minister's effectiveness in ministry. The significance for this study was the contributing factors which cause professional clergy burnout and varying strategies to help ministers cope with it.

Holaday et al. (2001) published a study evaluating the effects of vicarious traumatization and burnout in clergy who provide counseling for their church members. Thirty-five clergy members from different protestant denominations from south-central Mississippi were each interviewed and asked to complete two questionnaires implementing the Traumatic Stress Institute Belief Scale and the Maslach Burnout Inventory for this study. The results of the qualitative interviews revealed that many pastors feel unequipped and inadequate when it comes to counseling their members and many revealed that they dealt with depression and stress as a result to listening and attempting to counsel their congregants through many different scenarios. The participants also shared the importance of developing healthy comping skills such as outside friendships, developing hobbies, journaling, and talking with trusted colleagues. The quantitative portion of this study with the two questionnaires was analyzed with standard means and deviations to show the statistical significance, revealing again the stress pastors deal with in listening to and attempting to counsel people with limited to no training. Most of the participants in this study revealed that they were open to continual training and collaborating with mental health professionals. The implication for this study was the fact that too many pastors feel ill-equipped for the job they are doing and the importance of pastors being able to have peers they can share situations with in order to gain understanding on how to be most effective in their counseling techniques.

Muse et al. (2016) conducted a study where clergy from different denominations were surveyed with a pretest and posttest following a week-long intensive outpatient intervention to gauge clergy depression and burnout. One hundred and forty-four clergy were surveyed for this study, each characterized with moderate to severe scores of depression and burnout according to the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) and the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). The

purpose of the study was to analyze the effectiveness of a week-long, multi-therapist intervention designed to help clergy suffering from occupational depression and burnout. The results of the survey were measured with the BDI scale and the MBI scale to determine the results of the week-long intervention, followed by a follow-up survey that took place 6 months later. The results of this study revealed that the clergy who attended the week-long intervention improved, significantly lowering their emotional exhaustion, depression, and burnout scores; and continued to show improvement 6 months following. The implications for this study was the results of the study, namely the improvement of depression and burnout in clergy who received personalized care. This treatment program would be a powerful tool in pastoral accountability to help ministers who are suffering from occupational burnout and depression.

Francis et al. (2019) utilized the Scale of Emotional Exhaustion in Ministry (SEEM), the Satisfaction in Ministry Scale (SIMS), and the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS) to assess whether there is a positive correlation between satisfaction in ministry and clergy work-related psychological health and clergy mental well-being. Ninety-nine Anglican clergy from a rural diocese of the Church of England participated and completed a survey for this study. The data retrieved from the surveys were analyzed using the reliability, factor, correlation, and regression routines of the SPSS statistical package. The results of the study discovered that clergy who maintained positive psychological health and positive mental well-being were able to handle the negative effects of challenging ministry situations and were less susceptible to burnout. The findings of this study also revealed that experiences and situations that tend to negative psychological health and clergy's satisfaction in ministry are more within the control of the clergy themselves. The implication for this study was the emphasis on the importance of pastors to make an effort to maintain mental well-being and positive psychological health to avoid occupational burnout.

Visker et al. (2017) conducted a study to assess the occupational burnout and stress comping mechanisms among Assemblies of God ministers in the Minnesota District. Fifty-two clergy members participated in this study by

completing a survey which utilized the Clergy Burnout Inventory to assess burnout levels, and the COPE Inventory to assess the coping mechanisms of pastors. The data collected from the surveys were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20, which included descriptive statistics, Pearson Correlations, *t*-tests, and a one-way ANOVA. The results of this study indicated that most surveyed pastors were either experiencing extreme burnout, burnout, or bordering on burnout, and were coping by more prayer, more planning, mental disengagement, venting emotions, denial, or reinterpretation and growth. The implications for this study was the process of identifying burnout or potential burnout and developing and encouraging positive coping behaviors for clergy who are struggling.

Randall (2013) conducted a study to evaluate whether the two measures of the Francis Burnout Inventory, the Scale of Emotional Exhaustion in Ministry (SEEM) and the Satisfaction in Ministry scale (SIMS), could be used satisfactorily to measure clergy burnout. Three hundred and forty clergy from the Church of England and the Church in Wales were surveyed in their seventh year of parish ministry to evaluate their work-related psychological health, burnout, and personality in this study. Regression analyses were used to evaluate the data in this study. The results of this study revealed that most clergy surveyed suffered from emotional exhaustion, most of the clergy experienced high levels of satisfaction with the ministry they performed; however, the higher the emotional exhaustion, the lower the ministry satisfaction. The results of the survey validated the Francis Burnout Inventory's two scales as an effective means to measure clergy mental health. The implications for this study were the two indicators of oncoming burnout which were identified as emotional exhaustion and low satisfaction of ministry, each of these being indicators of poor mental health in clergy.

Baugess (2002) conducted a dissertation study to examine the relationship that mentoring had on clergy burnout. Protestant clergy from four denominations were surveyed for this study to compare clergy who had experienced either formal mentoring, informal mentoring, peer mentoring, or no mentoring. One hundred and eighty-six clergy were surveyed for this study from four different Protestant

denominations that shared similar theological beliefs. The data from the surveys were analyzed using the G-Power statistical power analysis software. The results of the survey revealed that traditional mentoring was statistically related to level of burnout with peer mentoring being statistically predictive for two of the three levels of burnout. This survey also revealed that appropriately designed mentoring relationships could be able to help manage and mediate in ministers. The implication for this study was the importance of mentoring, especially among peers to help ministers avoid emotional burnout in their ministry efforts.

Burnout among clergy may be due to the stress, emotional fatigue, and role overload resulting from many pastors' perceptions that they are ill-equipped for the job they are doing. Few careers place people under the same meticulous scrutiny that pastors experience from their congregations and their communities (Schaefer & Jacobsen, 2009). The importance of pastors being able to identify the symptoms of occupational burnout is imperative and can be accomplished through personalized peer accountability and education on various coping behaviors. Burnout is recognized as a common problem with clergy, with researchers showing small-church pastors being more likely to experience burnout than large church pastors (Smith, 2020). Low job satisfaction and emotional exhaustion are two major contributing factors to burnout among clergy; however, there has been success in peer mentoring in helping them identify and avoid occupational burnout.

Family Issues

McMinn et al. (2005) presented five separate studies distinguishing coping strategies between community, interpersonal, and family forms of care for pastors and their spouses. The first study dealt with coping with sexual attraction which 585 graduates from five evangelical seminaries participated in completing questionnaires. The results of this study revealed that pastors were inclined to more interpersonal coping mechanisms, such as prayer, Bible study, etc., then relational coping strategies in dealing with unwanted sexual attractions—or, rather, they turned inward rather than seeking outside help either from family or peers. Study 2 dealt 26 exemplar pastors, or pastors who demonstrated exceptional ways of remaining emotionally and spiritually healthy and handling stress. As in the first

study, these pastors also preferred interpersonal coping rather than relational coping when dealing with various ministry challenges. The third study presented 398 Protestant evangelical senior pastors and what their preferred coping mechanisms for exhaustion and stress was. As in the first two studies, these senior pastors were inclined to prefer a more interpersonal approach to coping with stress rather than relational, although relational coping for them always implied their spouses. Study 4 involved staying healthy where 226 clergy completed a survey and 103 completed an additional question which asked, "What is the single most important thing you do to keep yourself healthy so you can minister to others?"

The results of this study identified interpersonal coping strategies rating the highest with community coping (friends and peers) rating second with family rating last between the three. The fifth study presented involved interviews with 106 male pastors and their wives taking part in an interview regarding how pastors and their wives receive an experience care. Most of the responses of this interview focused on interpersonal care with acknowledgment of the importance of maintaining a healthy marriage. These five studies revealed that the majority of clergy rely on interpersonal means to cope and find solace with the rigors and stress of ministry, such as prayer, personal bible study, and other spiritual activities. Many of the clergy presented in these studies rarely reached out to external or community sources for help coping such as peer groups, friends, and other relationships. Most of the pastors surveyed in these studies referred to their marriage relationships as vitally important to them and their ministry efforts, and acknowledged the toll that ministry takes on families. The implications for this study were the importance of discovering how pastors cope with overwhelming stress of ministry, finding ways to promote healthy coping skills, and the importance of emphasizing and supporting healthy marriages.

Morris and Blanton (1994) conducted a study to further understand the work-related stressors that affect the parental, marital and life satisfaction of clergy and their spouses. A random sample of 272 ordained clergy from six denominations were surveyed with five different instruments for this study including the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMSS), the Clergy Family Life Inventory (CFLI), the

Edmonds Marital Conventionalization Scale (EMCS), the Parent Satisfaction Scale (PSS), and the Life Satisfaction Scale (LSS). The data from the surveys was analyzed using separate stepwise regression analysis. The results of the study revealed several stressors that impacted clergy marital, parental, and overall life satisfaction such as intrusions on family boundaries, unrealistic time demands, deficiencies in social support, and overall loneliness and isolation because of some ecclesiastical structures elevating clergy and their families to a celebrity type status, making intimate friendships difficult. The implications for this study was the exploration of the stressors impacting clergy and their families and the development of strategies to help clergy cope with these stressors in a positive and effective way.

Darling et al. (2004) conducted a study to examine the stress and quality of life among pastors and pastors' wives. A random sample of 436 clergy and their spouses from Georgia, South Carolina, Alabama, Florida, and Tennessee participated in a survey for this research study. The data from these surveys were analyzed using frequency distributions, means, ranges, multiple regressions, standard deviations, and ANOVA's. The results of this study revealed that clergy and their spouses are susceptible to compassion fatigue, financial strain, inter-family strains, isolation, and depression, each of these factors contributing significantly to stress and depreciating their quality of life. The implication for this study was the concept of being able to identify these stressors in pastors and give them effective ways to deal with each of them together with their spouses.

Lee and Iverson-Gilbert (2003) researched questionnaires from 312 Protestant clergy to examine the effects and impacts on a minister's personal and family life focusing on three variables of demands, support, and perception. Five Protestant denominations were chosen for this study: the Presbyterian Church of the USA, the Evangelical Free, the Assemblies of God, the American Baptist Church, and the Episcopal Church. Two exploratory hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to analyze the data from the questionnaires. The results of this study showed the more demanding a congregation is, the lower the pastors' life satisfaction and personal well-being, making them a likely candidate for burnout.

The study also revealed congregational family criticism played a large role in pastors' stress level and had an impact on their marriage satisfaction. The implication for this study was the importance of pastors being able to discuss openly the challenges they face with demanding congregations as well as the honest condition of their marriages. A pastor's personal life will have an impact on their ministry life, and trouble in the home will influence their ministry to their churches and congregations.

Anderson (1998) conducted a research study of 487 pastors' children 25 years and older to examine any relationship between their adult religious commitment and the aspects of growing up in a pastoral family. Amount of quality family time, expectations, ability to be oneself, a satisfying marriage, and relationships with friends and extended family members were all variables included in this study. A survey entitled Survey of Adult PKs (SAP) was developed and given to pastors' kids who were at least 25 years old from the Seventh-Day Adventist conferences in North America. Nine hundred and seventeen names were obtained from the conferences, with 487 meeting all the subject criteria. A quantitative stepwise multiple regression analysis and qualitative analysis was done on the survey which included five-point Likert scale questions and five open-ended response questions. The aspects of growing up in a pastoral home and the relationship to their adult religious commitment that showed the strongest and most frequent correlations in this study were expectations, family time, respect, and intimacy with mother and father. The survey can be summed up best as Anderson stated,

> If their parent had established a warm, loving relationship with them, had
> given them freedom to be themselves and to make choices, had made them
> feel important and spent time with them, and had been a genuine, consistent
> spiritual role model, and maintained boundaries between church and home,
> they would have been more likely to be more religiously committed.
> (Anderson, 1998, p. 404)

The implication for this study was the impact the ministry had on the children of clergy members and the results that it produced in them in their adult years,

particularly the importance of quality family time, respect and closeness felt, with the pastoral parents.

Wilson (2010) conducted a dissertation project examining the stressors children of clergy had growing up and how it affected their adolescent and adult quality of life. To collect data, 5,243 emails inviting children of clergy aged 18 years and older were sent out, with 220 meeting the criteria for the study and completing the surveys. An analysis of variance was used along with Tukey's post-hoc procedure to analyze the data collected from the surveys. The analysis determined that the quality of life of clergy children was influenced not only by the stressors of ministry life, but their sense of coherence and their coping resources were influenced as well. The analysis also demonstrated that the children of clergy reported a lower quality of life as adolescents, however, their quality of life as adults was not affected. The implication for this study was the importance of the pastor and their spouse being more of an active participant in their teenager's life, helping them get through their formative years as best as possible.

The pastoral ministry impacts the families and marriages of ministers in a profound way, many times causing minister's children to walk away from the faith in their adult years. A pastor's personal life will affect their ministry life, the congregations, and the communities they serve; therefore, learning skills such as setting boundaries and realistic time demands is imperative for ministers and their families. There are many contributing factors that work against the spiritual and practical well-being of the minister's family, while they are fulfilling the unique responsibilities associated with occupational ministry (Potts, 2020). Children of clergy often feel that the ministry takes away respect, closeness, and quality time with their parents, causing resentment for the church as a whole. Marriages and family lives of pastors are often vulnerable as the ministry can undermine domestic intimacy (Collingridge, 2015). Several denominations are recognizing the toll that ministry can take on a family and are offering continuing education and accountability programs for their clergy members to help promote overall job satisfaction and healthy marriages and families.

Accountability Measures

Accountability is a concept that can cause transparency, obligation, anticorruption, and trust among those who submit themselves to it (Vian, 2020). Much research has been conducted on the stressors of ministerial work, yet few scholars have focused on the results of effectual accountability among ministers. Each of the following studies presents various particulars for the need for ministerial accountability, from clergy recognizing the need to seek out professional help, to ministers recognizing when they are ill-equipped to handle a situation, to identifying the contributors to ministerial burnout and exhaustion. When the need for clergy accountability is established, a framework can be created to assist ministers in engaging in effective and beneficial accountability structures.

Miles and Proeschold-Bell (2012) analyzed data from a study conducted by Duke Divinity School of 1,373 clergy of the North Carolina (NC) conference of the United Methodist Church (UMC) for the purpose of understanding whether rural ministry was a more challenging occupational setting. A survey was offered in 2008 by Westat, a contract research organization, to 1,820 clergy of the NC conference of the UMC with 1,373 valid respondents, which was supplemented by congregational information from public records of the UMC NC conferences. The results indicated that rural ministry was not particularly beneficial or harmful compared to other ministry settings, although rural clergy reported a more positive experience with lower levels of stress while presenting various unique challenges such as lower income and multichurch ministry. A different ministry setting along with the way clergy interact with the challenges of this setting, especially regarding the pressures and stress of rural ministry were the implications to this study.

Salwen et al. (2017) published a study on pastoral mental health and pastors' attitudes towards seeking psychological help when faced with implications of mental health factors impacting them, specifically looking at their flexibility, self-disclosure, and spiritual well-being. Two hundred and fifty-one selected evangelical students preparing for or already in a pastoral role in this study were given three surveys using a 6-point Likert scale. Multivariate regression analysis was performed to discover predictive or significant relationships between the

pertinent factors of flexibility, self-disclosure, and spiritual well-being. The result of this study revealed that no significant relationship exists between flexibility, spiritual well-being, and self-disclosure regarding pastors' willingness to seek out psychological help for their own mental health needs, suggesting that other influencing factors play a role in these individuals' willingness in getting professional help for their own mental health needs. The implications for this study included the need for pastors to understand the importance of seeking out professional psychological help if necessary to maintain their mental health for the good of not only themselves, but the good of their congregations and communities as well.

Meek et al. (2003) executed a two-part study where they evaluated the responses to three open-ended questions regarding remediation efforts for distress, personal coping mechanisms, and structural support of 398 senior pastors. In the second part of the study, Meek et al. held 30-minute interviews with 26 Protestant Christian clergy who exemplified spiritual and emotional health to discover what these clergy saw as important in maintaining their psychological health. Eight hundred and seventy-four senior pastors of a particular evangelical denomination received a survey packet in the first part of this study, with 398 responding. The survey consisted of a subset of a burnout assessment consisting of three questions regarding pastors' stress, coping, and solutions; the responses were evaluated using the Non-Numerical Unstructured Data index Searching and Theorizing qualitative analysis software package. The second part of the study consisted of studying positive exemplars of for the purpose of learning from their examples. The responses of the 26 interviews of the second part of this study were also transcribed and coded using the qualitative analysis software package. As a result of these two studies, two central themes emerged: intentionality is essential and God is important. Pastors' responses revealed that they understood the need to be intentionally balanced and intentionally connected to family, friends, and other pastors, and that they needed to maintain their sense of calling, their spiritual disciplines, and their self-awareness of God's nature. The implications of these two studies for this study was the importance of maintaining spiritual disciplines for

spiritual and mental health, as well as the importance of being intentionally connected to not only family, but to other pastors as well.

Trihub et al. (2010) addressed the issue of little research being done on actual services available to leadership of churches to maintain their mental health. Three major Christian denominations were surveyed for this study; invitations to participate being sent to 1,186 clergy across the United States, with 434 responding. Two questionnaires were developed and sent, with the first being sent to denominational leaders and the second questionnaire being sent to the three denomination's actual ministers. The surveys sent for this study were quantitative using a 5-point Likert scale and the results were evaluated and quantified using a repeated analysis of variance or ANOVA. The surveys revealed that the denominations did provide several mental health support systems and programs, yet the pastors did not see them as adequate. The pastors who participated in this study also revealed several mitigating obstacles in utilizing these mental health programs such as concerns of confidentiality, financial limitations, and difficulties in getting time off from their churches. The implications for this study were the programs provided by various denominations for pastors to obtain help with mental health issues as well as pastors perceptions of how their denominations view the importance of taking care of their minister's mental health needs.

Bledsoe et al. (2013) developed a study to explore the demands on clergy to provide mental health services to their congregations, stress on the minister created by specific needs, resources available to the congregation to meet these specific needs, and collaboration with mental health professionals and clergy and referral practices. A survey was developed for this study using both open- and closed-ended questions to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. Two hundred and seventy-six surveys were distributed to Southern California clergy for this study, of which 74 participated. The quantitative responses to the distributed survey were analyzed using the PASW Statistics 18.0 statistics software, and the qualitative responses were analyzed using the grounded theory research measure for the purpose of axial coding, determining common themes, and categorizing. The results of this study indicated that pastors face many difficult mental health issues

with their congregations which can result in high levels of stress for the minister. The findings also revealed that the majority of clergy have a positive attitude in referring their congregants to professional mental health practitioners and a great need for ongoing education for pastoral care regarding the mental health needs of their parishioners. The implication for this study was the importance for pastors to understand when they are in need of referring either themselves or their congregants to professional help.

Proeschold-Bell et al. (2011) conducted a study of UMC pastors to determine a data-driven model of clergy mental health. Data for the study were collected using 11 focus groups with 59 UMC pastors and 29 UMC district superintendents from the North Carolina UMC conference. The data from the focus groups were analyzed using the grounded theory approach as well as theoretical sampling; categories were then transcribed and coded to identify themes. As a result of the study, a data-driven model for clergy mental health was developed from five socioecological levels: intrapersonal, interpersonal, congregational, institutional, and civic community. Forty-two conditions impacting clergy health also emerged from the data derived from this study, which were summed into three conditions for mediating clergy health: self-care, stress, and coping practices. The implications for this study were the factors which impact clergy health as well as understanding the five socioecological levels and how they interact with clergy mental health.

Hamilton (2012) conducted a qualitative dissertation that explored the relationship that an Assemblies of God pastor has with their idealized and performance role as a vocational pastor is expected to be the embodiment of the ideals of their congregations. In-depth interviews were conducted with 14 Assemblies of God pastors for the purpose of creating a description of the perceived relationship of vocational pastors toward their ideal performance. The interviews for this study were transcribed and analyzed using a directed content analysis where data were categorized, coded analytically, and categorized again as different themes emerged. The findings revealed that a pastor struggles with discrepancies of maintaining and performing an idealized role such as being highly

relational and the limitation of authenticity and transparency. The pastor is often involved in delicate and intimate details of their congregations' lives, but this intimacy cannot be reciprocated with the congregation, making performance of an idealized role difficult. The implication for this study was the stress a pastor is under to maintain a perceived image or role before a congregation and the toll that it can potentially take on the pastor.

Terry and Cunningham (2021) conducted a study using both quantitative and qualitive methods on how pastors perceive their ministries and their mental well-being, the methods they use to recover from their ministry duties, and ways they balance their ministries and nonministry aspects of their lives. A survey using both Likert-style questions as well as open-ended questions was presented to 546 participants from multiple denominations with 332 completing the total survey for this study. A grounded theory approach was used to code and identify themes in interpreting the data for the qualitative portion of the survey. The results of this survey revealed that most pastors believe the ministry is detrimental to their physical, spiritual, and mental health; that recovery from ministry demands involved personal time, physical activity, and time with friends and family; and that the demands of the ministry are best managed through prioritizing and setting boundaries. The results of this survey present multiple implications for this study, as accountability for pastors was given clear benchmarks with pastors maintaining themselves through personal time, exercise, relationships, prioritizing needs of their congregations, and setting reasonable boundaries.

Carey et al. (2016) did a scoping review of existing literature focusing on moral injury regarding the role of chaplaincy. Moral injury is defined as "perpetuating, failing to prevent, or bearing witness to acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations" (Litz et al., 2009, p. 700). A scoping review of the literature was implemented for this study to identify and resolve gaps in existing literature where no previous research had been conducted regarding chaplaincy and moral injury. A search of the literature was conducted using the terms *moral injury*, *chaplain*, *clergy*, *pastoral career*, and *spiritual career*, after which all resources were entered and categorized using EndNoteX7. Of the

available literature, 482 resources were identified as being relevant to the topic of moral injury and one of the other terms listed for this study. These researchers discovered that chaplains, pastors, and clergy have been addressing moral injury, moral pain, and spiritual distress for many years, specifically with veterans, and that there has been very little published research on the role of clergy in response to people suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome. The implication for this study was the fact that many ministers are ill-equipped to counsel people who have suffered from moral injury, thus creating stress for the minister and feelings of inadequacy.

Faucett et al. (2013) conducted a study to examine the relationships between role ambiguity and role conflict with three facets of clergy job satisfaction: denominational involvement, support relationships, and intrinsic aspects. For this study, 557 clergy of the Arkansas Conference of the United Methodist Church were invited to participate in a web survey measuring role ambiguity, role conflict, and job satisfaction, of which 179 returned valid responses The data were analyzed with SPSS 18.0 statistical software. The results of this study indicated that role conflict and role ambiguity had negative relationships with the three clergy job satisfaction facets of support relationships, intrinsic aspects, and denominational involvement. The significance of these findings for this study regarding pastoral accountability was the importance of understanding how job satisfaction can contribute to lessening the effects of clergy exhaustion, and how to best minister to clergy dealing with severe role stress and role ambiguity.

In 2007, a quantitative study was conducted to improve clergy effectiveness in the United Methodist Church by measuring and understanding pastors' knowledge, skills, abilities, and personal characteristics to match pastors to different church types and create trainings to improve knowledge and skills for a particular church type where the pastor may be lacking (DeShon, 2010). Nine hundred and thirty-five pastors of the United Methodist Church were selected to participate in a survey for this study, with 341 eligible responses returned. After the data were analyzed using an index format where a frequency weighted importance value is formed as the product of the frequency and importance ratings, the

quantitative results provided a picture of the tasks done by local church pastors and the knowledge, skills, abilities, and personal characteristics necessary to effectively perform each of these tasks. This study provided the first quantitative investigation of 65 different knowledge, skills, abilities, and personal characteristics supporting effective performance of a local pastors' tasks. The implication for this study was to understand the tasks expected of pastors and the work load they are under, regardless of whether they are equipped to perform these tasks, and the stress that pastors experience in trying to accomplish these expectations for their congregations.

Wallace et al. (2012) conducted a study to identify and characterize health programs for clergy in the United States addressing stress, emotional health, and physical heath among Protestant denominations as little is known in the research about such programs. Three methods were used in this study to identify programs addressing clergy heath: first, several national denominational headquarters in the United States were contacted by phone. Second, academic databases were searched using terms such as clergy health, clergy health studies, clergy health and wellness, etc. Third, the same search terms were used on Google to locate websites related to clergy health and wellness and contact information from the websites was used to contact the program directors to gain more information of their programs. The results of this study revealed several denominations had policies concerning clergy health; however, most of the programs were limited to specific congregations. The academic databases search also showed little about specific programs for clergy health and wellness, but the Google search identified several websites with clergy health programs with program directors being able to direct to other clergy health programs. The 56 programs identified for this study were then categorized into four categories: individual-level programs, interpersonal-level programs, congregational-level programs, and institutional-level programs. The findings also revealed a great need in denominations for emphasis on clergy health and wellness programs for a pastor to have a healthy and thriving pastorate. The implication for this study was that denominational directors must recognize the need for

accountability with pastors regarding their emotional and physical health and the need for programs to assist in helping pastors with their individual needs.

Frenk et al. (2013) conducted a study evaluating occupational distress in clergy using five perceptions of their work environment, or the frequency that ministers experience (a) excessive demands from people in their congregation, (b) criticism from people in their congregation, (c) feelings of isolation and loneliness, (d) stress from congregational criticisms, and (e) stress from congregational challenges. Data from the 2001 Pulpit & Pew Religious Leader Survey and the 2006 Clergy Health Study were utilized for this study, with the imputations, tests, and regression models analyzed using STATA 10.1. The researchers discovered that most United States clergy experience some occupational distress, while a significant minority of pastors experience all five occupational distresses very often. The implication for this study was the impact that clergy occupational distress has on pastors and how this affects them as well as their effectiveness with their congregations.

Linn (2000) reviewed tests and assessments of five waves of educational reform over the past 50 years for the purpose of evaluating program accountability, standards-based accountability, credibility, and high-stakes accountability. The outcome of the research study gave emphasis to three accountability systems: common standards and high-performance standards for all students, content standard roles, and accountability models validity. After assessing 5 decades of student assessments, the researchers discovered that accountability for improving education and student learning could not be dependent on assessments alone, as day-to-day observations of educators was a major part of understanding student progress and comparing averages among schools was unfair as each school had their inherent mitigating factors regarding accountability. The implication for this study to pastoral accountability was the intentionality for accountability, the understanding that simple assessments may not be sufficient to properly gage where a pastor may be emotionally and mentally, and each church and minister are unique unto themselves.

Pastoral accountability is complex and involves several different facets such as the uniqueness of the individual, the challenges of different ministry settings, and the many factors which impact clergy health, all of which cannot necessarily be determined by a simple assessment. These factors can present contradictions that are as yet unresolved, which is an understood characterization of accountability (Joannides, 2012). Pastors have a need to understand the importance of maintaining their personal mental health, either through professional counseling or programs established through their particular denominations, as their state of mind emotionally and mentally will have an impact on themselves, their families, and their congregations. The importance of peer groups cannot be understated as accountability through such groups can help a pastor maintain both spiritual disciplines, boundaries, and mental positive health. Many denominations are investing in programs in maintaining positive mental health for their clergy, as they recognize the importance of taking care of their members; however, some pastors struggle with seeking help from their denomination in fear of being perceived as weak or as having failed. Perception is a topic that has an impact on pastors, as many feel they must maintain a certain image before their congregations and their denominational leaders thus taking a toll on pastors' mental state. The role of a pastor presents an environment where it is easy to become unaccountable and emotionally isolated (Davies, 2003). Accountability must be intentional for a pastor in order to help avoid burnout, occupational distress, exhaustion, poor job satisfaction, and role ambiguity.

Pastoral Peer Groups

Miles and Proeschold-Bell (2013) researched the utility of pastoral peer support groups for the purpose of reducing psychological stress among clergy by analyzing data from two waves of an ongoing study as well as data from focus groups of UMC ministers in North Carolina. Data was collected from eight different focus groups as well as 1,726 participating UMC clergy using both quantitative and qualitative methods including linear regression models and pattern coding of transcribed interviews with the focus groups. The results of this study indicated a weak beneficial effect of peer groups on reducing pastoral stress, which

was an indicator of individual coping styles, producing both negative and positive results. The interest for this study regarding covenant accountability groups was the ideology of peer groups being a uniform solution to ministers and the emotional and mental stress they deal with, the effect of peer groups on one particular group, and the perception of group attendees of the effects of peer group involvement.

Abernethy et al. (2016) of the Fuller Institute and Emmada Psychology Center studied the effect of the Pastors Empowerment Program (PEP) on a case study following Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans and PEP as an intervention program for pastors dealing with demanding ministry situations or aftermath of trauma, looking to enhance clergy emotional and spiritual resilience, especially in the realm of clergy burnout, and self-care. These authors drew from the case study of a Baptist pastor who faced rebuilding after Hurricane Katrina and participated in the pilot trial of PEP as well as analyzing the rationale, components, objectives, and application of PEP. The results of this case study revealed the power of connecting, collaborating, and fellowshipping with other pastors in sharing their experiences as well as their insights regarding self-care, trauma, burnout, and stress. The implication for this study was the importance of connection with other pastors, as well as the emphasis place on pastoral self-care, especially in the case of trauma and natural disasters.

Sixbey (2014) conducted a study for dissertation involving clergy from the Virginia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church to determine whether involvement in clergy peer groups had any impact on clergy health and well-being. The study was a mixed-methods study, with two surveys designed to gather health, wellness, and group participation quantitative data and two questions designed to gather clergy perceptions of benefits of group participation qualitative data. Three hundred and seventy-one clergy of the Virginia Annual Conference participated in the study. The data analyzed using descriptive statistics revealed that clergy in peer groups had fewer depressive symptoms then experienced by those not involved in peer groups, clergy in peer groups had fewer issues with ministry demands then those not involved in peer groups, and clergy enjoyed support and friendships by participating in clergy peer groups. This study also revealed that clergy in peer

groups showed a higher level of susceptibility to strokes and other physical health issues then those outside of peer groups. The implication for this study was the positive benefits that consistent participation in a pastoral peer group can have for those involved, particularly regarding support, meaningful relationships, and accountability.

Miles and Proeschold-Bell (2013) researched the ability of clergy peer support groups to reduce psychological distress in pastors experiencing occupational stress. These researchers utilized both qualitative and quantitative research methods, eight different focus groups and a survey instrument, to gather data from United Methodist Church clergy members active in North Carolina. A total of 1,726 United Methodist clergy members participated in this study. The quantitative data were analyzed using linear regression models and the qualitative data were recorded and transcribed, with the data being placed into data-driven coding categories after patterns and reoccurring themes were identified. The results of the study showed that while many pastors benefited from being involved in a peer support group, some had negative experiences because of clergy's personal characteristics; the question of the peer groups affecting the distress level of pastors involved in these groups, the study showed marginal effects with the results coming down to each clergy member's personal experience with peer groups. The implication for this study was the emphasis that clergy peer groups are not a "cure all" for every pastor, and the need to give attention to the internal dynamics of peer groups with the emphasis placed on meeting the personal needs of its members.

Gubi (2016) conducted a research study on pastoral reflective practice groups (RPGs) of clergy in the Church of England with the purpose of creating a support system for clergy dealing with the overwhelming stress of ministry. Four RPGs were established consisting of four to five voluntary clergy each, was facilitated by a counselor/psychotherapist, and was evaluated after 2 years after meeting monthly. Qualitative phenomenological analysis was used to evaluate the experiences of the clergy involved in the RPGs, and three major themes emerged: value, limitation, and learning. The theme of value of the RPGs was defined by the clergy as support, feeling less alone, establishing boundaries for self-care,

empowerment, and health-giving. The theme of limitation was defined by the clergy involved as giving answers and people not listening/hearing. The theme of learning defined by the clergy involved in the RPGs was personal for each participant; however, each clergy involved expressed growth hearing the stories of the other pastors and gleaning from their experiences. The implication for this study was the importance of clergy peer groups and the impact they can have on willing participants, especially in the context of encouragement and support.

Pastoral peer groups can be a positive influence creating strong relationships outside of pastors' personal ministry setting, promoting clergy resiliency (Jackson-Jordan, 2013). Pastoral peer groups also offer support, accountability, and a way to deal with the emotional and mental stressors of everyday ministry by gleaning from other's experiences. Participation in a pastoral peer group can also help members cultivate faith, strength, and spirituality and identify the mental health struggles that pastors may be facing (Kramer et al., 2007). Although many ministers struggle with openness and trust, the impact that a pastoral peer group can have on willing participants in the realms of trust and support can ultimately contribute to an overall satisfying ministry tenure.

Covenant Relationships

The concept and theme of covenant is crucial, as it forms the backbone of the redemption story of the gospel throughout the Bible. Indeed the progression of the biblical covenants is the key to the redemptive plot structure of the entire scripture (Gentry, 2016). A covenant is a chosen relationship or partnership with defined commitments and obligations in which binding promises are made between two parties, often accompanied by ceremonies, oaths, or signs, in order to reach a common goal (Woollard, 2018). Foster (2006) defined covenant as a relationship of mutual obligation guaranteed by oath sanctions in which unrelated people were effectively made family, emphasizing relationship and obligation. Biblical covenant typically emphasizes relationship over oath; as Smith (1901) posited, "Primarily the covenant is not a special engagement to this or that particular effect, but a bond of truth and life-fellowship to all the effects for which kinsmen are permanently bound together" (p. 315). Kalluveettil (1982) reinforced the concept of

relationship in covenant by stating that covenant "implies a quasi-familial bond which makes sons and brothers" (p. 212). A biblical covenant culturally implied an obligational bond in brotherhood, fatherhood, loyalty, and kinship, or rather kinship-in-flesh (Hahn, 2005). A covenant also implies much more than an agreement and obligation for mutual good; once agreed upon, a covenant changes the relationships between two covenanting parties and brings it to an entirely different level (Niehaus, 2009). The biblical concept of covenant of mutual obligation towards a common good from the position of familial concepts such as brotherhood and loyalty is the implication for this study, as those pastors covenanted together will stand together and support one another for mutual benefit.

Examples of Biblical Covenant Between God and Man

The first mention of covenant in the Bible is found in Genesis 9:12: "And God said, 'This is a sign of the covenant which I make between Me and you, and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations'" (*New King James Bible*, 1982). Although this is the first recorded scriptural covenant, it has seldom received much scholarly attention (Hahn, 2005). This mention of covenant in the bible is in reference to the Noahic Covenant, in which God enters a formal partnership and relationship with Noah and all living creatures in which He promises to never destroy the earth by flooding it again, providing a rainbow as sign of his promise. The divine initiation and authorization of this covenant is emphatically established five times by God to Noah, leaving no question to who the author of it was (Busenitz, 1999). The Noahic Covenant guarantees God's commitment to creation with the promise of the preservation of life, thus providing the necessary foundation for redemptions story, particularly that life on earth will continue in spite of human sin (Chalmers, 2009). Also included in the Noahic Covenant is the identification of God being the ultimate judicial authority but commissioning man to exercise this power on His behalf in Genesis 9:5 (VanDrunen, 2016).

The next example of biblical of covenant is found in Genesis 17:9-10a (*NKJV*, 1982): "And God said to Abraham: "As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you, and your descendants after you throughout their generations. This is

my covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you.'" This mention of covenant in the Bible is regarding the Abrahamic Covenant where God enters a covenant with Abraham, promising him offspring, land, and universal blessing if Abraham continues to walk blamelessly and train his family to do so as well. This covenant is the declaration of God regarding Abraham's posterity and His future work with him (Dean, 2014). Essex (1999) stated, "Although He and Abraham were both parties to the covenant, the covenant was unilateral in the sense that He obligated only Himself to fulfill His commitment, making the covenant everlasting" (p. 209). The divine-human relationship that is defined by this covenant involved four areas of promise: a seed, a land, a blessing to the patriarchs, and a blessing to the nations (Davis, 2005). The historic significance of the Abrahamic Covenant in Jewish culture represents several things: the election of one man from a world of sinners, the election of a people, and a reward of land for righteousness (Mermelstein, 2017). The sign of this covenant between Abraham and his descendants was circumcision, which was a symbol of being set apart unto God.

The Mosaic Covenant is the next example of biblical covenant found in scripture where God, after bringing them out of the land of Egypt, promises to make them a set apart nation unto Him where He would dwell in their midst, leading them into the promised land if they obey His commands. There is much continuity between the Abrahamic Covenant and the Mosaic Covenant, and the latter is even regarded by some researchers as a renovation of the former (Macedo, 2016). Whereas the Abrahamic Covenant established the nation of Israel and they were to represent God to the nations, the Mosaic Covenant revealed how they were to represent Him as He revealed Himself through the covenant (Baylis, 2004): "Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is mine" (Exodus 19:5, *NKJV*, 1982). The Mosaic Covenant was an example to the international community of a populace government for a people committed to God and ruled by His laws (Vasholz, 2004). The legislation contained in the Mosaic Covenant prompted and encouraged a serious mindset regarding submission to the Lord, as

the promises contained in it were provisional (Barrick, 1999). Under the Mosaic Covenant, life an blessing were promised on the condition of obedience, and death and a curse for disobedience (Leighton, 2018). The sign of the Mosaic Covenant the Lord gave the children of Israel was the Sabbath: "Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant" (Exodus 31:16, *NKJV*, 1982).

In the Davidic Covenant, God places David as king over Israel and covenants to make David's name great, to fulfill the promises made to Abraham through his linage, and to provide an everlasting, faithful king on the throne through him. The Lord delivered His promises through Nathan the prophet to David and then said, "And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever" (2 Samuel 7:16, *NKJV*, 1982). The covenant promised that God's steadfast love would never be taken away as it was with Saul, and that David's line would endure with his throne being established forever (Tripp, 2014). The Davidic Covenant also promised David peace from his enemies, a peace similar to the type of peace achieved through the judges (Melendez, 2021). The Davidic kings had the second longest dynasty, reigning over 4 centuries, which came to an end with the destruction of Jerusalem, the destruction of the temple, and the exile of Zedekiah (Angel, 2016). David's part in this covenant was for him and his descendants to be faithful and obedient to God's commandments and in doing so, he would see the promises of God fulfilled. The Davidic Covenant was not independent of any possible iniquity of David's family; rather, it depended on the faithful obedience of David's offspring (Hwang, 2017).

The New Covenant fulfilled through the death and resurrection of Jesus according to scripture is where God promises forgiveness of sins and indwelling of His Holy Spirit which will empower people to love and obey His commands. The conditions of the New Covenant were mentioned prior in Jeremiah. 31, Ezekiel 11, Jeremiah 33, and Ezekiel 36 with a new heart, forgiveness of sins, permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and God's law written in the hearts of men (Pettegrew, 2007). Where the old covenants dealt with people on an external,

physical level, the New Covenant deals with people on an internal, spiritual level (Willis, 2011). According to Luke 22:20 (*NKJV,* 1982), "Likewise, He also took the cup after supper, saying. 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is shed for you.'" Paul in I Corinthians 11:7-34 alludes to the fact of both Jews and Gentiles as New Covenant participants since they both partake of the cup of the shed blood of Christ (Adeyemi, 2006). The New Covenant is a divine work that is superior to the old covenants, resulting in the forgiveness of sins providing redemption for all men (Hoch, 1997). The sign of the New Covenant is the resurrection of Jesus and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, where Jesus fulfills all the prophetic promises of the coming Messiah.

These examples of covenant between God and man from the Noahic Covenant to the New Covenant represent promises and obligations between two parties for mutual benefit where the parties involved enter familial bond: in these cases, God the Father enacting upon His sons in a covenantal relationship. These covenants reveal the history and nature of God's relationship with man, particularly with the nation of Israel through the ages. God established the nation of Israel, promised them a conditional peace and security, raised up leaders who would follow His precepts, and established the redemption of men through these biblical covenants. These covenants, from the Noahic to the New, also represent the vast love, concern, and heart of the Father towards His beloved creation.

Examples of Biblical Covenant Between Man and Man

The covenant between David and Jonathon gives a clear example of the component of kinship related to covenant, showing the friendship between two unrelated persons becoming stronger as a result of their covenant together (Priest, 1965). This friendship relationship between David and Jonathon is held up as the ideal covenantal relationship (Elazar, 1980). I Samuel 23:17-18a states, "And he said, 'Do not fear, for the hand of Saul my father shall not find you, You shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next to you. Even my father Saul knows that.' So the two of them made a covenant before the Lord" (*NKJV,* 1982). Their friendship was not based on self-interest but on selflessness, resulting in the covenant provision of mutual benefit for both parties (Alcorn, 2015). The mater of mutuality and balance

in the relationship between David and Jonathon is certainly not one-sided, as the covenant between them was mutually reciprocal (Stansell, 2011). As Jonathon and David made the covenant between them, Jonathon's concern for the future was made apparent as it was clear Jonathon recognized David's status as the future king (Thompson, 1974). I Samuel 20:14-16 states,

> "And you shall not only show me the kindness of the Lord while I still live, that I may not die, but you shall not cut off your kindness from my house forever, no, not when the Lord has cut off every one of the enemies of David from the face of the earth." So Jonathon made a covenant with the house of David, saying, "Let the Lord require it at the hand of David's enemies." (NKJV, 1982)

> Genesis 31:44-55 recounts the covenant made between Jacob and Laban with the main point of the covenant being that when Jacob and Laban were away from one another that Jacob would not afflict his wives or marry anyone outside of them for there to be peace between them. Genesis 31:43-44 states,

> And Laban answered and said to Jacob, "These daughters are my daughters, and these children are my children, and this flock is my flock; all that you see is mine. But what can I do this day to these my daughters or to their children whom they have borne? Now therefore, come, let us make a covenant, you and I, and let it be a witness between you and me." (NKJV, 1982)

This covenant between Jacob and Laban presented an especially narrow object being the protection of the wives, affecting Jacob alone with no reciprocity for Laban (McCarthy, 1964). The covenant term here also reflects the connation of kinship whereas two parties are making an agreement on terms of family ties, or as a relationship analogous of kin (Foster, 2006). The covenant of their peaceful relationship had God as both witness and judge, as Laban and Jacob swear an oath with a sacrifice and meal to confirm it, celebrating and sealing the peace (Hicks, 1995). Several covenants of the Old Testament were ratified by meals just as the treaty between Jacob and Laban at Mizpah (McCree, 1926). The covenant between

Jacob and Laban also established a borderline between their territories, marked by a curse as sanction for violation of the covenant terms (Kitchen, 1995).

In I Kings 5, King Hiram wanted to confirm the covenant he had with David with King Solomon as Solomon ascended to the throne, confirming the covenantal relationship with Israel marked by his love and loyalty to David (Olyan, 1996). I Kings 5:12 states, "And the Lord gave wisdom to Solomon, just as He promised him; and there was peace between Hiram and Solomon, and the two of them made a covenant" (*New American Standard Bible*, 1971). This covenant marked by love and friendship was also political and economic, as Hiram supplied supplies to Solomon and Solomon gave cities and food to Hiram as a reciprocal payment (Moore, 2004). The two kingdoms were closely aligned, particularly through close economic ties, with the superior kingdom being Hiram's recognizing Solomon's kingship over Israel (Kuan, 1990). This covenant was sworn between equals, two kings, representing a specialized type of covenant whereas the covenant was witnessed against themselves (Tucker, 1965). The covenant between Hiram and Solomon also represented the wisdom and diplomacy of Solomon as he relegated the terms for a continuous flow of lumber and materials for the temple (Porten, 1967).

These examples of covenant represent the common themes of kinship, love, and loyalty essential to covenants. The mutuality of benefit as well as the oaths given exemplify the serious of the covenants made between the two parties which these examples also demonstrate. These examples of covenant also represent a variety of covenants throughout the Old Testament, such as the establishment of territories, promises of peaceful cohabitation, promises of future consideration, and promises of economic cooperation.

Conditions of Covenants

There are many examples of the various conditions of covenant, particularly, covenant pledges, covenant signs, covenant witnesses, and covenant consequences. Each of these conditions would have to be met by each participating party of the particular covenant, making the covenant valid. Covenants were solemnly confirmed connections, which were not to be shaken by either parties

(Kapelrud, 1988). As covenants are one of the most significant concepts of Biblical theology and the substance that unities the Christian canon, the conditions of each covenant are important to understand (Williamson, 2006).

Covenant Pledges or Gifts. Covenant pledges or gifts were offered as part of the ratification of the covenant between two parties such as sheep, oxen, robe, or armor (Busenitz, 1999). Pledges or gifts bestowed upon covenantal parties could also have been represented by land or land grants for loyalty to the covenant made (Knoppers, 2021). The covenantal pledge could also be represented by intentional promises made, such as God pledging Himself to Israel and His faithfulness to do so (Bredenkamp, 1885). All the pledges—either gifts, land, or upheld promises—were essential in the process of establishing a covenant.

Covenant Signs. As covenant signs were similar to the pledge or gift, which were given when establishing a covenant, the signs of covenant were generally a repeatable memorial (Busenitz, 1999). The rainbow after the flood, circumcision established through Abraham, and the Sabbath established at Mt. Sinai all represent divine covenantal signs. Covenantal signs were a clear testament of the existence of a covenantal relationship (Levenson, 1980). Memorials were often erected to represent a sign of an established covenant, representing the intention of the parties involved (Spolsky, 2012). Covenantal signs, either divine in nature affecting the world or memorials established by men, all represented a key component of an active covenant.

Covenant Witnesses. Often covenants between individuals were divinely witnessed such as David and Jonathon's covenant made "before the Lord," and Laban and Jacob's covenant with "God is witness between you and me," each being acknowledged solemnly witnessed before God (Busenitz, 1999). Huffmon (1959) stated, "Witnesses serve as an indication or guarantee thar the unfulfilled obligation exists, which justifies Yahweh in actually invoking the curses of the covenant" (p. 293). Covenants and all legal contracts were witnessed by a number of people in their respective communities, acknowledging their existence and the oaths and promises of each party to fulfill it (Mendenhall, 1954). Witnesses of the

covenant were especially important should any of the covenant stipulations be revoked upon or disregarded.

Covenant Consequences. Covenant consequences were either positive or negative, whether the covenant was motivated out of friendship, suspicion, or God's providence, with fidelity to the covenant constituting the essence of it as the most fundamental anchor. Covenants were to be remembered and kept, with blessings awaiting those who did and many times curses for those who transgressed and broke them (Busenitz, 1999). Each party was responsible and obligated under the terms of the covenant and was liable to the consequences, either blessings or curses from adherence or rejection (Freedman, 1964). Noncompliance to the covenant resulted in one of three scenarios: a vowed death penalty, nullification of the covenant, or corrective actions that involve neither nullification of the covenant nor death (Dean, 2014). The consequence of blessing that followed compliance to the covenant, especially in the divine covenants, were extensive with rewards for all parties involved (Buchanan, 1970). All of the consequences, blessings, and curses were outlined in the foundation of the covenant, which was ratified many times with a blood sacrifice, indicating the solemnity of the matter.

The importance of covenant with the parties involved being placed in a kinship position with the obligation to fulfill it gave a security to all involved. Witnesses were involved, and tokens were exchanged as a way of sealing the covenant made between two parties. When a covenant was of a divine nature, it often revealed another facet of the character of God and His great love for His people. With stipulations and conditions set on the divine covenants, however, many times throughout Israel's history, the people failed in upholding their end of the covenant, resulting in negative consequences for the nation. By nature, covenant takes relationships to a deeper level.

Summary

Pastors have a difficult job as they many times make sacrifices unique to their position, whether being on call constantly, sacrificing time with their families, or not taking care of themselves personally. If not managed effectively, these sacrifices that pastors make can lead to burnout, depression, family issues, or moral

failures, causing mental and physical exhaustion. The need for accountability for pastors from the context of helping them have a satisfying and fulfilling ministry tenure is paramount. Scholars have shown that too many pastors have little to no accountability in their lives because of mistrust or a fear of appearing weak to their congregations or superiors. Several denominations are now establishing programs such as retreats and other continuing education to help their ministers effectively combat burnout and emotional ministry fatigue, but some pastors continue to struggle with the perception of appearing weak or unable to fulfill their duties should they utilize these programs. The concept of covenantal accountability is a concept where accountability is based on the foundations of deeper, richer relationships where each party of the relationship is treated in a kinship fashion. Clear conditions are set for the covenant accountability relationship for mutual benefit without the fear of negative repercussions or misperceptions. These types of covenant accountability relationships are what the pastors' fellowship in central Florida has been built on and effectively maintained for over 10 years, resulting in ministers experiencing lengthy tenures instead of moving on after only a few years of service. Covenant accountability relationships is what the current researcher sought to explore through this qualitative phenomenological study.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

Pastors face unique career challenges, as they are often driven by perfection, poor administrative support, long hours, personal sacrifices, and multiple stressors when serving their congregations (Trihub et al., 2010). The trend of those who are purveyors of hope found in faith leaving the ministry, suffering through divorces, and even taking their own lives is on the rise, impacting families, congregants, and communities at large. This phenomena of ministers experiencing burnout, depression, family issues, and mental and emotional exhaustion can be explored using phenomenological qualitative research (Gaete Celis, 2019). Phenomenological research is based in sociology, anthropology, and other human sciences, and enables the exploration and uncovering of the essence of participants lived experiences (Flynn & Korcuska, 2018). Phenomenological research is the investigation of a particular experience itself (Polkinghorne, 1989). Qualitative researchers draw data from events that occur by examining the perspectives of those associated with a central phenomenon (Jamali, 2018). By examining the perspective of pastors who are coping and overcoming the devastating effects of several different complex challenges, including stress, depression, and burnout through covenant accountability relationships, a solution may be derived to help pastors experience a satisfying and fulfilling ministry career.

Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research study was to explore the experience of pastors involved in covenant accountability relationships and their personal struggles with ministry burnout, depression, emotional exhaustion, and family lives. In Matthew 11:29–30, Jesus clearly states, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me [following Me as My disciple], for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest (renewal, blessed quiet) for your souls. For My yoke is easy [to bear] and my burden is light" (Amplified Bible, 1964); the Bible gives a clear picture of burdens being light and the yoke being easy. If Jesus declares the burdens of ministry being light and easy to bear, the phenomena of ministers experiencing burnout, depression, and even suicide is worth exploration.

The data gathered through this qualitative study were interpreted to develop a positive framework of covenant accountability to assist ministers to not only overcome depression and burnout in ministry, but also to have a satisfying and fulfilling ministry tenure.

Through this study, the researcher sought to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How is accountability understood from a covenantal perspective?

RQ2: How do regularly attending members perceive their experience of a covenant accountability group?

RQ3: What do ministers perceive to be the benefits of regular participation in a covenant peer group?

RQ4: In what ways (if at all) do regularly attending members of a covenant accountability peer group perceive a decrease in feelings of depression, burnout, and isolation from being a part of the group? If so, in what aspects of the covenantal accountability peer group serve to address these feelings?

Research Methodology

According to the Fuller Institute, 50% of pastors surveyed feel that they are unable to meet the demands of their jobs, 61% of pastors were forced to leave by their congregations, and pastors are leaving the ministry at an alarming rate (Maxwell, 2019). As phenomenological research theorizes the meaning of human experience (Neubauer et al., 2019) by interpreting data through interview questions (Vandermause & Fleming, 2011), the current researcher anticipated that interviewing pastors who have shared experiences in dealing with the various challenges of ministry while being consistently involved in covenant accountability relationships could offer valuable information in overcoming the complex challenges of pastoral ministry. By conducting interviews with individuals with a particular shared experience, explanations and descriptions of the shared experience can be achieved from an individual perspective (Roberts, 2013).

Participants and Sampling

Interviews with 10 different members of a pastors' fellowship in central Florida were conducted. The participants were senior pastors from various churches and denominations. The sample size was determined by the fact of this being a single case study, which would typically require 10–30 participants (Marshall et al., 2013). The pastors who voluntarily participated in this study were senior pastors with at least 10 years of experience in leading their perspective congregations. The participating pastors also read, agreed to, and signed an informed consent letter, and the process of nondisclosure was fully explained. Confidentiality was paramount for this study; each pastor was given a number to obscure their identities in the interview transcripts and final presentation of results.

Instrument and Data Collection

Englander (2012) posited that the main data collection procedure associated with qualitative research is an interview. By conducting interviews, it is possible to obtain detailed, first person accounts of each individual's experience regarding a central phenomenon (Chattaraman et al., 2012). In order to explore the impact of consistent participation in covenant accountability relationships and their relationship with burnout, depression, and stress of ministry, one-on-one interviews were conducted with 10 various volunteer members representing different churches and denominations of a pastors fellowship in central Florida. The instrument for these interviews was a list of 13 questions created by the researcher. The interviews for this study were conducted either face-to-face or online through Zoom. The interviews were recorded using the Otter application. Before each interview, an informed consent letter was read, agreed upon, and signed by each participant. Complete anonymity was assured to each participant with the guarantee of each transcription of their interviews being kept on a password-protected computer. If any of the volunteer participants of this study experienced any overwhelming emotional discomfort, the interview would have been terminated at any time. As effective communication is witnessed through verbal and nonverbal cues, the researcher took notes to record observations of each participants' nonverbal communication (Baugh et al., 2020). Each interview for this study lasted around 60

minutes, which aligns with the general average for qualitative interview at 60 to 90 minutes (Irvine, 2011). Follow-up interviews would have been conducted to obtain additional or clarifying information if necessary.

Interview Questions

The interview questions and their associated interview questions were as follows:

RQ1: How is accountability understood from a covenantal perspective?

1. Have you experienced accountability in the peer group? If so, how?
2. Have you experienced covenant in the peer group? If so, how?
3. How would you define covenant accountability?
4. What are some characteristics of a meaningful pastoral peer relationship?
5. How would you establish a covenant accountability relationship with new members to the group?

RQ2: How do regularly attending members perceive their experience of a covenant accountability group?

6. Has regular attendance at the pastors' fellowship impacted you? If so, how?
7. What are some positive experiences you have had with accountability in a pastors' peer group setting?
8. What are some negative experiences you have had with a pastors' peer group?

RQ3: What do ministers perceive to be the benefits of regular participation in a covenant peer group?

9. How has regular attendance benefitted your particular church?
10. What are some specific benefits of being in a covenant accountability relationship with local pastors?

RQ4: In what ways (if at all) do regularly attending members of a covenant accountability peer group perceive a decrease in feelings of depression, burnout, and isolation from being a part of the group? If so, in what aspects of the covenantal accountability peer group serve to address these feelings?

11. What would you define as common struggles a pastor deals with?

12. Has the pastors fellowship addressed these common struggles? If so, how?

13. How has regular attendance at the pastors' fellowship helped you personally with these common struggles?

Ethical Considerations

Upon confirmation of participation, each pastor received an informed consent letter detailing the study's background information and procedures, the voluntary nature of the interview, the risks and benefits of the study, a guarantee of confidentiality, and the researcher's contact information. The form included the disclosure of each interview being recorded for analysis and assurances of complete confidentiality. Once the informed consent letter was read, agreed upon, and signed by the participants, a copy of the informed consent letter was provided for each participants' personal records. The interview for this study was then scheduled and the best scenario for the participant was discussed: either a face-to-face meeting at a predetermined location, or online through the video conferencing platform Zoom. The participant was also informed that if they experienced any emotional discomfort during the interview, or any other reason that would cause them discomfort, the interview could be terminated at any time. The audio files and transcriptions of each interview were kept on a password-protected computer. After data analysis was conducted, all participants' identifying information was replaced with a number to protect their identities. Researchers have a responsibility to ensure the trust, dignity, privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity of the participants in their studies (James & Busher, 2007). Considerations for securing confidentiality of research study participants are always a primary responsibility of researchers (Surmiak, 2018).

Data Analysis Procedures

All the interviews conducted for this study were recorded with the Otter application, transcribed, and analyzed using qualitative methods. The researcher reviewed each transcript several times before coding using the four qualitative

methods of in vivo coding, process coding, values coding, and emotion coding (Saldaña & Omasta, 2016). During this coding, the researcher utilized the participants' own language to discover reoccurring themes, identify participants' actions, reactions, and interactions; reveal participants' value, attitudes, and beliefs; and define the emotions and emotional states as they experienced the central phenomenon. The coding of the transcripts was conducted by hand and by utilizing MAXQDA2020 software. The data were triangulated by validating the data against other interviews and observations to determine consistency, thus validating the credibility of the presented themes and describing the essence of the phenomena (Cypress, 2018). The data were then given a textual description defining the "what happened," a structural description defining the "how the phenomenon was experienced," and finally a composite description defining the essence of the phenomenon. This data were then utilized to develop a framework of covenant accountability to assist pastors in overcoming burnout in ministry as well as helping them have a satisfying and fulfilling ministry career.

Bias

The validity of qualitative research and analysis can be undermined by the bias of the researcher (Collier & Mahoney, 1996). Recognizing and understanding research bias, or any influence that provides a distortion in the results of a study, is vital for determining valid results for a research study (Galdas, 2017). Bias management is a major challenge for qualitative researchers who use interviewing as a data generation method for their research study (Chenail, 2011). Intrinsic bias in a single-observer study can be overcome by combining multiple observers, methods, data sources, and theories; triangulation may be incorporated to further validate research findings (Curtin & Fossey, 2007). In this study, the researcher incorporated triangulation of the data by using multiple data sources and multiple observers of the central phenomenon to provide the best possible research results.

Summary

Trihub et al. (2010) posisted that clergy are the most trusted professionals in society today, ministering on average to 120 million people each week. As minsters

are perceived as role models, it is important that they manage themselves well, including in the realms of mental and physical health. When ministers begin to overcome stress, burnout, and depression, it is important not only for themselves, their families, their congregations, and their communities for them to seek out help in overcoming these challenges. A consideration of the contributing factors of these stressors, as well as a practical understanding of how to develop a network of covenant accountability relationships, will give ministers a solid foundation to work from in ministering to the needs of the communities that God has placed them in. The purpose of this research study was to provide that understanding and help build that foundation.

Chapter 4 – Results

The purpose of this qualitative study was to discover how ministers involved in a covenant accountability group can benefit mentally, socially, and spiritually. In this chapter, the researcher presents the findings from the 10 participant interviews with active senior pastors regularly involved in a pastoral peer group in central Florida. The sample size for this qualitative study was sufficient, as data saturation was reached concerning the central phenomena (Sargeant, 2012). Demographic information of the participants is presented in this chapter as well as the data collected through the interview questions listed in Chapter 3. The phenomenological approach enabled an exploration of the lived experience of the participants who regularly attend the pastors' peer group in central Florida. Data from this study were collected and coded by hand coding using in vivo, process, emotion, and values coding and MAXQDA2022 software. The transcribed interviews were uploaded into the software and coded using the four coding methods with the tools provided in the software. The interview transcripts were then printed and hand coded, with themes being identified as they emerged from the two coding processes. Codes are presented in brackets and italics as demonstrated: [*code*].

Sampling

Participants for this study were selected being regular attenders of the pastors' peer group in central Florida. Each participant gave verbal consent prior to participating and signed a consent form after the form was explained in detail. Each participant has been involved in the pastors' group regularly for a minimum of 5 years and each participant is a currently active senior pastor serving in a church. All 10 participants in this research study were male. General demographic information for the participants is provided in Table 1. The Years Involved column in Table 1 represents how many years each pastor has been involved in the peer group. Following Table 1 is a brief profile of each pastor who participated in this study.

Table 1

Participant General Demographic Information

Identifier	Age	Gender	Years Involved
Pastor #1	65	M	10 years
Pastor #2	61	M	8 years
Pastor #3	51	M	6 years
Pastor #4	49	M	6 years
Pastor #5	49	M	6 years
Pastor #6	50	M	8 years
Pastor #7	44	M	5 years
Pastor #8	52	M	10 years
Pastor #9	55	M	8 years
Pastor #10	70	M	5 years

Pastor #1. Pastor #1 was a 65-year-old male who has been pastoring for 20 years. He also is the founder and CEO of a mission organization that has been reaching South America for the past 25 years and has a television show that reaches audiences in the United States as well as South America.

Pastor #2. Pastor #2 was a 61-year-old male who has been pastoring for 25 years. He is currently pastoring a church in central Florida and also teaches in a private Christian school.

Pastor #3. Pastor #3 was a 51-year-old male who has been pastoring for 10 years. He currently pastors a church in central Florida. He also runs a drug rehabilitation facility associated to the church for recovering addicts.

Pastor #4. Pastor #4 was a 49-year-old male who has been pastoring for 20 years. He is currently pastoring a church in central Florida as well as running an organization that helps feeds and houses the homeless.

Pastor #5. Pastor #5 was a 49-year-old male who has been pastoring for 25 years. He pastors one of the larger churches in central Florida. Pastor #5 is also an accomplished musician who leads and teaches worship.

Pastor #6. Pastor #6 was a 50-year-old male who has been pastoring for 19 years. He currently pastors a church in central Florida. Pastor #6 is an author who

has published several books and is also an accomplished traveling musician and singer.

Pastor #7. Pastor #7 was a 44-year-old pastor who has been pastoring for 10 years. He is currently pastoring a church in central Florida. Pastor #7 is one of the younger members of the group; however, he has a large vision to develop a Christian community with schools, resources, and services for the community at large.

Pastor #8. Pastor #8 was a 52-year-old male who has been pastoring for 32 years. He not only is a pastor in central Florida but an accomplished musician who builds guitars.

Pastor #9. Pastor #9 was a 55-year-old male who has been pastoring for 10 years. He is currently pastoring a church in central Florida as well as running a ministry that feeds and clothes the homeless.

Pastor #10. Pastor #10 was a 70-year-old male who has been pastoring for well over 45 years. He is currently pastoring a church in central Florida. Pastor #10 also serves as an evangelist and travels yearly preaching to many different churches across the United States.

Research and Interview Questions

The interview questions presented to each participant were given to explore the lived experience of each pastor and their experience with regular attendance to the pastors' peer group in order to answer the research questions of this study. These open-ended questions were also used to identify processes, correlations, and potential causes (Weller et al., 2018). Each question focused on the experience of the central phenomena of each pastor based on their in-depth responses relevant to the topic (Roberts, 2020).

Research Question 1

The first research question posited by this study was: "How is accountability understood from a covenantal perspective?" This research question was answered by asking Interview Questions 1–5 to the participants.

Interview Question 1. The first interview question asked, "Have you experienced accountability in the peer group? If so, how?" In response to this question, all 10 participants answered that they had experienced accountability in the context of the pastors' peer group. Two in vivo codes emerged in all 10 interviews under this question: relationally (12) and friendship (14). Pastor #2 responded to IQ1 with, "I have gotten to know a lot of the guys and they have gotten to know me [*relationally*]." Pastor #1 stated, "Accountability in my opinion is centered around friendship [*friendship*]… and formation of relationships of confidence [*relationally*]." "Being there and learning how to be an ear for somebody are two things that stand out the most (as far as experiencing accountability)[*friendship*]," Pastor #7 stated. "(I have experienced) accountability just doing life together [*friendship, relationally*]," Pastor #5 said. Other pastors responded:

> I think that the friendships and relationships [*friendship, relationally*] that we build automatically kind of builds and accountability to one another. And I think we're able to share with each other without expecting the others to get up and storm out of the room. So, personally, I mean, accountability is found in the friendships [*friendship*]. (Pastor #3)
>
> I think the accountability comes from a place of intimacy first [*relationally*]. I think that is where you hold yourself accountable. Anyone that is not intimate won't be accountable because there is no trust… we've developed a fear where we have help back on being transparent, so I've held back on that, but this group created an open door, a safe place with actual men of God that are trustworthy [*friendship*], that are kind, and have the same faith. (Pastor #4)

Several of the pastors also indicated that transparency, responsibility, vulnerability, and trust were significant factors when it came to experiencing accountability within the peer group.

Interview Question 2. The second interview question asked, "Have you experienced covenant in the peer group? If so, how?" When asked this question, all 10 participants answered that they had experienced covenant to some degree. Three

in vivo codes emerged from the 10 interviews being *connection* (9), *trust* (5), and *agreement* (5). Pastor #4 stated, "[Covenant] really began when I began connecting with pastors who stuck with me when we began working together [*connection*]… I began to develop a deep trust with them [*trust*]." Pastor #3 said, "There was a connection which made a covenant, more than just a friendship, a true brother [*connection*]." Other pastors' statements included the following:

> Covenant is an agreement, the strongest word for agreement. I agree to be accountable, I agree with others in the group to be accountable… it's something that we cooperate with. It is not a light thing, it is a very serious thing, so that's a very serious agreement that I agree with you and give my consent [*agreement*]. (Pastor #2)

> Covenant for me, it's an agreement [*agreement*] between two parties concerning the promises and the nature of a determined connection., so the part that sticks for me is the determined connection. I've learned to appreciate things in guys that I didn't realize I needed them for, but unless I honored them, I would never experienced that [*connection*]. (Pastor #5)

Other aspects the pastors expressed concerning experiencing covenant were fellowshipping, praying together, uplifting each other, encouraging each other, and honoring one another. Transparency also factored into the discussion when Pastor #8 discussed the covenant relationship he had with other pastors by stating, "We have strong relationships where we entrust everything down to even computer passwords when it comes to staying pure [*trust*]." Two significant words that the pastors referred to that emerged from the emotion coding for experiencing covenant were *love* and *honor*.

Interview Question 3. The third interview question asked was, "How would you define covenant accountability?" Each pastor brought a unique perspective to this question; however, three in vivo codes emerged: *transparency* (5), *vulnerability* (8), and *responsibility* (8). The process coding revealed the pastors defining covenant accountability with coming into agreement, checking in, praying for one another, mutual sharing, and edifying and encouraging one another. Pastor #3 stated that covenant accountability was "Transparency [*transparency*].

That's what sets this group apart… that vulnerability is really the special part of our group [*vulnerability*]." Pastor #8 stated, "We know each other's weaknesses and we can tell one another where we are struggling [*vulnerability*]." Pastor #10 defined covenant accountability as "Mutual sharing. It's edifying one another, praying for one another, encouraging one another [*responsibility*]." Other pastors responded with:

> It almost looks like the word responsibility [*responsibility*]. I feel responsible for being transparent. I feel responsible to that individual, if that makes sense, because of the covenant that we have, the brotherhood that has been established. I feel an obligation to that person [*transparency*]. (Pastor #7)

> To be blunt, the covenant accountability is daring to step out of a traditional relationship. Covenant accountability is when you step out. Common protocol where you dare expose your vulnerability. As long as you aren't vulnerable, you don't know what covenant relationship is [*vulnerability*]. (Pastor #9)

"The group allows me a space where we're able to create that trust where I can be vulnerable. I can have hard conversations and not be traumatized by it [*vulnerability*]," Pastor #5 stated regarding covenant accountability. The emotion coding also produced four powerful aspects of covenant accountability which the pastors defined as love, loyalty, availability, and trust. An interesting note concerning the first three interview questions given to the pastors is how often the word trust emerged.

Interview Question 4. The fourth interview question presented to the pastors was, "What are some characteristics of a meaningful pastoral peer relationship?" The average years of experience pastoring of all the participants interviewed combined is 20 years, so the answers to this question were extremely varied. Three in vivo codes emerged from the data: *commonality* (7), *mutual respect* (8), and *love (*12). Pastor #3 answered this interview question by stating, "Pastoring is hard. It's a lot harder than any of us ever dreamed it would be when we got into it." Connecting with other pastors can prove to be a difficult venture,

but Pastor #3 also indicated, "There is nothing like sitting down at the table with your brothers and these covenant relationships who know exactly what you are going through and are in the same place you are [*commonality*]." "Loyalty, faithfulness, and trust [*love*]" were characteristics of a meaningful pastor peer relationship stated by Pastor #1. Pastor #7 stated characteristics were "Love, being vulnerable, and real brotherhood [*love*]. Other pastors responded:

> We don't have to sit around and be superficial, just talk about ministry all day. We actually can be a person. And a lot of pastors can't so that. They live in the church world all day long, but they are never are themselves. I want to be with people just get to see me. They accept you for who you are, so you can be who you are [*mutual respect*]. (Pastor #6)

> You can have differences. You can have differences in your theology, You can have differences, But as long as you can have the same concept that no man comes to the Father but through Jesus, I think that's your foundational piece. Everything else can have different viewpoints [*commonality*]. (Pastor #4)

In the value coding, several points were made regarding characteristics of a meaningful pastoral peer relationship such as the ability to be real, trustworthiness, character, intentionality, and diversity.

Interview Question 5. The fifth interview question asked was, "How would you establish a covenant accountability relationship with new members to the group?" This question was acknowledged by the group as being a challenging question as the core group had been together for so long, having to start over with a new member could possibly be difficult. After this question was presented to all 10 participants, two in vivo codes emerged: *being open* (10) and *being willing* (11). Pastor #4 stated regarding building covenant accountability with a new member, "You have to be willing to invest. I don't think there's any relationship that doesn't have an investment in time [*being willing*]." Pastor #2 explained, "We operate with an openness [*being open*] to receive them, and have a willingness to be inclusive and by degree, be yourself and chose to be vulnerable in front of somebody that you barely know [*being willing*]…I think you need to study the person and see

what makes them tick and always take the first steps to be open and humble…

almost self-deprecating [*being open*]." Other pastors' responses included:

> I think the big thing that's probably most needed is organic connection and
> that you model it with one another and then they can see that you got guys
> that are extremely vulnerable and willing to talk about anything with each
> other [*being open*]. (Pastor #8)

> When I first came to the meeting, I was well received. Hands were laid on
> me. We prayed together and I felt like I had a thousand friends here. I think
> I found fellowship here. I think we should open up and welcome the and
> embrace them and make them feel part of the party [*being willing*]. (Pastor
> #10)

> I feel like we are going to do life together. Even though you have your
> church, we're all part of one body and we're coming into an agreement and
> we're going to do life together [*being willing*]. And so I think it probably
> goes a little deeper, showing that it goes deeper than just pointing to a
> person, but also following through and getting our hands in to see if we can
> help [*being open*]. (Pastor #7)

Most of the responses from the pastors concerning this question focused on being welcoming, being inclusive, modeling vulnerability, and being receiving of new members.

Themes Derived from Research Question 1

Based on the responses and the codes, three themes emerged from the coding process related to the first research question. Table 2 illustrates these themes and their associated codes.

Table 2

Research Question 1 Themes

Themes	Codes
Community (54)	Relationally (12)
	Friendship (14)
	Connection (9)
	Commonality (7)
	Love (12)
Esteem (24)	Trust (5)
	Agreement (3)
	Responsibility (8)
	Mutual Respect (8)
Knowable (34)	Transparency (5)
	Vulnerability (8)
	Being Open (10)
	Being Willing (11)

The first theme, community (54), was broken down into the following

codes: *relationally* (12), *friendship* (14), *connection* (9), *commonality* (7), and *love*

(12). The codes that were synthesized into this category indicated that the pastors

perceived a foundational piece of understanding accountability from a covenant

perspective was relational friendships based on organic connection, commonality,

and love. An actual brotherhood based on genuine love for one another with a

foundation on common experiences seemed to be the overall perception of the

pastors interviewed. This perception would align with biblical covenant, which

culturally implied an obligational bond in brotherhood, fatherhood, loyalty, and

kinship—or, rather, kinship-in-flesh (Hahn, 2005). Pastor #7 described these

relationships as a real brotherhood. Pastor #1 referred to this comradeship as

relationships of confidence, stating that these could only be established by a

genuine knowing of the individuals with whom you are in relationship with.

The second theme, esteem (24), was broken down into the following codes:

trust (5), *agreement* (3), *responsibility* (8), and *mutual respect* (8). The codes that

were synthesized into this category indicated the pastors believe accountability

from a covenant perspective required mutual respect, a mutual agreement, mutual

responsibility, and mutual trust. The interviewed pastors were adamant that

covenant accountability required trust and respect, along with equal agreement and

responsibility. Pastor #8 stated that mutual respect was essential, regardless if the other party possessed different views on ministry. Pastor #2 reiterated that covenant was a very serious agreement that was not supposed to be broken, making it a very strong thing, confirming Woollard's (2018) observation of covenant being a chosen relationship or partnership with defined commitments and obligations in which binding promises are made between two parties.

The third theme, knowable (34), was broken down into the following codes: *transparency* (5), *vulnerability* (8), *being open* (10), and *being willing* (11). The codes that were synthesized into this category indicated the pastors interviewed perceived accountability from a covenant perspective required an openness and a willingness for intimate connection involving transparency and vulnerability. Without this level of intimacy, several of the pastors indicated that covenant relationship was not possible. Pastor #4 stated that many pastors had developed a fear of being transparent as a result of being hurt by people in the ministry; yet, the pastors' group had created an open door for him to be transparent with the other pastors. This intimacy involving transparency and vulnerability is reinforced by covenant being a bond of truth and life-fellowship where each participant is permanently bound together (Smith, 1901). Pastor #8 indicated the members of the group being extremely vulnerable and willing to talk about anything with each other was a result of organic connection. Pastor #3 stated that the pastors' group was different because of the vulnerability and transparency that was fostered at each weekly meeting, making it a very special part of the group.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 of this study was: "How do regularly attending members perceive their experience of a covenant accountability group?" This research question was explored by asking Interview Questions 6–8 to the participating pastors.

Interview Question 6. The sixth interview question asked of the pastors in the interviews was, "Has regular attendance at the pastors' fellowship impacted you? If so, how?" All of the interviewed pastors indicated that they had been impacted by regular attendance to the group. Four in vivo codes presented

themselves in this interview question: *encouragement* (10), *scripture sharing* (5), *band of brothers* (9), and *prayer* (7). Pastor #4 stated, "I think the biggest impact for me is when we go over the scriptures [*scripture sharing*]." "It really does encourage me. It's nice to know that you have brothers [*band of brothers*]," Pastor #3 described. Other pastors responded:

> It is a supply of the Holy Spirit [*prayer*] for me personally that I don't get any other way and when that is absent I feel it. You know, I am not as spiritually dialed in or in tune if you will. I can feel a bit alienated. If I am not there for a couple of weeks in a row, I feel it [*encouragement*]. (Pastor #2)

> I would have quit. I would not be in the ministry anymore, there is no doubt about that We are just so much of a part of each other's lives that you know, we're praying for each other, encouraging [*encouragement*] each other, building each other. This is a kingdom mindset [*band of brothers*]. (Pastor #8)

> I've been greatly encouraged. I love the sharing of the word [*scripture sharing*]. I like that we pray for each other [*prayer*]. I don't feel inhibited in any way. I feel like I can share a bit. So that is very, very encouraging [*encouragement*]. (Pastor #10)

Many of the pastors also reiterated how much they had been impacted by the time that was taken during the meetings to pray for one another. The pastors had found great encouragement in being able to lift up one another in prayer.

Interview Question 7. The seventh question presented in the interviews with the pastors was, "What are some positive experiences you have had with accountability in a pastors' peer group setting?" Every one of the pastors said they had many positive experiences with the pastors' group, and two in vivo codes emerged: *support* (14) and *personal improvement* (11). Pastor #3 stated, "We do missions trips and stuff that are far from the group, that are outside the group… it helps me become a better man [*personal improvement*]." Pastor #2 recalled, "There are times I have been able to say I am struggling in a very tough season and it's been a real great thing to have that support [*support*]." Other pastors replied:

When someone is hurting financially, people will write checks for them. If someone is a but depressed and hurting, others have come by an prayed for them and spent significant time with them. We have been intentional to meet the need of loneliness among pastors by spending time with them outside of the group. Pastors are some of the loneliest people on the planet in my experience [*support*]. (Pastor #1)

When I was beginning to show signs of fatigue, the pastors were able to spot things that were happening to me. My emotions were much quicker to change, I had less patience and love for people. The other guys said I needed a sabbatical. So having these guys be able to spot those things in me was a very positive thing [*support, personal improvement*]. (Pastor #8)

A lot of pastors don't have friends, they have acquaintances, and what they really want is a friend They want that friend that they could say you know, I just want to be myself and say how I feel about this, or how I feel this week, you know, without someone judging me or thinking I need not feel bad about feeling the way I do [*support*]. (Pastor #6)

The lack of friendships was mentioned by several of the participating pastors, but many also said the pastors' group provided them friends where they felt safe to be their true selves.

Interview Question 8. The eighth interview question asked of the pastors in the interviews was, "What are some negative experiences you have had with a pastors' peer group?" Interestingly, almost every pastor had the same answer this question. Two in vivo codes emerged: *individual agendas* (10) and *asserting dominance* (8). The reason for only two codes was that seven out of 10 pastors interviewed responded with practically the same answer with the other three giving similar responses. Pastor #4 stated, "We have had someone come into the group with a certain agenda [*individual agendas*]. When someone comes in and tries to over assert themselves or tries to dominate every discussion [*asserting dominance*]." Pastor #3 explained, "Some people try to come in and dominate, and they just don't fit in that vulnerable mode [*asserting dominance*]." "The times that there have been individuals that had agendas… that's not the personality of the

group or it's not the DNA of who we are [*individual agendas*]," according to Pastor #2. Other pastors responded:

> Some people perceive humility as a weakness. Therefore some people will try to take advantage of people wo don't lord or extensively exercise their leadership authority. They perceive meekness as a weakness and interpret that as a vacuum I leadership and will try to step in and assert their dominance [*asserting dominance*]. (Pastor #1)

> The only negative I would say is that in the past we've had people who've been there that we generally all loved or liked, but they kind of allow their differences and beliefs or how thigs are in different dominations to separate them from the group [*individual agendas*]. (Pastor #6)

Most of the pastors centered around the idea of certain people coming in trying to impose their individual agenda upon the group, or would try to establish themselves as a leader by asserting their dominance. Two of the pastors mentioned the longevity of the group being the thing that protected the group from such people because the group was quick to recognize it when it had happened.

Themes Derived from Research Question 2

Three themes emerged from the coding process in response to the second research question. Table 3 is an illustration of the themes under this research question.

Table 3

Research Question 2 Themes

Themes	Codes
Personal Catalyst (34)	Support (14)
	Personal Improvement (11)
	Band of Brothers (9)
Spiritual Growth (22)	Encouragement (10)
	Scripture Sharing (5)
	Prayer (7)
Detrimental Associations (18)	Individual Agendas (10)
	Asserting Dominance (8)

The first theme of Research Question 2, personal catalyst (34), was broken down into the following codes: *support* (14), *personal improvement* (11), and *band of brothers* (9). The codes that were synthesized into this category indicated that the pastors interviewed perceived their experience with the covenant accountability group to be a catalyst of growth for themselves personally. The close, intimate interaction with brothers who were facing the same challenges helped them to glean from resources and experiences of the other pastors. This interaction with each other caused them to become better men, as Pastor #3 stated. Pastor #4 mentioned the camaraderie of the group impacted him where he did not feel alone. Pastor #8 stated that without the support of the pastors' group, he would have quit ministry altogether, but with their support, he was continuing to grow into what God had called him to be. This participants' reflection of his personal growth reiterates the fact that clergy peer groups can play a significant part of the overall health and well-being of the minister (see Sixbey, 2014).

The second theme of Research Question 2, spiritual growth (33), was broken down into the following codes: *encouragement* (10), *scripture sharing* (5), and *prayer* (7). The codes that were synthesized into this category indicated that the pastors interviewed perceived their experience with the covenant accountability group as a definite source of spiritual growth. The prayer, the studying of the scripture together, and the overall encouragement they found through these activities caused spiritual growth to occur in them. Pastor #2 stated that it was a weekly supply of the Holy Spirit for him personally and that when he was not able to come for a couple of weeks in a row, he did not feel as spiritually dialed in or in tune. Pastor #10 stated how much he enjoyed the sharing of the word and was greatly encouraged when the members would take time and pray for one another. Pastor #9 stated that he was deeply impacted by the love and encouragement he received from the pastors in the meetings. Pastor #4 indicated that his biggest impact was the study of the scriptures together and described how much he enjoyed the different perspectives the pastors would bring, which would cause him to want to dive deeper into the word. Pastoral peer groups provide a safe place where a

pastor can find intellectual and spiritual support along with mutual accountability (White, 2010).

The third theme of Research Question 2, detrimental associations (18), was broken down into the following codes: *individual agendas* (10) and *asserting dominance* (8). The codes that were synthesized into this category indicated that the interviewed pastors perceived their experience with the covenant accountability group could be tainted by individuals who came into the group with their own agendas or with a desire to take over the group. The participants referenced times in the past where individuals had come into the group with a definite agenda of either steering the group in a certain direction or with a desire to take over the group entirely. Pastor #4 mentioned that these individuals would come in and try to dominate every discussion or state how superior they were compared to the other members of the group. Pastor #2 indicated that the individual who had tried to steer the group in a different direction were not of the same DNA of the group and typically it did not last. Pastor #1 reaffirmed that by stating that one of the strengths of the group was because of the relationships that had been built over the last 10 years, those individuals who came in with agendas or tried to assert themselves were identified quickly and were given the opportunity to submit or not. Pastor #1 also affirmed that the Lord was faithful in sorting out all that needed sorting. Sometimes toxic people come into different group settings with an entitlement attitude where they desire to be recognized and treated special with an arrogant sense of self-importance (Mead et al., 2018).

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 of this study was: "What do ministers perceive to be the benefits of regular participation in a covenant peer group?" The themes that answered this research question were developed based on pastors' responses to Interview Questions 9–10.

Interview Question 9. The ninth interview question asked of the pastors was, "How has regular attendance benefitted your particular church?" The pastors responded enthusiastically to this question, and four in vivo codes emerged: *community focused* (5), *united efforts* (13), *leader benefits* (17), and *kingdom*

advance (8). Pastor #4 stated, "It has impacted our volunteerism, we have more people helping with our outreach which has been a huge blessing [*united efforts, kingdom advance*]." Pastor #3 said, "It's impacted me, it's impacted the church. It's definitely had a positive effect on the larger community [*leader benefits*]." Pastor Number #2 explained, "It makes me a better pastor. It helps keep our eyes outside on the community and be kingdom minded [*community focused, kingdom advance*]." Other pastors responded:

> It has built unity in the body of Christ and given our people a greater sense of belonging to a larger move of God than just out church in our community [*community focused*]. It's added a level of security for the people in our churches knowing their pastor in in rich fellowship with other mature pastors [*united efforts, leader benefits*]. (Pastor #1)

> Our church ends up better because I have relationships, then you are organically a liaison between the churches [*united efforts*]. And so it binds one body to another body. The community sees the pastors of these various churches are already prepared to try to unite and network together and work together [*kingdom advance*]. (Pastor #8)

> I am not alone, I am not isolated, so personally I feel better. I feel I make a better leader because I am affiliated with others and accountable [*leader benefits*]. There has been a lot of exposure from the guys, the pastors with my church, I feel that I am benefitting from the relationships, because I think it adds to the fact that the folks know whoever is in the pastors' group [*united efforts*]. (Pastor #10).

Most of the pastors to some degree mentioned that one of the major benefits of being involved with the pastors' group and its effect on their particular church was the fact that it gave their members a greater sense of connection to the larger body of Christ as a whole.

Interview Question 10. The tenth question asked of the pastors was, "What are some specific benefits of being in a covenant accountability relationship with local pastors?" Three in vivo codes emerged from the responses: *authentic me* (7), *learning* (7), *and mutual benefit* (19). Pastor #10 stated, "I have a tendency to

isolate, but I know that is not good. I encourage myself to be a part of the accountability and fellowship. There is great strength in the prayer together and the sharing of the word [*authentic me, mutual benefit*]." Pastor #7 related, "Being able to partner with other ministries to help get some things done that we may not be able to get done on our own… building the body together [*mutual benefit*]." Other pastors stated:

> I have the ability to come to them broken. I can say I'm confused, I can even say I made a mistake, you know what? I messed up. I did the wrong thing,. I felt the wrong thing. I did the wrong activity. I need your prayer and I need your help. I need some direction [*authentic me, mutual benefit*]. (Pastor #4)

> On the advancement of me being a part of the body of Christ, it really does make me be a better person [*authentic me*], but also I get to have an influence on the broader community. I get to have influence on people who are influencing others in the community that we serve [*mutual benefit*]. (Pastor #2)

> We are learning from each other [*learning*], presenting ideas to one another, gleaning wisdom and experience from one another. We are a diverse group of Latinos, African Americans, and whites… we have had more cross-cultural training in this group than I have had in 25 years of missions work. So the ability to genuinely learn from one another is greatest benefit I have had with being in relationship with these pastors [*mutual benefit*]. (Pastor #1)

The emphasis of mutually benefitting was articulated by most of the pastors in the interviews. There was a genuine sense from the pastors that the learning and the ability to be authentic with one another was a great benefit and blessing.

Themes Derived from Research Question 3

Based on the responses and the codes, two themes emerged from the coding process in regard to the third research question. Table 4 illustrates these themes.

Table 4

Research Question 3 Themes

Themes	Codes
Body Enrichment (26)	United Efforts (13)
	Kingdom Advance (8)
	Community Focused (5)
Individual Inspiration (50)	Mutual Benefit (19)
	Leader Benefits (17)
	Learning (7)
	Authentic Me (7)

The first theme of Research Question 3, body enrichment (26), was broken down into the following codes: *united efforts* (13), *kingdom advance* (8), and *community focused* (5). The codes that were synthesized into this category indicated that the pastors interviewed perceived their regular attendance to the pastors group benefitted their particular church by giving them a greater focus on the community of Christ as a whole, as well as the ability to unite their efforts to advance the kingdom. Their responses indicated that the churches benefitted by recognizing the greater community as well as joining together to advance the kingdom with a united effort. Pastor #5 indicated that the community services and the other pastors preaching in each other's churches created a sense of unity among his members. Pastor #9 also affirmed that having other pastors in to preach at his church and having other churches come and volunteer at his outreach events had enriched his church. Pastor #3 stated that church members seeing the pastors work together in the community services gave then such a sense of community. When a group of individuals with shared passions, goals, and values are committed to one another, this is the working definition of community (Romero & Harris, 2019).

The second theme of Research Question 3, individual inspiration (50), was broken down into the following codes: *mutual benefit* (19), *leader benefits* (17), *learning* (7), and *authentic me* (7). The codes that the researcher synthesized into this category indicated that the pastors interviewed perceived their regular attendance to the pastors group benefitted their particular church by their personal growth that they experienced by being able to be their authentic selves, learning, and mutually benefitting from their relationships with the other pastors. The

pastors' responses indicated these benefits caused them to be better leaders and better pastors. Pastor #9 stated that he greatly benefitted from the accountability, support, and resources gained by being in relationships with the other pastors. Pastor #10 indicated that he greatly benefited from the prayer, the sharing of the word, and the fellowship he received from the pastors group. Pastor #1 stated that the ability to genuinely learn from the different perspectives of the diverse pastors was a great benefit to himself. Pastor #3 shared that the relationships he had with the other pastors presented opportunities both in ministry and financially that were mutually beneficial for him. Being involved in a covenant accountability peer group can greatly improve pastors' career satisfaction and general life overall, according to Sixbey (2014).

Research Question 4

Research Question 4 of this study was: "In what ways (if at all) do regularly attending members of a covenant accountability peer group perceive a decrease in feelings of depression, burnout, and isolation from being a part of the group? If so, in what aspects of the covenantal accountability peer group serve to address these feelings?" The research question was answered through participants' answers to Interview Questions 11–13.

Interview Question 11. Interview Question 11 asked, "What would you define as common struggles a pastor deals with?" The pastors interviewed were very thoughtful about this question and were surprisingly forthcoming. Four in vivo codes emerged from their responses: *maintain appearances* (6), *personal struggles* (19), *congregational troubles* (8), and *difficulties with leadership* (5). Pastor #4 stated, "Wow, it's like Superman you know, we're supposed to be Superman without Kryptonite [*maintain appearances*]." Pastor #3 stated, "I think a huge thing with pastors is rejection. The pastor deals with it over and over and over and it doesn't stop [*congregational troubles*]." Pastor #10 indicated that he had to deal with contentions with members of his board [difficulties with leadership]. Other pastors responded:

> A lot of times it can be frustrating to see people you know who don't value
> you at the same level you value them. It's like a parent watching the kids

grow up and they're making mistakes and seeing that sort of thing is heart

wrenching [*congregational troubles*]. I don't know of anything more

difficult than that… that's the limit we have as pastors when there is such

suffering going on [*personal struggles*]. (Pastor #3)

Isolation breeds all kinds of problems. Isolation creates barriers for pastors

to reach out when they are having family problems, personal sin problems,

etc., and if we don't understand how to combat that isolation, we set

ourselves up for a fall [*personal struggles*]. (Pastor #1)

Am I leading effective enough? Am I in the right place? Did I hear God?

Was the sermon that I preached right? Could I have done better in any given

relationship when people leave the church? What if I did something

differently [*personal struggles*]? (Pastor #7)

The pastors' responses to this question were from the heart. The responses were

thought out and came from a place of experience. The answers that the pastors gave

to the question of common struggles are illustrated in Table 5.

Table 5

Common Pastor Struggles

Struggle	Examples from Participants
Isolation	"Isolation, which breeds all kinds of problems" (Pastor #1)
Being Overrun	"Being overrun and overwhelmed" (Pastor #4)
Rejection	"A huge thing with pastors is rejection" (Pastor #3)
Loneliness	"Loneliness is a big thing" (Pastor #5)
Depression	"Depression can be a factor" (Pastor #10)
Marriage Issues	"Husband and wife relationships" (Pastor #10)
Private Sexual Sins	"Sexual, private sexual matters" (Pastor #10)
Lack of Funds	"Lack of funds, lack of money" (Pastor #9)
Burnout	"Whatever pastor has a personal crisis, you know, he is used to being Superman… that's where major burnout happens" (Pastor #5)
Having to be Superman	"We're supposed to be Superman without Kryptonite" (Pastor #4)
Insecurity	"Am I effective enough? Did I hear from God? Was the sermon I preached right?" (Pastor #7)
Contentious Leadership	"There's members of the board, there's contention going on there" (Pastor #10)
Disappointment	"Incredible disappointment or loss" (Pastor #5)

Personal Critic	"Is there something I could have done better? What if I did something differently?" (Pastor #7)

Interview Question 12. Interview Question 12 asked, "Has the pastors fellowship addressed these common struggles? If so, how?" All of the interview pastors said that the group had addressed the common struggles, and five in vivo codes emerged: *open discussion* (7), *spiritually uplifting* (6), *safe environment* (6), *genuine concern* (8), and *commonality* (10). Pastor #4 stated, "We discuss all the time issues we all face. So, there is a gleaning from multiple years of experience [*open discussion, commonality*]." Pastor #3 stated, "It helps because you know they (the pastors) went through it. They are speaking from their own experience [*commonality*]." Pastor #2 explained, "I think it's just knowing each other and checking on each other and being interested in one another [*genuine concern*]." Other responses were:

> We pray for one another weekly. Prayer is effective and we bear one another's burdens in prayer as much as we possibly can [*spiritually uplifting*]. We minister to one another and the more we are in fellowship with each other, we can lift each other up. We weep during ministry times [*genuine concern*]. (Pastor #1)

> In the meetings, we talk about a lot of these issues [*open discussion*]. And the pastors really open up [*safe environment*]. They share their frustrations. And because of the vast well of experience in the room, we can always find a beneficial solution [*commonality*]. (Pastor #10)

> That's the uniqueness of our group, we can come together and share our experiences, complaints, and struggles [*safe environment*]. Issues we may have at our church, with situations, leaders, members, and there is always an answer in the group because someone has probably already dealt with it [*commonality*]. (Pastor #6)

Most of the pastors had expressed that the ability to be open was a distinguishing mark of the group that had helped them greatly.

Interview Question 13. The last question of the interview given to the participating pastors was, "How has regular attendance at the pastors' fellowship

helped you personally with these common struggles?" Three in vivo codes emerged from their responses: *relationally* (16), *spiritually* (11), and *personally* (16). Pastor #4 stated, "It helped me with the isolation piece [*personally*]." Pastor #3 described, "When I am coming every week to the group and I am faithful to it, it helps me be built up [*personally*]." Pastor #2 explained, "There's something about being in a group that understands about what it is you're feeling and just to have somebody who honestly cares about what you are doing [*relationally*]." Other pastors responded:

> I have personally [*personally*] grown and overcome in many area of my life and I can attribute it to the Lord using these guys as iron sharpening iron in my life [*relationally*]. Also, the richness found in the shared communion we have in Jesus, the anointing of the Holy Spirit that is evident when we gather together, it all is so wonderful [*spiritually*]. (Pastor #1)
>
> I actually shared some things and we've prayed about them [*spiritually*], and I have felt like, yeah, I've been lifted up and encouraged and I've definitely been blessed by the relationships [*relationally*]. Sometimes we just need a little encouragement. And so that has come through the word because we read the word and share together, there's definitely encouragement [*personally*]. (Pastor #10)

Almost all of the pastors interviewed shared their perception that they were very blessed by the relationships they had made in the pastors group.

Themes Derived from Research Question 4

Three themes emerged from the coding process to answer the fourth research question. Table 6 includes these themes and the codes that composed them.

Table 6

Research Question 4 Themes

Themes	Codes
Empathetic Environment (63)	Relationally (16)
	Personally (16)
	Open Discussion (7)
	Safe Environment (6)
	Genuine Concern (8)
	Commonality (10)
Holy Spirit Atmosphere (17)	Spiritually (11)
	Spiritually Uplifting (6)
Issue Awareness (38)	Maintain Appearances (6)
	Personal Struggles (19)
	Congregational Troubles (8)
	Difficulties with Leadership (5)

The first theme of Research Question 4, empathetic environment (63), was broken down into the following codes: relationally (16), personally (16), *open discussion* (7), *safe environment* (6), *genuine concern* (8), and *commonality* (10). The codes that were synthesized into this category indicated that the pastors perceived a decrease in negative feelings and challenges expressed. Although not explicitly stated by all pastors, many of the issues identified can lead to conditions of depression, burnout, and isolation. Researchers have shown clergy to be prone to occupational burnout, depression, and emotional exhaustion as a result of their ministry work (Faucett et al., 2013). The synthesized codes also indicates that the pastors' group created a safe environment, was committed to personal growth, was relational, encouraged open discussion, were genuinely concerned for one another, and shared a commonality. Their responses indicated that a welcoming, safe environment that encouraged open discussion about commonalities, where relationships of genuine concern causing personal growth and development could develop, could address these feelings of depression, burnout, and isolation. Pastor #9 stated that he was in a good position now specifically because of the relationships he had developed within the pastors group. Pastor #7 spoke of the authentic connections that helped lighten the burdens of ministry for him. Pastor #10 spoke of how much he was continually encouraged by the prayer and support

he received from the relationships with the pastors. Pastor #8 discussed how the relationships with the pastors had become a literal lifeline for him, indicating that he would not still be in ministry without them. Pastoral peer group participation is associated with greater effectiveness, higher motivation and energy in ministry, increased intimacy with God, and greater creativity, with positive impacts on family and friends (Miles & Proeschold-Bell, 2013).

The second theme of Research Question 4, Holy Spirit atmosphere (17), was broken down into the following codes: *spiritually* (16) and *spiritually uplifting* (6). The codes that were synthesized into this category indicated that the interviewed pastors perceived a decrease in feelings of depression, burnout, and isolation by fostering an environment conducive to allowing sensitivity to the Holy Spirit through prayer, sharing of the word, and ministry to one another. The pastors' responses indicated that intentionality to spiritually uplift one another through prayer and ministry could address the feelings of depression, burnout, and isolation. Pastor #1 stated that the evidence of the Holy Spirit that was present every time the group would gather caused him to grow and overcome challenges in many areas of his life. Pastor #2 was adamant about referring to the group as a supply of the Holy Spirit for him weekly, stating that when he missed a few weeks, he could feel it. Pastor #4 spoke about how the prayer and fellowship with the pastors specifically helped him overcome the isolation he had previously felt. Pastoral groups give attending pastors opportunities for reflection at a psychological, spiritual, and relational level from a peer perspective (Gubi, 2016).

The third theme of Research Question 4, issue awareness (38), was broken down into the following codes: *maintain appearances* (6) *personal struggles* (19), *congregational troubles* (8), and *difficulties with leadership* (5). The codes that were synthesized into this category indicated that the pastors interviewed perceived a decrease in the negative feelings they experienced by being aware of the common struggles that pastors deal with and having a support system in place to help them work through them. The pastors' responses indicated that several of them acknowledged the importance to be vigilant about the issues and being open to discuss them when they arose, making them able to address them directly. Pastor

#4 indicated that attempting to maintain the appearance of Superman could cause him not to want to be forthcoming with struggles, causing him to isolate. Pastor #2 stated that isolation underscored why the pastors' group was so important, serving as a counterweight to isolation. The accountability available in a covenantal accountability pastors' peer group can enhance the understanding of support strategies for improving the mental, emotional, and psychological health of ministers and the potential effectiveness of their respective ministries (Francis et al., 2013).

Categorization of Themes

Eleven themes emerged from the four research questions. These themes were categorized into three categories, as illustrated in Table 7.

Table 7

Categorization of Research Question Themes

Category	Themes	Definition of Themes
Atmosphere	Holy Spirit Atmosphere	Spiritually
		Spiritually Uplifting
	Empathetic Environment	Relationally
		Personally
		Open Discussion
		Safe environment
		Genuine Concern
		Commonality
	Community	Friendship
		Connection
		Commonality
		Love
Relationship	Knowable	Transparency
		Vulnerability
		Being Open
	Esteem	Trust
		Agreement
		Responsibility
		Mutual Respect
	Personal Catalyst	Support
		Personal Improvement
		Band of Brothers
	Detrimental associations	Individual Agendas
		Asserting Dominance

	Body Enrichment	United Efforts
		Kingdom Advance
		Community Focused
Personal Growth	Spiritual Growth	Encouragement
		Scripture Sharing
		Prayer
	Individual Inspiration	Mutual Benefits
		Leader Benefits
		Learning
		Authentic Me
	Issue Awareness	Maintain Appearances
		Personal Struggles
		Congregational Troubles
		Difficulties with
		Leadership

The 11 themes were categorized into three categories for better clarification in understanding how a pastors' covenant accountability model could be structured with essential elements such as creating a conducive atmosphere, organic connections with relationships, and a commitment to personal growth. Table 7 also provides a definition of each theme and helps create an understanding of their connection to the categories. The themes and categories listed in Table 7 are explored more thoroughly in Chapter 5.

Summary

The findings of this research study were presented in this chapter by the interview responses coded and synthesized into themes from the data found in the pastors' interviews. Groenewald (2004) posited that phenomenological research interviews should be summarized, validated, and modified when necessary, with an extraction of "general and unique themes from all the interviews and making a composite summary" (p. 50). In this chapter, the researcher summarized the interviews and extracted unique themes consistent with the methodology posited by Groenewald.

Chapter 5 – Discussion

Through this study, the researcher examined how ministers involved in a covenant accountability group can benefit mentally, socially, and spiritually. A phenomenological approach was used to capture the shared experience of 10 pastors who had been involved with the pastors' peer group for a minimum of 5 years. Pastors appreciate support from other pastors when they maintain relationships with accountability partners as well as group based support structures (McMinn et al., 2005). The pastors who participate in pastoral peer groups can develop self-awareness and an understanding of how to foster healthy psychological and spiritual practices (Gubi, 2016). In this chapter, the researcher summarizes the answers to the research questions, defines the categories and themes discussed in the findings, discusses the implications of the findings, defines the foundation of establishing an effective covenant accountability pastoral peer group, and outlines the study's limitations and suggestions for future research.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study were answered from the data collected through the interviews. The findings indicate that the pastors in the central Florida pastors' group benefit a great deal spiritually, emotionally, and mentally from regular participation in the group. The answers to the research questions from the data are presented in the following sections.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 asked, "How is accountability understood from a covenantal perspective?" From the data collected from the interviews, it was clear that the pastors understood accountability from a covenant perspective through having viable connections in relationships with other pastors based on the commonality of common experiences. Those relationship had developed into genuine friendships where the pastors expressed love for each other. Intentional community fosters the development of close meaningful relationships, and also fosters social support and enhances friendships (Farias, 2017). Therefore, the first

aspect of understanding accountability from a covenantal perspective was through connections of loving friendships based on commonality.

The second aspect of understanding accountability from a covenantal perspective indicated by the data was the willingness to be open, transparent, and vulnerable. Several of the pastors said that this willingness to be open and vulnerable was what set this particular pastors' fellowship apart from others. Vulnerability is a value that contributes to one's connection to others (Dryden, 2013). In that transparency, a mutual respect had developed between the pastors, as there was an understanding of each other's background. Shared vulnerability has the capacity to promote respect and compassion (Stelter, 2020). Therefore, the second aspect of understanding accountability from a covenantal perspective was a willingness to be vulnerable, resulting in a mutual respect.

The third aspect of understanding accountability from a covenantal perspective indicated by the data was agreement made by the participating pastors to walk together in covenant. Perceived agreement in values is the most powerful predictor of trust (Cvetkovich & Nakayachi, 2007). The trust that had developed between the members over the years created a covenantal culture where the participating pastors felt responsible for the well-being of the others. Attitudes of mistrust, suspicion, and resignation decline with analytical dimensions of trust and responsibility (Pellizzoni, 2005). Therefore, the third aspect of understanding accountability from a covenantal perspective was an agreement to walk together in covenant based on the developed trust causing each pastor to feel responsible for the well-being of their fellow pastors.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 asked, "How do regularly attending members perceive their experience of a covenant accountability group?" The participating pastors indicated that their experience gave them support. The support was demonstrated through the ability to network together, sharing of resources, the building of lifelong friendships, and lifting each other up through good times and bad. Relational closeness can promote self-flourishing through strengthening relationships (Borelli et al., 2020). The pastors' experience with the group

improved themselves personally through associations with each other through acceptance and working together in missions and outreaches. A genuine band of brothers had formed with the pastors as a result of regular involvement with the group. The catalyst of relational support promotes self-improvement (Tomlinson et al., 2016). Therefore, the first aspect of the perception of the pastors' experience of being involved with the group was support from the band of brothers that resulted in the personal improvement of the attending members.

The second aspect of the perception of the pastors' experience of being involved in the covenant accountability group was spiritual growth. Through the prayer and sharing of the word at the meetings, several of the pastors had indicated that they had grown spiritually as a result. Prayer has a great and significant influence on believers' spiritual growth (Seok, 2008). People experience significant transformation in the experience of prayer and the word (Morse, 2004). This prayer and sharing of the word also resulted in the members being greatly encouraged. Therefore, the second aspect of the perception of the pastors' experience of being involved with the group was encouragement and spiritual growth through the prayer and sharing of the word together.

The third aspect of the perception of the pastors' experience of being involved in the covenant accountability group was an understanding of detrimental associations. The majority of the pastors indicated that there had been times when individuals had visited with an intent of pushing a personal agenda or had attempted to assert their dominance over the group. People with personal agendas often attempt to maneuver, deceive, and humiliate others with the objective of personal gain (Mehta & Maheshwari, 2014). Because of the tenure the pastors had, together coupled with the respect and honor they had for each other, all the attempts of personal agenda and dominance asserting had been thwarted. Support from friends plays an important part in reducing and avoiding toxic relationships (Solferino & Tessitore, 2021). Therefore, the third aspect of the perception of the pastors' experience of being involved with the group was an understanding and mutual defense against detrimental associations.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 asked, "What do ministers perceive to be the benefits of regular participation in a covenant peer group?" The interviewed pastors indicated that there had been many mutual benefits such as resources, financial blessings, ministry opportunities, accountability, and mutual kingdom building in the community. The pastors also indicated that their leadership styles had greatly benefited from their involvement in the group, as they had gleaned wisdom and experience from one another, causing them to learn from one another. Leaders learn when wisdom and experience are given the opportunity for expression (Grint, 2007). The pastors also stated that the ability to be their authentic selves in the group with no facades was a great benefit as well. Individuals who express their authentic selves to others tend to have greater psychological well-being (Grieve & Watkinson, 2016). Therefore, the first aspect of perceived benefits from regular participation in the group was personal benefits of learning, sharing of opportunities and resources, and the ability to be their authentic selves.

The second aspect of perceived benefits from regular participation in the group was the effect it had had on their individual churches. There were united efforts that had taken place in outreaches to the community, and they recognized the advancement of the kingdom overall in the community as a result of participating in the group. Community efforts that are unified and focused can leverage situations effectively (Link et al., 2017). The pastors also indicated that being a part of the pastors' group had caused them to be focused on their communities, instead of only on their individual ministries. Therefore, the second aspect of perceived benefits from regular participation in the group was advancement of the kingdom through unified efforts as a result of being community focused.

Research Question 4

Research Question 4 asked, "In what ways (if at all) do regularly attending members of a covenant accountability peer group perceive a decrease in feelings of depression, burnout, and isolation from being a part of the group? If so, in what aspects of the covenantal accountability peer group serve to address these

feelings?" The interviewed pastors indicated that the feelings of wanting to isolate, insecurities, and other negative feelings were impacted by the Holy Spirit atmosphere created in the meetings. The pastors stated that they had been spiritually uplifted by the worship and the prayer they had experienced, indicating that much of the negative feelings they had had were dealt with. The Holy Spirit may give the word that heals and can set a mind at ease (Israel, 1995). Spiritual growth can decrease depression and help restructure the cognitive behavior of those suffering from depressive disorder (Good, 2010). Therefore, the first aspect of the group addressing the feelings of depression, isolation, and burnout was the Holy Spirit inclusive atmosphere that was created.

The second aspect of the group addressing the feelings of depression, isolation, and burnout was a safe environment that was created where the pastors could engage in open discussion. Researchers have shown that a psychologically safe environment promotes open discussion (Tofade et al., 2013). In that safe environment, the pastors experienced genuine concern for one another which caused relationships of accountability to form with each other. Empathy has been demonstrated to have a large casual effect on recovery from depression (Burns & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1992). Therefore, the second aspect of the group addressing the feelings of depression, isolation, and burnout was the creation of a safe environment that encouraged openness and genuine concern for one another.

The third aspect of the group addressing the feelings of depression, isolation, and burnout was issue awareness. The pastors were very forthcoming in describing common issues they faced and either had dealt with or were dealing with. Openness is beneficial and appropriate in confronting measures that are counterproductive (Bellantuono et al., 2021). The open discussion and the accountability measures had helped them overcome many of the issues and had caused them to maintain a vigilance of the detrimental issues that could ensnare a pastor. Awareness is an effective deterrent against corruption (Goel et al., 2012). Therefore, the third aspect of the group addressing the feelings of depression, isolation, and burnout was the development of an acute awareness of the detrimental issues commonly faced by pastors.

Definitions of Categories and Themes

Eleven themes emerged from the four research questions. These were categorized into the following three categories: atmosphere, relationship, and personal growth. These three categories represent three things the pastors interviewed indicated were the most significant things they had experienced by being involved in the pastors' peer group. The categories of atmosphere, relationship, and personal growth were categorized by the themes emerging from the interviews with the pastors.

Atmosphere

The category of atmosphere was defined by three themes that emerged from the research: Holy Spirit atmosphere, empathetic environment, and community.

Holy Spirit Atmosphere. The Holy Spirit atmosphere that the pastors referred to in the interviews was created by several different factors. Factors such as an emphasis on prayer, emphasis on ministering to one another, a sharing of the word together, and the anointing that arose whenever the pastors would gather all contribute to creating a Holy Spirit atmosphere. Pastor #10 stated, "The richness found in the shared communion we have in Jesus, and the anointing of the Holy Spirit that is evident when we gather together, it is all so wonderful." The atmosphere of the Holy Spirit not only is a spiritual emphasis, it is also spiritually uplifting to the pastors involved in the group. As an atmosphere differs from emotion and mood, but is the experience of the surroundings in relationship to the participants (Vogels, 2008), inviting the Holy Spirit by a focus on prayer, ministry, and the word can and does greatly benefit the pastors involved.

Empathetic Environment. The pastors were emphatic when describing the importance of the meaningful relationships they had experienced in the pastors' peer group. Several factors contribute to an empathetic environment such as organic relationships, personal impact, the open discussions, creation of a safe environment, genuine concern for one another, and commonality. The relationships the pastors had created with one another came from a place of noncompetitiveness, maturity, and mutual respect. Empathy is critical in building relationships (Zhao et al., 2021). The pastors had decided from the beginning to lay aside all attempts to

self-exalt and focus on learning who each other was. Examples of personal impact that they had had were things like, "They helped me not isolate," "I had the ability to open up," "They helped me realize that everyone struggles," and "They definitely encouraged me." The openness of the discussions was also an invaluable asset to the pastors, as many indicated they felt they could share anything because of the predetermined safe environment that was created. Several pastors also shared how much the genuine concern had touched them and helped them reciprocate that back. The commonality of being in a room with people who understand the challenges of pastoral ministry was greatly appreciated. Pastor #2 referenced commonality by stating, "Only pastors know what pastors go through." Compassion, mindfulness, and gratitude expressed in correlation to commonality can create a genuine empathetic environment (Biber, 2020).

Community. The pastors discussed several factors that contributed to the atmosphere of community such as friendship, connection, commonality, and love. The elements of friendship touched on by the pastors were things like learning to be a listening ear, being there for one another, doing life together, confiding in one another, and coming to a point of being able to trust one another. As a result of these friendships, a connection was made between the pastors in the weekly meetings, which resulted in a mutual sharing of a network of resources and volunteers. The security of being known and understood by similar individuals was an important part of the commonality, as Pastor #3 stated, "There is nothing like sitting down at the table with your brothers who know exactly what you are going through and are in the same place you are." The pastors also talked about the love that they had experienced in the group with emphasis on forgiveness, preemptive forgiveness, respect, the ability to be transparent, and bring accepting. Personal well-being, feelings of safety and security, and improved overall mental health has been associated with a sense of community (Francis et al., 2013). The community atmosphere experienced by the pastors gave them a sense of belonging, emotional safety, and the ability to be truthful with each other (McMillan, 1996).

Atmosphere emerges from and is created by people and things, it also is sensed by and is the state of being of people and things (Asikainen, 2021). The

atmosphere of the Holy Spirit where He is invited into the meetings, the atmosphere where empathy is practiced and fostered, and the atmosphere of genuine community where pastors feel they belong all contribute to the important category of atmosphere necessary for an effective pastor peer group. A perceived positive atmosphere such as community, empathetic, or one where the Holy Spirit is encouraged can affect participants' mental health and creativity (Tsai et al., 2015). A positive atmosphere can have a significant impact on interpersonal communication and group effectiveness; therefore, atmosphere is an essential element in creating a model for an effective pastors' peer group.

Relationship

The category of relationship was defined by five themes that emerged from the research: knowable, esteem, personal catalyst, detrimental associations, and body enrichment. This category of relationship was the most prevalent in the interviews, even more so than atmosphere.

Knowable. The theme of knowable referred to by the pastors emerged from several different factors. Factors such as transparency, vulnerability, and mutual respect contributed to the theme of knowable. Pastors often emphasized in the interviews their appreciation of having the ability to ask hard questions, the ability to expose their vulnerability, and the mutual sharing they had with one another. Pastor #3 stated, "Our group is different because there's just a vulnerability and we can bring it right out in the open and say, 'Man, we love you where you are at.' The vulnerability is really the special part of the group." Transparency is conceptualized as a virtue that increases both trust and behavioral integrity (Shum et al., 2019). Vulnerability can play a role in personal religious transformation as it implies a state of exposure which can potentially create self-understanding and greater compassion towards others (Brown, 2019). Both of these attributes of transparency and vulnerability are key elements of being knowable. Pastor #2 described, "People hold pastors unfairly to a higher standard, people judge us stricter, but there's a vulnerability that we are allowed to exhibit without any change or diminishing of our worth as people in amongst our group." The willingness to be transparent and vulnerable that is demonstrated in the pastors' group is also key to the success of

being knowable. Several pastors indicated the inherent risk of exposure, however, because of the safe environment that was created and the time of knowing each other, they perceived that the risk was minor. Trust is a major factor in willingness as it is based on the expectation of a party performing a particular action important to another party (Nienaber et al., 2015). The trust demonstrated by the pastors was exemplary as transparency and vulnerability, and the willingness to be such was a valued part of the group. When the pastors in the group demonstrated an openness and a willingness to be transparent and vulnerable, they contributed to an environment where they truly could be knowable.

Esteem. The pastors discussed several contributing factors to the theme of esteem such as trust, agreement, responsibility, and mutual respect. Esteem is generally defined as the regard in which one is held, or a high value placed on another. The pastors certainly demonstrated the high regard they had with one another by describing the relationships they had made in the pastors' group over the years. Trust was not only a demonstration of the esteem they had for each other, but also was a major subject with the pastors interviewed. Pastor #4 stated, "When I began connecting with pastors who stuck with me, I began to develop a deep trust with them." Pastor #1 also indicated that trust was one of the major characteristics of a meaningful pastor-peer relationship. Trust in this context is defined as confidence and strong belief in the goodness, strength, and reliability in someone (Lamsal, 2001). The trust demonstrated represented a mutual respect that the pastors had for one another. Mutual respect can be defined as the recognition of worth and the recognition of capabilities two parties have for each other (Clarke & Mahadi, 2017). Pastor #8 stated concerning an important characteristics of a meaningful pastor peer relationship, "Definitely a mutual respect for one another." Agreement or agreeing together was also discussed, with Pastor #2 stating, "Covenant is an agreement, I agree to be accountable. I agree with others in the group to be accountable, it's something that we cooperate with. Covenant is a very serious agreement." Pastor #4 explained, "I view covenant as two parties coming into agreement with terms of that agreement being mutually beneficial." Agreement in this context is a biblical concept found in Amos 3:3: "Can two walk together,

unless they are agreed?" (*New King James Bible*, 1982), and the pastors of the pastors' group certainly demonstrated a walking together. Lastly, responsibility was highlighted in the interviews as the pastors indicated the importance of checking in with one another, edifying one another, and always being available for one another. Pastor #10 explained, "It's a mutual sharing of our hearts, of our issues. And edifying one another, praying for one another encouraging one another. To build up and to help a person see some life and get back on track." Responsibility emphasizes discretion and empowerment with a sound concept of duties in accordance with consideration and reasoning (Przeworski et al., 1999). The pastors interviewed indicted that care for one another was their responsibility and took advantage of doing so both in the weekly meetings and outside of the meetings. Pastor # 7 stated, "I feel responsible for being transparent, I feel responsible to other individuals because of the covenant we have, the brotherhood that has been established." The trust the pastors have in each other, their agreement to walk together in covenant, the responsibility they felt in lifting each other up, and the mutual respect they have for one another demonstrate the high regard they have for the group and each other.

      Personal Catalyst. The theme of personal catalyst consists of three separate factors: support, personal improvement, and band of brothers. A catalyst is something that provokes or speeds significant change (Merriam-Webster, 2022). The pastors interviewed described personal change that had occurred in themselves through the support they received, the personal improvement from the encouragement and wisdom they received, and the band of brothers of which they had become a part. The support they pastors received came through the ability to network together; Pastor #4 validated the formation of relationships of confidence indicated by Pastor #1, and the encouragement they had received as stated by Pastor #10. Pastor #2 stated, "It has been a real great thing to have that support." Support in this context is defined as the degree in which the environment makes resources available; resources that help individuals cope with stress through supportive relationships (Collins, 2008). The personal improvement the pastors had experienced by being an active part of the group was stated by several. Pastor #3

stated, "The group helps me become a better man." Pastor #2 stated, "It has made me a better man. It makes me a better pastor as it keeps my perspective universal." Pastor #10 stated, "I feel it makes me a better leader because I am affiliated with others and accountable." Pastor #1 stated, "I have personally grown and overcome in many areas of my life and I can attribute it to the Lord using these guys as iron sharpening iron in my life." The band of brothers aspect of this category of relationship was also stated by several of the pastors interviewed. Pastor #4 stated, "The camaraderie has made a safe place for me." Pastor #3 stated, "It's nice to know that you got brothers who know exactly what you are going through and are in the same place you are." Pastor #8 stated, "These relationships have been a lifeline, this trust and camaraderie." Pastor #6 stated, "True friendship is they accept you for who you are, so you can be who you are." The support the pastors receive from each other, the personal improvement they experience, and sense of being in a band of brothers as a result of being involved in this group provoked significant change in each of them.

Detrimental Associations. The theme of detrimental associations was discussed by several of the pastors as including those who had individual agendas and certain individuals asserting dominance. When the interview question was asked of the pastors to describe a negative experience with the group, seven out of the 10 responded with either individuals trying to push an agenda, individuals trying to assert their dominance over the group, or both. People attempting to assert their dominance or trying to push an individual agenda upon an established group tend to have a grandiose sense of self-worth coupled with a lack of empathy for those affected by their behavior (Gillespie, 2017). Several pastors made statements similar to Pastor #2, who indicated that "Individuals that had agendas don't seem to last." Because the group had the tenure it had had of 10 years together, such individuals were quickly identified and were given an opportunity to conform with the group or not. The group being able to identify toxic people and deal with them accordingly gave them an understanding of detrimental associations and further insolated the group from such influences.

Body Enrichment. The theme of body enrichment referred to by the pastors emerged from several different factors. Factors such as united efforts, kingdom advance, and community focused referring to the building up of the body of Christ as resulting from involvement in the pastors' group. Pastor #4 referred to the united efforts by stating, "It impacted our volunteerism. More people helping with our outreaches." Pastor #1 described, "It has built unity in the body of Christ." Pastor #9 stated concerning united efforts, "I ask the brothers on a regular basis to come and speak. It has enriched our church. We also have had many from the different churches come and volunteer at our homeless outreaches and feedings." Being kingdom minded is having a focus on building the body of Christ as a whole and not being isolated to the pastors' own individual kingdoms. Pastor #2 stated, "Our group keeps our eyes outside on the community and be kingdom minded." The aspect of being community minded was best defined by Pastor #1, who indicated, "It gives our people a greater sense of belonging to a larger move of God than just our church in our community. This gives people such a sense of community being in fellowship with other believers." The pastors involved regularly in the pastors' group experienced benefits not only for themselves personally, but also for the body of Christ at large as well.

The relationship aspect of the pastors group allows themselves to be knowable; it places a high value on the relationships they have with one another; it causes them to grow as individuals, as pastors, and as leaders; it causes them to be aware of detrimental associations; and it enriches their churches and the body of Christ as a whole. Meaningful relationships often involve a synthesis of subjective qualities such as people's depth of feelings and their loyalty to each other and this was plainly demonstrated in the interviews with the pastors (Hay, 1992). Interestingly, the category of relationship was emphasized the most in this research study of an effective pastors' group, greater even than spiritual atmosphere and personal growth. The importance of relationship cannot be understated as an essential element in creating a model for an effective pastors' peer group.

Personal Growth

The category of personal growth was defined by three themes that emerged from the research: spiritual growth, individual inspiration, and issue awareness.

Spiritual Growth. The spiritual growth of the pastors involved in the pastors' peer group came from the encouragement, the Scripture sharing, and the prayer they experienced weekly. Encouragement defined is the process of facilitating the development of a person's inner courage and inner resources toward a positive, forward movement (Cheston, 2000). Nichols (2021) defined biblical encouragement as "coming alongside someone else, pointing them to Jesus, and giving them the courage to be who God wants them to be and do what God wants them to do" (p. 12). This level of encouragement was certainly experienced by the pastors involved in the group. Pastor #3 explained, "I think it is life, it really does encourage me." Pastor #10 stated, "I have been greatly encouraged." Pastor #9 said, "I have been deeply impacted by the love and encouragement I receive from each of the brothers in those meetings." The sharing of the word that takes place in the weekly pastors' meetings is when the leader of the group picks a passage of Scripture and the group takes time to evaluate it and give their various perspectives on it. This sharing of the word has had a profound impact on the members of the group; as Pastor #4 indicated, "The biggest impact is when we go over Scriptures. We've all learned methods of study going through the Bible. Often you'll hear something you didn't see when you read the passage from someone who did a deeper dive." Pastor #10 stated, "I love the sharing of the word. It is very, very encouraging." Prayer was indicated through several of the interviews as an essential element in spiritual growth for the members of the group. Prayer is an intentional encounter with power: power to change things and power to make things bearable (Swatos, 1982). Pastor #10 stated, "There is the strength of praying together." Pastor #1 described, "We pray for one another weekly. Prayer is effective and we bear one another's burdens in prayer as much as we possibly can." The encouragement the pastors receive from each other, the insight they glean from the sharing of the word together, and the power they experience through praying for one another facilitated their spiritual growth.

Individual Inspiration. The pastors discussed several contributing factors to the theme of individual inspiration, such as mutual benefits, leader benefits, learning, and authentic me. Several pastors in the interviews referenced examples of the mutual benefits that they had either witnessed or experienced by being part of the group such as financial blessings, having influence over a greater community, access to additional resources, and access to each other's specific giftings. The leader benefits the pastors referred to as examples were the impact the group had on their individual churches, gleaning from multiple perspectives of wisdom, not being isolated, and gaining strength from the participants of the group. The need to belong is a fundamental human need with inclusion decreasing depression, negative mood swings, and anger which are benefits echoed in the interviews with the pastors (Begen & Turner-Cobb, 2015). Learning is another aspect of the individual inspiration theme, with Pastor #1 stating, "We are basically teaching ourselves in a nonconfrontational way, we are learning from each other, presenting ideas to one another, gleaning wisdom and experience from one another." Lastly, the authentic me factor of individual inspiration was referenced by the pastors interviewed, with statements such as "the ability to come broken," "being authentic," and "not having to be something I am not." This characteristic of authentic me was a valued aspect of the group that several of the pastors referred to as one of the draws to the group. The pastors who reaped the mutual benefits grew as a leader from the leader benefits, learned from the collective of wisdom, were able to be their authentic self, and experienced individual inspiration, according to the responses gathered from the interviews.

Issue Awareness. This aspect of issue awareness in the category of personal growth has several contributing factors such as maintaining appearances, personal struggles, congregational troubles, and difficulties with leadership. Maintaining appearances was referenced by Pastor #6 as follows: "We can actually be a person (in the group). And a lot of pastors can't do that. They are always Pastor John, but they are never John." Pastor #4 stated, "We're supposed to be Superman without Kryptonite, and that is not the reality." Scholars have described that some clergy seem more concerned in maintaining their religious façade than

endeavoring towards the value systems that they preach (Pak-Shiraz, 2007). Interestingly, the pastors interviewed in this study were very forth coming with the common struggles that pastors face. Table 5 in the previous chapter provides a breakdown of the answers they gave concerning the common pastoral struggles. Every pastor interviewed referenced some sort of congregational trouble they faced as a pastor at some point during their interviews. Pastor #3 referred to rejection as one of the hardest things he deals with from the congregation: "The pastor does it over and over and over and it doesn't stop. You got to have your heart open or you're not going to do this job effectively. That's why rejection hurts so much." Pastor #10 referred to a difficult board member as an example of dealing with difficulties in leadership which is a topic that came up regularly at the pastors' meetings. Having an awareness of the issues that pastors deal with and a safe place to discuss them is an opportunity for every pastor to experience personal growth.

When participants view their participation as contributing to their growth and development, they are more willing to participate in a positive group setting (Anderson et al., 2020). Many of the participating pastors indicated that they had grown significantly from their involvement with the pastors' group. The pastors' group environment gives the pastors an opportunity to express feelings, perceptions, and beliefs, facilitating personal insights while providing a place for personal growth through the interaction with others (Webster & Spellings, 2016). The spiritual growth, the individual inspiration, and the issue awareness are all catalysts for personal growth for each pastor involved in the group.

Implications

This research study was conducted to explore how the ministers involved in a covenant accountability group can benefit mentally, socially, and spiritually. The researcher aimed to explore the experience of covenant accountability and its effects on ministers and their relationships with their peers. The findings show that in this specific pastors' peer group pastors did benefit mentally, socially, and spiritually from their participation, causing significant personal growth as a result. The findings also revealed that participation in the pastors' group caused greater mutual respect, genuine concern, greater trust, connection, and support among the

pastors and their peers. Pastoral peer groups can provide a safe place where the members can find intellectual and spiritual support, as well as accountability with other pastors (White, 2010).

Theoretical Implications

The findings of this study reflected several pastoral challenges such as depression, burnout, family issues, and isolation/accountability challenges. Through the responses in the interviews, these challenges can be theoretically met through the categories established through the research. Table 8 is an overview of the theoretical solutions to the listed challenges.

Table 8

Theoretical Implications

Pastoral Challenges	Categories	Themes
Depression	Atmosphere	Holy Spirit Atmosphere
		Empathetic Environment
		Community
Burnout	Relationship	Knowable
		Esteem
		Personal Catalyst
		Detrimental Associations
		Body Enrichment
Family Issues	Personal Growth	Spiritual Growth
		Individual Inspiration
		Issue Awareness
Isolation/Accountability	Relationship	Knowable
		Esteem
		Personal Catalyst
		Detrimental Associations
		Body Enrichment

Depression. The Christian clergy role encompasses a broad combination of responsibilities such as pastor, providing care and counseling, preacher, teacher, organizer, administrator, overseer, and facilitator; therefore, it is not surprising that clergy have been reported to experience high levels of anxiety and depression (Edwards et al., 2020). The category of atmosphere may provide a solution; as Edwards et al. (2020) posited, "Two factors that have been studied in relation to their impact on mental health in clergy are social support and spiritual well-being"

(p. 858). A spiritually uplifting atmosphere where Holy Spirit interaction is encouraged, and where prayer and ministry are a focus, could certainly be of benefit to a pastor wrestling with depression. Such an atmosphere could provide a foundation for spiritual well-being. A pastor struggling with depression could also benefit from the social support of a community-based atmosphere where friendship, connection, love, and commonality are evident. An empathetic atmosphere that is relational, where genuine concern is displayed, a safe environment that encourages open discussion, and that is personally welcoming could also benefit a pastor dealing with depression. Theoretically, a pastor dealing with depression could benefit, find spiritual well-being, find social support, and find relief in an atmosphere that is Holy Spirit inclusive, empathetic, and community based.

Burnout. Most clergy begin their ministerial career with high ideals and optimism but quickly disillusionment and despair set in as a result of difficult parishioners, bureaucracy, and unending crisis after crisis with many reaching the extreme of burnout and breakdown (Grosch & Olsen, 2000). The category of relationship may provide a solution as Grosch and Olsen posited that the prevention and treatment of burnout in clergy includes support, being vulnerable, self-care, and being open. A support group that encourages vulnerability and transparency, where being open with peers that have a mutual respect could greatly benefit a pastor dealing with burnout. A support group that focuses on personal improvement from interaction with brothers in the faith who are not promoting agendas or asserting dominance, who are trustworthy, and who are in agreement to walk in covenant together could also minister to a pastor working through burnout. A support group committed to building the kingdom through community united efforts could assist an overwhelmed pastor struggling with burnout. Theoretically, a pastor wrestling with burnout could find treatment and prevent burnout by participating in a group that is supportive, values transparency and vulnerability, assists in personal growth, and encourages openness with covenant relationships.

Family Issues. Many clergy experience family stress from unrealistic expectations of occupational and personal perfection, as well as the stress of financial strain, lack of family privacy, being on call, frequent moves, and

diminishing quality in family life (Meek et al., 2003). The category of personal growth may provide a solution, as Meek et al. (2003) posited that potential remedies for helping ministers deal with family challenges were spiritual disciplines, awareness, and individual prevention. A support group that provides and encourages daily prayer, biblical study, and encouragement could benefit a pastor and their family. A support group that also encourages pastors to be their authentic self and provides opportunities for learning through a shared collective of wisdom and experience could assist pastors and their families. Lastly, a support group that has continual open discussion about the issues pastors face from maintaining appearances to personal struggles could serve a pastor dealing with family challenges. Theoretically, a pastor working through family challenges could find remedy by participating in a group where spiritual disciplines are practiced and encouraged, where issues are continually and openly discussed, and where individual growth could occur through interaction with group members sharing their wisdom and experience.

   Isolation/Accountability. "Pastors are some of the loneliest people on the planet from my experience," stated Pastor #1, a 25-year ministry veteran. Stressors in clergy, including the isolation caused by critical congregants, low vocational satisfaction, lack of support from superiors, and discomfort in discussing one's concerns, have been related to mental illness and burnout among clergy (Proeschold-Bell et al., 2015). The category of relationship may provide a solution, as Proeschold-Bell et al. posited that increasing social support with other clergy can promote mental health as well as decrease isolation and nonaccountability. A peer support group that encourages openness and promotes transparency and vulnerability from a position of mutual respect could benefit a pastor dealing with isolation. A support group that is committed to be a band of brothers also could assist a pastor struggling with isolation. Lastly, a peer support group that sees the well-being of their peers as their responsibility could serve a pastor working through isolation and non-accountability. Theoretically, a pastor dealing with isolation and a lack of accountability could greatly benefit from a peer group that encourages social support.

Practical Implications

For the creation of a pastoral peer group that has an atmosphere that is Holy Spirit conducive, empathetic, community focused, relational, and committed to the personal growth of its participants, two practical implications must be considered: leadership and maturity. Without specific leadership and maturity, the pastoral peer group will not be effective in supporting its members.

Leadership. Identifying the person who sets and creates the group's atmosphere is crucial in understanding a group's atmosphere (Allanic et al., 2019). The values and values systems of leaders matter in organizations, as their values will ultimately be embedded in the fabric of the organization (Ciulla, 2020). Transactional skills for running day to day activities of the group and transformational skills for assisting the group in being innovative and creative by working together is essential for leaders to possess (Outhwaite, 2003). Personality is an important aspect of effective leadership, and has been long studied in relation to leadership emergence and effectiveness (Steinmann et al., 2020). In the context of an effective pastoral peer group, several factors must be considered for there to be a successful leader. Factors such as personal devotional life, relational abilities, commitment to the success of individuals, and a noncompetitive attitude are essential for a pastoral group leader. Pastor #1 referenced the importance of leadership demonstrating meekness as opposed to lording leadership extensively over the members even though "Some people perceive meekness as a weakness." Intentionality also cannot be understated for the leader, as they must be intentional about keeping in contact with pastors outside of the group, intentional about keeping the meetings focused, and intentional about maintaining a Holy Spirit inclusive atmosphere as well as a relational atmosphere. The pastoral group leader must essentially become a pastor to the pastors.

Maturity. Pastor #1 stated, "Every relationship is going to be enhanced by how much we are Christ-like, or is going to be devalued and hurt by the extent where we don't act like Christ. Maturity is critical in maintaining healthy relationships." Similarly, Armitage et al. (2006) posited, "Maturity conveys the notion of development from some initial state to some more advanced state,

acquired through active learning and meaningful experience" (p. 42). Pastor #2 concurred with this statement, in reference to maturity being an essential part of the pastors' group, stating, "I think it is a maturing thing, it helps us to mature. It cultivates maturity within us." What the individual sees as important, as determined by the specific stage in life that individual is currently in, is a demonstration of maturity in leadership (Nelson et al., 2014). A leader must also possess emotional maturity which constitutes the understanding and acceptance of all of an individual's normal feelings and emotions in all circumstances; it is also the willingness to expand an individual's paradigm with gaining new information while recognizing and accepting differences in others as assets to be valued (Hyatt et al., 2007). For a pastors' peer group to be effective, maturity must be a valued component as ministry is an emotional thing. Without the ability to understand and accept the emotional responses of others in the group and recognizing and accepting those individuals as valued assets, the group will not achieve its desired goals of building unity and supporting the participants.

The Model

The current researcher explored a pastors' peer group in central Florida that has been operating with success for several years according to the interviews with the pastors involved with the group. The possibility of replicating that group for other pastors in other areas of the country has been one of the goals of this research. The culture of a pastoral peer group must be established from the beginning with an agreement from all participants to adhere to the culture established. Organizational culture describes the shared values, belief systems, attitudes, and the set of assumptions shared by members of an organization (Vijfeijken, 2019). The culture of the central Florida pastors' group is centered around the following tenets:

1. A culture of unity comprised of many churches and ministries, but one in Christ. Value is placed on the Spirit over individual churches.
2. A culture of invitation where any pastor who lifts up the name of Jesus Christ and declares Him as Lord is invited and welcomed.
3. A culture of love and friendship where members are loved and aspire to lay down their lives for others.

4. A culture of preemptive forgiveness, where potential offences are forgiven before they happen.

5. A culture of holiness where the participants choose to walk in holiness and fear of God.

6. A culture of honor where each pastor and each church is honored and respected.

7. A culture of mutual submission where the giftings of each pastor are respected and the chose is made to submit to one another.

8. A culture of trust where the conversations are in a safe place for the pastors to share their deepest concerns.

9. A culture free of jealousy members are not solicited to join other ministries, sheep are not allowed to cause division among the pastors, and communication is encouraged between the pastors concerning nomadic congregants.

10. A culture of building God's kingdom where individual ministries are not promoted, but community outreaches are, as the fellowship looks to see God's kingdom come to the area.

11. A culture of respect where each pastor is encouraged to maintain relationships of accountability and confidence within the fellowship. The authority which the pastor choses to submit themselves is respected.

12. A culture of spiritual freedom where the expression of spiritual gifts is encouraged as they are needed to strengthen each other. All expressions of spiritual gifts in the meetings are to build up the body and are peaceful, decent, and in order.

13. A culture free of control or compulsion where no membership fee, offering, or tithe is required. Each pastor is encouraged to contribute to the group community events.

14. A culture of reconciliation where brothers in breach of covenant are gently and lovingly confronted in order to gain and restore the brother.

Once the culture is established and agreed upon by the participants, the execution of weekly or monthly meetings can begin. How the meetings are conducted is

determined by the leadership of the pastoral group. The central Florida pastoral group has three intentional components for each meeting they conduct: encouragement/edification, word, and prayer.

Encouragement/Edification. In each of the weekly meetings, time is taken to "check in" with each pastor present. Each pastor is given an opportunity to share briefly how they are doing and how their ministry is going. Because of the tenure of each pastor at the group, these check-in times are very powerful, as the pastors are very open with where they are at mentally and emotionally. Many of the pastors use this time as an accountability check-in as well, with them sharing about an issue and asking to be held accountable by the present pastors. This time of check-in many times results in a prayer time for the individuals sharing.

Word. Each week, an appointed pastor brings a scripture or scripture passage designed for discussion. The passage is read and then discussed at length by the attending pastors. The pastor sharing the word is encouraged to not preach, but to guide a conversation with the passage given. The depth that the conversations reaches is enhanced by the combined wisdom and experience in the room.

Prayer. Prayer cannot be understated, as it is one of the prominent things offered by the pastors' fellowship. General requests from the pastors are received and prayed for, and needs in the community are also lifted up in prayer. A chorus is often sung by the pastors during this prayer time resulting in several minutes of worship. Lastly, prayer for revival for the community is lifted up with several—if not all—of the pastors present praying.

For the creation of an effective pastors' peer group, leadership must be carefully screened and selected, and maturity must be a predetermined valued virtue. A culture for the group must also be predetermined, agreed upon, and adhered to by attending members. The frequency of the meetings must be determined and established. Lastly, the execution of the meetings must be done with the edification and encouragement of the members being a priority and with the Lordship of Jesus being established through worship and prayer.

Principles

There are four overarching principles in the context of pastoral accountability in covenant community: (a) the establishment of an intentional determined culture, (b) a commitment to covenantal relationships, (c) a mutual commonality in worship, and (d) an intentional inclination towards exposure.

Establishment of an Intentional Determined Culture

To establish an effective covenantal community, expectations must be clear concerning the intended culture of the pastoral group. Culture describes the set of values, social ideals, and beliefs that organizational members share (Bellot, 2011). The culture of the covenantal group must be welcoming and acceptable behaviors should be outlined, causing a sense of safety for those involved. Once the culture has been predetermined and established, there also must be a determination to keep to the said culture for the duration of the group.

Commitment to Covenantal Relationships

The relationships established in an effective covenant community must eventually supersede casual friendships to a more committed state. As already stated in this study, a covenant changes the relationship between two covenanting parties, ratifies it, and brings it to an entirely different level (Niehaus, 2009). The covenant relationships are committed to one another, regardless of what circumstance and situations may bring.

A Mutual Commonality in Worship

In an effective pastoral covenant community, there must be a commonality in worship. Commonality in organizational settings has proven to have positive effects on members' performance and overall satisfaction (Drescher & Garbers, 2016). Different denominations can come together in a pastors' group; however, there must be a commonality on basic tenets of faith such as the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, Christ, the inerrancy of the Bible, and the gospel of salvation. If the commonalities of worship exist, there can be powerful spiritual experiences that will impact the attending group members.

An Intentional Inclination Towards Exposure

Once the trust has been established through an intentional determined culture, a commitment to covenantal relationships established, and mutual commonality in worship, there must be a genuine willingness of the participants to be transparent and vulnerable. Trust is ultimately the definition of be willing to be vulnerable to another party (Schoorman et al., 2007). Accountability requires transparency to be effective, and this requires participants to be willing to be exposed. Members of the pastors' group can find restoration and healing through accountability if they are willing to be transparent and open with one another.

Limitations of the Study

There were several significant limitations that impacted this research study. First, the researcher focused on one pastors' group in one geographical area. Further research could be done analyzing several pastors' groups in different geological areas to further expand the research. Secondly, the pastors interviewed were primarily male and gave their perceptions from a male point of view. Many women are in the roles of pastors today, and gaining their perspective of the issues pastors face concerning accountability could be useful. Thirdly, researcher bias is a common limitation in phenomenological research. The researcher took care not to insert his personal bias in the interview process or the analysis of the data, but there is a possibility that unintentional and unconscious bias occurred. Fourthly, all the data were self-reported and the pastors that were represented in this study made up the core of the group. As the requirements to participate in this study required a minimum of 5 years' involvement with the group, there are several pastors who were not represented because they had only been attending the group for a short period of time. Therefore, other pastors involved weekly in the group may not have shared the same perceptions of the group as the pastors who were interviewed, and a more rigorous assessment would be needed to help determine whether everyone shares the same perceptions as the pastors interviewed. Lastly, the pastors were not asked to disclose whether they had a diagnosed mental health condition such as depression, so any indications given concerning feelings of depression were again self-reported.

Recommendations for Future Research

As pastors have a unique position of providing care and support for many while often forgoing their own emotional and mental needs, the implementation of a support structure for them is an essential component for their overall general health and job satisfaction. Too many pastors isolate themselves because of various reasons, causing them to suffer from loneliness, isolation, and burnout. Accountability structures based on covenant could provide the emotional and mental support that they so desperately need. Further research is suggested in three different areas: spousal input, geographical research, long-term research, and mental health assessment.

Spousal Input

The toll of high ministry stress on ministers and their spouses is evident, which can ultimately impact their marriage in a negative way (Rowatt, 2001). In consideration of the negative impact stress in ministry can have on a marriage, gaining perspective from minister spouses could be of benefit for understanding how to build an effective covenant accountability group. Spouses witness the pastor in their ministry as well as how they conduct themselves at home, which gives them a unique understanding of the ministry. Future research is recommended to gain the spousal perspective of ministry and accountability and enhance understanding for building effective ministerial support structures.

Geographical Research

In this study, the researcher focused on one geographical area of the United States. Different areas of the country present different perspectives and different needs. Also, this research study was conducted in a mid- to upper-class area of central Florida; seeking the perspectives of individuals from different economical and geographical areas would greatly benefit future research in assisting pastors in accountability. Future research is recommended in gaining an understanding of different geological and economical areas to better gain understanding for building effective ministerial support structures.

Long-Term Research

The research done for this study was a snapshot of where the pastors of the central Florida pastors' group were presently. To further gain an understanding of the impact of the pastors' group effectiveness, a study 5 to 10 years in the future could give a more accurate understanding. It would be interesting to see how the leadership changed, how the pastors progressed in their ministries, and the overall well-being of the members of the group. A follow-up study is recommended to better gain understanding for building effective ministerial support structures.

Mental Health Assessment

The research done in the study was from a self-reporting perspective. Perhaps the investigators of a future study could administer a general mental health assessment to determine whether the pastors had a clinically diagnosed mental health condition such as depression to distinguish between feelings of depression and actual depression itself. The mental health assessments would be completely anonymous in the reporting, but the results could provide a better understanding of the mental health condition of future pastors being studied.

Concluding Reflections

The intent of this study was two-fold: (a) to explore the experience of pastors involved in a covenant accountability group and (b) to look at the group with the intention of understanding the components to be able to recreate the covenant accountability group. The interviews with the pastors were inspiring, saddening, and encouraging, with many—if not all—telling of how much the group had impacted them in a positive way. The fact that the pastors were so forthcoming on the challenges that pastors face was surprising but informative, especially with the idea of being able to recreate the group where other pastors could benefit and avoid potential pitfalls. Pastor #1's quote of "Pastors are the loneliest people on the Earth" was very telling, as that particular pastor was speaking not only from the experience he had had in the United States, but also from having ministered to pastors abroad for many years. Overall, most pastors minister from a place of divine calling and therefore work through the myriad of challenges of ministry,

regardless of the personal toll it takes on them. This tireless work can drive them to a place of poor emotional and mental health, which can ultimately affect their families in a negative way. The need for an effective peer support structure is imperative and understanding the needs of local pastors can help build that support. This research study was conducted to help give an understanding of the needs of pastors and provide a snapshot of a pastors' peer group that is accomplishing covenant accountability for their members.

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Appendix A
Interview Transcriptions

Pastor #1 Interview

Interviewer: My first question is this, have you experienced accountability in our peer group and if do, how?

Pastor #1:   Well by the formation of relationships of confidence with other people in the group, and it doesn't happen automatically but it happens when you get an inside sense of the person not only knowing who they are, but knowing they are not going to throw you under the bus by opening their mouth and sharing something with somebody else that would be damaging to me.

Interviewer: Exactly. How would you describe relationship in that context?

Pastor #1:   I am not sure how to answer that…

Interviewer: (Laughs) This is a doctoral level thing.. you understand that. I'm going to ask really hard questions.

Pastor #1   Right (Laughs). Relationship in the context of accountability in my opinion would be centered around friendship. Friendship centered around the Lord. In the church world, we call everybody family, brother, sister, whatever and it gets a little over used but friendship from a deep sense of family is where the relationship of accountability must be.

Interviewer: All right the second question is have you experienced covenant in our peer group and if so how?

Pastor #1:   Personally I would rather use of the word friendship or close relationship because covenant can have so many different meanings. We developed in our group an actual covenant where it outlines confidentiality, not talking ill of one another, lifting each other up, not "stealing sheep," being in contact with one another if someone shows up from someone else's church, things like that. I have noticed we don't talk about the covenant as much anymore as it seems to be in the hearts of all of us now. This is nice because it

happens automatically and we don't have to rely on the letter of the law by but instead rely on our friendships and relationships. So yes, I have experienced covenant in the group.

Interviewer: Excellent, excellent so then the third question to tie this together is how would you define from those two perspectives covenant accountability?

Pastor #1: I think all of this is really better described as just being in relationships of agape love where we love one another and support one another. The accountability part is where I know if I step out of line, my brothers will call me out on it, as well as checking in with me regularly to see how I am personally doing and visa-versa. We all have each other's backs and are in relationship with each other.

Interviewer: Wonderful, wonderful, excellent. What would you say are some characteristics of a meaningful pastor peer relationship?

Pastor #1: Loyalty. Faithfulness. Trust. I like what one of our pastors refers to as preemptive forgiveness, where if you offend me, I have already made the decision to forgive you. There are always some things that come up because we are human, so we need to be ready to forgive one another. Matthew 18 in action.

Interviewer: Perfect, great. Okay next question; how would you establish a covenant accountability relationship with new members to the group, or how would we do that if a new member comes in, what would be some of the steps that we would take to establish that covenant accountability?

Pastor #1: Wow, that is a challenge. I'd like to say maybe there are certain principles that guide in every circumstance but people are different and they have to be approached differently. I think you need to study the person and see what makes them tick and always take the first steps of trying to be open and humble. One of the things that is characteristic of our group is the fact we are not beating our chests over how many people we have or how many got baptized, where

we are almost self-deprecating which helps newcomers feel welcome and not under any pressure to outperform someone in the room. I think most people expect pastors to brag on themselves and all of their accomplishments which doesn't help anyone. That is one of the positive criticism that we've had from new members who have come in who have said we expected to hear chest pounding but we didn't see any of that at all. I think that's just kudos to this unique group that we have and are very proud to be a part of.

Interviewer: Okay the next question is has regular attendance at our pastors' fellowship impacted you personally and if so how?

Pastor #1: Very much impacted, yes. Without regular attendance, it would be difficult to develop and maintain the relationships we just discussed so it has impacted me for the positive. Inversely people who have not been attending quite as faithfully don't feel the same connection because they haven't had the time to develop the relationships which each other and extract the benefits out it.

Interviewer: You're reading into my notes here because my next question is what are some positive experiences have you had with the accountability with our pastors' group, one or two of those.

Pastor #1: Well even in hard times we have been governed by spiritual and biblical principles like for example, when one brother tried to assert himself over everybody else, everybody worked through the Matthew 18 principles with him. Our relationship with each other is as such as when someone is hurting financially, people will begin to write checks for them, if someone is a bit depressed and hurting others have come by and prayed for them and spent significant time with them. We also have been intentional to meet the need of loneliness among pastors by spending time with each other outside of the group and gathering in group events as well. Pastors are some of the loneliest people on the planet in my experience. We meet weekly as a group and invest in our pastor friendships weekly, yet it

is not regulated to just the weekly meeting. That is a testament to how powerful these relationships can be, especially in the context of accountability.

Interviewer: This sounds like a baiting question but it's really not meant to be… how much would you say maturity is a factor in these positive experiences?

Pastor #1:   Every relationship is going to be enhanced by how much we are Christ-like and it's going to be devalued or it's going to be hurt by the extent where we don't act like Christ. So yes, maturity is critical in maintain healthy relationships. It's just absolutely essential that we carefully pick who we can confide in and that is a challenge for us, even considering how new members become a part of the group.

Interviewer: Great, wonderful. Okay, what about a negative experience… what is a negative experience that we've had as a pastors group?

Pastor #1:   Some people perceive humility as a weakness. Therefore some people will try to take advantage of people who don't lord or extensively exercise their leadership authority. They perceive meekness as a weakness and interpret that as a vacuum in leadership and will try to step in and assert their dominance. We have had some of that with a handful of pastors. Thankfully because of the strength of the relationships we have built over nine years, those pastors were identified quickly and were given the opportunity to submit to the group, and to their credit some did while others did not. The Lord is faithful in sorting out that which needs sorting.

Interviewer: All right five questions left… the next question is how has regular attendance benefited your particular church as being a part of the fellowship?

Pastor #1:   Well you know it's an interesting thing as it has built unity in the body of Christ and given our people a greater sense of belonging to a larger move of God than just our church in our community. We hold a quarterly ONE event where all our churches come together

for a night of worship and this gives people such a sense of community and being in fellowship with other believers… people know we all work together and meet together weekly and see the friendships we have. I personally think it gives an added level of security for the people in our churches knowing their pastor is in rich fellowship with other mature pastors.

Interviewer: I mean myself, I have walked into restaurants and have had people from other churches say, "Hey Pastor Jim," because they have seen me working with the other pastors in the group. It represents a greater community and I think that is so powerful especially in today's world where everything is so segregated. It's is really tearing down those unseen walls between churches which is really powerful. The next question is what are some specific benefits of being in an covenant accountability relationship with local pastors… what are some of benefits you've experienced in being relationship with all these crazy guys personally?

Pastor #1: We are basically teaching ourselves in a nonconfrontational way, we are learning from each other, presenting ideas to one another, gleaning wisdom and experience from one another. We are a diverse group of Latinos, African Americans, and whites and the ability to learn from other culture perspectives has been absolutely invaluable. We have had more cross-cultural training in this group than I have had in 25 years of missions work. So the ability to genuinely learn from one another is the greatest benefit I have had with being in relationship with these pastors.

Interviewer: Wow, that's awesome. The investigator is not supposed to talk about our experience in this process but that's what I've enjoyed the most is the richness of the relationships with me being more of a rookie pastor, I know it has saved me countless times to have the relationships that I've had with a different pastors in our group with

situations I have faced, and just gleaning from their wisdom, their experience, and their understanding has been invaluable.

Pastor #1:   Absolutely, absolutely.

Interviewer: All right three questions left. What would you define as some common struggles a pastor deals with? You mentioned loneliness, you've mentioned depression, any others that you would say are probably big ones for pastors?

Pastor #1:   Isolation breeds all kind of problems. Isolation creates barriers for pastors to reach out when they are having family problems, personal sin problems, etc., and if we don't understand how to combat that isolation, we set ourselves up for a fall. Pride can be an issue which can also cause all sorts of problems, and yeah, things like that.

Interviewer: Absolutely. You've mentioned isolation, depression, and in a lot of my research I see a big issue with burnout where guys are getting burned out to a terrible degree. How would you how would you say our pastors fellowship addresses some of these common struggles that pastors face?

Pastor #1:   Well, we pray for one another weekly. Prayer is effective and we bear one another's burdens in prayer as much as we possibly can. We minster to one another and the more we are in fellowship with each other, we can lift each other up and carry each other if need be through the difficult times. We have had guys weep during those ministry times because of the stress thy have been under and the other guys gather round and weep with them and pray for them… it is powerful. Then again, checking in with each other weekly outside of the meeting, meeting each other for breakfast or lunch, it all helps in helping each other deal with the common struggles pastors face.

Interviewer: Last but not least, how has regular attendance at the pastors fellowship helped you personally with any of these common struggles?

Pastor #1:   For me personally, the richness of the relationships is what has been
               the most help I have received… being in weekly fellowship with
               like-hearted and like-minded guys who share a commonality,
               knowing what each of us faces on a weekly basis. I have personally
               grown and overcome in many areas of my life and I can attribute it
               to the Lord using these guys as iron sharpening iron in my life. Also
               the richness found in the shared communion we have in Jesus, the
               anointing of the Holy Spirit that is evident when we gather together,
               it all is so wonderful.

Interviewer: Alright, thank you sir! We are all done!

Pastor #2 Interview

Interviewer: The first question I have for you is have you experienced accountability in our pastors fellowship group and if so, how?

Pastor #2: Relationally. I've gotten to know many of the guys and they have gotten to know me and they can look at me and ask the right questions at the right time. So it's not a formulaic thing, but a relational thing.

Interviewer: Perfect. Have you experienced covenant in our pastors group and if do, how?

Pastor #2: Yes. Because we understand the covenant as is an agreement, the strongest word for agreement, I agree to be accountable, I agree with others in the group to be accountable it's something that we cooperate with. Covenant is not supposed to be broken either so it's a very strong thing. It's not a light thing, it is a very serious thing so that's a very serious agreement that I agree with you and give my consent with you in.

Interviewer: Perfect. So in the context of those two definitions, those two kind of views that you just stated, how would you define covenant accountability?

Pastor #2: Well I know there are people already in position that have agreed to help me be accountable and in some ways be accountable to me. I think the thing is there's a preempted agreement with one another that's already in place and it is something I know that's available to me and I just have to avail myself to it.

Interviewer: Okay, in that process what would you say are some characteristics of a meaningful pastor peer relationship that you've experienced… what are some characteristics of these meaningful pastor peer relationships?

Pastor #2: I would say the ability to be vulnerable. Where in most other contexts people hold pastors unfairly to a higher standard… people judge us stricter but there's a vulnerability that we are allowed to

exhibit without any change or diminishing of our worth as people amongst the group.

Interviewer: They say when you're doing your interviews for a qualitative research project when you hit saturation or the same answers, you know you've hit enough interviews. So far every answer you've given has and a carbon copy what Pastor #1 just said not even 40 minutes ago. I think I've hit saturation with just two interviews (Laughs). All right, how would you establish a covenant accountability relationship with a new member that comes to our group? How would we begin to lay the groundwork to establish that covenant accountability with them?

Pastor #2:   That's a really good question… that's sort of the of the hurdle we face because we don't want it to be just us four and no more, yet there is safety in the tenure we all have with one another. I think we need to be inclusive, we would invite people in to experience what we are and how we operate with an openness to receive them. And we have had times where he or she has had their own agenda and things that were outside of that group, and the group can pick it up fairly quickly, it doesn't last. Whoever is not there sincerely just disappears, with no one actually evicting them, they just kind of drop out. I would say just have a willingness to be inclusive and by degree be yourself and chose to be vulnerable in front somebody that you barely know. That's the challenge. But if the new person proves themselves after hearing what's shared, they can become a great asset to the group. It's a risk, but when it pays off, it is a good thing.

Interviewer: Absolutely, absolutely. Okay well the next question is has regular attendance at our pastors fellowship impacted you personally and if so how?

Pastor #2:   Absolutely. In fact there's a season here where I've been unable to attend as regularly as I would like… I want to be there every week

as it is a supply of the Holy Spirit for me personally that I don't get any other way and when that is absent I feel it. You know I'm not as spiritually dialed in or in tune if you will, I can feel a bit alienated and it's just the circumstances that caused it so I've seen it more from the absent side of it. Like if I'm not there for a couple weeks in a row, I feel it.

Interviewer: What would you say are some positive experiences you've had with accountability in our group setting?

Pastor #2: Just this week, I have had two of the pastors text me and ask how am I doing? It is an opportunity for me where I can share or I can give some sort of short answer. But there's times where I've been able to say I'm struggling in a very tough season and it's been a real great thing to have that support.

Interviewer: What would you say with some negative experiences of being involved with our group or that we've experienced as a group?

Pastor #2: I don't know… maybe just the times that there have been individuals that had agendas… it doesn't seem to last. On occasion there's been people that have had some sort agenda to steer our group in a way that it's not organically blessed. They were trying to turn the ship in a direction in a way that's not the personality of the group or it's not the DNA of who we are.

Interviewer: Right, right. I asked Pastor #1 this question off the cuff and I'll ask you as well, how much of a factor is maturity as far as being a component of our group?

Pastor #2: I think it's a maturing thing, it helps us to mature, it cultivates maturity within us. I don't think you have to have a certain amount already established… but you need to have a willingness.

Interviewer: Awesome. Okay five more to go and we're done! The next question I have is how has regular attendance in our group benefited your church particularly?

Pastor #2:   It has made me a better man. It makes me a better pastor as it keeps my perspective universal. There's a community that I'm aware of, because it's easy to just kind of stare at your own people inside your own walls and only be concerned about that, but our group keeps our eyes outside on the community and be kingdom minded. It really does foster that thinking better than anything I have seen.

Interviewer: Okay, great. What are some specific benefits that you would define as being in an accountability relationship with local pastors personally?

Pastor #2:   Well the first one is just what it means to me personally on the advancement of me being a part of the body of Christ. It really does make me be a better person but also I get to have an influence on a broader community… I get to have influence on people who are influencing others in the community we serve.

Interviewer: Absolutely. What would you define in your vast years of ministry are common struggles pastors deal with on a regular basis?

Pastor #2:   It's probably isolation. There's a lot of assumptions that people make about their pastors. It can be being in an isolated place which underscores why our group is so important and how it's a counterweight to Isolation. A lot of times it can be frustrating to see people you know who don't value you at the same level that you value them. It's like a parent watching the kids grow up and they're making mistakes and seeing that sort of thing is heart wrenching. I don't know of anything more difficult than that you know you want to be able to say something that lifts someone out of their pain… and many times your only option is to be present and let them know you love them. And that's the limit that we have as pastors when there's such suffering going on.

Interviewer: How would you say our pastors fellowship address or addresses some of the struggles you've mentioned?

Pastor #2:   I think the accountability. I think it's just knowing each other and checking on each other and being interested in one another.

Interviewer: Just one question left… how as regular attendance to the pastor fellowship helped you personally with some of these common struggles of isolation, depression, etc.?

Pastor #2:   I have been able to open up because I know it's a safe environment and I know that's all I need. Sometimes you just need somebody to care about you and need somebody to be there and that is one of the most powerful things about it. There's something about being in a group that understands about what it is you're feeling and just to have somebody who honestly cares about what you're doing. Only pastors know what pastors go through. You really just need somebody to understand what is happening and that I don't think you can get that anywhere else in the world.

Interviewer: Wow that's powerful.

Pastor #3 Interview

Interviewer: The first question I have for you is have you experienced accountability in our pastors fellowship and if so how?

Pastor #3: I think that the friendships and relationships that we build automatically kind of builds an accountability to one another. And I think that we're able to share with each other without expecting the others to get up and storm out of the room. So, personally, I mean, accountability is found in the friendships. That's just kind of naturally birthed out of more than just. "Hey, how you doing relationship?" It's a relationship that we come and do in the group. You know, there's others coming in, but there's a core there that absolutely all hearts are knitted together.

Interviewer: Great. Have you experienced covenant in our pastors peer group, and if, so how?

Pastor #3: I remember there was a time when we had the meeting at our church, and one of the pastors was just going through it, and he was bad. We were able to speak into him and encourage him, and lift him up. And then it was, I think, a week or two later, I was going through, you know, the one who was just telling him, you know, "God's gonna help you through this." And so there was a connection which made a covenant, you know, more than just a friendship, a true brother. We're able to speak into each other at our levels. You know, when we're really down we can we can pretty much to depend upon the group and those that are doing well to uplift and that's a big part of covenant in it is to encourage lift and the help on when you're down.

Interviewer: Yes, it's walking together. Excellent. How would you define covenant accountability?

Pastor #3: Transparency. And that's what kind of sets our group apart you know, we've all been in these other groups where someone comes in and it's all, "I got this and they got to do this." But our group is

different because there's just a vulnerability and we can we can bring it right out in the open and say, "Man we love you where you are at." The vulnerability is really the special part of the group. And that's, that's covenant accountability, really.

Interviewer: Great to have a safe place to be vulnerable. Perfect. What are some particular characteristics of those relationships that you've enjoyed or that you've experienced that would make a meaningful relationships with the pastors?

Pastor #3: Pastoring is hard. It's a lot harder than any of us probably ever dreamed it will be when we got into it. And the reason it's so hard is our hearts are so connected to it. If we were just in this and we were charismatic, good speakers and, you know, good business leaders, then it probably wouldn't be so hard. The thing that I like is we're all in the same place. We're all doing the same thing. We're all trying to advance the kingdom and do good for God in the earth. And it's different than talking to somebody that has no idea. It's different than sitting down on the table with somebody that's never pastored. There is nothing like sitting down at the table with your brothers and these covenant relationships who know exactly what you are going through and are in the same place you are. And so, I like that I like that. Each of us knows what the other ones experiencing. It's not just you know, we're not a psychologist trying to be you know, find some kind of mental thing we can speak into you, even though we don't have any idea of the heart condition, you know what I mean? So, that's, that's one characteristic I really like is I know these guys know what I'm going through.

Interviewer: Okay, great. Let's shift gears just a little bit. Has your regular attendance to the pastors fellowship had an impact on you and if so how?

Pastor #3: Yeah, absolutely. I think it's life… it really does encourage me. It's in it's nice to know that you got brothers. This is a thankless,

friendliness job you know, you don't have friends. You might have a couple but very minimal. At the group, you got friends, you know, and so you can go in there. And the word is always good, and you get so many different perspectives from different backgrounds, different races, different ideals, different perspectives. I love it.

Interviewer: That's great. What would you say would be some positive experiences you have in the pastors' peer group? One or two.

Pastor #3: Again, those moments when you don't think you can go another day it's alright and then it's, you know, missions trips and stuff, like, you know, things that are far from the group that are outside of the group that are awesome. You know, it helps me become a different man. Activities separate from the group, but it's because of the group, the right connections were made because of the group but then, you know, through that we build lifelong friendships.

Interviewer: Perfect. How about any negative experiences that you've had with the group?

Pastor #3 Well, you know, some people try to come in and dominate, they come from the old school of look at me and look what I got. And they just don't fit in in that vulnerable mode. So that's a negative, you know, you'd want everybody to come in and just be open and vulnerable forever. They see what the group is, but a lot of times, it doesn't fit their agenda and they leave.

Interviewer: Right. How would you say over the last six years, you being a part of this group, has it impacted your church?

Pastor #3: Because it's impacted me it's impacted the church. I tell my church over the pulpit all the time. It definitely has a positive effect on the larger community. As ministers because we experience a lot of frustrations, but can when go on Thursday, and lay it out before groups and kind of deal with it. Talk about kick it around, get encouraged.

Interviewer: What are some specific benefits of being in covenant accountable relationships with local pastors? What were some benefits of being on this level of relationship with these guys?

Pastor #3:   Well, for instance, other ministries gave opportunity to go on missions trips, it gave us opportunities where it's mutually beneficial. And you know, there's been a number of times where others were tight financially and we felt like the Lord was leading us to sow into them that needed cash. So financially, it's been mutually beneficial.

Interviewer: Those were powerful times for sure. From your observations being in ministry, what are what would you say are some common struggles that pastors deal with? What are some regular common struggles that pastors can fight through or deal with?

Pastor #3:   I think a huge thing with pastors is rejection. And I think the rejection comes because of the systemic model that we built. We build this thing and make men put men on pedestals and make them popular and we've fed off of that and so when people walk away, it just devastate us. I just wish we would get to the place where church was more of a family. You know, you're the shepherd. This is a family. It's not a ministry, model, or a work. I think that would help with the rejection thing, but rejection is huge. I would say that's what you're talking about stuff that pastors deal with. That's something that's going to be top of the list. The pastor does it over and over and over and it doesn't stop.

Interviewer: Rejection breeds all kinds of scary things, but yes, that is a big one. The number one thing that I saw in my research was isolation.

Pastor #3:   When get jabbed so many times you cover up. You got to have your heart open or you're not going to do this job effectively. That's why rejection hurts so much which eventually leads us to isolation.

Interviewer: Has, in your experience the last six years, the pastors' group helped you personally with some of these struggles?

Pastor #3:   I know that every man around the table was going through the same rejection and same types of things and people stabbing in the back and people walking out. And so it helps because, you know, they went through it.. So it's that knowing that all of us have been through it. It does help you when you know that you are the one that's going through it. These guys ain't just saying something to make you feel good, they are speaking from their own experience.

Interviewer: Exactly. Alright, last question. See, that wasn't so bad. How has, you've kind of already answered this last question, how has regular attendance to the pastor group helped you personally with these common struggles pastors face?

Pastor #3:   Through the relationships, and the commonality of situations we face together.
It's the same scenario, you know, if you're going to get in shape. You have to go to the gym all the time. You can't go once a week, once a month. You have to create a pattern and you stick with it. When I'm coming every week to the group and I'm faithful to it, it helps me be built up. It's so important that you're there.

Interviewer: Right, exactly. Well that's it! Thank you so much!

Pastor #4 Interview

Interviewer: All right, sir, the first question I have for you is this have you experienced accountability in our pastors group and if so how?

Pastor #4: I think the accountability comes from a place of intimacy first. I think that is where

you hold yourself accountable. Anyone that's not intimate won't be accountable because there's no trust. So I think what the pastors' meeting did for me was it create an intimacy. I got to know other men of God that go to the same things that I go through even though we may have differences, socioeconomic differences, theoretical and theological differences. But I think intimacy was what came first because I don't think I've ever made myself accountable to someone that I didn't know their character. And based off that intimacy, I think it created things where I had a go to. If normally, if I experienced something, it was kind of me, myself and I, and then maybe my wife. But that was about it, because sometimes in pastoring, of course, in the past, we've gone to people and then six months later, they leave your fellowship and they don't leave peacefully. They leave and tell people their stuff. I think pastors, we've developed a fear to that we've held back on being transparent, so I've held back on that but this group created an open a door, a safe place with actual men of God that that are trustworthy, that are kind, that you know, have the same faith. And that's the core of intimacy, I'm able to say, "Hey, this is something I'm working on, would you just check it out for me or hold me accountable to it... if you think that I'm over presenting myself or over hyping myself, you know, you can call me." So I think that's what really developed that accountability piece for me was the intimacy.

Interviewer: Perfect, perfect, all right, well that leads into my next question which is have you experienced covenant in our fellowship and if so how?

Pastor #4:   Sure. Some of that began really when I began connecting pastors with who stuck with me when we began working together with our non-profits. I began sending clients to them. And not just that, but I began to develop a deep trust with them and ask things like, "What if I do this in this situation?" And those relationships began to develop on a more deeper level than just a friendship level. That really helped me, it really helped me to grow a lot by being open to hear ideas and then being able to be prayerful and see those ideas in action to help us be most effective serving people.

Interviewer: Perfect. Perfect. Thank you, sir. Third question. So from that context, how would you personally define covenant accountability?

Pastor #4:   I view covenant as two parties coming into an agreement with terms of that agreement being mutually beneficial. There is an understanding that we're not going to share this information with other people and this is between you and I. I'm trying to grow and develop in areas and I need someone that can be honest with me and hold me accountable from slipping in one area. So the benefits are my growth. So I view it as those two parties are involved in that covenant relationship. And I believe covenant relationship is built into what's called family. I believe there's a reason why God asked us to view him as father, there's a reason why we get saved and we're called sons and children of God. I think the concept of family was always God's principle. And through that concept, we have multiple pieces, the covenants that we keep with each other, the encouragement that we do for each other, the intimacy that we develop among each other. So I think it all functions underneath God's overall aspect of being a father.

Interviewer: Perfect. Perfect. Thank you so much. So that being said, what would you say would be characteristics of a meaningful pastor peer relationship? What would you say are some specific characteristics of that relationship process?

Pastor #4:   We've been so blessed with our group. I think that because I've been
               to other groups and I still visit some other groups and we've been so
               blessed. I think the first step is the intention of why they are there.
               Who are why are you actually coming visit? Is it to tell us about
               your church attendance? Is it to tell us about the stuff you're doing or
               is it trust to be able to lean on each other and grow together? So I
               think the intention of the heart of the person and why they're coming
               to me is one of the primary foundational pieces of the group. You
               can have differences, you can have differences in your theology.
               You can have difference. But as long as you have the same concept
               that no man comes to the father but through Jesus, I think that's your
               foundational piece. Everything else can be have different
               viewpoints. But I think it's the character of the men that are coming
               and their hearts. There's a lot of buildings called church, but they're
               church gatherings where people use the scriptures to justify their
               own personal goals. So you have to have men or women of God that
               come from the concept of what actual church is the outreach,
               discipleship fellowship and prayer and the union of a family, a
               group of believers that want to grow to each other. I think that's
               foundational because if you if you let in wolves in sheep's clothing,
               it can really be a disaster because again, even though they have a
               pastor title, you have the place called church that does not mean that
               that's what biblically is defined as a church. So I think the intentions
               of the person, the character and the reason why they're there, the
               heart of why they're there, or a couple of key pieces that I would
               look at forming a relationship.

Interviewer: Yeah. Perfect. Perfect. All right, how would you go about
               establishing a covenant accountability relationship with, say, a new
               member that comes to the group? So we're in our group and a new
               member comes. What steps would you suggest that we take to help
               begin to build that covenant accountability with them?

Pastor #4:   I think you have to spend time with them. I think outside of the meeting with someone, you'd have to be willing to invest in that. I don't think there's any relationship that doesn't have an investment of time, which all of us pastors struggle to find. I think it's time... you have to be one to invite them over, be around the family and be around their friends. It starts with time because time is the best investment and that's where you realize and learn a person's heart. You can do that.

Interviewer: All right. Has regular attendance to the pastors group impacted you, and if so, how?

Pastor #4:   Yes, yes, absolutely. It has had a great impact on me. I think the biggest impact is when we go over scriptures. So we've all learned methods of study and methods of how we study this Bible and how go through it. And often, you'll hear something that you didn't hear or you didn't see when you read that passage, when someone maybe did a deeper dive or did a little further insight. So for me, it's that kind of insight. And the second piece is just, I don't know, I think maybe it's the camaraderie. It's the feeling that I'm not alone. Before I had no one to call, I had one person in New York, maybe one or two. Now I have a whole group I can call in case I have a question. So I think the camaraderie, it has just made a safe place for me.

Interviewer: Perfect. Perfect, wonderful. What are some positive experiences you've had with the our pastors' peer group? So personally, what are some positive experiences, particularly that you have had?

Pastor #4:   I think the ability to network together. Being able to put together a vision and a plan and help people, share the gospel and help meet their physical needs. So me being able to see the different aspects of different ministries and being able to connect with and work with them has been a very positive thing. One of our pastors and his missions ministry who takes many of us overseas with him is mind blowing that we can all work together so well. That's my blessing to

see this in action which has been such a great encouragement for me.

Interviewer: How about some negative experiences you've had with the group that you've had, maybe one or two?

Pastor #4: I can't say I have had a particular negative experience, other than when we have had someone come into the group with a certain agenda. When someone comes in and tries to over assert themselves or tries to dominate every discussion. Or tries to beat their chest with everything they are doing and how many people they have in attendance and they are so much better than the rest of us. The group is able to recognize that though and is pretty quick to shut it down. Other than that, my overall experience to this point had mostly been positive.

Interviewer: All right. Thank you. All right, next question: how has regular attendance to the pastors group benefited your particular church, your specific church? How has it benefited your church?

Pastor #4: Sure. I think that one of the key aspects is it impacted our volunteerism. We got other churches helping us out with what we do. We've got volunteers from one church, who's now coming here. God calls each to do a particular unique thing, so it's brought help to us in our situation with more people helping with our outreach, more people helping with our development referrals to individuals that could help us get referrals from our group. So all that's been a huge blessing.

Interviewer: Yeah, that is powerful. What are some specific particular benefits of being in a covenant accountability relationship with other local pastors?

Pastor #4: Number one, I have the ability to come to them broken. I can say I'm confused. I can even say I made a mistake. You know what? I messed up. I did the wrong thing. I felt the wrong thing. I did the wrong activity. I need your prayer and I need your help. I need some

direction. I think that to me is one of the biggest benefits because before I was more of an island, to be honest, I was more of an island. If you tried breaking, you don't show anybody, especially those who you minister to. To have someone with like heart that you can come to and acknowledge that you're broken is so encouraging.

Interviewer: That is absolutely invaluable. In your experience as a pastor, what would you define as common struggles that a pastor deals with?

Pastor #4: Isolation, number one.

Interviewer: Yes, that's number one across the board.

Pastor #4: Isolation and being overrun. I saw a man of God that I deeply respected that looked like they had their stuff together, and they never showed me a weakness. And then when he showed weakness and showed me he needed prayer and encouragement, that was an eye opener for me. Like, Wow, it's like Superman. You know, we're supposed to be Superman without Kryptonite, and that's not the reality. And if we had that mindset, we find ourselves by ourselves because now you don't want to tell anyone anything and you want to appear to be this thing. So I think isolation and being over overwhelmed are examples of common struggles. And I learned early in ministry, don't do things because you think the church is supposed to do them. Stop doing stuff just because you thought it had to be done in order for you to be call yourself a pastor. Do the things that are effective for the group that God has given you in this current moment, right?

Interviewer: How has the pastors group addressed these common struggles?

Pastor #4: We discuss all the time issues we all face, from unruly members, to staff issues, to conflicts with people, and stuff like that. We discuss it and kick it around and someone will eventually drop some information or an example that will be great and we all are in awe. So gleaning from multiple years of experience of the other pastors is

a way we help each other cope with the common struggles we all face.

Interviewer: Has the pastors group helped you personally with the common struggles pastors face and if so how?

Pastor #4: Sure. It helped me with the isolation piece. Going there and sitting with you guys and talking with the guys. And then we had discussions about church challenges and different things like that and hearing different opinions and then hearing, you know, some scripture that just opened up my mind to say, Wow, you know, this is we really need to look at this thing altogether and understand. That was huge for me and that transformed a lot for me. Being able to develop other individuals and that you learn not to be so isolated.

Interviewer: Right, right. Would you say that regular attendance, as opposed to sporadic attendance has made an impact in helping with these struggles?

Pastor #4: Drastically, because at first I was very sporadic, I was very sporadic. And then it's like when I come in, I caught moments and was like, "Holy cow, this has really been helpful. What happened at the last three that I missed?" Sometimes it's seeing the smile of one of the pastors here, feeling that a handshake, or seeing them smile at you which means a lot to me. It's like wow, this is family,

Interviewer: Absolutely. Absolutely. Well, sir, that's it. Thank you so much!

Pastor #5 Interview

Interviewer: The first question I have is this. Have you experienced accountability in our peer group and if so, how?

Pastor #5: Well, I didn't come to the meeting yesterday and one of the pastors texted me.

Interviewer: Right?

Pastor #5: I think the accountability has just been, you know, doing life together. Whenever I've become self-sufficient or just isolated or doing my own thing and and a lot of times it's for legitimate reasons, and sometimes it's just a choice. And accountability became as simple as the text today from one of the pastors. Just, "Hey, I missed you yesterday."

Interviewer: Yeah, pretty cool. Have you experienced a covenant in the pastors group and if so how?

Pastor #5: The only way it's lasted is because of covenant We basically have a framework of, you know, things like one of the pastors who coined the phrase like the preemptive forgiveness. Ideas like that is who we're going to be for each other. Yes, we're going to offend each other and that's going to be a part of it. But we're going to get over that. We're going to get past it. Covenant for me, it's an agreement between two parties concerning the promises and the nature of a determined connection so that the part of that that sticks for me is the determined connection. It's like it was interesting the guys in our group that I felt the Lord wanted me to draw close to were polar opposite from me. Personality wise weren't the guys that I would have picked to be the first ones to try to draw close to. So that was a little different for me. And just knowing that their way of doing church, their way of doing life was going to be foreign to me and even offensive to my sensibilities and deciding ahead of time, you know that we do church different. We do life different. We do family different. But we have decided to, you know talk about this.

You try to learn and you try to find where the gold is and appreciate who they are and what they bring to the table. I've learned to appreciate things in the guys that I didn't realize I needed them for, but unless I honored them, I would never experience that. And there are needs and deficits that I have that I would have never been fulfilled if I didn't bring honor to the table.

Interviewer: Really good. So in that context how would you define covenant accountability?

Pastor #5: So covenant accountability, like you said, covenant is an agreement between two parties regarding the nature of a determined connection. You know, accountability. You know, it's always been the idea. You know, if I want to have someone stop calling me, I become their accountability partner. That seems to be the way it works. But you have to give. You have to give someone the ability to ask hard questions to you. And you have to not be offended by it. And that to me is is what it looks like when you give someone access to you. There are certainly guys that if they asked me a question or some of the other guys I'm closer to, or if you ask me a question, I would be a straight shooter. But it's like the nature of our group is we also have guests in it. So guests will come and you're sort of like trying to discern around the table, who am I sitting with and am I in a safe place? So a lot of times the safety doesn't always happen in the context of the group at large, but the relationships that are forged outside of the group meeting as well, which allow me a space where we're able to create that trust, where I can be vulnerable. I can have hard conversations and not be traumatized by it and not be offended and I say, "I'm done with these, these jerks," you know?

Interviewer: That's good. Thank you. So you've been in ministry for many years. What would you say that would be some characteristics of these

meaningful relationships you have with pastors throughout the years?

Pastor #5: You know, pastors can be as needy as lay people. You know, all that and more. And that's OK. And that's OK. I. I think, though, when you look at there are certain people, certain pastors that are just life giving, you know, I have a friend named George Copeland, when you have a lunch date with George, you feel like you've been hugged by an angel. I mean, you just walk out of there feeling lifted. Like, like Jesus just put his arms around you for an hour. And it's just that's their gift. And that's what they bring to the table. But you understand that every pastor, you know, doesn't have that level of pastoral gifting, you know, the five-fold, they may possess different things. But what I've learned why our group is amazing is because we allow enough context to actually find out what those things are. Because at face value, I mean, we've all been to pastors meetings where it's like dogs sniffing each other. You have the context where you're just sort of, you know, trying to size someone up. You're trying to see if they have anything to offer you. And sometimes it is an act of giving on your part, which you'll be able to appreciate something from them. So I think I think you understand when with pastors that everyone's going to be a different place. Everyone's got a different set of giftings and you can't just go to it with, OK, I'm looking for a friend to meet my needs like, OK, who am I going to?

Interviewer: Let's say we have a new member that comes to the group. What would be some of your suggestions and how to help him or her engage in covenant accountability with the rest of the group? What was some steps that we could take to get them to come to that level with us?

Pastor #5: When I come into a new group of people, I do a lot more listening and a lot less talking. And I'm trying to not be shy if I'm asked a question, I'll tell people what I think. A lot of times, you know,

we're trying to out impress each other with our with our wisdom. And it's like, Yeah, I don't need that from the group. I need someone who is going to be real and be a good listener. You need to understand what made that, what made that culture great, what makes these guys want to meet every week. So you should probably ask the Lord to help you discern that before you completely stick your foot in the water, you know, and I'm not saying people should be fearful or they shouldn't speak their mind, but I just think that there is a that they need to understand the culture instead of thinking that, OK, I need to bring the goodness to this group or I need to show them who I am so that they respect me. That stuff won't happen in one meeting. If you want to be well respected in the meetings, it'll be because you've done life with these guys.

Interviewer: Right, right. Absolutely. Absolutely. So you've been a fairly regular attender for several years now. How has that impacted you personally?

Pastor #5: Well. You know, I think that I've learned a lot. I've learned a lot in, you know, there were times where I thought I didn't need the relationship, where I was frustrated by it, where there were, you know, relational dynamics or there was a bump in the road as far as the continuity of the group. And that made that made me think to myself, You know, why do I need this, you know, I can get this drama in my church? Why would I want to come and subject myself every week? So I've learned, I've learned, and it's funny, and it's true. It's a true story that there were certain guys that I did not respect and did not honor in my heart. And because of that, I held them at arm's distance. But then there were times where I was going through something and they ministered to me and I saw gold in them that I didn't see before. And because we went through the fire together, I gained a new appreciation for that and I realized what I didn't get. There are just your kind of people that are going to be a

resource for you, and it's also something that makes you understand someone else, you understand when you know someone's story, you understand where they grew up at and their family of origin and substance pieces start coming together in relationships with people for you. And it sort of explains why people are and why they do church, why they do life the way they do. And all of that has has has helped me. I think I've seen the value of of community. I mean, really, there was a time when I looked at these guys and I said for the first time, I mean, I'm the only guy in the group that's a denominational guy, and I get ridiculed for that. But I don't have relationships like this within my denomination. I have zero. And I feel guilty about that. These guys have become, you know, my tribe. And you know, it's difficult because we are all so different. But also there are things that we do share and we celebrate those things. But yeah, I have learned a lot about myself because, you know, at times when you think you think you don't know what you don't know. And I think that I have learned some hard, some hard lessons too with these guys. So it's been it's been a gift.

Interviewer: Great. You've described several positive experiences with the group. How about a negative experience that you've had with the group?

Pastor #5: Well, at one time we proved that we weren't good at conflict resolution in spades. And I think it one point I looked at, you know, I looked at our our leadership and I said. We can't we can't do this this poorly again. And I and I let them know, I said I won't stand by while it happens again, like and I didn't say I was going to leave, it wasn't a threat. It was just just no, if it comes and it's not being dealt with that I will. And I will be a part of helping. I won't be a part of being disgruntled. I basically I'm going to put my money where my mouth is. I'm going to help be a part of the solution, but I'm not going to sit by when if we're going to be passive in an area and not deal with stuff, you know, I think Switzerland has never gone well

for me. And the truth is quicker all the time. So I think that is that is the only thing I think we realized that there was part of us that even though we talked about forgiveness, we talked about all these things we didn't have a mechanism in place or at least the guts to pull the trigger when someone needed to be confronted and what that looks like, even if it's just one of us coming alongside, like saying, Hey, I'll go talk to them, I'll go personally. And then, you know, even look even biblically the way you would just do it simply one guy, go to them, take him to lunch, see if you can get some kind of resolution before you had to bring it before the group, right?

Interviewer: Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. Wow. How has attending this particular pastors group impacted your church?

Pastor #5: You know, I think beforehand, people had a mentality like we're competing against the church down the street. And even church folk think that way, and really people will follow your lead in that regard, I think it was honoring and celebrating each other, having each other to preach. You know, has always has been a big thing and just, you know, having an event at the church and having the guys over or having a pastor bombing or something, just seeing like the other guys there who really created a sense of unity. People in our churches realized they weren't alone. I think it was a very gratifying thing for them to know that we were trying to do because really for years we have not done what we'd ask our people to do. So then they saw us putting our, you know, again, put your putting our money where our mouth is right. And they felt like they get behind that.

Interviewer: Well, it's demonstrating that you're part of a bigger community, the faith community and the like. I can't tell you at times I walked into a Wal-Mart or a restaurant. Somebody from one of the churches has said, Hey, you're Pastor so-and-so, because they've seen us function together with other pastors. Yeah, that's powerful... we can to this to

dismantle those perceived walls that we have between our ministries.

Pastor #5:   You know, it's like they had a point of reference already. Yeah, that really made it easy. You know they're in our group. We love that, you know, of course, you know, and it's easy in that way because people have a reference because, you know, we have not been in competition with each other. We in fact, it's gotten to the place where and when we've done this more often recently, even where it's like, you know, hey, if we're not your tribe, we can help you find one. But the important thing is that you find one.

Interviewer: What would you say from your years of experience of being a senior pastor would be common struggles that typical pastors go through.

Pastor #5:   I mean, loneliness. Any denominational leader will tell you that loneliness is a is a big thing because when you talk about, you know, as in what we do, you keep your friend group your circle small, especially within your congregation. I mean, that's why our group is great because we have something outside of it, right? And you know, it's difficult. We had a situation where and even after all these years we had, I had some recently where there was a an issue of betrayal with someone who was in my circle who was also in my wife's circle. So that that becomes really difficult to contend with, you know, in that way, and you think you think at this point it should be easier because you dealt with it for so many years, you don't expect someone that that close to that obvious to do that at this point. But it happens. But one thing that you know, the nature of the gospel is the mandate of forgiveness. So it's like, how do you model that? How do you show people how to do that if you're unable to? If I'm all bound up with bitterness, there's a lot... I can't walk through deliverance if I have unforgiveness. You know, there are certain things I can't do if I'm not able to walk in that level of forgiveness,

because that was the mandate. Right? You know, that was the mandate.

Interviewer: Yeah. Common struggles. A pastor to walk through that you've seen through your years.

Pastor #5:   Yeah, I betrayal, obviously is a common thing

Interviewer: Across the board in the research, it's isolation, depression and burnout... the three top three.

Pastor #5:   Well, I said, I said loneliness. So that was that was up in that sort of blend, right? I would say to, I mean, whatever pastor has a personal crisis. You yeah, he's used to being Superman. And basically, he's in a place where, you know, he's always keeping his head above water to help other people. But then when calamity strikes or there's something of an incredible disappointment or loss, then how do you process that and contain that scene? That's where major burnout happens, when how you continue to process that kind of grief or loss or pain in and still trying to do your job. For me, the only way I've been able to do ministry is there have been good people that have been able to pick up. And I feel like I'm coming out of a time like that in recent years where there's been some, some major stuff that we've had to deal with. And if I didn't have some wonderful people, basically because I would have completely dropped the ball and everything, but luckily there were people to come alongside and do other things so that, you know, I could still, you know, function in the things that I had to function in.

Interviewer: Yeah, absolutely. How would you say the pastors group addresses these struggles?

Pastor #5:   Of course, you know, our weekly meeting format being an open format where we invite people in and you show up at the table and you don't know who people are. So. You know, that isn't necessarily the safest environment, but I mean, if I show up at the table and it's my friends with others I don't know, and people ask me how I am

doing they're going to be two different answers. So really the only way that it functions is if we have some kind of relationship outside of that context.

Interviewer: Now that's a big piece. And actually all the guys who interviewed at this point as though that exact same thing, it's all the it's the relationship outside of the meetings. That is what helps to give me that that safety that I need and require.

Pastor #5: The reason why it's hard is we've all carved out that time. But like, there's guys in our group that I love, that I just have not had time to connect with outside. Like, you know, one of the pastors reached out to me today and I love ths guy, and he came to the group because of me. It becomes tricky to carve out other time for guys and then still have to get emotional, especially some our guys, because all pastors are going to be extroverts. You know, they were saying that you were an extrovert is just do you need you need time to recover from social interaction. That's an introvert extrovert. They're energized by social interactions, but some of our guys are either or. Yeah. So it's like you have a you have a guy who went to a meeting with, you know, you know, 15, you know, 10 to 15 driven pastors. And then they had to meet a bunch of their own people for lunch and meetings and meetings and meetings. And it's like, do you have the emotional space? If you're an introvert to get together with the pastor for lunch or breakfast, and that's just something you have to make a priority. And it's hard to do at times, especially if you're wired differently, because one thing we don't take into account is, you know, that's what the thing about the five fold ministry is. Not everyone looks at the gospel the same way. There's five different perspectives and looking at the gospel and they're not all the same, but they're all needed.

Interviewer: Absolutely.

Pastor #5:   Absolutely. So, yeah, the the weekly meeting is a blessing, but at times for me, it's also been man, I would have liked to have been at lunch with two of these guys instead of the group context. But yeah, but every week is different. So, you know, some weeks are brilliant and some weeks you don't feel as are brilliant, but you just I've told myself because I've been discussed after leaving a meeting before, I told myself, You know what? I'm just I'm I'm sowing seed for later. You know, you just don't know what the outcome of the meeting will be and something you could have said that would have helped somebody. So you just you just trust the Lord with it. And it took me a while to get to that point where I can say that.

Interviewer: I think that's powerful. That's it, my friend. Thank you very much. This is a very valuable.

Pastor #6 Interview

Interviewer: All right, have you experienced accountability in the pastors peer group and if so, how?

Pastor #6:   Well, you know, as well as pastors we come together weekly, you know, it's made us all accountable to pray for one another. And even when we don't feel like praying because of the week that we've had, you know, you feel a sense of responsibility and accountability to pray for your brother that's next to you. And so it's made us accountable to meet consistently and fellowship and to do the thing that we all as pastors tell our members to do.

Interviewer: All right. Wonderful. Thank you. The next question is have you experienced covenant in our peer group and if so, how?

Pastor #6:   Well, I think that, you know, meeting each week, praying, fellowship, fellowship and eating together has allowed all of us to build covenant. Some, you know, even deeper dependent upon, you know, who you're, you know, talking to or whatever. But yeah, I think meeting weekly has has definitely done that because there's a lot of guys who go out together to play golf and such, they do different things that would create that level of covenant within the group

Interviewer: So for those two answers, then talk, you're talking about having building relationships, praying for one another, having accountability in prayer, getting deeper in relationship with each other... from those two perspectives. How would you define the term covenant accountability if you were to share this with another pastor? How would you define the term covenant accountability?

Pastor #6:   Covenant accountability. Well, of course, we know the word responsibility means to risk, it's your ability to respond. And so our ability to respond to the covenant that we have created within our group. You know, it's it's on us as individual pastors. You know, if you come to the group and you you've made up in your mind that

you're not going to be in covenant, then you'll be distant. You know, you won't build a friendship, you'll be distant. It'll be superficial. Hey, how you doing that kind of thing? But for most of us, we have had to have an intentional ability to respond to creating that covenant, much like what people need to do in churches. You know, most people just come and they go and they don't even know the people that they fellowship with for years because they haven't made the attempt to make covenant with the people they go to church with.

Interviewer: Right, right. You have to make a choice. Thank you, sir. Now you've been in ministry for many years, so what would you say are some characteristics of a meaningful pastor, peer relationships like with all your pastor, peer friends? What would you say are some common characteristics of a meaningful pastor peer relationship?

Pastor #6: Well, my definition of a peer relationship is really one that can be transparent, open. We can be friends. We don't have to sit around and be superficial, just talk about ministry all day, we actually can be a person. And a lot of pastors can't do that. They live in the church world all day long, but they never are themselves. They're always Pastor John, but they're never John. And I want to be around the people who just want to be John. Me, you get to see me. My flaws, my weaknesses, my strength. All of that and it doesn't matter, you love me, no matter what you see. And that's that's true friendship, right? They accept you for who you are, so you can be who you are.

Interviewer: Excellent. Excellent. Perfect. Thank you, sir. All right. Number five, eight more after this, how would you establish a covenant accountability relationship with a new member to our group? So in other words, if a new member comes into our group observes us, how would we go about, or what steps would we begin to take to help establish that covenant relationship with them?

Pastor #6:   When you go to build a relationship, you know, nobody's going to give you every bit of information about them unless they feel like there's a connection. Most pastors have been hurt. They've been in superficial groups and they're looking for a relationship. They're looking for camaraderie. And you won't get that unless you take the time to build relationships with that new pastor. So I take them out to lunch or, you know, find out what they like to do and go do that. And just kind of, you know, first build, which is what all of us did in our group. We all came in with our antennas up and watching each other and being careful what we released until we realized that we were in a safe place. Then we could cry, laugh, we could complain. We could, you know, open up.

Interviewer: That's good. Yeah. Has regular attendance at the pastors group impacted you personally and if so, how?

Pastor #6:   Oh. yeah, we're always getting together and it is always meaningful.

Interviewer: Absolutely. Absolutely. What would you say would be a positive experience that you've had?

Pastor #6:   I would say to see all of all of us have, I've seen all of us, including myself, be greatly encouraged and built up as we come to these meetings. You know, pastors are known and we may have a lot of people who love us or like us for what we do, but that doesn't equate to friendship. And so a lot of pastors don't have friends, they have acquaintances, and what they really want is a friend. They want that friend that they could say, You know, I just want to be myself and say how I really feel about this or how I feel this week, you know, without someone judging me or thinking I need to not feel bad about feeling the way I do.

Interviewer: Right, right.

Pastor #6:   And so I think that's what the group has done is allow people to come and share their strength, and we celebrate that, share their weakness. We cry with them, pray with them and they can leave

knowing that it's not going to be on the front of the Christian newspaper.

Interviewer: Front page charisma. Right, right. OK, well what is a negative experience you've had with our fellowship?

Pastor #6: The only negative I would say is the that in the past we've had people who've been there that we generally all loved or liked, but they kind of allow their differences and beliefs or how things are in different denominations to separate them from the group. I think that, you know, one thing I like about the group is that everybody is from different backgrounds and you got all these different backgrounds when people are normally, pastors are normally used to meeting with people that are like them in the like faith. I think this comes from meeting with people of different backgrounds and being able to still heal. Have the differences, but yet still have a relationship and appreciate the differences.

Interviewer: Correct. Kind of the common answer I've gotten on that question across the board has been when people come in with kind of their agenda.

Pastor #6: Yes with their own thought process, you know, they're a little bit more on the prophetic then everybody. So now it's the rest of us don't really know anything because we're not prophetic enough.

Interviewer: Absolutely true. All right. Number nine, how has regular attendance benefited your church, in particular, your personal church?

Pastor #6: It has given me strength when I need it, because if I need strength, I get it on Thursday and I'm ready to get back in the saddle on Sunday. Sometimes we have that that high on Sunday and then Monday, Tuesday is kind of like maybe you may jump back up on Wednesday because you got to teach, but Thursday, really, you can, like I said, be yourself, let your hair down. And and when we have discussions, those discussions sometimes birth ideas, concepts, how

to deal with training and of leaders. And sometimes the discussions help us with messages that we had hadn't even thought about.

Interviewer: Right, right. Yeah, that's perfect. Thank you, sir. Number 10 and three more to go after this. What are some specific benefits have you seen by being in relationship with local pastors? Has there been any specific benefits because you've been in relationships with local pastors?

Pastor #6: Well, yeah, I mean, we all need, you know, all of us have different strengths. All of us have different avenues. And so because of relationships, you know, if somebody was homeless, I'd know who to call in the group because they have a ministry. You know, if somebody needed counseling for their marriage, we knew who to call because that person was in our ministry with that, that our group with that background, if we had a legal problem, we had a lawyer that was in the group, that's in the group, that's a pastor. If we needed something construction wise, done personally or with the church, we have a construction guy in the church and people need real estate. I'm there. So it's all of us have something to bring to the table that's different, which makes us unique and knowing that if we need something or our members need something, the first thing we're going to think about is the people we sit with at that table.

Interviewer: Oh, I love that answer. That's perfect. Thank you. You've been a pastor for many years, and I have a great deal of respect for you because God keeps putting you in these interesting positions as the leader across civic circles, across all kinds of crazy. What would you define in your experience as a common struggle that most pastors deal with from what you've witnessed through the years? What would you say a common struggle or struggles pastors deal with?

Pastor #6: I think one of the greatest thing of the past is that feeling that perhaps you love people more than they love you. That's the struggle. Because a lot of pastors give their heart to their sheep.

They generally love them. They go out of the way for them. And then one day you find out they're just not as committed in that relationship as you were. To them, as far as being a pastor, people don't realize we see some of them as children. And I think pastors struggle with that. Then you gave your life to someone for ten years and one day they just walk out with either a simple answer that doesn't make sense or they don't give you an answer at all. They just use God as the get out card. And you're wondering, you know, and you left feeling like a divorce? Like, Wait, wait, wait, what did I do, you know? And why didn't they come and talk to me? They talked to me for ten years, but now all of a sudden on the way out, they can't talk, right? So I think that's what passes that with the struggles of. Church relationships. Mm hmm. I think how to separate that from being the pastor, just giving the word. But it's kind of hard for us to give the word and not want the desire to have a relationship.

Interviewer: Right, right. That's the hard part because you cannot do this job without your heart. You have to do it.

Pastor #6: Yeah. And a lot of times when you do that, it gets you... where one family walks away and they don't think it's that big of a deal, but they don't realize we do that almost on a weekly. We have to deal with that kind of divorce type of feelings every week with other people.

Interviewer: Yeah. Would you say that the pastors fellowship helps address some of these common struggles? Would you say that's a common thing that they do?

Pastor #6: Yeah. Well, that's the uniqueness about the group is that we can come together and share our experiences, complaints, struggles. Issues that we may have at our church with situations, leaders, members, and there's always an answer in the group because someone is probably already dealt with it. But you can also get a corporate sort of perspective that that, you know, you can get many

perspectives. You can get a perspective that maybe you yourself saw it wrong or you could get a perception that. Why don't you do it this way or do it differently, you know or you were right in what you did. Don't feel bad about it. Just keep walking. Keep moving. So and that's what the group does. The group, you know, everybody will sit there and their hear what the issue is. And then most chime in. And, you know, and it's sort of a great dialog to hear people who that you realize have been there and you didn't go through that by yourself or you're not the only one who's going through that.

Interviewer: Right? That's powerful. Last question and we're done. Thank you again for your time. How has your involvement with this pastoral group helped you personally with some of these struggles pastors deal with?

Pastor #6:   A whole lot. Yeah, definitely a whole lot. You know, it's helped me deal with, you know, leadership has helped me deal with training has helped me deal with, you know, having more faith. You know, I didn't always have a building and, you know, faith was built in that group to go to go get one. I didn't always have musicians and I've learned how to keep moving, even if you don't have them yet. And so, yeah, I would say just about every aspect of. The last eight years have definitely been a help to staying in the fight and being OK with things that are not going the way you want them to go and learn how to say, OK, that's just what it is and move on.

Interviewer: Wonderful. Wonderful. Yes, sir. That's perfect. Thank you. Well, sir, that said, I appreciate your answers.

Pastor #7 Interview

Interviewer: The first question I have for you is have you experienced accountability in the pastors peer group and if so how?

Pastor #7: Basically just being there for one another, you know, learning how to be an ear for somebody else and not making every, you know, like thinking that I'm the only pastor that's going through something, you know, extended myself and finding the or creating that that space for somebody else rather than just myself, my own issues. So I think those are things that really stand out the most.

Interviewer: Have you experienced covenant in the peer group and if so how?

Pastor #7: So there's this one gentleman that I really am close with in this group and he and I, even though I haven't been around the group as much lately, we stay in touch. And I know for a fact that if there's anything that I need, I know I can call him no matter what it is, and hopefully I know that he feels the same way about me. And in the beginning, you know, obviously I didn't really know anybody. When I first joined the group, I knew like maybe one or two people. But over time there was this one person that really took a liking to and really took a liking to me. And in that bond, even though, like I said, we may not talk every day, but I pray for him daily and I know he prays for me. And so I think that is one for sure that I could say. And he's not the only one, but he's one that stands out the most. OK. You know, so yeah, definitely.

Interviewer: Great. OK. So in that context, how would you define the term covenant accountability?

Pastor #7: It almost looks like the word responsibility. I feel responsible for being transparent. I feel responsible to that individual, if that makes sense, you know, because of the covenant that we have, the brotherhood that's been established. I feel an obligation to that person. And so that to me, I think that covers that accountability of being there for that person when they meet me, or even if they don't

say they need me, just being able to pick up and just say it, I'm there for you, regardless, if you feel like you need me or not.

Interviewer: I love that term responsible. It's now moved from just a casual acquaintance. Now I'm responsible for action. I love that. That's really good. From your experience, what would you say are some characteristics of a meaningful pastor relationship with peers? What would you say are some things that are particularly meaningful characteristics?

Pastor #7: I want to go back to the word transparent, being vulnerable. Loving, you know, loving brother, that real brotherhood. And character. I don't know, that's really all I can really think of. I feel like those are like the umbrella answers and then there's like little layers underneath of what they look like.

Interviewer: OK, great. So let's say a new member comes in. How do we begin to establish that covenant accountability with them or what steps can we take to help establish a covenant accountability relationship with new members?

Pastor #7: I think the first thing is really just finding out what their needs are individually family wise and ministry wise, find out what those needs are, and they're being extended resources to try to help them get those needs met and then following up, you know what I mean and following up, like kind of like get to a point where you're almost hands on with them because you feel like, you know, like the objective is for new pastors. I feel like we're going to do life together. Even though you have your church, we're all part of one body and we're coming into an agreement and we're going to do life together. And so I think probably goes a little deeper, showing that it goes deeper than just pointing to a person, but also following through and getting our hands in to see if we can help.

Interviewer: Excellent. All right. Next question is how has regular attendance at a pastors fellowship impacted you?

Pastor #7:   It makes me feel like what's happening at the church is meaningful, and that is impactful for those individuals that come back consistently. That they're getting something, that they're being moved closer to God and that they can feel like this is a place where they should be to grow in their wealth as individuals or families.

Interviewer: Sure. Excellent. What is a particular positive experience you've had with accountability to pastors peer group?

Pastor #7:   Let's see. I think one of them was when we all came together to stand against a lot of things that were happening with brutality against blacks. You know, we all came together and, you know, those who are available to do it, but everyone's heart was in the process. I think that was really big, really huge because it takes a lot to make that type of a sacrifice when dealing with race when you're your pastor. But for the front line, everyone was there, you know what I mean? And so that was really big for me. So I think that one really stands out the most to me.

Interviewer: Awesome. What would you say was a negative experience that you had with the peer group?

Pastor #7:   You know, it's hard to say negative. Because with this particular group, I can't say anything negative has happened. Obviously, there's been disagreements that I know of, you know, disagree with having to part with individuals. But the group itself, I can't think of anything where I could actually say that this was a negative experience.

Interviewer: OK, great, all right. The next question is how has attendance to the pastors peer group affected your particular church specifically?

Pastor #7:   Oh, wow. A lot of different ways. I think number one, the wisdom that I get. And to be able to gain perspectives from various pastors, various leaders to had all different types of experiences. That's huge because I've taken a lot of the things that I've listened to and learned in those meetings. I've taken them back and applied to my church

and has been impactful. You know, and so some things like just just the wisdom for, for example, also the sharpening, you know, and then being fed for a change versus feeding all the time, right? And so to be able to come in there and just listen to all the different men and women say the things that they say, you know, that just really is impactful to me. So that's another benefit for sure. And then also, you know, in the extension of help, you know, when you need something, you have a group of people that they're willing to be there for you. They're praying for you and just covering you so that those are some definite benefits.

Interviewer: Fantastic. What would be some potential benefits of being friends with local pastors?

Pastor #7:   I think is almost like duplicating or recreating what's already established in Clermont. As far as those relationships, those resources in this community, especially me being new in this area. They can help steer me in the right direction. You know, obviously, like if there's no motive behind everything, right? But being able to steer me in the right direction, being able to even partner with some of the ministries to help get some things done that we may not be able to get done on our own. And then just building the body, building the body together, you know, and that says a lot when you can see an established church loving, welcoming a new church and the community to a point when we're doing things together just to show people that it's all about God, it's about Christ, not about my church or this person's church. So I think that could also create a more impactful presence for the community by establishing yourself with other ministries when we come in.

Interviewer: Love it. All right, what would you say in your experience as a pastor would be common struggles that pastors deal with?

Pastor #7:   Am I am I leading effective enough? Am I in the right place? Did I hear from God? Was this sermon that I preached right? And then just could have done better in any given relationship when people leave the church or you have fault, is there something I could have done better? You know, I think that a lot of times, you know, we kind of we carry that weight. Thinking that it is, and obviously sometimes we can kind of see based on what people come and go, we can know why all this had nothing to do with me. But sometimes I think, at least for myself in my quiet time, even when those did leave, they left on their own. It's like, I still kind of wonder, like, what if I did something differently? Would they have even gotten to that point? So we just we carry burdens unnecessarily.

Interviewer: How has the pastors' fellowship addressed these common struggles pastors deal with?

Pastor #7:   Number one, it helps to realize that you're not alone. Number two, there's somebody who already went through what you're going through now, and they can actually advise and help and encourage you on how to get out of it and give you perspective to strengthen you. And, you know, and ultimately, even if they don't have an answer, you have people that can pray with you. You know what I mean, even if they can't necessarily answer a question, you have a group of people who's willing to pray with you and touch heaven on behalf for you. You know, and so I think that really that really helps a lot. You know, it's what we can gather and agree on something here. That helps a lot. Plus, as a group of people with commonality, again, only pastors understand what we do. They're a group of people that know where you're coming from. That makes it a lot easier.

Interviewer: Exactly. How has attendance at the pastors helped you personally with these common struggles pastors deal with?

Pastor #7:   Wow. Well, you know, it's. Discipleship. That's the word that just popped in my head discipleship, because the way the way the structure is set up. Everyone is disciplined by everyone to some degree.. And so. For me, one of my struggles I deal with is in the ministry is the lack of growth. And this was something that I battled with even before COVID when we had some pretty decent numbers. But then when I got with the group, you know, I'm with the group and I realized that everyone was dealing with that. Simple fact is we just relate with each other. We just have authentic connections, which is something God really been talking to me about a lot in the past six to eight months is we have to have authentic connections. So that's something that I took with me to kind of help lighten that burden is that, you know, focus on making authentic connections, not just getting people to come to church.

Interviewer: Awesome! Okay sir, we are done! Thank you again!

Pastor #8 Interview

Interviewer: All right, first question, have you experienced accountability in the pastors peer group and if so how?

Pastor #8: Yes. Well, after being in ministry for 32 years now, I can definitely see differences from when I first started to where I am now. First off, I was a youth pastor first. So in my youth group, that would have been my second official ministry. There was absolutely zero accountability. I didn't have. I was the only youth pastor in a town of 2400 people. There were a couple of youth volunteers, but there was no other youth pastor and then my pastor came out of out of Pillsbury College, so his concern was that everything looked right and whatever was going on on the inside just cover it up. So there was no vulnerability there whatsoever. Which is very different from where I am now, where I have got multiple guys in the pastors group I am in right now. We're able to talk about anything. So that's what my current accountability is.

Interviewer: Absolutely, have you ever experienced covenant in the pastors group and of so how?

Pastor #8: Yes, with the pastors i am connected with, we have strong relationships where we entrust everything down to even computer passwords when it comes to staying pure. Another covenant that I've got is with my wife, as well as the other pastors. They all have access to every password. They are free to ask me to check out, to examine, to look at my computer and my phone right? So, there's that aspect of covenant.

Interviewer: OK. Perfect. So in those contexts, then you're talking about relationships with pastors. You're talking about covenants being that we're making basically to vow to each other to be pure... so in that kind of context, how would you describe or define covenant accountability?

Pastor #8:   Well, so in my experience with the guys that I'm in covenant with is that we have freedom to ask for another and hold each other accountable and ask the hard questions. Even when some of them like you get to the end and have you lied to me, you know, to that degree. And I think like with the guys that I'm with, I mean, our relationship is so well that we we know each other's weaknesses and we can tell one another where we're struggling, you know, and have the freedom to ask, how how's that going with you and how do you do that? And what's your relationship like with your wife and stuff like that.

Interviewer: So you define that as the ability to ask hard questions, being vulnerable.

Pastor #8:   Vulnerable is a really big thing and to call you out. You know, it's like, yeah, you have the right to call me out right here because we are a part of the same body.

Interviewer: OK. What would you say would be some specific characteristics of meaningful pastoral peer relationship?

Pastor #8:   Definitely a mutual respect for one another. And you know, I'm going to speak very clearly with you and I, and that is that we come from kind of different veins of ministry and yet the respect that I think we've got for each other and the fact that that I know that maybe I don't agree with everything, but I've got a lot to learn from you. And I think there is a sense there of mutual iron sharpening iron in the truest of senses of respecting that and looking to the other as a gift from God to help shape us. So these kind of relationships that, oh, the meaningful. So there is a trust which is a big thing in both. You and I have been through relationships where we have had that trust just shattered. And so I think the positive thing of coming through that is we understand the importance then of why we need to be able to trust or even the value of rights and value that trust.

Interviewer: That's great. Perfect. So let's say you're in the pastors group and a new member comes in? What steps could you take to encourage them to enter into a covenant accountability relationship with the group?

Pastor #8:   I think the big thing that's probably most needed organic connection and that is is that you model it with one another and they can see that you've got guys that are extremely vulnerable and willing to talk about anything with each other. And that will model it very quickly.

Interviewer: OK. How has regular attendance at the pastors fellowship impacted you personally?

Pastor #8:   It's the hugest thing... I would have quit. I would not be in ministry anymore. There's no doubt about that. The things that are just life shattering and to have those brothers that will pray over me, you know, we pick each other up and really that picture of being in a battle and on the front lines and being in the trenches together. I mean, there's a reason why that picture is a picture for all for us because it's it's absolutely necessary, you know, I mean, we are sometimes pulling each other out of the trench missing limbs, you know, bleeding all over. I guess we are just so much a part of each other's lives that you know, we're praying for each other, encouraging each other them, building each other... this is a kingdom mindset. And so we are trying to build a Christ culture within and to bring the Kingdom of God now here with us as a community.

Interviewer: Absolutely. What would be a specific positive experience you have had being a part of the pastors group?

Pastor #8:   You know, just this last year, my wife and I finally took a sabbatical and we needed it really, really bad. And now I can say that we really needed it. Two and a half to three years ago, I would have told you I don't need a sabbatical, but that was when these other guys said I needed a sabbatical. And so a really positive outcome was they were

able to spot things that were happening in me, where I was
beginning to show signs of fatigue and show signs of that maybe I'm
handling all OK right now. But but the things that were happening
were not necessarily good. My emotions were much quicker to
change, I had less patience and love for people. So having these
guys be able to spot those things in me was a very positive thing.

Interviewer: So these guys were able to speak in real life to you at an opportune
time. That's awesome. What would be a negative experience you
have had in the pastors group?

Pastor #8: You know, it's not nothing too terrible other than, you know, on
occasion there you might get a guy in that is actually a little bit
loopy and make statements about sorts of things that are just out
there. But being upfront, you know, we've got like our peer group in
our community and then within that peer group in our community,
we've got another little triangle of peer group of guys that are like
minded, like hearted and have the same desire for purity, have the
same desire to see things go, you know, biblically concerning the
gospel. And then there's a little bit larger group that the
accountability is there, but it's not the same degree. So you've got
like coming into a target, right? You know, it's like you've got this
group and then this group and then this group and then you've got
this or the core. So sometimes as that is a bigger circle radius there.
Yeah, you get some guys in there that are just a little.. they do not
necessarily bring in good vibes. I don't want to use the word vibes,
but yeah, they don't bring in a good relational skills.

Interviewer: Gotcha. How has regular attendance to the pastors group benefited
your particular church?

Pastor #8: Well, because our church ends up better because I've got
relationships. Me as a pastor, then you are organically are a liaison
between churches. And so it binds one body to another body. So you
are now the cells or these groups now are connected through the

pastors, which then you end up getting more. I see a group, right, so you have greater community. And so we do, you know, we do missions, trips with other churches. We support other churches on taking a disaster relief trip. So we're going to go along or we're, you know, or vice versa. Our youth ministries are connecting, doing things, you know? Oh, there have been times, too, where even within our community, where it's been interesting, where like tragedies happen in and the rest of the community sees, like the pastors of these various churches are already prepared to try to unite and network together and work together. Whether you're going into the schools because there's a young death or suicide or something, or even as simple as I've had it, where I had to do two weddings one weekend and I had one on Friday night, one on Saturday. And so one of the other pastors from town took the one family through the rehearsal while I was performing the other. So it's just awesome. You know, you just have that, that trust and camaraderie.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. What would you say would be defined as common struggles that a pastor deals with on a regular basis?

Pastor #8: I think one of the big things that I didn't realize early on was that ministry was a roller coaster ride. What I didn't realize was the reality like this last year, while I am holding a wife next to her husband as he's breathing his last breath, my phone is ringing in my pocket from a young man who is going to ask me to do the wedding ceremony for him and his fiance, so I take that call just few minutes later. But what's going on at that moment is I am walking along somebody that is right now at a high point in their life and full of hope, full of joy, full of excitement. And I'm alongside another person who is at a lowest loss. And at that same point, to some degree, we protect our own spirit and our own heart. But but one of the big struggles is you walk home now and you walk into that door and you see your own wife, you see your own kids and you've got to

carry in both things. And it's not a roller coaster of just up and down. It is up and down at the same time. To learn how to mourn. To learn how to rejoice with those who are rejoicing and to mourn with those who are mourning.

Interviewer: Across the board in the research, it's usually isolation, burnout or depression.

Pastor #8: Yeah, isolation is going to lead to the burnout. You know, relationships in churches are an intriguing thing because of your friendships, it's like as a pastor, you can have friendships, but it's not the same. It just isn't. And it can't be. Some of those who you feel like you can finally have them as a friend different from anybody else in the congregation, give it just a little bit of time and it will come back and bite you.

Interviewer: That's tragically true. Has the pastors fellowship addressed these common struggles?

Pastor #8: Yeah. We talk a lot about issues in our pastors meetings. And I would also give a lot of credit to my district of the denomination that I am with because they have cultivated that and they have taught it. They bring they the pastors up on multiple different types of weekend retreats. And these retreats aren't like, "Hey, you come, we're going to teach you it's Hey, how are you doing?" They are more like, "I know right now you're going through a lot. Let's talk about it. Let's pray over each other. Let's weep together." So I would say our denomination has done a good job with that by fostering it within.

Interviewer: Sure. Ok, last question, has regular attendance to the pastors fellowship helped you personally with these common struggles?

Pastor #8: If I have had not had that support I know that I would not be still in ministry. I would say I probably would have given up. If I hadn't given up, I probably would have had a fall. Yes, you know, I mean, it's all, it's the amount of struggles that you go through and the the

isolation that you can feel, these relationships has been the lifeline. Otherwise, I drive a truck for a living.

Interviewer: Wow. Okay great, we are finished!

Pastor #9 Interview

Interviewer: First question, have you experienced accountability in our peer group and if so, how?

Pastor #9:   Yeah. Absolutely. We have come to a point of trust where we are not afraid of confiding in each other anymore to the deepest levels of our hearts.

Interviewer: Have you have you experienced covenant relationships in our peer group?

Pastor #9:   We have two kinds of people coming in our peer group. We have those that have decided to be found. Who remain willing to unwrap their hearts. And then we have those that sit on the side and talk a lot, but that are not really open for covenant relationship. But I don't think it's it is not because they're not open. I think they simply do not know the level of friendship and relationship we have actually built in our group.

Interviewer: Right, right. I agree.

Pastor #9:   So we have two kinds of people, those that likes to sit and listen to themselves. And then you have those that love their heart for the brothers, whereas one is actually self-motivated. You know, it's actually very selfish because it's all about getting acknowledged by another.

Interviewer: Right. How would you define covenant accountability?

Pastor #9:   To be blunt, the covenant accountability is daring to step out of a traditional relationship, covenant accountability is when you step out. Common protocol where you dare to expose your vulnerability. As long as you aren't vulnerable, you don't know what covenant relationship is.

Interviewer: Absolutely, absolutely. I agree. What would you say are some characteristics of meaningful pastoral relationships? What would you say are some meaningful characteristics of these relationships that you have with these particular pastors that are close to you?

Pastor #9:   Transparency. It's very important one, Transparency, but also that you lay your life down. You see, we have some relationships where they love to the point where somebody makes a mistake. And that's the end of that. We have to be willing to lift each other up when we are down.

Interviewer: OK. All right. Next question. We have a new member or say we have a new member that comes into our group. How would you suggest that we begin to establish this covenant accountability with a new member?

Pastor #9:   First thing is, undress yourself before like what we have done, we are 100 percent honest. That is almost like undressing yourself. And now when you see your brother's intimacy, like when you feel that intimacy, that's the best way of inviting people to become relational.

Interviewer: How has regular attendance to the pastors fellowship specifically impacted you personally?

Pastor #9:   What we have is so precious, and I have been deeply impacted by the love and encouragement I receive from each of the brothers in those meetings.

Interviewer: Right. Has being a part of this group impacted your particular church?

Pastor #9:   I ask the brothers on a regular basis to come and speak, because I think we represent different aspects of the Kingdom of God. So it has enriched our church, of course. We also have had many from the different churches come and volunteer at our homeless outreaches and feedings. Their support and love for what we do has been amazing.

Interviewer: Wonderful. Wonderful. What would you say would be particular benefits for you personally to be connected with all these local pastors?

Pastor #9:   I would have to say the ability to be accountable to each other, to offer resources and help to each other as we are able, and to pray and support one another.

Interviewer: What would you say in your experience are common struggles that a typical pastor would have?

Pastor #9:   Lack of funds, lack of funds, you know, lack of money. There's nothing wrong with their vision, but I see many pastors actually give up before they see that breakthrough of faith. Uncleanness, and lack of faith. The Bible says we should walk by faith.

Interviewer: I couldn't agree more. Absolutely. In my research, some of the things I have found have been isolation, depression, burnout. Those kind of things Would you say that these relationships and our peer group have helped you and other pastors deal with these common struggles that we have as pastors?

Pastor #9:   How many times have you seen me just sit and cry? No question. I'm almost crying now just for thinking back on the intimate moment where I didn't know what to do. And I just sat with you guys and I just cried. You put your arms around me, all of you, and would pray for me. I am definitely in a good position right now because I have brothers that have been with me.

Interviewer: That is what makes the fellowship so unique as it has genuine and sincere guys. That's all my questions. Thank you very much. This is great.

Pastor #10 Interview

Interviewer: The first question I have for you today, sir, is have you experienced accountability in the peer group? And if you have, how?

Pastor #10: I have actually generally through the group... I think I experience it through our discussions, but I also have had just recently. I did ask one of the pastors to pray, they contacted me and asked if there was anything they could do for me. And I said, Well, yes, my wife is sick and I need somebody to pray for her. I've been praying for her and she's been doing what she has to do, but I need to get her healed. She's not well. And so I said, would you be able to pray for her? And he said, yes. So we got on the phone together and went to my wife. And he prayed. And she was healed. Almost instantly. And it worked, so I feel like at that point I was accountable to say I need help. I can't handle this on my own. I'm tired and I need some, some backup.

Interviewer: Absolutely, yes. Wonderful. That's a great answer. All right. Next, question, have you experienced covenant in our peer group and if so, how?

Pastor #10: Individually, I experience covenant. I think I have. It hasn't been noted as such, I don't think it hasn't been defined as this is what we're doing. But I think on at least one occasion, like I said with a brother that I was just talking about, I think there is a covenant and there's a new relationship has been established and a deeper relationship. I believe it's a covenant relationship that we've agreed to be there and share and pray for each other. And I think there are several covenants that work.

Interviewer: Yeah, absolutely. How would you define if you would, if you're sharing with other pastors, how would you define the term covenant accountability?

Pastor #10: It's a mutual sharing, I think, of of our hearts, of our issues. And edifying one another, praying for one another, encouraging one

another, I have been in different covenant accountability relationships where actually we have actually talked about that kind of an arrangement and in the past, and I'm still in one with a brother. He's in Texas and I'm over here. But we have we have shared so some deep things and some issues. And he has called me at times to listen, and I called him one time as a listener. So, so I think that's what it that's what it would be that or accountable, we're willing to expose ourselves kind of and share and receive correction. One time I had to share some correction with him over something he shared with me and I said, No, you can't do that. So whatever needs to be expressed to, to build. To build up and to help the person get see some life get back on track or whatever makes that a covenant of accountability. And so I've had that and I do have that. It's been it's been a little while since we've all all we just saw each other. I drove to California and I stopped in Texas to see him, and we understood that that was still happening. So we haven't had need to communicate. Issues, but but we're always. We're always in. We're always available to each other.

Interviewer: Right, right. That's great. Thank you for that answer. You've had several relationships through the years with pastors in ministry. What would you say are some characteristics of a meaningful pastor or peer relationships with the pastors?

Pastor #10: Well. I think working together, the friendship brotherhood kind of thing. Again, maybe not in that covenant accountability thing, but we're available to each other to help each other out. Praying together. And confidence in each other, trustworthiness, where they can trust me.

Interviewer: Let's say in our group, a new pastor comes in, how would we begin or what steps could we take to help encourage a covenant accountability relationship with these new members?

Pastor #10:   I think I experienced it myself when I first went to the to the group, to the meeting. Nobody knew who I was. I was referred to that meeting by another pastor. And and when I went in, I shared, I think either at the first meeting, maybe the second, you know, where I was at and who I was and where I'd been and what I needed at the moment. And I was well received. Hands were laid on me. We prayed together and I felt like I have thousands of friends here. I think I found the fellowship here. I think we should open up and welcome them and embrace them and make them feel part of the part of the party.

Interviewer: Yep, absolutely. How has regular attendance at the pastors' fellowship impacted you personally?

Pastor #10:   Two things I've been I've been greatly encouraged. I love the sharing of the word. I like that we pray for each other. And at times, even like the last the last time this last week, one of the one of the two of the brethren began to pray for me and it was a prophetic prayer. And as things that I had discussed with my wife that nobody else knew and and the man prayed, a pastor prayed according to that as if he had heard the conversation. So that was very, very encouraging. I don't feel inhibited in any way. I feel like I can share a little bit. And I think it's altogether been a great blessing.

Interviewer: Great. Wonderful. What would you say has been a positive experience that you've had being a part of this groups in particular?

Pastor #10:   Well, I've had I had the opportunity to ask the lawyer in our midst some questions. And I think that's important because otherwise I'd be paying big bucks, maybe, you know. At one time I was facing an issue and I said, Can I just talk to you? And we went out to lunch together. I shared with them what I was going through and they gave me some counseling. And it ended up turning out, OK, you know, so I think that's a positive experience.

Interviewer: Good, Okay. How about a negative experience you have had with a group?

Pastor #10: With a certain brother that turned out to be really not a friend, you know? I was very disappointed that we welcomed him and we took a man that was evidently well referenced and then he turned out not to be and he did some harm. And that's been one of the most disappointing things I've experienced.

Interviewer: That's kind of the answer across the board is that when people come in with an agenda but because we've been together so long, we can pick up on that pretty quick. Right. How has being a part of our group benefited your particular church?

Pastor #10: I feel better being a part of it. I'm not alone, I'm not isolated, so personally, I feel better. I feel I make a better leader because I'm affiliated with others and accountable. And so I think that's helped. And plus I have had a pastor in our group come in and preach for me one night and it was like, Wow, this is what I would have said and what I would have wanted to say in those days because he touched on a topic that that was needed to be said to be spoken to. And so the the reaction and the and the response was very positive. So I really appreciated the word that he shared. There has been a lot of exposure from the guys, the pastors with my church, I feel that I'm benefiting from the relationship because I think I think it adds to the the fact that the folks know whoever is in the pastors group.

Interviewer: What would you say has been a benefit of having relationships with local peer pastors?

Pastor #10: It's important because. Personally and privately, I kind of have a tendency to isolate, but I know that's not good. So I I tell myself, I don't want to be the Lone Ranger here, right? And so I need this. So I encourage myself. I encourage myself to be a part of accountability and fellowship. There is the strength of prayer together and sharing the word. And so I consider that a great asset in my life. A great

blessing. Well, yeah, otherwise I'd be out of here by myself. And that's not a healthy place to be.

Interviewer: Great answer. What would you say in your experience are common struggles pastors deal with? From what you've witnessed through the years, what would you say are common struggles that pastors deal with?

Pastor #10: Husband and wife relationships. Sexual, private, sexual matters that have been shared with me and things like that. Isolation and problems with some of the church people, you know? And sometimes with members of the board, there's some contention going on there. And pastors have shared with me and actually I've experienced that a long time ago when I was pastor at another church I had, I had some matters I actually had to deal with. But there's a number of things that pastors can have to deal with sometimes.

Interviewer: Across the board in the research is isolation, burnout, and depression.

Pastor #10: Oh, yeah, that's true too. I haven't encountered so much depression, really depression. But it can be. It can be a factor and burnout could be a big one.

Interviewer: How would you say that the pastors fellowship addresses some of these common struggles that pastors deal with?

Pastor #10: In the meetings we talk about a lot of these issues. And the pastors really open up. They share their frustrations. We have we have addressed a lot of matters. And because of the vast well of experience in the room, we always can find a beneficial solution. So I think there's a benefit in the sharing, whether we're the one that airs the problem or just listening to everyone share.

Interviewer: Wonderful. Wonderful. All right. One last question, has the pastors group helped you personally with some of these common struggles?

Pastor #10:   Yes. Yes, yes. Like I said, I've actually shared some things and we've prayed about them, and I have felt like, yeah, it's it's I've been lifted up and encouraged and so I've definitely been blessed by the relationships. Sometimes we just need a little encouragement. And so that has come through the word because as we read the word and share together, there's definitely encouragement. And that's that's something that I really appreciate about our meetings.

Interviewer: That's powerful. Well, you've given some amazing answers, and I thank you so much for your time!