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According to the Barna Research Group annually, 19,000 people in the ministry are forced to terminate their ministries (that would represent 1 out of every 20 churches). This extremely complex phenomenon is explained partly by the cultural changes that have occurred over the last 30 years, but especially over the last 10 years.

Most people in churches run from conflict and do nothing in the face of conflict so when a minister faces a crisis that many times results in his forced termination, he finds himself alone even though most of the congregation does not want him to leave. Yet to understand the dynamics that are at work in the church, it is essential to understand the dynamics at work in society.

The problem can be traced back to the child rearing of the 1950's and 60's. Before the counter culture revolution of the 60's the way children were raised was different than today. In the 60's and especially in the 70's, religious psychologists began to be vocal about how to raise children and introduced "behavioral modification." It began in laboratories with white mice that learned behavior from a rewards/punishment mode. It spread from white mice to children.

Christian parenting took on this concept. Books were written in the 70's that showed parents how to follow this type of child rearing. (*James Dobson was the clearly intended author to whom Dr. Campbell was referring*). This type of child raising was based on reacting to the behavior of the child. Discipline is many times a result of displeasure and results in anger in the child.

The counter culture revolution was a natural occurrence, not a result of bad parenting, (*this needs serious further study*). The resulting behavioral modification for this natural occurrence caused elevated anger in children who did not feel loved.

1. What a child needs.

Most children do not feel adequately loved and cared for. Most parents deeply love their children but show it conditionally. Children are behaviorally motivated; adults are verbally motivated. Words cannot transfer love to a child; he has to be shown love on his terms which is

behavioral. A child has an emotional tank that can only be filled with unconditional love. For a 2-year old this tank is small, it doesn't take much to show love, but for a teenager, the tank is huge. The more mature one gets the more one moves from behavioral motivation to verbal motivation. So, as we mature, we should not constantly need to have love proven to us. Children want unconditional love and they need to have that love shown. Unconditional love is expressed no matter how we feel, how they look, how they behave. Conditional love is the love of behavioral modification expressed when a child pleases the parent ("I love you when you are good.")

Christian parental love is unconditional love expressed in 4 ways to a child: eye contact, physical contact, focused attention and loving discipline. We can display eye contact and physical contact all the time. Focused attention is proactive not reactive. (*I wonder if he was in disagreement with" tough love"*). It is a way of making the child feel like he/she is the most important person in the world at that moment. Be careful with discipline (training) and punishment – they are not synonymous. Discipline is "training a child in the way he should go." You cannot expect a child to be mature without training. Parents must seek to understand their children and ask not "How do I correct this behavior?" but "What does the child need to help him/her be all he/she can be?" Such questions as these need to be asked, Does the child need love? Is the child having a physical problem? Does the child feel sorry for what he/she has done? Is this defiance (not all misbehavior is defiance—challenging parental authority)? Parents need to use punishment judiciously because it removes guilt and there is value in the conscience experiencing guilt. Unresolved guilt/lack of forgiveness of self are often carried into the future.

Much parenting is done out of fear and results in being either overly strict or too lenient. Children (especially 2-3 year olds) should be allowed to find their ego boundaries – this is necessary for a healthy self esteem.

There are five ways to handle the behavior of children:

1. Requests (positive) "Will you do this for me?"– requests with upward inflection and lighter tone communicate a non-verbal message; they respect the fact the child can think for himself/herself, has feelings and opinions; and they build responsibility rather than promoting a victimization approach that blames someone else for behavior.

2. Commands (negative) – often made with downward inflection and lower tone, they can cause lack of responsibility. Remember that 2 people cannot take responsibility for the same thing at the same time.

3. Gentle psychical manipulation (positive)– guide them in what you want them to do as in care giving.

4. Punishment (negative)– most difficult to control behavior; must be appropriate and fit the crime – it is best for this to be proactive – not reactive. Remember that not all children respond the same way so it must be appropriate for each behavior and each child. Boundaries should be set with pre-determined actions.

5. Behavioral modification (neutral)– OK but should not be a primary way of relating to a child. Give children a value system based on rewards and punishment that can cause anger or can cause the child to live for “what is in it for me?” or can cause the child to become manipulative.

2. Training children how to handle their anger maturely

Up until about 10 years ago, the parent child relationship in our society was looked at in a positive light – not so now; most views are negative, i.e. television. (*Another item for more study*). So, in today’s world the tendency is that parents do not handle verbal anger effectively and therefore children live out behavioral anger (*note the idea that this is unavoidable, it is a natural occurrence*). Anger then goes from normal to abnormal, acceptable to unacceptable and pleasant to unpleasant.

Immature children naturally handle anger verbally and unpleasantly and are taught that this is bad and is a sign of disrespect. Other options are to repress anger or act in passive-aggressive ways. Such passive aggressive behavior which starts as an unconscious motivation to do the opposite of an authority figure. The behavior is intended to upset the authority figure. On the ladder of anger responses, the best response is verbal, even though it is unpleasant and the worst response is the passive-aggressive behavior that is even more unpleasant.

The greatest threat to a child is his or her own anger. Parent’s typical response is to get angrier and louder which feeds child’s fears—breaking the love bond with the parent or parental anger. Best parental response is with 2 key words—pleasant and firm. Children observe how their parents handle anger. There are two situations when children express anger verbally and inappropriately:

- 1) aggression (threat to bring harm to someone)
- 2) ventilation (letting it out for no legitimate reason other than to manipulate the parent.

To train children how to handle anger properly parents need to give their approval (“I’m glad you brought this to me so we can talk about it and learn from it.”); praise them (“I’m proud of the way you handled your anger.”); take one step at a time up the anger ladder (request that they take the next step by saying, “Please do not do that in the future.”)

How to identify passive aggressive behavior:

1. It is illogical – it makes no sense. We tend to dismiss it as “no one would act that way” because it is so unexplainable
2. No matter what authority figure does, nothing seems to correct the behavior.
3. Realize that even though they are behaving to upset the authority figure, they are the one which is getting hurt.

The passive-aggressive behavior is normal (starting at about 9 years old, intensifying at 12-14 and leaving at 16 or 17). As character forms at about 16 or 17, integrity is developed as children tell the truth and take responsibility for their own behavior. What is abnormal is if it does not pass. Children must be trained how to come out of passive–aggressive behavior (major parental responsibility being neglected in our society). If it does not pass, it will come out in the adult years in areas that have nothing to do with the anger, such as college dropout rate, job turnover, or marriage failure. The anger will blow in a context that has nothing to do with causing the pent up anger that may have been suppressed for years. Rather aggravations and irritations accumulate over time then the adult responds in a passive-aggressive ay. It takes an average employee 18-24 months to express their anger through poor attitude, poor performance, etc. It is probably the #1 cause of divorce.

3. Situation in the church as a result of mishandled anger

This condition is genetic and has an innate response to authority. About 25% of people are pro-authority; that is they will do anything you ask, but they have a hard time thinking for themselves and are not natural leaders. They want to please, tend to be anxious, and are easy to manipulate with guilt. They must be taught how to think for themselves. *Campbell called them the 25%er’s.*

The 75%er's are anti-authority. They want to think for themselves, are strong willed, more free-spirited and are usually natural leaders. They do not like rules and resent authority figures.

In the Church, about 90% of the people are 25%er's (pro-authority) and 10% are 75%er's (anti-authority). Thus, 90% of church members want to please, seek peace at any cost, and tend to avoid conflict. They tend to be followers not leaders since they want to be under authority (Christ, church, church leaders, etc.). They can be and must be trained to deal with conflict.

Most ministers are 25%er's. The thing that makes them so dear (their pastor's heart) is the thing that makes them so vulnerable. A tender, caring heart can be very fragile. They often sacrifice so much for others then get burned. They are usually not natural leaders and hate conflict. However, the best leaders are 25%ers who have learned to be leaders and have been trained to handle conflict. They also need to be trained how to use church power.

Most church leaders are 75%er's. They don't care about who is leading, because they naturally rise to leadership. When they become Christians, submitting to authority goes against the grain of their personality traits. This is OK if they have good character, are people of integrity, and have learned to handle anger. Most are passive-aggressive and have learned anger from bad parenting (*certainly from dysfunctional families – I think it is more the whole dysfunctional family system than just behavior problems*). They react adversely to authority – especially pastoral authority, since 75%er's naturally look down on the 25%er's. They often see ministers as weak, inept, easy to control and manipulate. So even to perceived authority, they respond with passive aggressive behavior.

These people usually work in corporate jobs, or in other jobs where there is no real “family” feeling. Here, they are frustrated and since they cannot verbalize their anger and distress, they bring it to Church where they feel powerful. It used to be that the church was one happy family (spiritual model) and have now adopted a corporate model (hierarchy). 75%ers are frustrated in this model, so there they express anger. Such behavior is OK if they have the church's interests first.

Then, in the last 15 years our culture has seen the advent of the socio-path. This is the passive-aggressive person who knows the difference between right and wrong but does not care. Now, these folks are hard to deal with, because most others do not understand how they can be that way. Others cannot see their sociopathological ways because they do not think the way they

do nor understand their values. They, however, know all about us and therefore they know how to play us. They get powerful before they are detected. They are self-serving and it comes out in one or more of the following ways:

1. Power
2. Sex
3. Money

Until lately, these were no big threat, because they were not recognized leaders. But now since the 1980's and the advent of Bakker, Swaggert, and Clinton, they are easily recognized and modeled. The passive-aggressive borrows from the sociopath. This has been made possible because of the way they were raised (*dysfunctional families and other institutions*). It has been easy to learn to become a good sociopath and get by with it. Kids are raised to believe that 75%ers are strong leaders, good thinkers, brilliant, clever and never get caught.

How to make a sociopath:

1. Don't fill his emotional love tank – he will look elsewhere and will get it somewhere.
2. Poorly discipline him and make him angry so he doesn't care about doing right.
3. Don't teach him to handle anger and they will become totally self-absorbed, motivated by self-serving values.

What makes a socio-path tick:

They know right and wrong; they know others are value-driven; they know our response. They will out-flank and out-maneuver us. They act in secret and are people of darkness. They hold secret meetings at night.....

Most socio-paths are not in the church – it is not big-time enough for them. But the trend is there. There is much sociopathology in the church. They may not be sociopathic in every area of their lives, but in the way they deal with anger and conflict.

Not all the 75%er's are sociopaths, but they have learned well from them. They see the sociopathology in sports and work and leisure and then they take it to Church with them. *We would need to examine the lives of our leaders as they live out the sociopathology of their workplace, schools, friends, television and movie selections, and even their retirement activities.* They always have a sidekick or 2 or 3. They are the “gang of 3.” They have a mob mentality. They use similar phrases:

1. They always start by doing this for the “good” of the Church.
2. They blindside the minister with accusations – usually after vacation or a conference or at a low time in his life. This often follows months of pastoral persecution (gossip, criticism).
3. They almost always use these words:
 - A. “They” are saying.
 - B. “We speak for the whole church.”
 - C. “If you resign quietly and cooperate, we will provide this generous severance package.”
 - D. “This must be kept quiet so you or the church won’t be hurt.” (This usually means that the other 95% of the congregation do not know what is going on and they do not have the support or votes to back up their claims.

Less than 7% of all forced terminations are for moral reasons, thus 93% of all forced terminations are for some other reason.

Most ministers are so broken all they want to do is just get out and survive. So they get out and they and their families are devastated, broken, depressed and many times rendered ineffective in their service. They feel alone (like no one else is going through this). Their children often drop out of church and their marriages frequently end in divorce. It typically takes a minister in such a situation 1½ years to relocate, so the “generous” severance package results in financial hardship.

In the church, most people are 25%er’s who cannot stand conflict and do nothing and sometimes do not even know why the preacher they love is leaving, and then they get angry at the abused and broken minister and family. They are 90% of the congregation. They might stand up if they knew. Tragically, most times area preachers and old friends also are strangely absent.

But, one must remember it is much easier for the preacher to leave than the homeowners, many of whom are the golden boys or girls of the church.

So the minister and his family pack up and leave – broken and bruised, sometimes beyond repair. And this is done to them by the people they love the most!

Healing takes up to 3 years, if they get help (one cannot heal by keeping it inside). For things are needed for any hope of healing to take place:

1. Trusted group in the new location to keep them informed of what is happening and help them see what is coming.
2. Support group outside the church (perhaps other preachers).
3. Attorney for counsel and legal advice.
4. Therapist other than spouse (why marriages often undermined). May need treatment for depression.

How do you keep it from happening? Have a covenant or contract when called to a ministry. Learn to use the power! Learn about formal and informal power. Use the honeymoon period to find and analyze the power—who has it, how they use it. Work to use the power for Christ’s ends not selfish ends. Use church power to make irresponsible people powerless. *If you don’t use the power, it will abuse you.* Maybe a better word than “power” is influence. Be an influencer and do not empower sociopathic manipulators to influence and control. We cannot allow the sociopaths to be the power in the Lord’s Church. We need to learn from family systems theory. Christians are notorious for being “triangulated” (“so and so is doing this, you need to go talk to them”). Realize that the 25%ers are good people and can be taught to be leaders. Locate and train an appropriate power figure; enable appropriate person with power. 25%ers need to learn to be Christ-like—balancing grace and truth (tough and tender). Every person needs to be accountable for what they say and do.

Strong 75%ers see ministry as not just another job! When criticized they say, “It’s part of the job.” Tell people it is a calling; it is a tough task. *It hurts terribly when you are abused, when you live your whole life to be used of the Lord.*

We need to tell people all this and help them understand what is going on in our cultures and in this ministry crisis. It is causing young people to shy away from ministry. It is destroying ministers. The average minister says “This could never happen to me” but it will to about 25% of those in ministry. The average church member says, “This could never happen in our church” but 19,000 forcible terminations represents 20% of the churches in America. Ten years ago it was an act of age discrimination (ministers in their late 50’s) but today it is happening to younger ministers.

The value of an interim ministry is that this may be a key to breaking behavior patterns. Once a church forcibly terminates a pastor, it often happens again. The cycle of churches doing this can be broken.

Recommended Resources:

Wayne Oates, *Care of Troublesome People*

Bob Perry, *Pass the Power, Please*

Dr. Ruth Peters, *Don't Be Afraid to Discipline*

Dr, Mike Simpson at www.lazarusproject.org.

Sample contracts and resources from Ministering to Ministers Foundation
(www.mtmfoundation.org)