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Unmasking the black pastoral superman: self-care for male black pastors serving the black church

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UNMASKING THE BLACK PASTORAL SUPERMAN: SELF-CARE FOR MALE BLACK PASTORS SERVING THE BLACK CHURCH

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to all of the African-American male pastors who champion the black church and the ministry of leading black people as LEADERS while Following. It is especially dedicated to my father, the late Elder Ovester Armstrong, Sr., who was a minister in his own right and who taught me to forever LEAD. Love you, Daddy. I hope you are proud of your "one and only son."

Acknowledgements

I want to give GOD Almighty the highest praise. I want to acknowledge my daughters, Zharia Bernice Armstrong and Rylee Faith Armstrong, who inspire me to be great. I am grateful for my wife, Stacey D. Armstrong; her support is undeniable, and I am grateful for her love and encouragement as God allows me to pastor. Also, thanks to many who have been a blessing along the way. These vessels include: my mother Priscilla Armstrong; my sisters Razietta S. Bishop, Clasonda V. Armstrong-Grandison, and Vivia E. Armstrong; Charles Grandison; Tracy L. Box-Netters; Pastor Perry Bennett; Corey D. McCray; Chester Box; Robert Joseph King; the Reverend Charles Graham; Shirley Marie Graham; Pastor David Hill; the Reverend Dr. Theodore Hickman-Maynard, Dr. Eileen Daily; the Reverend Dr. Karen Westerfield Tucker; and all those who have helped, encouraged, and prayed for me.

Finally, I want to acknowledge my personal hero, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Since I was a child, I aspired to be MLK, to be outspoken as MLK, and to change the world like MLK. I chose Boston University because of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

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ABSTRACT

Black male pastors are at risk for overlooking self-care and for experiencing mental health crisis while striving to address the complex ministry situations of black churches and communities that historically were traumatized and oppressed. Burdens are typically borne in silence out of fear of appearing weak or lacking in faith.

This study calls for pastors and congregations together to reexamine their understandings of discipleship, followership, authenticity, and success, and to recognize a pastor's humanity and vulnerability, thereby enabling him to lay aside an unhealthy superman persona imposed internally and externally, and allow for healthy conversations about well-being.

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List of Abbreviations

KJV- The King James Version of the Bible

NIV- The New International Version of the Bible

CHAPTER 1: AN AWAKENING

The Testimony

I am a black male pastor who has been pastoring for almost ten years. I have pastored as a single African-American male. I have pastored as a single parent. I have pastored alone, with not much support. I have discovered that pastoring can be a lonely ministry. I have pastored while divorced. I have pastored while sad. I have pastored while happy. I have pastored while angry. I have pastored depressed. I have also pastored happily married with lots of support. I have pastored while suffering the ups and downs of life. I have discovered that pastors must have a heart for God and be fully aware of their human capabilities to serve God, the church, and God's people.

I thus write this study from the perspective of a black male pastor. I hope that this research will bring attention to a growing problem that is not often discussed in the black church. I hope the reader will find this writing helpful in understanding the importance of black male pastors taking care of their physical, mental, and emotional health as they serve the black church.

I was inspired to take up this project and write this thesis due to the sudden death of the Reverend Teddy Parker, Jr., thirty-eight years old, a husband, and a father to two young girls.[1] On the morning of Sunday, November 10, 2013, Rev. Parker, Jr., a sixteen-

[1] Leonardo Blair, "Meet the Family Left to Weep in the Aftermath of Pastor Teddy Parker, Jr.'s Suicide as They Prepare to Say Farewell Saturday," *The Christian Post*, November 15, 2013, accessed December 1, 2020, https://www.christianpost.com/news/meet-the-family-left-to-weep-in-the-aftermath-of-pastor-teddy-parker-jrs-suicide-as-they-prepare-to-say-farewell-saturday.html.

year pastor of Bibb Mt. Zion Baptist Church in Macon, Georgia, committed suicide with a self-inflicted gunshot wound in the driveway of his home. Pastor Parker sent his wife and children to church for Sunday worship, then committed suicide shortly thereafter. The family and congregation discovered what happened as Pastor Parker did not show up for church that morning. This suicide was a shock to other black pastors throughout the United States. Under the pastorate of Rev. Parker, Bibb Mt. Zion was a growing congregation. His death sparked a conversation about depression and the black church nationwide. Pastors began to dialogue more about their mental health, particularly depression, and coping with stress while they led any given congregation. The battle with depression as a pastor is particularly hard as one leads the African-American church due to expectations of self and the black congregation.

Dr. E. Dewey Smith, Jr., senior pastor of the megachurch The House of Hope in Atlanta, Georgia, commented on many occasions about his friend Rev. Teddy Parker, Jr., and the need for black pastors to be honest with themselves. In a 2014 interview on the show "Mid-South View Point with Byron Tyler," Dr. Smith expressed openly and honestly the need for pastors to be vulnerable and transparent particularly in the black church.[2] Dr. Smith indicated that it is important for pastors to be honest with themselves and their mental well-being in order to remain healthy with good self-care while pastoring. He also commented that, in the past, black pastors played multiple roles

[2] Byron Tyler, "Mid-South View Point with Byron Tyler: E. Dewey Smith Talks Depression and Suicide among Pastors," September 7, 2014. Accessed July 7, 2020. https://youtu.be/RwQvwpynRxc. The following comments by Dr. Smith come from this interview.

within the black church and, as a result, black congregants had unreasonable expectations. An example he gave was, while growing, he generally viewed and visualized the black pastor as the musician, the architect, the counselor, the doctor, the attorney, and the accountant in addition to being the preacher. Dr. Smith alludes to the reality that pastors need help to be able to concentrate on the priestly duties of leading the church (preaching and prayer). Smith says that a black pastor should assemble a team of gifted individuals and not be insecure in allowing the teams to assist with the responsibility in the church. Smith further comments that sabbaticals should be taken often amongst black pastors and assistants, and church staff should inquire/check in with the pastor to make sure he is not burned out. Dr. Smith finds that it is an issue of pressure and self-neglect of black pastors in the black church because pastors are often not honest with themselves.

Dr. Smith has also expressed concern about the inability for a pastor to be vulnerable in any African-American church. "It's hard for pastors, particularly in the African-American church, to step away because the church is so personality driven some people are not prepared for the pastor to step away. . . How do you tell your church that you have mental and emotional disorders, and they trust your leadership? It's almost like a death sentence to share that."[3] The obvious question as it relates to this statement is how will the black church perceive a black pastor after revealing a mental health

[3] E. Dewey Smith quoted in Leonardo Blair, "Pastor Who Killed Self Battled Manic Depression, Struggled to Keep it Secret; Was Taking Medication, Had 'Physical Challenges,'" *Christian Post,* November 13, 2013, accessed December 1, 2020, https://www.christianpost.com/news/pastor-who-killed-self-battled-manic-depression-struggled-to-keep-it-secret-was-taking-medication-had-physical-challenges.html.

problem(s)? In "A Pastor's Suicide: Addressing Mental Health in Black Churches" on the website *Religion Dispatches,* Darnell Moore, who references part of Smith's comment quoted above, joins him in arguing for a larger conversation amongst pastors in the black church. Black pastors who deal with depression do not find it easy to get help. Dr. Smith here emphasizes the lonely walk of a black pastor in the black church and the inability to trust others with transparency.[4]

The Need for Self-Care

The lack of self-care by black pastors is an historical problem. Later, we will examine the research by author Wynnetta Wimberley that shows an increase in the mental health issues of black pastors. While these statistics are a growing phenomenon, they are not a new phenomenon. Black pastors have long been sacrificial of self for the cause of leading black people. In the time of slavery in the United States, black pastors who themselves were traumatized as slaves were still expected to lead the people (other slaves). Black pastors, while enslaved, were charged by their slave masters to lead and maintain the peace amongst the slaves as they lived on the plantation in order to please the slave master. This responsibility included making sure slaves did not go against the slave master and keeping them quiet. For pastors, this enslavement and mindset of being property was traumatizing while, at the same time, made more complex by being called to share the gospel. We will look at the history of the black pastor as it relates to pressure

[4] Darnell Moore, "A Pastor's Suicide: Addressing Mental Health in Black Churches" *Religion Dispatches*, December 12, 2013, accessed August 22, 2020, https://religiondispatches.org/a-pastors-suicide-addressing-mental-health-in-black-churches/.

and early self-neglect. The expectation that the enslaved black preacher would offer comfort to other slaves and preach the gospel, despite personal trauma and pressure, may be identifiable as a source of today's problems of lack of self-care.

Recent suicides (and attempts), and admission of depression and anxiety inspired this research. It will later be revealed how well-known men of the black clergy took their own lives and battled with mental health issues. Rev. Parker's death was shocking amongst black pastors and the black church community because of the means of his death by suicide. A black pastor and suicide is inconceivable in the black church. Disclosure of struggles with mental health and suicide is taboo in the black community: conversations about mental health and suicide do not happen often within the black community and especially within the black church. As Dr. E. Dewey Smith discussed in the radio interview, people within the black church customarily are told that as long as you have faith you can overcome many mental struggles.[5] Phrases in the black church such as "I am blessed and highly favored" are common in covering emotional struggles that faith is believed to handle. Within the black church, faith is the remedy of all things involving an emotional struggle, a topic that will be discussed within this research. Smith also asserts that the black church has stigmatized mental illness. Therefore, it will be revealed how hard it is for black clergy to be honest and vulnerable about their state of mind and mental health as they pastor.

[5] Tyler, "Mid-South View Point with Byron Tyler: E. Dewey Smith Talks Depression and Suicide among Pastors."

Joyce Meyer, renowned author and pastor of Joyce Meyer Ministries, said in an interview on the show "Life Today" hosted by Sheila Walsh that often the Christian serves selflessly and sacrificially without placing attention on themselves because they feel they are not supposed to complain.[6] The Christian places the burden on the shoulders of serving because faith motivates them to please God. In general, Christians tend to serve faithfully because of the belief that God is well pleased, so therefore they make the effort not to complain to anyone. This is especially true with black pastors. I remember thinking while serving, "I can't complain. I can't talk or trust anyone with my issues. I am doing this for God. God will give me strength." Unfortunately, as these thoughts of self-inspiration and encouragement settled in, I became neglectful of myself. I began serving long hours, neglecting sleep, not eating right, and mentally struggling while dealing with my own life issues. This included feeling alone, depressed, and physically tired. The call to minister becomes personal and important to black pastors. This is because when leading a congregation of people already hurt and challenged in a hurtful world, the mindset of remaining strong becomes a priority. More simply, the black congregation is already hurt, oppressed, stressed, and suffering from societal woes. Many look to the black pastor for strength and hope. Knowing this, the black pastor serves unselfishly, sometimes neglecting themselves to give hope to the black church and the black community. The main issue with lack of vulnerability is that behind it comes the feeling of invincibility. I can remember hiding feelings of exhaustion and being alone

[6] Joyce Meyer, "Authentic People," "Life Today" hosted by Sheila Walsh, lifetodaytv, September 7, 2021, accessed December 5, 2021, https://youtu.be/F4T2jORcJNQ.

to the point that I felt I could endure ministry without hurting inside. If I kept smiling, I was ok.

Later, suggestions of self-care both personally and cooperatively will be given for the black pastor and the black church, as both need to be healthy for ministry success. After exploring the research, the reader will discover that once the problem of black pastors struggling with their mental health is made known, help is available. A possible biblical remedy and cause to help black pastors will be examined, which includes aid and respect for the human person. The black pastor is in the same light as the disciples' response to Jesus' leadership and Paul's declaration of respect for the spreading of the gospel. These biblical remedies are for black pastors but especially give a charge to the black church to provide for a healthy space to minister.

While pastoring, I literally thought I was the original Black Superman. I thought I was the black pastoral Superman in the pulpit. Through research and by talking with others, I have discovered I am not alone. I have discovered that many black male pastors feel or have felt that they can remain strong as they pastor and not allow life to cause weakness. The black male pastor has made the attempt to control failing mental health and emotional issues as they minister and provide hope to a hurting people. This is true as black pastors have inherited a traumatic background of mental strain because of the challenges of leading a socially oppressed people. I will discuss how today the black community is suffering from societal woes such as poverty, violence, and prejudice. These issues plague the black community in such a way that the black pastor is expected to get involved and lead in addition to ministering within the black church. I was under

pressure as a black pastor not only to advocate for my church but also for the community as so many of my congregants, like most of the black church, were members of fatherless homes and victims of violence. I felt the urgency of being called to the black community, not just the church.

The research reveals the black pastor's persistence to the call of ministry within the black church and the black community, despite mental distress and other personal challenges. As the Black Pastoral Superman, I personally experienced what Dr. Donald Winnicott describes as the "Theory of the True Self and False Self."[7] The main definition of this theory is to have had a sense of "false self" develop from the beginning of life, so much so that it becomes our reality, our way of living. However, the "false self" is not the "true self" or who we really are. In summary, we are a threat to our selves whenever the sense of "false self" is threatened by the "true self." Some even contemplate or commit suicide when the "true self" is not justified as being who we really are. Per Dr. Winnicott, suicide can happen when the "true self" never comes into its own and is too much of a threat to who we thought we were or the "false self." This theory will be described in its entirety later; however, it is important here to emphasize that to live out and remain within the context of a "false self" or false personality does not validate who a person really is. As the Black Pastoral Superman, I pastored completely with my "false self." The reason I did was not to seem vulnerable to the

[7] D. W. Winnicott, *The Maturational Processes and the Facilitating Environment: Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development* (New York, NY: International Universities Press, Inc., 1965), 140-43.

congregation and to keep my "true self" of battling depression and anxiety to myself. Once the possibility of the "true self" was threatened to be exposed, I remember feeling overly self-conscious and fearful of it displaying weakness in my congregation. The Black Pastoral Superman in me and many black pastors will serve because of knowing how black congregations and black communities hurt. The research will show this fervent dedication by black pastors to a community of people that have suffered over time. Unfortunately, because the need is great, it becomes sacrificial. The sacrifice is creating self-neglect and lack of self-care as they pastor the black church.

Self-care and the Black Male Pastor

African-American churches are served by both male and female clergy, but the focus of this study is upon black males, who outnumber females in pastoral leadership. Some concerns about pastoring apply to both black males and females, and numerous statistical studies often do not split out gender when examining race. But gender is an important difference, as studies relative to black masculinity and black male culture detail.[8] As a black male pastor who has been in conversation about issues of self-care specifically with other black male pastors, my work here focuses on men; specific studies of black clergy women are beyond the scope of this work.

Black males often have a lack of awareness of the need for self-care for physical, mental, and emotional health that arises from multiple factors that researchers are starting

[8] See, for example, the research in Serie McDougal, III, *Black Men's Studies: Black Manhood and Masculinities in the U. S. Context*, Black Studies & Critical Thinking, vol. 115 (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2020).

to identify.[9] One complicating issue is a general mindset among black males of not visiting a health professional unless there is an obvious feeling of sickness or disease.[10] In 2011, the average life expectancy for black males was 72.2 years compared to 76.6 years for white men, 81.1 years for white women, and 78.2 years for black women. Societal woes (homicide, for example), cultural factors, economic challenges, and biological risks contribute to these numbers.[11] Death rates are higher for black men then other ethnic and minority groups, and may be the result of complications from heart disease, diabetes, and the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), to name a few. Most of these causes likely would be preventable with proper and regular health care. Black male health is a public health crisis, a problem from which many black male pastors are not immune. Pastoring the black church can bring a tremendous physical and mental toll, and the black male pastor comes from this cultural perspective of lack of attention to preventative healthcare and maintenance that ultimately can be harmful.

To address this complex issue of self-care for black male pastors, this study will draw upon insights and research from the social sciences, psychosocial studies, African-

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[9] See, for example, Daphne C. Watkins, "A Light on the Path to and Promise for Black Men's Mental Health," *Men and Masculinities* 22, no. 5 (2019): 917-920; McDougal, *Black Men's Studies*, 343-70; and Janelle R. Goodwill, Robert Joseph Taylor, and Daphne C. Watkins, "Everyday Discrimination, Depressive Symptoms, and Suicide Ideation among African American Men," *Archives of Suicide Research* 25, no. 1 (2021): 74-93.

[10] Joseph E. Ravenell, Eric E. Whitaker, and Waldo E. Johnson, Jr., "According to Him: Barriers to Healthcare among African-American Men," *Journal of the National Medical Association* 100, no. 10 (2008): 1153-60.

[11] M. Jermane Bond and Allen A. Herman, "Lagging Life Expectancy for Black Men: A Public Health Imperative," *American Journal of Public Health* 106, no. 7 (2016): 1167-69.

American studies, biblical hermeneutics, and pastoral theology, which will be interwoven throughout Chapters 2 and 3. Historical/contextual analysis and constructive approaches are also used. These resources will be brought together as a whole to demonstrate the silent epidemic amongst black male pastors and lack of self-care. It is important to look at these various resources to bring into the full view the importance of self-care while pastoring the black church.

CHAPTER 2: A SILENT EPIDEMIC

The Situation of Black Male Pastors

The African-American pastor seeks to fulfill his "call" to lead the black church well. The black pastor in the black church is a disciple, a follower, a preacher of the gospel, and a leader in the black community. The black pastor leads a black congregation that, since the days of slavery, has been oppressed, has remained strong while depending on faith, and is resilient through societal change. As black pastors lead, the pressure of all the above is hard on their physical, mental, and emotional health. This pressure also includes ministry or work overload, insufficient financial compensation, the strong desire to honor God, and the burden of needing to "please" the waiting black congregation. We will look at the effort of "followership," the history of the black pastor's efforts to serve, the lack of self-care, and the neglectfulness of self as it relates to emotional health. This will demonstrate the declining mental health of black pastors, the black pastor's history of mental health issues while pastoring, and the lack of attending to this issue by the black pastor.

The Black Pastor as "Disciple" and "Follower"

Ministry for black pastors who serve a predominantly black church is being a follower of Jesus Christ while leading. The history of the black church and its members witnesses to a strong need for dedicated and strong disciples because of the struggle to survive during oppressive times. The same need continues in the present day. "Followership" for black pastors comes with great responsibility and can cause them to be neglectful of self-care. Black pastors, as part of their call, tend to put God/Jesus first,

others (the congregation) second, and themselves last, along with their families. Children in the traditional black "church school" learn from an early age that the acronym J-O-Y stands for "**J**esus, **O**thers, and **Y**ourself."[12] The original intention of this acronym was to prevent selfishness and self-centeredness in young Christian converts. The mindset of God and Jesus first and self to come last is the approach of many in the black church including the pastor. It adds to the pressure of the black pastor as he serves because this old saying, which took hold early when he was a new or young Christian, is, truthfully, the mindset behind the call for most black pastors.[13] Black pastors tend to answer their call by working hard for Jesus, sacrificing for others, while considering themselves last. Merriam-Webster defines a disciple as "one who accepts and assists in spreading the doctrines of another: such as a Christianity: one of the twelve in the inner circle of Christ's followers according to the Gospel accounts."[14] The key terms in this definition are "accepts," "assists," and "Christ's followers." The Bible defines Jesus Christ as the only Messiah or Savior. The twelve disciples are explained in Christian doctrine as followers of the Messiah appointed directly by him. The view of the black pastor within the black church is to play the role of a disciple. That is, to follow the example of Jesus, the Messiah, and to learn from scripture about the leadership of the original twelve. The disciples took on various roles in assisting the Messiah, but all were to fulfill that

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[12] Erika D. Crawford, "Serving Them is Killing Me: Using Technology as a Vehicle for Self-Care for Bi-Vocational Pastors in the Black Church" (DMin thesis, Fordham University, 2012), 49.
[13] Crawford, "Serving Them," 49.
[14] "Disciple," Merriam-Webster.com (2022), accessed August 17, 2022, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/disciple.

complementary role. This role is to assist in spreading the gospel. The twelve disciples often challenged the Messiah; nevertheless, they were Jesus' helpers, none of them *the* one to be the savior of the world. In following the Messiah, the disciples took on great responsibility and burden.

Lessons from the Disciples

The lessons of the scriptures teach us about the "call" or the "followership" of the disciples. The black pastor amplifies the efforts of James, John, Peter, and Judas throughout ministry. As with James and John, the black pastor becomes ambitious to lead with power and authority but is not fully aware of the toll or potential harm it can take on himself. The black pastor is committed to working feverishly and with dedication towards the call of God as Peter and Judas do to the very end. When the call is perceived by the black pastor as unsuccessful or lacks effectiveness, it can cause spiritual and mental pain due to the notion of failing God. Black pastors serve through the pain because, like Peter and Judas, they feel that the pain and distress is warranted due to their dedication to God and to the church they lead.

"Followership" of Christ requires dedication and sacrifice by the disciples and spiritual leaders (namely pastors) committed to their call. Merriam-Webster defines "followership" as the act of following and the "capacity or willingness to follow a leader."[15] Robert E. Kelley and Ira Chaleff give a more specific definition of "followership" with those answering the call of ministry. Kelley describes followership

[15] "Followership," Merriam-Webster.com (2022), accessed December 17, 2022, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/followership.

amongst leaders as one who behaves courageously, independently, and is actively engaged in self-initiative for most endeavors. Furthermore, he describes these persons as those who go over and beyond their typical call of ministry, who are very active, and who have positive energy.[16] Chaleff's definition of followership takes into account people who take risk, assume responsibility, serve, participate in transformation, and take moral action.[17] Jesus often repeats to the disciples that following him will require courage and sacrifice. In Mark 10:29-31, Jesus says that great is the reward when the sacrifice is made by the commitment of following him. Black pastors have the same commitment and mindset in their followership of Jesus and dedication to God within their call of ministry. Their sacrifice however can unintentionally mean their health and livelihood affecting them adversely.

The definitions of "discipleship" and "followership" go hand in hand. Both terms have similar meanings such as helper, serving or service, commitment, and are oriented around action. Being a dedicated helper, servant, and preacher are all positive goals of black pastors. These goals are often demonstrated in the service of black pastors. To be a servant and a helper in ministry and be committed to spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ are part of the call to ministry as it relates to the black pastor. These are also qualities of a black pastor that parishioners look for in the black church. Pressure comes when these areas lack, or black pastors perceive that they are not good enough for God or

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[16] Robert E. Kelley, "Rethinking Followership," in *The Art of Followership: How Great Followers Create Great Leaders and Organizations*, ed. Ronald E. Riggio, Ira Chaleff, and Jean Lipman-Blumen (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 7-8.
[17] Ira Chaleff, *The Courageous Follower: Standing Up To & For Our Leaders* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2009), 6-9.

in the sight of God. These expectations of both the black church and the black pastor can make the call to black pastoral leadership overwhelming in attempting to please God and please people, with the result being neglect of self.

Black pastoral leaders are followers of Christ. These leaders should represent and follow as the Messiah leads. A good black pastoral leader will follow the teachings and the call of the Messiah unselfishly. A predominantly black congregation will look for the example of the black pastor's unselfish following of the Messiah. This congregation expects the black pastor to be sacrificial. Part of the "call" of pastoral leadership is the sacrifice of living life while following the teachings of Jesus Christ. Sacrifice comes with followership. Author Obery Hendricks, in *The Universe Bends Towards Justice,* describes the distinction of a "follower of Christ" as seeking the sacrifice of self for the betterment of people.[18] Hendricks points out that religious leaders should treat people and their needs as holy. The original goal to serve the people, the intention and heart of serving, is holy, as Hendricks describes, not the actual work or action itself. Holiness considers serving and treating the saints of God as a task representative of the sacred. Black pastors are dedicated to serving the black congregation with a heart of God. Shepherding the flock is considered a sacred service consecrated by God. This view is the perspective of a true lover of God and humanity, and no one should take on a selfish role of power, Hendricks says. A person dedicated to service Hendricks describes as a "servant leader": acting to serve others as was the example of Christ. This perspective as

[18] Obery M. Hendricks, Jr., *The Universe Bends Towards Justice* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 218.

a follower is not optional, but is instead required of a true follower of Christ.[19] Even though efforts towards this perspective become tiresome, it should remain in full view as black pastors lead.

A good pastor should not lose sight of himself while following God as he ministers to the people of God. As mentioned before, the intention is to honor God and follow as his disciple. However, instead of doing ministry feverishly and overextending the self, the black pastor should keep pace with his own health. The black pastor honors God by keeping his own self in mind while leading the people. It is not holy to think of oneself as the Messiah; that is a selfish messianic mindset. This includes believing that pastors can serve often and everywhere without being mindful of their own health. Similarly, this also involves a thinking that no harm can occur to self as one is doing God's work. Furthermore, this thinking also (falsely) supposes that overextending oneself in the call of ministry will not cause physical or emotional harm because strength comes in doing the work for God. In the past as well as today, the black pastor has considered himself invincible as he works hard for the black congregation while being neglectful of personal health and livelihoods. We will explore how this phenomenon has become more harmful to the physical and emotional health of the black pastor over time.

The sacrifice of self can turn into self-neglect as black pastors lead the black church. This self-neglectfulness has been an ongoing reality since the days of slavery. In slavery days the black pastor was the voice of the oppressed, the representative, and peacemaker. Wynnetta Wimberley assesses that the "slave preacher" held the slave

[19] Hendricks, *The Universe Bends*, 218-19.

community together despite being scrutinized themselves.[20] The same attributes of sacrificing for community and the church monetarily and with lifting heavy burdens are true with today's black pastor as they were in previous generations. Self-neglect has become a byproduct of high expectations from the black church, its members, and the wider black community. In addition, black pastors committing to the "call" of pastoring often have not dealt with underlying mental health issues, stress, and pressure while pastoring. Within this study, I will explore each of these areas of sacrifice. That includes the history of the black pastor and the black church, the dedication to the call of pastoring, and the many sacrifices that black pastors make while pastoring. All of these areas will show a long and current strain on black pastors when it comes to their mental health. Also, the situation of black pastors can best be broken down by exploring the workload expectations, pressures inside and outside the black congregation, the underlying mental health issues they face, and the fear of appearing weak in their commitment to doing God's work. These problems are exacerbated because of the absence of mental health support. We will explore each of these elements in turn.

The Black Pastor has a History of Unselfishly Serving

The role of the black pastor has remained constant throughout history. Historically, the black church was uprooted during the days of slavery. The black church has been a safe haven for black people for many years. The black pastor has been known as the advocate for oppressed black people in the black church. The traditional black

[20] Wynnetta Wimberley, *Depression in African American Clergy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan Publishing, 2016), 39.

church calls for the enhancement of spiritual well-being and hope for blacks, as well as social change, and it is a conduit for social justice and activism.[21] The black pastor has been America's first advocate for oppressed people (most especially African-Americans) since slavery. The expectation, therefore, is to lead with power and proficiency from within the congregation, and to broaden that leadership to the wider black community.

The early black church in America was originally dependent on the black pastor. In many cases, slave owners charged black pastors to spread the gospel amongst the slaves, to reason, and communicate with them. Lots of black pastors in the 1700s and 1800s were freedmen who established religious worship for slaves as a movement, which led to the creation of the original black churches and denominational missions. This includes the beginnings of the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the black Baptist churches. The Reverend Andrew Bryan was a slave who founded a congregation in Savannah, Georgia, in the early 1780s called The First African Church. Many scholars and members of the black community consider this congregation as the beginning of the establishment of the black church. Other preeminent black pastors of the early black church movement include the Reverend Richard Allen, founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia in 1807, the Reverend Josiah Bishop, organizer of the historic Abyssinian Baptist Church in New York City in 1808, and the Reverend Thomas Paul, who served the African Baptist Church in Boston in 1804.[22] Evidence from the

[21] Trinaa L. Copeland, "African American Christian Senior Pastor's Beliefs about Mental Health Treatment" (PhD diss., Walden University, 2019), 34-35.
[22] Thabiti Anyabwile, *Reviving the Black Church: A Call to Reclaim a Sacred Institution* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2015), 230.

earliest history of the black church shows an expectation, by clergy and others, of the black pastor as leader in church and community.

Black theologians in later years included black pastors and pastoral leaders who dedicated their ministry and works to empowering the black congregation and the black community. Black theologians and community advocates in the 1960s such as James Cone, W. E. B. Dubois, and E. Franklin Frazier provided for theological and ethical discourse in giving hope to the black church and community during difficult times. The black theology movement also connected with the civil rights movement led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., a black preacher out of the South, who strongly advocated for the civil rights and liberties of all the black community. The efforts of the Reverend Jesse Jackson as a preacher and social activist originated in the 1960s but continued into the 1980s as a preacher with the organization Operation Push and The Rainbow Coalition out of Chicago to advocate for all of the black community. In an article in *The Journal of Religious Thought*, Harold Trulear comments, "It is probably more accurate to say that the African-American pastor is the reigning spokesperson of a prophetic community—a group of people whose struggle for survival and wholeness against the sin of white racism is itself a prophetic witness against the reality of oppression. . . . the pastor is better thought of as the mouthpiece or voice of resistance representing the faithful community of the oppressed."[23] Trulear's words speak of the urgency and broader context of the black pastor, who serves not only his church, but also a wider community,

[23] Harold Dean Trulear, "Standing in the Gap: Pastoral Theology in the African-American Church," *The Journal of Religious Thought* 57, no. 2–58, nos. 1-2 (2001-2005), 21.

and even, in some cases, a nation. The black pastor who advocated for slaves on the plantation is the same black pastor advocating for other blacks suffering from abuse, lack of resources, and racism today.

Current ministries of the black pastor include the uplift the black church and community, with a focus upon overcoming the trauma and oppression of the past. It also includes the black megachurch ministries and conferences organized by black pastors that appeal to self and social esteem. Pastors such as Bishop T. D. Jakes and Cornel West raise and incorporate motivation and scholarly relationality to surviving as black people in today's America. This includes providing motivational messages of "manpower," "woman thou art loose," and prophetic encouraging African-Americans to rise above the top of society against all odds. These are messages of hope that raise self-esteem and relevancy as a black person. These messages are imperative in the black church and community because of the suffering from historical and present trauma, violence, and injustice. Black people, in particular, are seeking hope and a sense of change in their lives beyond the worship. The experience of worship provides a spiritual connection that gives hope. In addition to this, however, black people seek a true awakening and new way of living in a harsh world. Within a community that has suffered from racism, absent fathers, and substance abuse at higher numbers, the black pastor today is providing the relational aspect of someone who cares.[24]

[24] Harold Dean Trulear, "Good Religion, Spirituality, and African Americans," *Cross Currents* 46.4 (1996/1997), 538-39.

A Heavy Workload in Ministry and Self-Neglect

Kirk Byron Jones testifies that the many roles black pastors play in the black church entails that they "willingly and eagerly sign this premature death certificate" since "there is enormous physical, mental, and spiritual strain often associated with pastoral ministry."[25] Most new black pastors are eager to fulfill their calling to lead one of the most historic institutions of African Americans, but do not realize what the work involves. Pastoring the black church comprises church responsibilities such as administrating, developing a vision, casting and supporting missionary work, coordinating meetings, supporting families, and church community involvement that stretches well beyond a forty-hour work week. This heavy workload is tiresome and detrimental to physical and mental health. These responsibilities at times are unrealistic, given the fact that the black male pastor often has a family of his own.

According to Homer Ashby, "The black church is always engaged in both survival and liberation."[26] The black pastor is today's leader in refuting racism locally and nationwide. This is an automatic assumption and expectation of pastors within black communities and the black church. Such work includes advocacy in the areas of police brutality, police shootings, job discrimination, and housing discrimination. With mental illness, physical/emotional abuse, poverty, and substance use at high levels in black communities, the black pastor is a safe haven, an advocate, and a "fixer." This includes

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[25] Kirk Byron Jones, *Rest in the Storm: Self-Care Strategies for Clergy and Other Caregivers* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2021), 3-4.
[26] Homer U. Ashby, Jr., *Our Home Is Over Jordan: A Black Pastoral Theology* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2003), 36, cited in Anyabwile, *Reviving the Black Church*, 100.

counseling, consoling, and being a peacemaker. Members of the black church increasingly depend on the pastor outside of worship for the role of father figure and black male role model. These roles fill the gap that is absent in many black homes and black families. Black pastors increasingly feel stressed because of the pressure to advocate in these areas and in the fulfillment of these roles, often at the cost of their families and their personal well-being.

Black pastors take the call seriously to serve God and their church. This perspective is expected amongst black church congregants. Edward Wimberly says that the African-American church is emotionally therapeutic for African-American Christians.[27] Wimberly also assesses that the black pastor is the essential focal point of the black support system outside of church.[28] The pastor holds multiple roles in the black community as spiritual leader, community leader, counselor, father figure, etc. These various pastoral roles are of the center of the black community and keep the black pastor servicing others with the potential of being neglectful of himself. Part of the pressure in serving in these roles is that congregants and the black community expect him to do so.

There is also pressure amongst black pastors in that African-Americans look towards the black church as "therapeutic communities."[29] The call and effort to serve others is perceived as holy by congregants and black pastors, no matter the task. In other

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[27] Edward Wimberly, *African American Pastoral Care*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 17.
[28] Wimberly, *African American Pastoral Care,* 40.
[29] Jacqueline W. Mattis, N'jeri Mitchell, Nyasha A. Grayman, Alix Zapata, Robert Joseph Taylor, Linda M. Chatters, and Harold W. Neighbors, "Uses of Ministerial Support by African Americans: A Focus Group Study," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 77, no. 2 (2007): 249.

words, serving, no matter how hard it may be, is done to honor and represent God. While the goal for most black pastors is to honor God, work toward achievement of the goal oftentimes can turn into neglectfulness of self. The task at hand can create harm to their health and mental state. This includes but is not limited to depression, unhealthy disease (e.g., diabetes, high blood pressure), anxiety, and even suicidal ideation.[30] Black pastors are becoming burnt out in fulfilling multiple roles in addition to pastoring a local congregation.

The multifaceted roles that black pastors play are unlike the roles of white pastors. Black pastors are considered the village leaders in the black community.[31] For most African-American families and communities, the black pastor fulfills the role of what is missing in the healing village or community of support. This is particularly symbolic in times of catastrophe and recovery. Edward Wimberly mentions the black pastor as leader of the support system within the black church and community that has cultivated resilience and survival with the connection to God. He describes the black pastor as the indigenous storyteller, who, by drawing people into the "unfolding story of God," transforms lives by "connecting them with hidden and unconscious resources that lead to resiliency in difficult times" and rid a negative psyche when people are attempting to be

[30] For these issues among black men in general, see Janelle R. Goodwill, et al., "Everyday Discrimination, Depressive Symptoms, and Suicide Ideation among African American Men," 74-93.
[31] Wimberly, *African American Pastoral Care*, 44.

better.[32] African-Americans overwhelmingly look to the black pastor for this type of support.

Black pastors often play the role of the absent father and male role model missing from the black family. The black male presence is essential to the black family unit, and dearly missed when not present in the home. Black men in America are unemployed, uneducated, and incarcerated in higher rates as compared to white and Hispanic men.[33] With the absence of the male voice, male consciousness, and male presence in the home, black pastors assume these roles for members and constituents of the black church. Black boys and young male adults look to the pastor to meet their needs of socialization and identity, and pastors, out of concern, may reach out to young men who appear to need guidance. Women comprise sixty percent of membership in the black church, while African-American men are much less than that.[34] According to a United States Religious Landscape Survey conducted in 2007 by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life, African Americans reported to have a formal religious affiliation at eighty-seven percent. Within this number, six out of ten black women say they attend religious services every week. Studies show that sixteen percent of black men compared

[32] Wimberly, *African American Pastoral Care*, 41.
[33] Erik Eckholm, "Plight Deepens for Black Men, Studies Warn," nytimes.com, March 20, 2006, accessed November 10, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/20/us/plight-deepens-for-black-men-studies-warn.html; and McDougal, *Black Men's Studies*, 159-226, 269-338.
[34] Anyabwile, *Reviving the Black Church*, 218.

to nine percent of black women are unaffiliated with any religion.[35] With black churches populated with a majority of women, black girls and young female adults have role models and mentors to go to in times of need. This is not the case with black males, who sometimes resort to their peers for support and example. In a negative sense, this can sometimes create alternative relationships and gang activity.[36]

The multiple roles that black pastors play in the lives of black people can cause pressure. The black pastor is firmly aware that black people and the black community are dependent on these roles for normalcy in their family and communities. These roles are unlike those of white counterparts ministering within their own communities. Black pastors in general understand their role is to serve the underprivileged and act as emotional support for those without it. This is also the expectation of the black church for the black pastor: to serve well within these roles as part of their pastorate.

The black pastor is expected to be strong while serving the black church for the purpose of honoring God depending on faith alone. Black pastors remaining strong can succumb to lack of self-care. The issue with lack of self-care for pastors comes when they neglect themselves as they remain dedicated to their call to serve the people. Serving the people is *holy* per Obery Hendricks as mentioned above. This is the mindset of the black pastor that drives him as he serves. In other words, pastors perceive the self-neglect to be worth it because it is all about serving God and the people. The pastor is to

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[35] Neha Sahgal and Greg Smith, "A Religious Portrait of African Americans," Pew Research Center, January 30, 2009, accessed October 22, 2022, https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2009/01/30/a-religious-portrait-of-african-americans/.

[36] Wimberly, *African American Pastoral Care*, 59.

serve for the benefit of the oppressed people, in the opinion of distinguished pastor and leader Howard Thurman. Thurman commented in *Jesus and the Disinherited*, "It cannot be denied that too often the weight of the Christian movement has been on the side of the strong and powerful and against the weak and oppressed—this, despite the gospel."[37] Therefore, the burden of the called is to serve the congregation and the people who are oppressed. The urgency of this within the black congregation is even more burdensome because African-Americans in America are part of an oppressed population of people.

The black pastor is dedicated to the institution of the black church meant for survival and spirituality. As mentioned, the black pastor is the leader of oppressed people who remain faithful to the divine. Studies show how reliant African-Americans are on the black church in response to their faith. The Pew Research Center of Washington, DC, conducted a research study in 2009, and discovered that African-Americans are more religious than any other racial group in the United States. Blacks within the study acknowledged their affiliation with church as an important part of life. The research identifies African-Americans as the most religious ethnic group in America, finding that they are praying more and frequenting religious services at a higher rate than other racial or ethnic populations. Also, according to research, at least half of African-Americans in all regions of the country are members of historically black churches.[38] It is obvious that African-Americans find and have found comfort within the church.

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[37] Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 20.
[38] Sahgal and Smith, "A Religious Portrait of African Americans."

The black pastor has preached on survival to a surviving people while surviving himself. This includes maintaining his own physical/emotional health while faithfully serving the divine, striving to limit his own stressors of life, in many cases working a secular job in addition to pastoring, and dealing with the mental strain of living as a black man in the face of the prejudices of the world. The call of the black pastor is multifaceted. As mentioned earlier, the black pastor is attempting to honor God, lift up a congregation that is oppressed, expected by this congregation to serve in many capacities, and does not want to fail God and his church in doing so. This can cause stress, mental strain, and neglect of self. At the same time, the black pastor continues in ministry and work because, in his mind, the call of God is at hand and he perceives that his people need him. Also, in their mind, the people need him. This all may cause the black pastor to essentially become worn out and lead to a fast demise due to this pressure.

Many black pastors are dealing with underlying mental health issues. Numbers are on the increase for black pastors who figure amongst the depressed, lack interest or fulfillment in ministry, and inflict self-harm. The majority of these issues, if not all, come from working so hard in response to the call of ministry. It also comes as the black pastor deals with the unique conditions that come in pastoring the black church. These issues are causing dysfunctional activities such as promiscuity, misuse of church finances, and use of alcohol/drugs. The dysfunctional activities are often the result of avoidance. In a 2018 study, Akeem Zarell Walker showed that black pastors lack self-care and wholeness as a sacrifice to the people of their congregation. It was also revealed the long-tenured black pastors have served without self-care for so long that they had

become blinded to the detrimental effects. Walker discovered that black clergy feel their call and/or assignment is to minister to the wholeness of others while settling for their own brokenness as they pastor.[39] Brokenness and avoidance can cause black pastors to indulge in behaviors that are against church and pastoral norms. If black pastors do not address the underlying mental health concerns with black churches and denominational groups showing equal concern, black pastors will continue to have these issues, worsening their health and that of the black church. Within this research it was common to see the correlation between the wellness of the black pastor and the wellness of the black church. According to Thabiti Anyabwile, the church's health and strength depend on a biblical model of pastoral ministry.[40] This model includes having a pastor with character who will teach, preach, and pray, but not engage in or oversee extra activities and programs that can be taxing. This was the model given by the Apostles in the book of Acts and the call/charge that Paul gives to Timothy in I Timothy. Underlying mental health issues must be addressed as it is important to the future of the black church. A healthy black church is the result of fulfilling these biblical roles by the black pastor and shepherding the flock well.

In his research, Robert Rogers revealed that the good health and wellness of black pastors lead to healthier congregations.[41] Rogers explained that black churches add stressors that are often not privy to other pastors. This includes financial assessments

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[39]Akeem Zarell Walker, "The Black Therapeutic Preacher: Wholistic Care of the Self" (DMin thesis, Virginia Union University, 2018).
[40] Anyabwile, *Reviving the Black Church,* 99.
[41] Robert Rogers, "The Stressors Black Pastors Experience: A Counseling Perspective" (PhD diss., Montclair State University, 2002), 184.

required of congregations in the African-American Episcopal Church (AME), Christian Methodist Episcopal Church (CME), and the Church of God in Christ (COGIC) traditions that support the work of their general denominational bodies. These assessments are expected to be paid in full within these denominations, but it is hard to do so hard when congregations are small and financial resources are limited. Black churches in numerous cases are solely dependent on these assessments to function and the congregations expect the black pastor to lead this effort. This adds to the stress of the black pastor.

Black Pastors and their Failing Mental Health while Pastoring

In recent years, mental and emotional health has become more of a factor amongst African-American pastors as they lead. Wynnetta Wimberley says in *Depression in African-American Clergy* that depression and suicide statistics and incidents have grown tremendously in recent years, particularly in southern states. Wimberley also reports that African-American clergy suicides have become an agenda item in denominations such as the United Methodist Church in Ohio.[42] This includes discussing within the conference/convention and meeting setting how to address clergy suicides and emotional mental health amongst the governing body and general membership. A study conducted by Wimberley confirmed that black pastors suffer from depression to varying degrees and some depression is connected to mood disorders. Moods range from sadness to suicidal thoughts/feelings, to the thought of failure from their past, to changes to sleeping patterns and other behavior (extramarital affairs and infidelity for example).[43] Wimberley also

[42] Wimberley, *Depression in African American Clergy,* 5-7.
[43] Wimberley, *Depression in African American Clergy,* 16.

revealed that black pastors exhibit different types of depression such as major depression and persistent depression (commonly known as dysthymia).[44] This increased concern amongst black pastors has affected the black church community, as these pastors are looked at as their leaders in church and community.

Wimberley further comments that the issue of depression amongst black pastors is a growing phenomenon that is causing current clergy to leave the ministry, and as such is a matter of great concern. A healthy pastor makes for a healthy church. The black church must address the mental health of the black pastor in order "to remain relevant." "To discount clergy depression as a salient issue at this juncture in our religious history is to undermine the life and health of African-American congregations."[45] Black pastors cannot effectively lead churches while dealing with these issues without significant support. An example would be the growing number of black pastors living double lives to avoid a sense of insecurity or dealing with bi-polar mood disorder. Living double lives include having extra marital affairs and misappropriating funding from the church. These actions are a result of adverse emotional mental health. Taking steps towards addressing emotional mental health with the black pastor and the black church improves the future of the church and effectiveness in ministry.

Black pastors mostly identify themselves as evangelicals, and general statistics show that the numbers of evangelical pastors who are dealing with mental health issues have increased in recent years. The Francis A. Schaeffer Institute of Church Leadership

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[44] Wimberley, *Depression in African American Clergy,* 9.
[45] Wimberley, *Depression in African American Clergy,* 11.

Development surveyed 8,150 evangelical pastors in a random survey in 2016. This study was not specific to race. The following was discovered among them: thirty-five percent battle depression, twenty-six percent are overly fatigued, fifty-four percent feel overworked, and forty-three percent are overstressed. However, what is interesting about this survey is that eighty-eight percent have a "high view of Christ" and ninety percent feel honored to serve.[46] These pastors demonstrate the outlook that to suffer or sacrifice is worth it to serve God and the people of the church.

As reported by *The Christian Post*,[47] Lifeway Research conducted a pastoral attrition study of evangelical and black Protestant pastors in August through September 2021, and the results were telling of the sign of the times today. The study involved 1,576 pastors from evangelical and historically black Protestant churches. Of the pastors that left the ministry altogether, thirty-two percent said that they had a change in calling. Amongst this number, eighteen percent said they left because of conflict in their church and thirteen percent said they were burnt out. Other issues and problems reported amongst them were family issues, moral/ethical issues, illness, and personal finances. While many of these pastors indicated in the survey that they were successful in the

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[46] Richard J. Krejcir, "Statistics on Pastors: 2016 Update Research on the Happenings in Pastors' Personal and Church Lives," Schaeffer Institute of Leadership Development, 2016, accessed May 8, 2022, http://www.churchleadership.org/apps/articles/default.asp?blogid=4545&view=post&articleid=Statistics-on-Pastors-2016-Update&link=1&fldKeywords=&fldAuthor=&fldTopic=0.

[47] Leonardo Blair, "'Change in Calling,' Top Reason Black, Evangelical Pastors Quit: Study," *The Christian Post*, October 27, 2021, accessed December 17, 2022, https://www.christianpost.com/news/change-in-calling-top-reason-black-evangelical-pastors-quit.html.

ministry, the few that chose to quit indicated the feeling of being overworked and having their families impacted while being in ministry. Within the number surveyed, sixty-three percent said pastoring is overwhelming. A similar survey was conducted in 2015 and, in comparison, the pastors surveyed in 2021 showed an increase in the numbers who were stressed, experienced conflict within their churches, and made changes within their congregations and beyond. Change included moving to other churches and/or leaving ministry altogether.

The 2021 study also disclosed more interesting and revealing research regarding black pastors. Amongst the black pastors and other ethnicities, thirty-two percent said that their church had unrealistic expectations of them compared to twenty-two percent of the white pastors who completed the survey. Also, fifty percent of evangelical and black Protestant pastors surveyed said that they "feel that the demands of ministry are greater than they can handle."[48] When it comes to their pastoral image, ninety-six percent of the black pastors surveyed agreed that it was important to protect it. These statistics confirm the idea of a black pastoral superman, that is, to take on the task of pastoring regardless of the stress, and maintain credibility while attempting to have a vibrant and growing ministry.

To date there is no significant research specific to black pastors who pastor black churches; however, as most black pastors who pastor black denominational churches

[48] Lifeway Research, "Pastor Attrition Study 2021: A Survey of 1,576 Evangelical and Black Protestant Pastors," accessed December 17, 2022, https://research.lifeway.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Pastor-Attrition-Research-Report-2021.pdf.

identify mostly as evangelicals, they are included in the above statistics. To the insights from this survey here needs to be added the stressors that occur within the black church. There are certain areas of pastoring black churches, serving as a black pastor in black communities, and denominational works specific to the black church that are not as prevalent in other churches. This includes being on the front lines of social justice issues that affect the black community (police brutality, poverty, trauma, and substance abuse). This also includes servicing a congregation that deals with various areas of physical and emotional abuse higher than any other race. Traumatic experiences such as physical/sexual abuse, abandonment, and households led by one parent involve a high number of people within black churches. These stressors, complications, and dealings of the black pastors impact their persons and their ministries.

In her book, Wimberley places a call to African-Americans to address these statistics instead of seemingly ignoring them. Wimberley regards the black church's reliance on faith and view of mental health as taboo as the reasons why these statistics are being ignored. Simply put, black churches are not addressing these issues head on because they do not view mental health as a main topic of discussion. This is why Wimberley says that these issues need to be addressed more often within the black church for the sake of the future of the black church. Wimberley shares in her writing that the black church is addressing issues such as church plants, increased community involvement, and denominational work, but seems to avoid speaking to the issue hurtful to the future of the black church: a healthy black pastor. This is especially true as more black pastors deal with mental health issues, conditions, and symptoms as they serve.

Getting the black pastor well and/or creating a space for the black pastor to be less stressed and/or mentally drained will lay a strong foundation for a healthy black pastor and a healthy black congregation.

Wimberley's book also makes mention of many preeminent and well-known African-American pastors and their battles with mental health in as recent as the past ten to twelve years. Impactful black pastors who have and continue to wrestle with mental health issues while pastoring include Bishop Paul S. Morton, Bishop Eddie Long, Bishop Thomas Weeks III, Creflo Dollar, Dr. Jamal Bryant, Pastor Zachary Tims, and the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.[49] The record of these giants in the black church community reveal the fact that no one is immune from complications related to mental health while pastoring. Both Pastor Zachary Tims and Bishop Paul Morton self-disclosed their diagnoses with post-traumatic stress disorder, and Dr. King was quoted as admittingly battling with "two selves" in Michael Eric Dyson's book, *I May Not Get There With You: The True Martin Luther King.*[50] Wimberley writes that Bishop Paul Morton references stories of Bishop Charles H. Mason (founder of the Church of God in Christ) walking naked in the streets of Memphis while preaching. This alluded to the time when Bishop Mason relinquished his duties as head of the Church of God in Christ and allegedly suffered from a mental breakdown afterwards.[51] The pressure of leading people while maintaining a certain image or mask was a factor for these well-known

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[49] Wimberley, *Depression in African American Clergy,* 60, 66-67.
[50] Michael Eric Dyson and David L. Jagerman, *I May Not Get There With You: The True Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Free Press, 2000), 162.
[51] Wimberley, *Depression in African American Clergy,* 60.

black pastors as they ministered. In the case of Bryant and King, it led to extra-marital affairs. The pressure within them led to the creation of alter egos, personas opposite of their public ones. These alter egos may develop simply because it can become more comfortable to live outside of the "god-like" perfect pastoral image that the black church constructs for its black pastors. Black pastors will sometimes live opposite of this portrayed image or a double life in order to cope with expectations of being a superman imposed externally and internally. Later we will discuss Howard Thurman's emphasis on separating the "religious professional from the person."[52] This distinction must be made to prevent living out of character detrimental to the pastoral image. Wimberley contributes to this thought by stating that black pastors can spiral downward if they do not separate their "personhood from their pastoral function."[53] There has to be a distinct separation of the black pastor between the God-appointed man and the man of God. Even though the man was appointed by God and considered "anointed," he should still be considered as human. Black pastors must maintain the pastoral image with human limits to stay mentally fit.

The Black Pastor and their True Self vs. False Self

Wimberley discusses Dr. Donald Winnicott's "Theory of the True Self and False Self" to describe the false pastoral image that is currently happening with black pastors.[54] Winnicott developed this theory to describe how people create a false self to protect their

[52] Howard Thurman, "The Living Wisdom of Howard Thurman: A Visionary of Our Time," Audio Book (Boulder, CO: 2010).
[53] Wimberley, *Depression in African American Clergy,* 66-67.
[54] Wimberley, *Depression in African American Clergy,* 61-65.

inner, more vulnerable true self. In the early stages of life, particularly while in the mother's womb or in the infant stages of care with a mother or mother figure, there comes a comfortable sense of self that is false. It is false because it comes from the mother's or mother figure's persona, and is not authentically the person's. The second aspect of this theory is when the true self is threatened by the false self. One looks for meaning in the true self to validate their true self of being. However, people are constantly looking for feedback or praise to maintain the false self because that is what feels more comfortable than the authentic self. The false self becomes part of who and what you identify with but not who you really are. Winnicott describes in his theory that suicide can occur when the true self does not come into its own amongst the false self: "suicide is the destruction of the total self in avoidance of annihilation of the true self."[55] The image of strength, invincibility, and over-confidence in most cases for black pastors is part of the false self. Vulnerability or weakness can be a product of the true self that is a threat to the false self. This amongst black pastors can cause a mental breakdown, a deeply depressed state of mind, and even suicide.

Winnicott expresses in this theory that it is the environment or an influence of self from the outside that produces a false sense of who someone is. It is the mother or motherly role that has great influence in the beginning in developing this false image. A father's influence comes significant later as a male person.[56] All in all, it is the beginning, most personal, external influence that creates who we think we are. In

[55] Winnicott, *The Maturational Processes,* 143.
[56] Winnicott, *The Maturational Processes,* 142.

looking at this phenomenon, I relate the black church as common in the early influence of the black preacher/pastor in the infant stages of leadership and pastorate.

The black church culture in many ways creates influence intentionally. Some examples of this are building up pastors during the preaching/worship experience in the black church which is culturally referred to as "hollering back," the infamous "call and response" engagement between preacher and congregation. "Hollering back" is a common term in the black church for agreeing with the preacher as he preaches. This happens as the black pastor is preaching and the congregation openly agrees, offering such expressive affirmation as, "Talk PREACHA! GO 'HEAD NOW! AMEN!" Wimberly describes this as "God imagery during the preaching moment.[57] In other words, the black pastor while preaching appears as "God" to others in the pew and receives compliments as such. This outside influence also comes in the compliments and admiration as a family man, scholar, and as someone who always brings around god-like inspired energy/holiness. These influences can create a false image of a demigod or of a person who is "holier than thou" amongst others.

The "Fall"

A black pastor who does not have a strong mental capacity or a high regard for himself may cause himself to fall. In reference again to the Winnicott theory, the black pastor can suffer when the authentic self is in conflict with the false self. That is to say that a black pastor can struggle if he is not successful or perceives himself as unsuccessful in the areas of leadership, authority, preaching, and overall pastoring the

[57] Wimberley, *Depression in African American Clergy,* 82-84.

black church. Loss of authority or lack of control while pastoring can cause a self-inferiority complex amongst black pastors. This includes not being able to influence black congregants, not generating a following, not having authority, and not having support as pastor. Other examples of this are pastors who become depressed when, as so goes black church tradition, they do not get the lavish gifts/pastoral anniversaries, receive support in black communities, and experience growth both fiscally and physically within their congregation. The cultural tradition of the black church to celebrate the pastor with large monetary offerings, cars, and even a new wardrobe for self and families has created such an expectation with the black pastor that it affects him mentally when he is not celebrated as such. All of these factors can cause a black pastor to fall in embarrassment, depression, anxiety, and even suicide.

Wimberley describes the above as lack of self-awareness. As a black pastor is celebrated and honored (whether during the worship experience or for his service), he should be able to do so with, as Wimberley describes, "self-awareness that does not allow pastors to take themselves too seriously." A pastor who lacks self-awareness lives a life in the shadows of a persona they can only "hope" to maintain. Wimberley also asserts that pastors often "mask" themselves when these false personas are not maintained as a defense mechanism to appear unaffected.[58] This illustrates the creation of the false self, as enabled by the black church culturally, to have a potential of an emotional demise when threatened or feeling insecure. It is unfortunate, but I have experienced this myself,

[58] Wimberley, *Depression in African American Clergy,* 82.

and I have witnessed this emotional fall amongst other black pastors when not as supported by the churches they serve.

When there is not a strong following and the black pastor does not gain support from the church and potential members, he can feel less committed to God, his call, and the mission in pastoring the black church. A black pastor can feel as though, in the same light, that they have failed God. It could even be in the discovery of the authentic self that the black pastor is not as influential as he had set himself out to be. This can be detrimental to the black pastor's ego as he pastors. The loss of a following can indicate to a pastor that he is not fulfilling his call, is not effective or successful as a pastor, or is just not influential as a leader or a called man of God. These types of self-assessments can really affect a pastor psychologically.

Often, complications and the adverse effect of poor emotional health happens when reality sets in and the black pastor is reminded that he is human. As the black pastor realizes his humanity, he will no longer feel invincible and physically experiences the effects of mental strain. Henri Nouwen, in the book *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society,* assesses that most pastors/ministers have hurts, pains, and tribulations as a part of humanity and so are not exempt from such.[59] Black pastors resist vulnerability. Avoidance of human failure and human error causes an overextension of self and exerted stress.[60] The latter portion of Winnicott's theory comes to play when reality settles in and reveals the true/authentic self. This authentic self can be scary,

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[59] Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society.* (New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group,1972), 85-87.
[60] Crawford, "Serving Them is Killing Me," 9.

awkward, and less gratifying particularly when the church discovers it. Some examples are the church finding faults amongst black pastors and their families or issues within their families. Another example is when black pastors stop concentrating on ministry and preaching and become less influential and inspiring. Other examples include when membership declines or the giving decreases as black pastors can take that as a measure of no longing having positive influence over a congregation.

The realization of human error or a human impact via error or fault can cause a deep depression amongst black pastors, sometimes resulting in suicide. The shock and fear of failure may result in suicide because it is the slow reveal of human inadequacies of building a large and influential black congregation that can cause a dark depression. This is part of the intention of gaining a large following and increase membership. One can speculate that this was the case with Rev. Parker or any black pastor with a growing congregation. Once discovering that outside of church they are human, they are a father, a husband, and life is taking its toll, it can hurt with the realization that you are not the black pastoral superman.

Parker revealed some of his vulnerability in a sermon just prior to his death. Within this sermon he discussed prayer, seeking communication with God, and the lasting statement that he "didn't feel like God was hearing him."[61] This is an example of storytelling by the black pastor referred to by Edward Wimberly. Wimberly defines this

[61] Leonardo Blair, "Pastor Who Confessed: There are Times 'I Don't Feel Like God is Hearing Me' Kills Self as Congregation, Family Wait For Him on Sunday." *The Christian Post*, November 12, 2013, accessed December 1, 2020, https://www.christianpost.com/news/pastor-who-confessed-there-are-times-i-dont-feel-like-god-is-hearing-me-kills-self-as-congregation-family-waited-fo`r-him.html.

as the opportunity, through the telling of stories, to sort out the difficulties faced in life.[62] This is often done through preachment. Parker seemingly described his human battle of a spiritual relationship with God as he faced difficult circumstances. This can be difficult to endure as the revered man of faith in the black church.

Wynnetta Wimberley explains that in the case of black pastors, the false self creates this type of false pastoral image. Wimberley gives the interpretation of the infant being in a "psychic space in which the infant is protected without knowing that he/she is being protected."[63] She acknowledges the need of the black church not to meddle in the personal life of the black pastor. The old adage of "not airing dirty laundry" is common in the black church as it is supposed to protect the black pastor from the black church indulging too much in his personal business.[64] To even discuss the black pastor's potential mental health issues would be breaking the unwritten code of secrecy within the black church. This violation of "the code" would be to speak negatively against the "called man of God," which is ill-advised in the black church. It is, as Wimberley says, often met with idioms from the Bible such as not to touch the anointed ones and do the prophets no harm.[65] Most times, the black church reacts negatively when the black pastor has obvious mental health issues rather than seeking to get him help. Wimberley acknowledges that the black church almost hides or ignores the personal truths of the black pastor in crisis rather than helping him through the crisis. This negative reaction

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[62] Wimberly, *African American Pastoral Care*, 41.
[63] Wimberley, *Depression in African American Clergy,* 62.
[64] Wimberley, *Depression in African American Clergy,* 57.
[65] Wimberley, *Depression in African American Clergy,* 57.

only avoids a potential problem with which a black pastor is dealing internally. This, in the black church's view, prevents the pastor and the church from seeming weak and less dependent upon their faith for strength.

Wimberley's book is a charge for the black church specifically to address this issue of black pastors and their mental health. Black pastors are hurting and attempting to minister to hurting congregations. This is not beneficial to a thriving congregation: "The African American Christian community is not safe from harm from its depressed clergy leaders."[66] Not thriving is not fruitful for the African-American church, as its resilience has withstood much in America. When imagining the black preacher in America, the black church envisages a strong and domineering black male who is an advocate for the black community and provides hope for the hopeless within the black church. As Wimberley points out, this black male influence has been strong in the black community for years, dating back to the times of slavery.[67]

Too many black pastors are wearing "the mask," as Wimberley describes. This in turn is hurting themselves and the black church. "The mask" hides vulnerability, weakness, and is kept on amongst black pastors to protect a seemingly strong persona. Wimberley says that this is happening all too often in the black church. Pastoral masking is often used as a defense when the black pastor's personhood becomes threatened.[68] When the mask is left on, the black pastor can neither be his true self nor feel safe in doing so. The mask can become permanent as it can falsely become part of who they are

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[66] Wimberley, *Depression in African American Clergy,* 8.
[67] Wimberley, *Depression in African American Clergy,* 38.
[68] Wimberley, *Depression in African American Clergy,* 82.

(according to Winnicott) and can create a mental health crisis when the pastor tries to remove it. Wimberley suggests that the black church is an enabler for black pastors by falsely protecting them from their true selves, making them seem as though they are God, and not encouraging them to deal with their emotional health. Also, emphasizing the spiritual and healing nature coming from the black pastor during worship can enable them to feel as God. God gives the spiritual gift of anointing to the pastor to be intercessor for healing, prayer, and spiritual power. This is a gift given by God not man, but the black church has a tendency to build this up as man's gift alone. Wimberley refers to this as "conjuring, a magical tradition in which spiritual power is invoked for various purposes such as healing, protection and self-defense."[69] As the church potentially enables the black pastor during the preaching/worship, it can feed into the black pastor's "false self." A black pastor has to be careful not to allow this to feed into a perceived false God image but receive it as good and promising feedback of helping the congregation with a moving worship experience.

The Pressure

The expectation of the black congregation is to have a positive and holy image of their pastor, which adds pressure to an honest viewing of the black pastor as a man. It is because of this expectation that black pastors, as Wimberley points out, place pressure on themselves to conform to these expectations that are also influenced by their own mentors or other pastors that they admire.[70] This can make their own views of

[69] Wimberley, *Depression in African American Clergy,* 84.
[70] Wimberley, *Depression in African American Clergy,* 58.

themselves false in that they are living and being who the congregation expects them to be and not their authentic selves. Authenticity or the allowance to be human is not often available for black pastors. There is no place within the congregation for black pastors to gain self-care or have their lives nurtured for what it is they may be going through. Black pastors typically do not have a safe space to speak in confidence with one or more parishioners out of the fear of playing favorites in the congregation. Doing so runs the risk of losing respect based upon perceived favoritism. Therefore, most black pastors are finding mentors or other black pastors to trust and with whom to relate. These are important outlets to find some comfort while pastoring. There are limited opportunities for the black pastor to trust anyone with being human or to have an opportunity to be considered like the person in the pew or as another Christ follower attempting to live righteously.

The demands of pastoring create constant mental and physical strain. Thabiti Anyabwile finds that only a small number of pastors report being "happy and content in Christ, in their church, and in their home."[71] Many report constantly fighting depression and mental strain while dealing with parishioners. Furthermore, pastors report that disagreeing with congregational leaders about the "vision" and the direction that the church is headed can cause mental distress. Anyabwile assesses that more pastors are leaving their congregations because of that congregation's unwillingness or reluctance to

[71] Anyabwile, *Reviving the Black Church,* 105.

pursue the same direction and goal as the pastor.[72] With expectations of the pastor being high in the black congregation, the mental strain can be especially excessive.

Similar to Wynnetta Wimberley, Thabiti Anyabwile finds that the black church pressures the black pastor with high expectations. Part of the expectancy of the black church comes from the look toward hope for change. The black pastor is a part of this hurt population of people that has been traumatized and seeks hope for change. Anyabwile points out that the black pastor is carrying the load of others who have been hurt and in pain while dealing with his own issues of exhaustion, stress, and brokenness.[73]

The black church depends heavily on the wellness of the black pastor as discussed by both Wimberley and Anyabwile. The black pastor's ministry includes the concern for both the sacred and the secular regarding the black church and black people.[74] While this is needed, it is not always healthy for the black pastor as he leads and becomes overwhelmed with ministry. The multiple roles that black pastors play in the lives of black people and black communities are part of pastoring the black church and expected by the black church. Anyabwile points out that there are more expectations of black people for black pastors that are outside of biblical principles and ministry work. This includes multiple roles outside of priestly efforts for the sacred. The primary focus for pastors should be to preach and teach God's word and Jesus' mission. It is too often that the black congregation expects the pastor to lead community organizations (NAACP,

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[72] Anyabwile, *Reviving the Black Church,* 105.
[73] Anyabwile, *Reviving the Black Church,* 99.
[74] Anyabwile, *Reviving the Black Church,* 104.

National Urban League, for example), the denominational convention/governing body, or other activities/organizations outside of the local church's structure. This hurts the black church in that black pastoral leaders are not able to concentrate solely on preaching the word and providing ministry to the faithful.

Another observation made by both Wimberley and Anyabwile is that black pastors are not educated in areas of self-care and in areas of providing a balance to ministry in the black church. According to Anyabwile, more black pastors are becoming educated in predominantly white institutions and are not getting the training, cultural knowledge, and resources impactful for pastoring black congregations. He even questions whether this is appropriate in sending out a black pastor to lead black people.[75] Predominantly white institutions have limited resources specific to the cultural aspect of the black church, and so they are not addressing the areas of self-care, evaluation, and accountability especially needed for black pastors and the black church.[76] There is a culture within predominantly black seminaries and schools such as The Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, Georgia, and The Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology at Virginia Union University, that speaks to dealing with blacks in society, social justice, and ministry towards the trauma/hurting livelihood of black people. In the same light, fewer black pastors are attending seminaries known for teaching and placing emphasis on the culture of the black church. Some reasons include non-local proximity of the campus/institution, competitive admissions, and limited

[75] Anyabwile, *Reviving the Black Church,* 166.
[76] Wimberley, *Depression in African American Clergy,* 4.

resources. These seminaries are few and in limited parts of the country, which explains why admissions only allow for a certain number of students. More black pastors could benefit from attending these institutions in that they would be better prepared to handle ministering to the brokenness of predominantly black congregations.

The Fiscal Measure of Ministry as an Added Stress to the Black Pastor

Close to a majority of African-American pastors are "bi-vocational," serving their congregations and community while working a secular full-time job. Becky McMillan and Matthew J. Price surveyed and compared the service of black and white pastors from 2001 through 2005 on behalf of the Pulpit & Pew Research on Pastoral Leadership project sponsored by the Duke University Divinity School. This research was based on race (black and white) and gender was not made specific in comparing the two. The early part of the study was telling. It was reported in 2003 that forty-three percent of all African-American pastors are bi-vocational.[77] A survey in 2002 also reported that the average African-American pastor is servicing the church and its members in a seventy-two-hour work week, compared to forty-nine hours a week of their white counterparts.[78] McMillan and Price also reported that the black pastor's salary in a predominantly black congregation is less than that of the white pastor in a white congregation. This is true even though typically the black congregation tithes more. Black congregations also have larger congregations with a median attendance of one hundred compared to eighty-five

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[77] Becky R. McMillan and Matthew J. Price, "How Much Should We Pay the Pastor?: A Fresh Look at Clergy Salaries in the 21st Century," *Pulpit & Pew Research on Pastoral Leadership* (2003), 14.
[78] Becky R. McMillan, "What Do Clergy Do All Week? *Pulpit & Pew Research on Pastoral Leadership* 2 (2002), 9.

for whites.[79] Working full-time and pastoring a church congregation adds to stress and the detriment of mental health for black pastors. Black pastors are serving in ministry and working professionally more hours weekly in comparison with their white counterparts, and so, not surprisingly, their potential to lack stability in physical and mental health is higher.

The need to be bi-vocational, the need to prepare the church fiscally for its future, and the need to finance various ministries all create stress when it comes to pastoring the black church. Jackson Carroll reports in *God's Potters: Pastoral Leadership and the Shaping of Congregations* that seventy-eight percent of black pastors are in the pastorate as a second career, compared to sixty-seven percent of conservative white Protestant pastors and approximately forty-five percent of mainline Protestant pastors.[80] Carroll observes that black pastors were bi-vocational as early as the 1800s, both slaves and freedman.[81] Black pastors have also acknowledged investing their own funds into the ministry of the church as black churches are typically limited in financial resources.[82] Even though black congregations generally have a strong attendance, their monetary resources are limited because they depend on a membership whose own financial means are limited. As most black churches are reliant upon donations, tithes, and offerings from members, black pastors feel the pressure to grow attendance in order to maintain or improve the fiscal capabilities of the congregation. Studies indicate that depression in

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[79] McMillan and Price, "How Much Should We Pay the Pastor?," 15.
[80] Jackson W. Carroll, *God's Potters: Pastoral Leadership and the Shaping of Congregations* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2006), 74.
[81] Carroll, *God's Potters*, 80-81.
[82] Rogers, "The Stressors Black Pastors Experience," 87.

black pastors occurs when attendance declines because of the stigma of potential loss of membership.[83]

This is especially true in black church denominational settings considered "autonomous," which operate independently by a local board when compared with "connectional" churches or churches overseen by a governing regional or national body. Connectional and predominantly white churches such as the Catholics, Lutherans, and Episcopalians provide and pay into more benefits for their pastors, including retirement. The common reason reported for less financial support of black pastors is because the black congregations assume the black pastor has a secular job and is bi-vocational.[84] Black denominational churches, among them certain Baptist denominations and the Church of God in Christ, earn an average fifteen percent less than the black Episcopalians or black pastors in largely white Methodist denominations, for example.[85] Black pastors feel that they must work a secular job to receive a stable income and to support their families whereas the need for bi-vocationality is not as great for white pastors, as reported by McMillan and Price. As giving goes down in the autonomous church, the black pastor's salary also goes down and stress increases.

A more recent report in 2022 by David Eagle and Collin Mueller revealed that black pastors make less in salary than white pastors within the United Methodist Church (with an episcopal and connectional polity) in North Carolina and South Carolina. This report specifically noted the type of appointment of the pastor to a specific church

[83] Rogers, "The Stressors Black Pastors Experience," 52.
[84]Crawford, "Serving Them is Killing Me," 35.
[85] McMillan and Price, "How Much Should We Pay the Pastor?," 6-7, 15.

(mostly white versus mostly black) as to why the difference in salaries, yet the fact remained that black pastors were making less for doing the same amount of work as white pastors. The predominantly black churches within the study had limited resources, could only offer part-time appointments or pastoral positions, and expected the pastor to work another job. This reportedly creates ongoing insecurity and stress for black pastors.[86] Another factor within this study was the size of the churches. The predominantly white churches were larger than the predominantly black churches. Even the smallest of white churches were larger than the largest black church served by black pastors. It was reported that the black pastors are not only challenged in working with a smaller salary, but also with the demands from their conferences/governing bodies to do the same ministry work with fewer resources.[87] The black pastors in these areas had to work part-time jobs to make ends meet.

These statistics demonstrate that there is increasing pressure that comes with ministering as a black pastor in the black church or in a predominantly black church. With the growing number of issues in this country pertaining to African-Americans, the expectation of the involvement of the black pastor is growing. These statistics also demonstrate that many black pastors are doing more vocationally than "pastoring" the black church, which adds adversely to their mental stability and capacity. This includes working a secular job, handling more internal responsibility in the church, and the

[86] David Eagle and Collin Mueller, "Reproducing Inequality in a Formally Antiracist Organization: The Case of Racialized Career Pathways in the United Methodist Church," *American Journal of Sociology* 127, no. 5 (March 2022): 1532.
[87] Eagle and Mueller, "Reproducing Inequality," 1533.

increasing pressure of maintaining the ministry, the church, and their obligation to God. These numbers reflect the potential for a direct relationship between pastoring and mental distress for the black male pastor.

Black Pastors and the Call of Ministry

"Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock, and when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away" (I Peter 5:1-4, KJV). This scripture reflects the true and authentic call of the pastor which is to shepherd the flock. Any pastor should be able to take care of the sheep, preach, and minister as is pleasing in the sight of God. This reflects the original call to the elders of the church according to Peter. This same "call" of ministry should remain true to the black pastor. In today's world, the black pastor becomes mentally distressed as he deals with more issues outside of the church while attempting to minister within the church.

To put it plainly, black pastors have become more and more discouraged and frustrated with not being able to concentrate solely concentrate on their calling. The "call" is primarily to preach and teach the Word of God and lead others to Christ. The "call" primarily comes from Matthew 28:19: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (KJV). These pastors admit to have gotten away from the "call" and primary mission as a church leader to "preach, and teach God's Word and shepherd the sheep."[88] The demands of the

[88] Anyabwile, *Reviving the Black Church,* 104.

black church to be effective in community and church politics, as well as to be spiritually attentive to all of the flock, not only has become more stressful but also distractive from ministry.

Fear and Refusal to Show Vulnerability

The black pastor must appear strong and serve by way of faith and faith alone in the view of the black congregation. Black pastors are determined to look strong and not weak as they lead. Looking weak can be a sign of not working for congregation and community as is expected in the black church. Revealing emotional issues can make a black pastor seem vulnerable to his congregation, which in their view can make them appear not to be relying on faith as they lead. I now explore this concept as it relates to the outlook of the black pastor and the black church as it relates to emotional health issues. I also consider how this vulnerability may cause black pastors to feel as if they are not honoring God and being true to their call to lead the flock.

Taking on the role of disciple, black church leader, and pastor can be challenging. Within the black church, the pastor is not always prepared for the task at hand or know what to expect, but works feverishly for God and the benefit of the church. The burden and responsibility can be taxing. The black pastor aspires to be great for God and for the church.

If the black pastor is not careful, as he serves feverishly, he can become ambitious. This ambition is often demonstrated in black pastoral leadership/discipleship similar to the ambition demonstrated by James and John (sons of Zebedee) in Mark 10:35-45. These disciples had ambition to possess the same authority as Jesus but, as

Jesus points out, they are not fully aware of the sacrifice that comes with this authority. The black pastor has ambition for power, authority, and to be one of Jesus' agents for change; however, the task is sometimes overwhelming. For any pastor, the goal is to be successful. For black pastors, because the expectation is so great, the goal is to be even more successful. For some black pastors, any cause of ministry that falls short of a successful and bountiful church, or even a megachurch, can be deemed a failure. The effort in forming what is thought of as "successful" can be mentally draining.

The black pastor typically has the same belief system as his congregants regarding focusing on "divine intervention" instead of seeking professional help for mental distress. Some researchers have found that evangelical pastors seek help for their mental health by spending more time with God, praying, and fasting, versus utilizing a mental health practitioner.[89] This is certainly the case in the black church because spiritual practices are the safe space to seek support as opposed to seeing counseling professionals. Most black pastors identify with the evangelical church. The "stigma" surrounding blacks and mental health includes the distrust of the professionals, who most times are white, and the practices of counseling and healing being of a "nonspiritual" nature. This, theoretically, could cause a threat to the spirituality of the believer in the black church and community. An adversarial perspective of faith versus science is a very real mindset amongst many in the black church in which faith always is to win. Additionally, the view that psychotropic medication is not to be trusted is a myth in the black community that puts it

[89] Erik D. Salwen, Lee A. Underwood, Gabriel S. Dy-Liacco, and Kathleen R. Arveson, "Self-Disclosure and Spiritual Well-Being in Pastors Seeking Professional Psychological Help," *Pastoral Psychology* 66 (2017): 517.

faith in God and not in science. This is a commonly known and well-shared myth amongst black people. This, in part, is due to the history of African-Americans and science, particularly dating back to the Tuskegee Syphilis Study between 1932 and 1972 which killed hundreds of black men. This created history hurt. Black pastors have been at the forefront of these types of beliefs even attributing mental health issues to being "demonic" or the "work of the devil."[90]

Therefore, black pastors getting help for mental health issues is perceived as a sign of weakness and/or loss of faith for many in the black church. A study by Jennifer Payne indicated that black pastors identify depression, for example, as "hopelessness when one does not trust God."[91] Caucasian pastors were much less likely to have this perspective. In the same study, black pastors attributed the lack of spirituality to strained physical/emotional health rather than having an actual mental health issue. The black church has been a gathering of an oppressed people and has remained strong through weakness. Therefore, the leader, the black pastor, should never display any weakness. The black pastor is expected to be spiritually inclined and dependent on God and faith for the strength of self, making it difficult to convince a black pastor to be open and public about receiving help. There would be a fear of looking vulnerable, weak, and less dependent on God, therefore making it hard to lead the church.

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[90] Copeland, "African American Christian Senior Pastor's Beliefs," 185-87.
[91] Jennifer Shepard Payne, "Variations in Pastors' Perceptions of the Etiology of Depression by Race and Religious Affiliation: Findings from the Clergy Depressive Counseling Survey," *Community Mental Health Journal* 45, no. 5 (2009): 362.

The main difference between the black pastor and pastors in other communities of faith is trust! Most families or individuals regardless of race will seek help for their emotional mental health, whether it is through a mental health professional or with clergy. Most families and individuals with these issues trust clergy. Clergy have become first responders when it comes to emotional mental health. There is a financial aspect to this as, for the most part, help from clergy is free whereas one must pay a fee to go to the mental health clinic. Pastors have been intervening in the lives of depressed people for a long time.[92] The main difference is that African-Americans will take longer to seek help from mental health professionals because of lack of credibility (lack of black staff, perceived misunderstanding of cultural issues such as trauma), fear that there is something more medically severe, and lack of trust in a remedy (such as psychotropic medication or therapy). A common view in seeking help is that it is readily and openly available for all; this mindset is different in all of the black community, as it is not freely thought of in the same light, according to the research.

In today's age of trauma in the aftermath of the COVID 19 pandemic, the tragedies of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and too many others, mental health and addressing mental health has become a central part of living in all communities of color. In the article, "Clergy of Color Face Unprecedented Mental Health Challenges," Adelle M. Banks and Deepa Bharath discuss the complexity of minority pastors who minister in

[92] Jennifer Shepard Payne, "The Influence of Secular and Theological Education on Pastors' Depression Intervention Decisions," *Journal of Religion and Health* 53, no. 5 (2014): 1399.

these communities of color during this time.[93] With black pastors being a part of this community, it affects them personally and often while doing ministry. Blacks and other minorities pastoring amongst communities of color have revealed the following: fear and mistrust, and doubt with science, government agencies, and peacekeepers in communities. Blacks and other communities of color are not trusting doctors, police officers, and even government officials who provide the science and knowledge to help all communities. It is because of this mistrust that many minority pastors who serve these communities are stressed, burnt out, and/or mentally exhausted.

The Stigma

Treating mental illness is a stigma in the black community. Even though they are not mental health professionals, black pastors are viewed as such within the black church community. Black congregants have a tendency to view their black pastor as the elder or supreme helper with life's challenges. According to Jennifer Shepard Payne in a 2008 study, over fifty percent of the African-American church community sought advice from the senior pastor of their church in a "crisis situation."[94] These congregants expected the senior pastor to be strong enough to handle and expert enough to help address these situations. The black pastor is viewed as an "alternative" to physical/emotional health in the black community. Rather than resort to critical theorem or treatment modalities,

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[93] Adelle M. Banks and Deepa Bharath, "Clergy of Color Face Unprecedented Mental Health Challenges," *Religion News Service*, June 2, 2022, accessed December 17, 2022, https://religionnews.com/2022/06/02/clergy-of-color-face-unprecedented-mental-health-challenges/.

[94] Jennifer Shepard Payne, "Saints Don't Cry: Exploring Messages Surrounding Depression and Mental Health Treatment As Expressed By African American Pentecostal Preachers," *Journal of African American Studies* 12, no. 3 (2008): 217.

black pastors counsel based off lived experience. This is not healthy for both the black pastor and those that seek help: for the former because they are not getting the treatment they may need; and for the latter because lived experience can create transference or traumatize both the pastor and the congregant causing more mental strain. Furthermore, it can suppress the true emotional issue for the one in need and cause more mental stress for the pastor as he recalls his own mental health issue during counseling.

The essential advice is to "give it to God," "pray about it," or "turn it over to Jesus." This ideal expresses, as discussed earlier, that faith is the remedy for all including one's mental health. Essentially, this is the answer most in the black church seek, which is why they go to the black pastor. In the same light, black pastors cannot offer an expertise outside of the strength of this ideal because they, in turn, would look weak not to depend on faith. I do feel, and it is my opinion, that an extreme case of self-harming, suicidal ideation, or any act of violence should cause a black pastor to have the congregant seek professional help. Spiritual advice and encouragement validate the spiritual guidance of the black pastor and a strong foundation of faith of the one in need. A referral to professional help by the black pastor can cause the one in need to lose creditability in the black pastor as a person strengthened by faith and bring about a view of weakness because of the perception of less dependence on God.

The mental health stigma is amongst certain evangelical churches in similar ways. Some evangelical churches emphasize praying about physical/emotional struggles and that the devil is the likely source of these struggles. A 2020 article by Ian Lovett in *The Wall Street Journal* revealed that even though churches discuss mental health, many

congregations believe that any problem "reflects a spiritual deficiency or lack of faith in Christ."[95] This article also reported that a 2013 study by Lifeway Research found about half of evangelicals and other Christians believe that prayer can heal mental illness. More specifically, of the 1,001 people who completed the survey, thirty-five percent said that Bible study and prayer alone can help people overcome mental illness.[96] This article also reported that evangelical pastors were being terminated and forced to resign for revealing their battle with mental health and were even chastised for getting professional help. Mental health is commonly looked at as a spiritual problem amongst evangelicals.

Black pastors are not mental health professionals and most admittedly lack expertise in mental health science and psychotherapy. In general, seminaries offer courses in pastoral care, and black pastors are experienced in encouraging others to pray, fast, and lean on discernment and spiritual intervention. Pastoral care more relates to a spiritual guidance in ministering to a self-disclosed mental health problem. A study in 2017 reported that evangelical pastors generally spent more time in spiritual intervention to resolve their own mental health issues, including prayer and reading/meditating on the scriptures.[97] Many black pastors are the "gatekeepers" when it comes to assisting others

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[95] Ian Lovett, "'It's Like I Got Kicked Out of My Family.' Churches Struggle with Mental Health in the Ranks," *The Wall Street Journal*, January 20, 2020, accessed August 20, 2022, https://www.wsj.com/articles/its-like-i-got-kicked-out-of-my-family-churches-struggle-with-mental-health-in-the-ranks-11579547221.
[96] Bob Smietana, "Mental Health: Half of the Evangelicals Believe Prayer Can Heal Mental Illness," Lifeway Research, September 17, 2013, accessed June 7, 2020, https://research.lifeway.com/2013/09/17/mental-health-half-of-evangelicals-believe-prayer-can-heal-mental-illness/.
[97] Salwen, et al., "Self-disclosure and Spiritual Well-being in Pastors Seeking Professional Psychological Help," 517.

with emotional health problems. As alluded to earlier, the black pastor is highly regarded amongst the church and community, and many go to him prior to seeking professional help. A study in 2007 found that, in general, ministers refer parishioners to mental health professionals in times of crisis, suicidal risk in particular.[98] This is problematic as one can speculate that their parishioners are not getting help until it is too late or until the mental health issue has run its course into a life or death situation. These findings prove furthermore a lack of expertise amongst pastors in general when it comes to mental health and psychological caregiving.

The lack of education in the signs, symptoms, and awareness of mental health problems is concerning in the black community because of the high rate of trauma and mental health issues in that community. Researchers have discovered that African-Americans are not using outpatient mental health services as often as other populations of people.[99] The black pastor should become educated in the basic science of all mental health conditions and know the signs and symptoms of a mental health issue. This also includes being able to do, at minimum, a basic four to five question psychoanalytic assessment which inquires about self-harm, depression, and potential anxiety. This training can create more of a confident measure of knowledge of mental health and even enable self-awareness when they become emotionally challenged themselves.

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[98] Teresa L. Kramer, Dean Blevins, Terri L. Miller, Martha M. Phillips, Vanessa Davis, and Billy Burris, "Ministers' Perceptions of Depression: A Model to Understand and Improve Care," *Journal of Religion and Health* 46, no. 1 (2007): 134.
[99] Vetta L. Sanders Thompson, Anita Bazile, and Maysa Akbar, "African Americans' Perceptions of Psychotherapy and Psychotherapists," *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice* 35, no. 1 (2004): 19.

Coping

There is a distinctive difference between pastoral care and seeking professional help or therapy when dealing with mental distress. Black pastors walk a fine line between seeking and giving pastoral counseling and psychologically sound care. When distressed, a large number of black pastors seek help from a peer or another pastor because they do not see their emotional health as necessarily requiring intervention from a mental health professional. This is the same as how they pastor their parishioners. This comes from miseducation or from inadequate knowledge of the maintenance of mental health and emotional issues. In the Copeland research mentioned earlier, black pastors admitted that mental health training was not essential to their formal seminary training. These pastors admit having only been trained in pastoral or spiritual care. Admittedly, pastoral care counseling has been mistakenly done in place of professional psychological intervention for emotional health. Pastoral care, in many cases, specifically works through issues by biblical reference and not psychological modality. It is the "lived" experience which becomes helpful in fixing emotional health gone bad. A black pastor would rather seek out the advice of another black pastor instead of seeing a mental health therapist because the assumption is that a pastoral colleague has had similar experience.

Mentoring, whether receiving or giving, and connecting with pastoral colleagues is a big part of coping for any pastor. In general, emotional exhaustion comes from pouring out as a pastor/minister/clergyperson in service to the church. Benjamin Doolittle reports that mentoring and mentoring relationships protect against "emotional

exhaustion" as clergy have means to pour into others and gain valuable feedback.[100] Mentoring relationships give ongoing social support for the demands of ministry.[101] Mentoring and healthy relationships with peers present an opportunity for healthy connections outside of the church environment. This provides a healthy outlet for the black pastor. In the context of mentoring, the black pastor can be authentic and his true self, thereby fostering the true self outside of the false self. Doolittle reveals in a 2007 study about clergy burnout that acceptance and positive reframing gained socially can assist pastors to cope with emotional exhaustion. Ongoing emotional support is most helpful for the black pastor.

The "spiritual father," as he is more commonly referred to, helps to navigate the black pastor through hurt, mishaps, and troubled times. This mentor also helps to celebrate the good times and gives counsel when black pastors fall short of the expectations of the church.[102] "Without a spiritual dad, you have no sense of belonging," says Rev. George R. Tynes, author of *Wanted Spiritual Fathers,* and a black pastor of Truth Baptist Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.[103]

Black pastors often will make other pastors their "mentor" or "spiritual father," because they are seeking to be pastored themselves and learn from an experienced leader of the black church. Pastors depend upon this mentorship for guidance, confidence, and

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[100] Benjamin R. Doolittle, "The Impact of Behaviors upon Burnout among Parish-based Clergy," *Journal of Religion and Health* 49, no. 1 (2010): 93.
[101] Doolittle, "The Impact of Behaviors," 94.
[102] Benjamin R. Doolittle, "Burnout and Coping among Parish-Based Clergy," *Mental Health, Religion, and Culture* 10, no. 1 (2007): 36.
[103] George R. Tynes, *Wanted: Spiritual Fathers!: This is a Call to Seasoned Pastors to Take on the Role of a Spiritual Father* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris Publishing, 2014), 10.

direction/guidance when in a complex situation or facing a difficult pastoral issue. However, often these pastors turn into their own self-proclaimed therapist because of perceived knowledge and comfortability. In the end, this turns out to be "pastoral care" amongst pastors and does not get to the true root of a potential mental health issue. This sense of pastoral care amongst pastors does not properly assess or give professional self-care suggestions/methods when there is a potential mental health issue. It is very important that black pastors sort out whether they seek social support or guidance or are facing a deeper issue that deals with emotional/mental health. Mentors should also assist with establishing a boundary between pastoral care, moral support, and clinical counseling, and know when to refer to a mental health professional. Pastoral care is not mental health counseling and it is important to distinguish the two.

The Struggle of Following

There seems to be a relationship between the spiritual disciple or follower and the idea of weakness. Judas is a disciple who can be referenced here in speaking to following and weakness. Kim Paffenroth (author of *Judas: Images of the Lost Disciple*) posits that Judas felt that his suicide would be "justified" due to his failure as a disciple.[104] Paffenroth explains that Judas was a "gnostic or a "spiritual villain." The same can be said, as Paffenroth describes, about Cain, Esau, Eve, and the serpent. In the case of Judas, even though he is considered a villain, his betrayal helped Jesus "return to his spiritual, nonfleshly, heavenly home," giving us (believers) revelation of God.

[104] Kim Paffenroth, *Judas: Images of the Lost Disciple* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 61.

Paffenroth speculates that Judas was entrusted with the spiritual truths of Jesus being of God, and given this knowledge because he was a disciple, a follower of Christ.[105] While this is only speculation, it is inferred from the scriptures that Judas could not face the innocence of Jesus and his betrayal and so he committed suicide. Judas "speaks" in Matthew 27:4 (KJV), "I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood." Suicide would avoid the disgrace and embarrassment as a weakened vessel, one who followed Jesus.

There are black pastors that have made this same escape (suicide) to avoid weakness in front of their congregations. One example mentioned earlier is Rev. Teddy Parker, Jr., who pastored a fast-growing black congregation in Macon, Georgia. It was reported that Parker was battling with depression privately and did not make his church aware. Rev. Parker and Pastor Dr. E. Dewey Smith, Jr., had a pastoral mentor/spiritual father and son relationship. One could speculate that Parker could not be open with his church. One can also speculate that this was because Parker wanted to maintain the illusion of being a pastor of strength and faith.

In recent years there have been other pastors of large congregations or megachurches who have committed suicide citing mental health issues. They include Jarrid Wilson (pastor of Harvest Christian Fellowship Church, Riverside, California), Scott Capp (pastor out of Illinois), and Jim Howard (lead pastor of Real Life Church, Valencia, California). These pastors camouflaged their depression from their congregations. Their families, particularly their wives, and close church affiliates, all say

[105] Paffenroth, *Judas,* 62.

that they never saw signs of potential suicide. All of these men described depression as a demon that, no matter how much they tried to suppress it in the past, remained a factor in their lives. These above-listed names were prominent pastors whose suicide brought this issue to light amongst other pastors in similar age groups and in congregations across the country. Pastor Jim Howard battled with "mental health challenges" prior to his suicide and spoke about this battle publicly but lived with it privately.[106] The January 2020 edition of *The Wall Street Journal* revealed that Pastor Scott Capp only communicated with a few close people about his battle with bi-polar disorder before committing suicide. The same article also revealed that Pastor Jarrid Wilson killed himself after very privately battling with depression and was the third well-known pastor in Southern California to do so in just over a year.[107]

In summary, it is a goal to encourage black pastors to be honest with themselves before they pastor and as they pastor. Black pastors should invest in themselves for the benefit of being a more effective black pastor for black people. This includes seeking knowledge, course work, certification, and partnerships in the areas of self-care, mental health, and trauma in underserved, impoverished, and urban communities. A black pastor should be prepared for what the expectations are from the African-American congregation. A black pastor should be prepared to lead with total involvement in the lives and communities of black people. A black pastor should do this with the idea that

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[106] Leonardo Blair, "After Struggle With Mental Illness, Megachurch Pastor Jim Howard Fatally Shoots Himself," *The Christian Post*, January 28, 2019, accessed December 1, 2020, https://www.christianpost.com/news/after-struggle-with-mental-illness-megachurch-pastor-jim-howard-fatally-shoots-himself.html.
[107] Lovett, "'It's Like I Got Kicked Out of My Family.'"

they are a follower and disciple of God, using God as a divine model to lead. A black pastor must set human limits not to crossover from being a spiritual individual to thinking of himself as a person of the divine or God. This will prevent a messianic mindset. African-American pastors seek their relationship with God and their positioning in the church to lead the people of God. This essentially is why faith is the reference point for healing in most cases.[108] It will also promote self-care because as they set their human limits and are aware of them, they will know once they become too extended. All of these things require that black pastors be authentic and honest with themselves.

[108] Copeland, "African American Christian Senior Pastor's Beliefs," 223.

CHAPTER 3: WHAT'S POSSIBLE FOR BLACK PASTORS

Followers are Human

The Bible mentions the role of the disciples and their purpose to follow Christ: to imitate and repeat his teachings, encourage repentance, the saving of souls, and spread the gospel. The call Jesus made to the disciples was to "follow him"; for example, the Gospel according to Matthew makes multiple references to this invitation (e.g., 4:19, 8:22, 9:9). Commentator Michael Joseph Brown describes Matthew 8:22 as a deeply serious and uncompromisingly radical call to discipleship.[109] In Matthew 28:16-20, Jesus gives the great commission and purpose to the disciples: a discipleship to teach, lead, and be an example to the teaching of the gospel. Paul further gives the purpose of spiritual leaders in Ephesians 4:11-12 (KJV): "And he gave some apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." The New Testament scriptures make the call to follow Christ and its purpose obvious with Christ himself serving as the model and example.

Black pastors should follow Christ as disciples. The key is remembering they are disciples and not Christ the Messiah. Again, the messianic mindset can cause black pastors to think they are invincible, but black pastors must remember they are human and remain humble servants as Jesus instructed the disciples. This humble and human

[109] Michael Joseph Brown, "The Seriousness of Discipleship," in *True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary*, ed. Brian K. Blount, Cain Hope Felder, Clarice Jannette Martin, and Emerson B. Powery (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 97.

mindset must be kept at the forefront in leading the waiting congregation of the black church, the same as the disciples were to serve others alongside Jesus. I had a black pastor tell me once, prior to pastoring my first church, that as a pastor you will be closer to God than ever before. All pastors are disciples of Christ and should follow and live the life of Christ closely as they lead. When black pastors become distracted or succumb to stress, depression, and emotional trauma, they lose sight of their purpose and their leadership. The effort of trying to imitate Christ to "perfection" can cause failing emotional health.

The disciples Judas and Peter give us an example of followership amid struggle as they deny Christ. Both disciples are loyal until defining moments test how loyal they are. We see in the Gospels, Matthew 27 and Mark 14 in particular, their personal struggles as they are both confronted with their affiliation with the Messiah. This confrontation leads Judas to suicide and Peter to repentance. It is not until they confront their own struggles that they realize the innocence of Jesus and that he came to fulfill what was foretold. Jesus personally picked these men to follow him. They were to follow the Messiah as disciples and be obedient to the call of following. Both Judas and Peter were human and, in the end, were subject to their human emotions and feelings as they followed Christ.

Black pastors must keep in perspective that they are "followers" of the example Christ set forth in the scriptures. This is not easy while pastoring the black church. An example of this is when a black pastor believes he has a vision or goal given to him by God. If the church membership or leadership does not accept this vision or goal, the pastor may be disappointed, frustrated, or even angry (as was mentioned earlier by author

Anyabwile). In this case, black pastors must remember that they are human and not everyone will accept what they propose before the church. They do not have the divine power to convict the minds of people as God but they do have the power to convince and model the example of Jesus to explain what God has placed on their heart. In this example and for others, black pastors will save themselves mental distress if they remember that they are followers and human, and that church members will not always accept their suggestions. Within the grueling demands of the black church, the black pastor must keep the perspective of the follower in mind.

For black pastors it can be hard to follow God amid struggle and rejection. It can be hard to follow knowing that (to their minds) pleasing God is at stake. This is again demonstrated by Peter and Judas. Peter and Judas attempt to demonstrate being loyal to Jesus until they are faced with adversity, for example, a need for money (silver), or a need for protections amongst those who sought to crucify Jesus and anyone who followed him. Jesus comments on rejection to the disciples as they go out to minister: "and whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet" (Matthew 10:14 [KJV]). Black pastors should not take rejection and non-acceptance to heart. Maintaining the mindset of a "follower" will keep black pastors on the trajectory of serving in a healthy emotional manner. This prevents the thought process of being a perfectionist and not accepting the possibility of failing. The potential of failing would be more accepted as the black pastor realizes that possibility is part of following. Black pastors must realize that in leading it is important to continue to follow God.

Lesson from Repentance and Reconciliation

Kim Paffenroth and William Klassen discuss and contrast the moment of repentance by Judas and Peter. Klassen talks about Judas' and Peter's repentance as a part of their followership of Jesus. This includes essentially being a part of God's plan of discipleship as they follow Christ. Paffenroth emphasizes the love Judas and Peter have for Jesus within their repentance.[110] Klassen points out repeatedly that Judas' repentance was in divine order. It is interesting that Klassen attributes Judas' trauma to God's will. Klassen also points out Jesus knowing of Peter's denial and repentance, as is explained in Mark's Gospel, as part of God's will and the fulfillment of scripture.[111] Paffenroth gives this same perspective as she describes Judas' handing over of Jesus and later repentance as part of his spiritual allegiance to the Messiah. More simply, Paffenroth explains that as Judas repented and ultimately succumbed to suicide, he (Judas) did so trusting it to be in accordance with his discipleship and that his betrayal would be justified as he returned to a "spiritual, nonfleshly, heavenly home."[112] These authors both illustrate that the repentance of Peter and Judas, even though done outwardly, internally resonated in their followership of the Messiah. These authors both point out how suicide was a result of the repentance of Judas and the trauma of denial as a result of Peter's repentance as both relate to their public betrayal of Jesus.

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[110] Paffenroth, *Judas*, 64-66.
[111]William Klassen, *Judas: Betrayer or Friend of Jesus?* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 84.
[112] Paffenroth, *Judas*, 61.

Klassen describes the repentance and remorse of Peter and Judas as part of the lament that affects them spiritually. He proposes that the Gospel writer Matthew indicates that as Peter weeps he finds his way to repentance whereas Judas commits suicide as part of his remorse in seeking spiritual redemption.[113] Klassen suggests that Matthew considers Judas a friend of Jesus even in his taking of his own life and not as a betrayer as the other Gospel writers have a tendency to portray. Judas' suicide is "part of the Jesus story" per the Gospel writer Matthew.[114] Paffenroth describes Judas as the "enlightened follower" of Jesus according to Matthew 27.[115]

Judas' repentance in Matthew 27 accompanies his effort to reconcile the potential betrayal. Matthew 27:3 describes Judas attempting to return the ransom he gains from handing Jesus over once considering the spiritual stronghold of what took place. Paffenroth says that Judas knew that Jesus was innocent and understood the real heavenly reality "that Jesus was not of the flesh."[116] Both authors offer that Judas' repentance and later demise at his own hands was his attempt to spiritually make a return to a heavenly place to reconcile wrongdoing. However, the desire to repent and reconcile with God for wrongdoing does not have to result in suicidal demise such as Judas chose.

Repentance and reconciliation do not have to come in the form of suicide and the denial of Christ. These authors demonstrate the reaction to repentance and reconciliation that both disciples felt was justifiable and warranted, and they took their actions

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[113] Klassen, *Judas,* 105.
[114] Klassen, *Judas,* 107.
[115] Paffenroth, *Judas,* 59.
[116] Paffenroth, *Judas,* 61.

accordingly. However, I would view in reading this account of scripture that both actions were unnecessary. Both authors illustrate that the actions were part of the Jesus story to reveal Jesus as the Son of God. The suicide by Judas and the repentance by Peter took place because of being close to Jesus as handpicked disciples (followers) and as ones who walked physically beside him. One could speculate that the action, as a result of their repentance and reconciliation, was due to their lack of knowing what it meant to be a true follower of the Son of God. As a follower of God, the disciples should have realized that even after the betrayal and denial of Jesus Christ, that God provides grace as they repent. Black pastors must realize that God's grace is available to them and potential failure should not cause suicide as of a result of repentance and the feeling of failing God and the people of the black church.

Jesus illustrates in Matthew 26: 21-35 (KJV), that even as the disciples were the disciples, they still do not know the end outcome of Jesus' life, God's will, and the meaning it would have on humankind. Jesus comments in this scripture that he would be betrayed, and knew the one who would betray him, and gave this information to Peter. No matter how much Peter denied the possibility of betrayal, in the end he would still deny him. This account reveals that the disciples were not aware of the circumstance, the meaning, and significance of the betrayal of Christ. Judas and Peter were not aware of the significance of their betrayal and its impact on their own lives. Black pastors, in the same light, must be aware of the potential fall as it relates to following God and its impact on their God-inspired ministries in the black church.

Klassen and Paffenroth remind the reader of the spiritual meaning of being a disciple. Klassen illustrates that the repentance and remorse by Peter and Judas was a completion of their discipleship. Klassen, for example, gives the assessment that Judas was the first "witness" to the innocence of Jesus. This is true as Judas realizes Jesus as the Messiah, the man that had done no wrong as the authorities took him. This depiction validates the definition of a disciple as a true "witness" to Jesus as the Messiah.[117] Paffenroth points out that Peter's denial and passionate repentance was part of the fulfillment of Jesus' words and ultimate handing over to the authorities per Mark 14:27-31.[118] Both authors relate the repentance and attempt to reconcile as part of the fulfillment of Jesus ministry, arrest, and ultimate crucifixion.

Additional Reflections on Peter and Judas

Peter and Judas were two disciples who identified with Jesus differently while laboring with Jesus in spreading the gospel. The Gospels depict Judas as one close to Jesus and a follower. Although Judas was challenging, he quietly served his role. Peter had an outward expression that was openly inquisitive to Jesus. Peter was not the follower Judas was. The above is illustrated by Tom Thatcher in "Jesus, Judas, and Peter: Character by Contrast in the Fourth Gospel," where he points out that in the initial introduction of Judas in John 6 we can observe the quiet acceptance of the declaration that one of the twelve would betray Jesus. Thatcher then gives contrasts to this account

[117] Klassen, *Judas,* 174.
[118] Paffenroth, *Judas,* 114.

by describing Peter's outspokenness to deny the rejection of Jesus as genuine but "imperceptive."[119]

Furthermore, Thatcher indicates that Peter did not understand the control structure of his relationship with Jesus as Jesus rejects him in John 6:70. Thatcher also points out another example in John 13:24-38, where he describes Judas as receiving the announcement of betrayal from Jesus as quietly going out into the night (verses 27-30). There was no action, no questioning by Judas as described by Thatcher; he received the command and departed. In comparison, Thatcher says that Peter was not receptive to the command of Jesus (John 13:34-38) and called it into question. Though Judas did not realize the power of his resistance of betrayal, he received Jesus' command. Peter, in comparison, seemingly did not realize the power or the significance of Jesus' plan and was not as obliging or accepting as Judas.[120]

Peter and Judas demonstrate a hard acceptance of a "fall" or mistake in the denial and betrayal of Jesus Christ. They do not understand Jesus as the one and only true Messiah until the betrayal and denial. An acceptance and/or acknowledgement of denial and betrayal turn into an emotional repentance for Peter and a suicide for Judas. Their commitment to serve and be a part of the Jesus ministry made their denial and betrayal devastating. In contrast, the black pastor becomes just as distraught at the thought of failing God after a strong effort of serving in the black church.

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[119] Tom Thatcher, "Jesus, Judas, and Peter: Character by Contrast in the Fourth Gospel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153, no. 612 (1996): 441.
[120] Thatcher, "Jesus, Judas, and Peter," 443-44.

Thatcher goes on to say that Peter's sincerity in following Jesus kept him "clean" or innocent in the sight of God because of not foiling Jesus' plan. This as a response made Peter's repentance after the death of Jesus generate a calling to continue the mission of spreading the gospel.[121] In comparison, the overwhelming hypocrisy of Judas led to his suicide and demise, according to Thatcher. The idea here was that these were two disciples with different hearts to serve and remain obedient to Jesus and their own role as a disciple.

There is struggle amongst Peter and Judas as followers and disciples of Jesus Christ in the end. Judas becomes closer to the divine as he struggles with his betrayal. Peter repents and draws closer to the divine in the denial of Christ. The struggle of denial and betrayal develops more of a spiritual awakening amongst Judas and Peter. Judas demonstrates this in Matthew 27:4 (KJV) when he recognizes Jesus as "innocent." Peter demonstrates this in the remembrance of Jesus' words being fulfilled after the denial of Christ in Matthew 26:75, Mark 14:72, and Luke 22:62. Seemingly, Jesus is not recognized as the Messiah until this moment of remembrance and repentance.

Applying the Stories of Judas and Peter

The black pastor must remember that he is a follower of Christ, a disciple of the gospel. The black pastor should remember that mistakes will happen, the fall will likely come, and disappointments will occur, but this is all the human aspect of pastoring. The realization of mistakes and acknowledging a fall must be a reminder of being human. Acknowledgement of failure should prevent further mental strain, self-harm, failing

[121] Thatcher, "Jesus, Judas, and Peter," 448.

health, and bad choices. It is at that point that knowing a pastor is a follower should bring the realization that a person is neither perfect nor the Messiah.

The black pastor must also remember that, like the people of the congregation, he is a child of God. Thurman says, "the psychological effect on the individual of the conviction that he is a child of God gives a note of integrity to whatever he does." I Timothy 3:1 says, "This is a true saying, if a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work." Both Thurman and the scriptures reflect on operating within God's grace while serving. Thurman explains that a man must move ego out the way and remain grounded in the integrity of service. In doing so, man's gifts and "intrinsic powers" will be displayed.[122] Black pastors must mentally keep in mind that they are covered by God's grace and that God is in control as they serve.

Knowing that God is in control relieves stress. The struggle to serve graciously, honestly, and effectively would be easier once realizing God is in control. Black pastors should remain close to God while serving throughout their ministry. The closeness to the divine releases the pressure of serving and also prevents declining emotional health. One can speculate that Judas and Peter did not get close to the divine until they made mistakes. They did not realize the measure of the man in Jesus that they were following. They also did not seem to recognize that the work/service they were doing was within the plan of God for the sake of the kingdom. It is the work or service that should empower black pastors to serve while remaining healthy and psychologically fit. If black pastors

[122] Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 43.

maintain a close relationship with God, they can lead devoutly, knowing that God is on their side and not stress about the task at hand.

Definition of Success

"Success drives the ministry and appearing successful provides the minister's sense of self-worth" says author Thabiti Anyabwile.[123] Success can build into that "false self" according to Winnicott's theory. True success for every church should be measured by the biblical paradigm of service. This includes the pastor using his spiritual gifts, tutelage, training, and leadership to enhance the kingdom of God. Success should drive the ministry of the church itself, not the pastor. When the black pastor bases his own self-worth off of success, he is doing a disservice to God and the people of the church. This is because the pastor is not there for himself but appointed by God for the benefit of the kingdom of God.

There is a "fear" black pastors have of disappointing God, the black church, and black people by not fulfilling their call. Black clergy take pastoring very seriously as it relates to God and the people. Not being successful at pastoring can cause a black pastor to question his call to God and the people. Failing in the black pastor's own self perspective could create emotional shame. This again goes back to the times of slavery. As an advocate, representative, and mediator for the slaves on the plantation, the black pastor in that context felt pressure not to misrepresent and let the people down. As an advocate and community leader, during oppressed times in the civil rights era and in the

[123] Anyabwile, *Reviving the Black Church*, 112.

struggle of today, most of the black community are dependent upon the black pastor inside and outside of church ministry.

The purpose of ministry found in Matthew 28:16-20 as stated by Jesus and in Ephesians 4:11-12 by Paul should measure success. The measurement of true success is not numbers, but, as Jesus and Paul communicated in the scriptures, it is how effective the black pastor is equipping others by the spreading and teaching of the gospel. In the same light, fulfillment to self should come in equipping the waiting black congregation. Equipping black congregations will create better communities, will lessen trauma amongst the congregation, and will heal the hurt/pain of black people. Black pastors should be able to minister effectively while making their mental health and self-care a priority as they work towards success. This should be the goal of every black pastor.

Ambition is Human

In Mark 10:35-45, James and John have ambition to ask for power; however, Jesus makes it known that the task comes with sacrifice. Jesus references sacrifice as he teaches that not everyone can partake of or be chosen for the true sacrifice (crucifixion) for all. Jesus says not everyone can "drink of the cup" that he drinks or maintain the baptism that he does. In referencing this scriptural passage, commentator Emerson Powery states that sacrifice has historically meant suffering for African-Americans. Suffering and sacrifice has constituted "damaging effects" for African-Americans, as most times done so on behalf of a cause. He further explains that suffering/sacrifice is

rhetoric for the powerful among black people.[124] African-American pastors have ambition to be impactful in their pastorate but are not always up to the true sacrifice that comes with that responsibility. As a result, this can create overexertion of self, unsuccessful church leadership, and failing health. When black pastors do not take care of themselves and remain physically and mentally healthy, they are a disservice to their church and to God. This is because as part of the call they are responsible for the service to God and to the people that they serve.

Black churches should have a ministry or subset strictly dedicated to the black pastor. The goal of this ministry would be to assist the pastor in service, provide opportunities of rest, relaxation, and meditation, and finally arrange for co-ministry leaders who are tasked with some of the priestly duties (preaching, prayer, and Bible teaching) of the church. This ministry would empower the black pastor to serve graciously while healthy, and prevent the view of weakness by the congregation. The congregation would feel more empowered to do ministry and the help would keep ministry strong in the community.

Impacting can mean power for many black pastors. Power can create ambition and an ambitious black pastor can develop a "messianic" mindset. Merriam-Webster defines "messianic" as "of or relating to a messiah." It also defines the term as "marked

[124] Emerson B. Powery, "The Third Prediction and Misunderstanding," in *True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary*, ed. Brian K. Blount, Cain Hope Felder, Clarice Jannette Martin, and Emerson B. Powery (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 142.

by idealism and an aggressive crusading spirit."[125] The black church enables this mindset in the black pastor. This is especially true as the black pastor leads in communities, holding various responsibilities and overseeing social justice initiatives. This is also true in the preachment or preaching moments of the church. The black church especially recognizes the presence of the Holy Spirit within the black pastor in the communal worship experience. The black pastor can preach the word at a level that heightens emotions and is dramatic in such a way that the people in the pew receive it as strong signs of the presence of the Holy Spirit. This, at times, is dangerous because the person in the pew can reference the black pastor as the Holy of Holies and even as God.[126] Obviously the black pastor is not God but the black church can build his spiritual gifts up to receive him as such or perceive him as a "holy" extension of God who can do no sin. This type of response and feedback from the black church has the capacity to make a black pastor feel infallible or invincible. More simply, as the black pastor preaches with power and conviction, the black church tends to build him up as "God" in worship because of perceived anointed power. As the black pastor leads fervently and preaches well, he can build a major sense of false self that alters behavior and ministry.

The black church also enables the messianic mindset of the black pastor in their honor and respect for black pastors. The tradition of the black church is to serve the black pastor and to serve him and his family with high regard. This can create a sense of entitlement and/or a high authoritative self-complex. We see plenty of "double honor" in

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[125] "Messianic," Merriam-Webster.com (2022), accessed December 17, 2022, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/messianic.
[126] Wimberley, *Depression in African American Clergy*, 90.

the black church when it comes to the black pastor in respect of I Timothy 5:17 (KJV). Many black churches reference this scripture as it simply states, "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor." Honor for those in authority, particularly the black pastor, is expected in the black church.[127] Black pastors must be careful to not misinterpret this high regard for authority. Timothy Witmer says about pastors, "our sinful tendency is either to abuse authority or to neglect its proper use," and observes that the proper use of authority is to serve the well-being of those under the care of the pastor.[128] Therefore, with the overabundance of honor the black church has for the black pastor, he must be careful not create a strong sense of self or abuse the authority which comes from it.

The black pastor should find gratification ministering to others as a servant, not as one ambitiously in power and authority. The focus within the black church should be on ministry and serving the people. To be overly ambitious oversteps the true call to pastor in serving others. Ambitious pastors negatively seek power and again build up the false self instead of the righteous authenticity of being a minister in ministry. In Mark 10:42-45, Jesus speaks of the gentile unbelievers, the non-Christians, as those who seek power over others, which is what the disciples should avoid. Jesus expresses in verse 45 that disciples are servants. In the same scripture, Jesus tells the disciples that only he, as the Messiah, will suffer through sacrificing himself for all humankind, and that they (the

[127] Anyabwile, *Reviving the Black Church*, 123.
[128] Timothy Z. Witmer, *The Shepherd Leader: Achieving Effective Shepherding in Your Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2010), 93.

disciples) will suffer of self for purification for the glory of God.[129] This scripture describes a true disciple as one who serves humankind to the glory of God but not as the Messiah. Therefore, black pastors should not be ambitious for power but be as servant to many.

The black pastor should keep in mind that he is a servant while avoiding and refuting a possible messianic complex. When black pastors receive the "double honor" in the black church, a sense of false self and entitlement can come as they are being "served." This can create arrogance and a false notion that the church should serve him because he is the revered pastor and leader. However, as they are disciples, they should follow the principle of Jesus to be a servant first. Jesus says in Mark 10:45, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (NIV). Jesus, in this verse, not only talks about serving but the commitment to serve. This is the ultimate example of service for any disciple of Christ. Jesus here describes that he is giving his life out of love for others as a servant. Black pastors should remain humble in being a servant to the black congregation and not become ambitious for power and control within the ministry of the church and in the wider community.

According to Pastor J. Alfred Smith, Sr., Jesus lost the commitment of the twelve disciples who deserted him even though he (Jesus) suffered for them.[130] This demonstrates the lack of commitment the disciples had to serving, as Jesus emphasizes in

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[129] *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 1916.
[130] Martha C. Taylor, *From the Heart of a Pastor: J. Alfred Smith, Sr.* (Bloomington, IN: WestBow Press, 2020), 67.

Mark 10:45. A black pastor must understand the commitment that comes with pastoring. This commitment should be as dedicated as Jesus' commitment of crucifixion on the cross as sacrifice for us all. However, Jesus is, again, the model for commitment and service. A black pastor must remember that as a disciple of Christ, he is to model the ministry of Jesus. The disciples had to recognize that they serve within the model as an example of service and ministry. Black pastors must also recognize the same. The black pastor must be careful to not minister as if the ministry is set forth solely by his own doing and not inspired by God. Having awareness of this fact sets human limits with the black pastor as a "religious professional" who is human.

Struggle and Human Limits

Individual struggles draw us closer to God, the divine, and God's purpose according to Howard Thurman in Chapter 5 of "The Living Wisdom of Howard Thurman."[131] Thurman describes that one must go through struggle to discover what is meaningful about one's own life. Struggle strips down a person to what is precious to provide more meaning to life after such struggle. He contends that one can only feel more of the presence of God through struggle. This thought process has the capacity to make struggle purposeful amongst black pastoral leaders. As black pastors suffer internally, they may find themselves closer to God. Thereby, black pastors may deem their internal struggles as useful and sacred as they draw them closer to the divine.

[131] Thurman, "The Living Wisdom of Howard Thurman" (Subsequent references to Thurman in this section are from this audio book).

Thurman points out the purpose of struggle can be perceived as coming directly from God. "Struggle is relief that allows us to come into the presence of God." This same type of relief can reveal how committed a pastoral leader is to the "call" and to being a servant to God. Thurman gives the example of Jacob's struggle with the angel in Genesis 32:30 (KJV) as he (Jacob) describes the aftermath as bringing him close to God "face to face" alongside a comfort of preservation. Black pastors can get comfortable in their struggle. This is because it is a result of their loyalty towards their call and God. Struggle to a hard-working black pastor is part of their faith and a part of devoted sacrifice because of their call to ministry.

The "religious professional," says Thurman, must remind himself that he is still "a person." Black pastors sometimes do not see themselves as human, but, in the end, need reminders of such. Being human causes the black pastor to suffer as everyone does when it comes to life and what life brings. This includes distractions, hardships, and physical/emotional health that can sometimes become factors while ministering to others. Thurman points out that religious professionals should always be attentive to their emotional and physical health—and to their limitations and fears—as they practice their religious profession. Awareness should keep the pastor grounded and prayerful. Remaining in prayer and maintaining a spiritual focus helps to keep the black pastor "grounded" in the fact that they are human and also a servant of God and not the Messiah. Thurman comments that religious professionals must remember that they are no different than laity and if they do not keep this in mind, they will fail. Remaining

grounded as a faith believer and religious person can prevent a messianic mindset amongst black pastors.

The realization of being human and the necessity of setting limits is important for black pastors as they pastor. With the black pastor knowing and realizing their own vulnerability, they are apt to not become so emotionally distressed. This also includes knowing that they have faults, sharing the same trauma as others in the pew, and remaining protected against criticism that can potentially be altering psychologically. This also includes not being stretched but knowing what their capabilities are emotionally and physically. This, again, is the lesson we take from Peter and Judas that if they had realized their human limits and themselves as Jesus' representatives (similar to being a religious professional), perhaps they would not have been so emotionally distraught. It is possible to speculate that Judas may not have committed suicide if he was aware that his fall could be forgiven, and Peter may have realized the power of repentance in seeking forgiveness for his denial of Christ. Recognition of human limitations from the outset may help pastors cope with the complexities of ministries. Black pastors must keep limits in perspective while remaining aware that a potential fall, while serving and following God, can have a negative impact on the God-inspired ministries in the black church.

A Safe Place

Black pastors need a safe place. This safe place is essential for self-care. The fear of appearing weak is, in part, due to lack of a safe space. Black pastors feel they are not able to be vulnerable with their congregation and the people they lead for fear of

appearing weak and lacking of faith. Therefore, a secure place where a pastor can be vulnerable and discover intimacy with God is healthy and much needed while pastoring the black church. Black pastors who suffer from depression need a place and relationality that they can trust where they can "unmask" their authentic selves.[132] Comfortability while pastoring is essential for black pastors. That is to be able to relax, engage with others openly and freely, and to be able to be themselves without judgement or fear, all of which is important while leading a demanding congregation.

Jesus modeled a safe place in his most vulnerable moment, for example, in Matthew 26:36-46 and Mark 14:32-42. In these scriptures, Jesus prepares for the hour of arrest and sacrifice, and so he goes to God in prayer. Jesus asks a few disciples (Peter, James, and John) to go with him while he goes farther off to pray. Jesus comments that he is weary. Black pastors should find an opportunity to separate from others and find sacred place for prayer and intimate devotion. This is especially true when they become mentally drained or have feelings of burnout. Black pastors should seek safe places that provide for intimacy with God. This includes the chapel/sanctuary, a destination outside of the area of the church, and/or any place of peace where the pastor can find time alone with God.

Jesus models the practice of sabbatical within Matthew 26 and Mark 14. Jesus goes upon the mountain to gather himself prior to the ultimate sacrificial death. A sabbatical is an excellent opportunity for black pastors to go into a safe place away from the church. In late 2019, Pastor Howard John Wesley announced to Alfred Street Baptist

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[132] Wimberley, *Depression in African American Clergy*, 98.

Church of Alexandria Virginia, where he pastors, that he was taking a three and a half month sabbatical. Wesley is a popular black pastor of a predominantly African-American church that had quadrupled its attendance within the past eleven years. Wesley said that he was motivated by the suicide of Jarrid Wilson (Pastor of Harvest Christian Fellowship Church, Riverside, California), to take a sabbatical. When commenting to reporter James Brown of CBS News about how he felt about the upcoming sabbatical, he said, "I am not ashamed, free, that I don't have to be superman, I don't have to be perfect, I don't have to be super anointed every time I walk in this building, that I can be Howard John and not just Pastor."[133] Wesley found it important to use the time off to renew his relationship with God as he felt distant from God. He also wanted to start healthier habits and renew relationships. This popular black pastor needed to step away because pastoring was becoming overwhelming.

Adelle M. Banks of the Religion News Service followed up with Pastor Wesley after a shortened sabbatical. Wesley made it from January to Palm Sunday though he originally intended to conclude his sabbatical at Easter. He said he became anxious to get back to church. Banks asked Wesley about the seemingly "silent epidemic" of burned out black clergy. In response Wesley commented, "the black pastor has a very different relationship and role within the church than you see in Caucasian (congregations), much more authoritative. The church is much more dependent on the pastor. It has always

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[133] James Brown and Alvin Patrick, "'Preacher Burnout': Job Demands Creating Stress for Many Pastors," interview by James Brown with the Rev. Howard John Wesley, CBS News, aired December 18, 2019, accessed on January 15, 2020, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/pastor-howard-john-wesley-takes-sabbatical-from-alfred-street-baptist-church-to-address-mental-health.

been one of the most prestigious professions in black America. And then it's very addictive because it feeds the ego. And the burnout may be more self-induced than a result of the church in the nature of it."[134] In this interview, Wesley acknowledged the fact that pastors are human and within the "self-induced" adverse cause to the ego one can easily fall prey to negative behaviors. Wesley confirms the results of "fall" can develop into negative behaviors such as alcoholism and adulterous affairs. Sabbaticals can help black pastors become renewed. Pastor Wesley's sabbatical became well-publicized news because it is rare to see the opportunity within the black church and for such a well-known black pastor.

There are existing organizations that help pastors and churches provide for a sabbatical or opportunities for rest and renewal. One such organization is the Lilly Endowment Clergy Renewal Program. This program is administered by the Center for Pastoral Excellence at Christian Theological Seminary. Their mission, according to their website: "Through its religion grantmaking, Lilly Endowment, an Indianapolis-based, private philanthropic foundation, seeks to deepen and enrich the lives of American Christians….To this end, National and Indiana Clergy Renewal Programs provide an opportunity for pastors to step away briefly from the persistent obligations of daily parish life and engage in a period of renewal and reflections."[135] This organization provides

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[134] Adelle M. Banks, "Sabbatical Cut Short, Megachurch Pastor Relished Quiet, Turns to Pandemic," *Religion News Service*, April 8, 2020, accessed February 1, 2023, https://religionnews.com/2020/04/08/sabbatical-cut-short-megachurch-pastor-relished-quiet-turns-to-pandemic/.

[135] Christian Theological Seminary, "Lilly Endowment Clergy Renewal Programs," accessed February 2, 2023, https://www.cts.edu/cpe/clergy-renewal/.

grant funding to churches of up to $50,000 for the sole purpose of rest and renewal for their clergy. This Renewal Program finds value in giving the pastor an opportunity to have time with God separate from pastoring.

Every church should have a resting or sabbatical action plan/opportunity for their pastor. With the demands and expectations of the black church, it is essential for the black pastor to have an opportunity get away from the church ministry and spend time with God while being able to renew/refresh. If this opportunity took place, at a minimum, every sixteen to eighteen months, lasting a minimum of thirty days, it would be mentally helpful for the black pastor. The opportunity should be given for staff and ministry assistance during the sabbatical so that the pastor will not have his mind on the goings on of the church while away. The church pastoral care team should organize this time for the pastor including travel and placing other ministers and church leaders in charge of the service of the church. With these sabbatical opportunities planned out, it could allow the church to be intentional about giving their pastor rest.

Remaining Healthy Spiritually and Physically

Paul, in I Corinthians 6:19-20, references the body as a temple of God. Paul says that the body is of God and not our own (verse 19). It is the black pastor's sacred duty to care for himself as part of his responsibility to God and as a person of faith. The Bible teaches that the Spirit of God dwells in our bodies and, as believers, we must honor that the Spirit takes care of our bodies accordingly. All in all, Paul encourages the believer to take care of the body in honor that the body is a temple and given by God.

Each pastor should know his physical and mental limits, and acknowledge that "a pastor's inability or unwillingness to value that physical, mental, intellectual, and emotional limitations become an avenue towards unmanaged stress."[136] Remaining grounded as a human being while serving is challenging, but doing so allows black pastors to recognize their human limits and manage their stress levels. This must take place: all great religious leaders eventually learn to do ministry within their own limitations. Limitations include monitoring stress levels and acknowledging possible fatigue and mental strain.

Knowing one's limitations can help to prevent serious struggle and the potential for self-injury. Had Peter and Judas recognized their limitations as disciples perhaps their outcomes would have been different. Knowing limitations can prevent further brokenness. As illustrated by Thurman, religious professionals or ministers must know and remember their limits as being human and spiritual persons.[137] This is important for black pastors as they lead responsibly and in respect to their call to God.

Black pastors should seek knowledge and awareness of mental health for the sake of themselves and others. If black pastors trust the science of mental health and its value, and are able to connect with it spiritually, they may be more apt to seek help for themselves and others. Black pastors should educate themselves more on the symptoms, signs, and the science of mental health as well as the importance of self-care. This knowledge and awareness could be gained with training, following a curriculum, and/or

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[136] Crawford, "Serving Them is Killing Me," 57.
[137] Thurman, "The Living Wisdom of Howard Thurman" (Subsequent references to Thurman in this section are from this audio book).

certificate program with a mental health professional or organization. A suggestion could also be made of installing a mental health ministry in churches and having organizations provide for awareness as part of the ministry. Within this concept or program of knowledge should be a defining measure of differentiating between pastoral care and mental health. In addition, this should consist of being aware of themselves and others when there is a potential crisis or emotional problem.

Black male pastors should lead by example in promoting proper healthcare and maintenance. Living a healthy lifestyle should include a physical check up with a primary doctor minimally twice a year and a visit/check in with a mental health professional at least quarterly. This is part of maintaining the body as a temple and keeping accountability as a religious professional.

Humility and Limitations

Different aspects of pastoring the black church may lead to a messianic mindset and/or pastoring beyond the human capacity. However, being humble while serving may minimize this consequence. The expectation of being a "savior" of all things (family, community, and the church) by the congregants may help to create such a mindset. One example of this is a black pastor thinking that a community cannot survive without the pastor being involved. Being "involved" includes communal affairs and civic action within communities. Essentially the black pastor will feel as if he needs to be "the voice" in the room. Humility disrupts this messianic mindset by reminding the leader that he is the "follower" or "disciple" of the Messiah and not the Messiah.

Author and consultant Roy M. Oswald states, "part of what it means to be human is to fail, to experience fatigue, to be finite, to need relationships, and support."[138] Being human, being a religious "professional," reminding himself that he is a religious "man" keeps the black pastor grounded. Limitations and striving for (and maintaining) other limits can also prevent the messianic mindset and reminds the black pastor of his human capacity.

Progressive action can take place in the black community with the help of the black pastor. However, as the black pastor is involved, he must use and imitate the model of Jesus and not assume that he can become Jesus. A true disciple serves humanity as he serves God, all the while remembering that he is not God but instead a servant of God. It is part of the calling. A black pastor should be ambitious enough to work for the call and know when to lean on God or lean towards God as a spiritual man of God, and when to seek professional help as needed.

Black pastors need a safe space. Black pastors need a space of lament, care, self-care, and spiritual engagement. The same concern and care that the black pastor has for his church and community should be reciprocated. The black congregation should give a unified response of care when seeing their pastor hurting. Wynnetta Wimberley suggests congregations advocate for the black pastor and their self-care. Congregations should also train lay leaders in mental health and crisis intervention and require candidates for

[138] R. M. Oswald, *Clergy Self-Care: Finding a Balance for Effective Ministry* (Washington, DC: The Alban Institute, 1991), 15.

pastoral ministry to undergo mental health evaluations.[139] Mental health awareness is key within the black congregation for both healthy pastors and healthy communities.

[139] Wimberley, *Depression in African American Clergy*, 95.

CHAPTER 4: UNMASKING

Background

To address the problems of mental health among black pastors in the black church, I propose the creation of "unmasking" pastoral workshops that trained leaders may hold in various venues. An obvious opportunity is at African-American congregational leadership conventions, gatherings, and conferences, examples of which include the National Baptist Convention, USA, the African Methodist Episcopal leadership conference, and the Church of God in Christ Convocation. Other possibilities include the annual Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference, the annual Hampton University Ministers' Conference, the annual Festival of Homiletics, and the annual E. K. Bailey Preaching Conference. In these settings, leaders might offer the workshop as part of the agenda primarily for African-American male pastors willing to participate, but another version of the workshop might include church leaders, particularly those formulating or organizing pastoral search committees. It may be advantageous for ministry leaders in search of a black pastor for a black church to take into account learning and understanding challenges for black clergy during the workshop as they consider a new pastor for their congregation. As part of these larger events, the workshop would not be a part of the main agenda for the day, and would only be ninety minutes to two hours at length. Within this conference setting, attendance at the workshop would be no more than thirty to thirty-five participants. If a co-facilitator is available, up to forty-five participants could attend. Among these participants, small groups would form with five

to six people per group. The goal is to create an intimate and comfortable space for personal dialogue and participation.

Goals and Process

The goal of the pastoral workshop is to "unmask" the black pastor and allow him to have an in-depth view of himself as a pastor, church leader, and person of faith serving the black church. This workshop should have a defined set of rules that include but are not limited to the following: *confidentiality*: discussions amongst participants, personal testimonies, and dialogue in particular should stay within the confines of the group; *honesty*: in discussions, each participant should be honest with themselves and with the group; *openness*: a willingness to participate openly. Each participant should have an open mind, be willing to receive critique, and be respectful of the insights of others. These three ground rules are important in order to gain the full effect of "unmasking."

Each participant will receive a mask and be encouraged to use pen and pad for taking notes. The mask will be a key product used during the workshop. The workshop generally will flow in the following sequence.

Introduction (12 to 15 minutes)

At this time, leaders will introduce the purpose of the workshop and describe the prepared flow. Those in attendance will be asked their name and church affiliation. The above-mentioned defined set of ground rules will be identified, discussed, and affirmed. The establishment of a "safe place" and "safe space" will be made at this stage, and groups will be formed. Participants will be encouraged to be both honest and open in giving and receiving.

Anonymous Poll (10-15 minutes)

Participants will be given a five to nine question anonymous poll, done online via cell phone or digital device or by a paper form, which would include the following questions. Answers to select would include: yes, no, sometimes, and not at all.

1. Do you enjoy pastoring?
2. In the past 30-45 days, have you daily felt tired, exhausted, and/or experienced loss of appetite?
3. Do you wish you had chosen another profession or call to ministry other than pastoring?
4. Do you feel alone while pastoring?
5. Do you personally feel as if you have disappointed God?
6. Do you personally feel as if you have disappointed the church you pastor?
7. Have you harmed yourself in the past 30-45 days?
8. Do you drink alcohol or have you used drugs (legal and illegal) in the past 30-45 days?
9. Do you feel estranged from your family/spouse/children/relationships?

After the results have been tabulated, attendees will be encouraged to engage in discussion about the findings.

The Wearing of the Mask (10-18 minutes)

The pre-determined groups will gather into circles and discuss the intimacy of that space. Participants will be asked to put on a mask and disclose how they feel. A brief discussion will take place about discomfort and how it feels to wear the mask not only while serving as pastor but also while not serving as pastor. At this stage the groups will discuss personal strengths, weaknesses, and fears. How to overcome weaknesses and fears will also be discussed.

Education (20 minutes)

During this time there will be a quick overview of the definitions of mental illness, depression, and anxiety. Conversation will mention black male pastors who have

dealt with depression/anxiety and, in addition, those who have ultimately succumbed to suicide.

It is hoped that within the education stage of the workshop black pastors can become educated on mental health and self-care with a specific focus on depression and anxiety. This is the time in which the definition of mental illness and the signs and symptoms of a mental illness will be explored utilizing experts on the subject in person or on video. Black pastors will be able to ask questions and get a basic understanding of what mental illness is and how to become aware of their own mental health and self-care. This is also an opportunity to discuss pastoral care versus mental health therapy and the difference between the two. Participants will be instructed on how to search for a mental therapist and a mental health community. Knowledge will be shared in this stage that hopefully will create more of an awareness for mental health. During the education period, there may be a mental health professional or representative from a local mental health agency.

Creating of a Safer Space (20-25 minutes)

There will be a releasing of the mask and pastors will engage in a discussion of how they feel after this release. The participants will be encouraged to discuss and reveal how they have been feeling on the average of the past six months to a year while pastoring.

Black pastors will be given an opportunity to consider the creation, production, and development of a safe space that is therapeutic. Pastors will have an opportunity to talk and dialogue about the difficulty in pastoring and how it is affecting them mentally.

The intention is to be able to offer a space for the black pastor to communicate his brokenness, emotional issues, and how it is affecting him and his personal environments (i.e., family, friends, relationships, and passions) while in the company of trusted peers who can identify with what he is going through. This is even an opportunity to learn about coping and be given advice from other black pastors in like situations. Pastors (and congregations) will learn about sabbaticals, the opportunity for sabbaticals, and getting rest away from the pastoral ministry. There should be a strong feeling of relief and release during this stage. Information (e.g., brochures) should be available for various areas where pastors can take rest and get self-care.

Remedies and Suggestions (25-30 minutes)

Participants will be given suggestions for themselves and advice to take to their congregations in order to facilitate development of self-care plans. A key component in this segment will be to write down a "plan of action" for themselves and their churches.

Strategies such as time management, delegation of authority, and church team development/planning will be provided during this stage of the workshop. Black pastors will learn ways to distribute responsibility and organize ministry work. This will be constructed around the idea of lifting up burdens and not bearing the cross alone. Pastors will be provided the opportunity to personalize and input these strategies in their plan of action.

Pledge to go Forward (5 to 15 minutes)

Participants will be asked to write a pledge, a goal, and a mission for themselves as they pastor. This will include motivation for self-care and a continued setting of limits as they pastor the black church.

The "plan of action" and "pledge" are communicative ways of how to move forward and be healthy. These are opportunities for the black pastor to take resources, ways to discuss mental health concerns, and ideas to develop action back to the churches they pastor. The goal is to place mental health and self-care at the forefront of pastoral and church ministry, and not allow it to be an issue ignored and placed on the back burner. The "pledge" provides an opportunity to establish a covenant between the black pastor, God, his family, and the church(es) he pastors regarding the pastor's mental health and self-care. The "covenant" is a solemn oath or promise between the pastor and God (and others) to maintain the pastor's mental health and self-care in a way that keeps him healthy.

As time allows, conversation will address the biblical lessons of discipleship and rest, considerations of a healthy body in honor of the temple that God has provided, and the role/expectations of the call of ministry.

Personal Reflection

It is hoped that this workshop will allow black pastors to acknowledge their own limits, capabilities, mental health, and means for self-care. Acknowledgement includes being able to see when they are overly ambitious, working too hard, sacrificing too much, and extended greatly beyond doing the priestly duties of a pastor (preaching and teaching

God's word). Some examples are recognizing how often they work with the church and parishioner in mind and not considering self or family as they pastor. This includes coming to grips with fatigue and burnout that if it does not currently exist has the potential of existing. A black pastor may be going so hard that he is becoming numb to the fact that he is burning out because of the demands and expectations of the church. Some black pastors in attendance at the workshop may have been leading fiercely and just are not aware of the signs and symptoms of potential mental health issues that come from pastoring as they currently are. As a pastor, one of my main issues was constant fatigue. I never realized my fatigue or linked it to a mental/emotional health issue until I was outside of church ministry. Realizations gained from this unmasked life should be able to create more awareness about mental health within the demanding context of the black church and potentially save a black pastor's life.

This workshop is designed for black pastors to face their real and authentic self, and their fears, in a safe place/space. The black pastor will be granted an opportunity to relax amongst their peers and other church leadership. The idea is that there will be like individuals in the room who can identify with each other and the strain of pastoring the black church. This workshop is meant for the black pastor to "unmask" and to no longer be neglectful of themselves and to see that being the black pastoral superman is unhealthy. By God's grace, a transformation may come in the black pastor's way of thinking regarding pastoring and handling the black church. A transformation will also potentially take place within the black church and how they respect the black pastor's need for self-care.

This workshop is designed to start the conversation and bring about the realization that a black pastor's mental health and self-care are important and should be considered by both him and the waiting congregation as he pastors. As mentioned earlier, there was limited research on this topic, yet lots of insight was available as many have taken notice of this growing problem and issue within the black church. The design of the workshop is to start the conversation and look at potential numbers of black pastors taking care of themselves as the main head of the African-American church. The workshop is hoped to start discussions between the black pastor, other church leaders, and black congregations. This includes working with black pastors as they serve, choosing future black pastors to lead, and preparing other black pastors to replace those who retire or transition from pastoral ministry.

One of the most important aspects of this workshop is creating a safe place and safe space. Early establishment of house rules, forming groups, and even wearing the mask should help with this. Black pastors should be able to feel safe and have a willingness to share their story and life as they know it while pastoring. The "mask" is the unique way of getting the pastor to know how it feels to be masked. This includes having the feeling of others not truly seeing the expression of how it really is to be stressed and/or lack self-care. Black pastors need intentionally to know and feel what this pain is like to be open about it in this workshop. Education is essential as pastors will need to learn about the signs, symptoms, and long-term effects of failing mental health. This is not only important for the pastors personally, but also as they outwardly minister to their parishioners and have a newfound respect for professional mental health

care. Finally having the opportunity to dialogue with their colleagues in an intimate setting will establish the perspective that the pastor is not alone in the feeling of being overwhelmed. These stages during the workshop create awareness, establish a common ground, and encourage the black pastor to get help for their mental health.

A major goal with the workshop is to provide transformation that is life changing with black pastors. Such transformation requires bringing together wisdom, experience, mind-body science, and inclusive support of all learners. According to Ken Nelson, transformation should be "organic, natural, and inevitable."[140] Transformation also comes from being more present and aware of the current situation, in this case, pastoring the black church. Attitudes and feelings can be conditioned within this workshop through personal stories and testimonies that bring about self-awareness of heavy burdens while pastoring. A shift should happen, and this includes a shift in doing, thinking, and pastoring. It is hoped that once black pastors experience this workshop and are enlightened and unburdened, they will feel better and do better.

I imagined myself doing this workshop as I pastor, and I find it to be potentially helpful to me and to my call to minister. In my darkest days if I had realized that I had taken on too much, had a close confident to relate to in pastoral ministry, and understood myself as human with limits, I would not have been so depressed, mentally strained, and burnt out. I desire to pastor comfortably, doing the will of God, and making a difference

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[140] Ken Nelson, David Ronka, Lesli Lang, Liz Korabek-Emerson, and Jim White, *Designing and Leading Life-Changing Workshops: Creating the Conditions for Transformation in Your Groups, Trainings, and Retreats* (Kittery Point, ME: Cliffhouse Press, 2020), 11.

in the black church and community. Mental health and self-care are important in doing these things. All are important in unmasking the Black Pastoral Superman that need not be a superman but a humble pastor who helps, guides, motivates, cares, and changes lives as God leads him.

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