

DISCERNING THE CALL TO PROPHETIC CIVIC LEADERSHIP WITHIN THE AFRICAN
AMERICAN PASTORAL TRADITION

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AMERICAN PASTORAL TRADITION

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to my late grandparents, Andrew and Earline Blanks Sr., Jimmy and Amenta Moody and Ellis Horton, Sr., who saw God's hands on me before my first steps. Thank you for teaching me to "take what you got, to make what you want, to get what you need, and if you see where you can't make it, just draw a line". To Rev. Dr. G. V. Clark, my pastor and the "Paul" to my "Timothy", thank you for your prayers and presence every step of the way. Thank you for believing this was in me and that God has a plan.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Significant Role of the African American Pastor

The pastor in the African American culture is a significant figure who has, and continues to embody leadership, spirituality and advocacy. Since the time of slavery, the African American pastor has been understood to be one sent by God to help a population of marginalized people navigate the inequities, challenges and uncertainties of life in the United States.¹ William E.B. Du Bois said, “The Preacher is the most unique personality developed by the Negro on American soil. A leader, politician, an orator, a “boss”, an intriguer, an idealist, –all these he is...”.² Throughout history, those who answered this unique prophetic call have served both the African American church and community in various ways, each person discerning their particular assignment from God.

This study will focus on the unique call and distinctive pastoral identity of the African American pastor. Several aspects of this culturally distinctive identity will be explored through focus groups. Data will be collected from African American pastors about this particular pastoral identity and how this unique call is understood within the African American church and community.

For the purpose of this study, based on the work of Du Bois and the definition he employed, the words pastor and preacher will be used interchangeably. I do want to acknowledge that based on my personal experience as an African American pastor, the word pastor is traditionally reserved for an ordained clergy person who is officially called to give primary

¹ Paul Harvey, *Through The Storm, Through The Night : A History Of African American Christianity* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers; 2011), 9. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/utxa/detail.action?docID=726688>

² William E B DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: McClury, 1924), 116.

leadership to a congregation or serve in an official staff position. The word preacher traditionally refers to a clergy person who has accepted their call to ministry and serves a congregation, often voluntarily, under the leadership of another pastor.

Traditionally for African American clergy, God’s prophetic call to ministry extends beyond the incredible privilege and responsibility of preaching, teaching, counseling and shepherding a local congregation, and extends into a public domain of civic leadership. This prophetic call is a unique call, especially for the African American pastor in the United States, who has historically had the added challenge of also confronting systemic and institutional racism within their community. Systemic racism can be defined as, “...the foundational, large-scale and inescapable hierarchical system of U.S. racial oppression devised and maintained by whites and directed at people of colour”.³ Therefore, this prophetic call is designed to intentionally and directly address issues facing African Americans outside the church, to stand in the public square and speak boldly with a prophetic voice. For the purposes of this study, public square is defined as an equitably accessible place, physical or virtual, where public and private voices intersect and interact for the possibility of a common good.⁴ John L. Thomas defines prophetic in the context of the African American preacher in this way,

Prophetic in this sense means to “speak truth to power” in order to bring about the liberation of God’s people. Many Black preachers from the past have been considered prophetic. They have been willing to engage directly with governmental structures to bring about social reforms. The needs of the African American community are the basis for their prophetic preaching. To be prophetic is more than sensationalized rhetoric about what should be. It is best expressed by a willingness to expose hidden realities that otherwise would go unnoticed and to call into question that which is normally accepted. Prophetic Black preaching willingly takes risks, using subversive speech to confront

³ Joe Feagin and Sean Elias, “Rethinking Racial Formation Theory: A Systemic Racism Critique,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 36 no. 6 (June 2013): 936, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2012.669839>.

⁴ Frederick L. Ware, “African American Pentecostalism And The Public Square,” *The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center* 44 (2016): 100, <https://www.itc.edu/academics/degrees-programs/itc-journal/>

policies that are detrimental to the struggle of African American people, regardless of the source.⁵

Although it is true every African American pastor may not feel called to speak in the public square, this voice has been and remains critical in the life of African Americans in this country. As long as racism and inequities continue to exist in this country, this prophetic voice remains indispensable as a voice through whom African Americans have found courage and identity.⁶

For those who accept this unique prophetic call on their life, a discernment process occurs within the pastor to understand and embrace their divine assignment. Therefore, it is reasonable that any pastor who is compelled to accept this unique prophetic call can benefit from discovering the discernment process of those who have come before them.

Personal Context and Development of Research Question

How does one who is divinely commissioned as an African American pastor understand and embrace this complex identity? Who does one look to for guidance and wisdom while attempting to fulfill the spiritual destiny placed before them? Is this prophetic voice something to be inherited? How does the African American pastor embrace the legacy of the prophetic voice they have inherited and ensure it does not stop with them? How does the African American pastor shoulder the burden of this expansive calling while faithfully serving the local congregation?

These are the kinds of questions I found myself asking as an African American who is maturing in my faith and pastoral call, while becoming more immersed in my community

⁵ John L. Thomas, *Voices In The Wilderness: Why Black Preaching Still Matters* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2018), 16-17.

⁶ Howard Thurman. *With Head And Heart: The Autobiography Of Howard Thurman* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1979), 20.

through civic leadership and engagement. Because of the admiration I have for the African American pastors who have invested in my ministry, I wanted to know how they, and those who came before them, discerned their divine call. Therefore, I developed a research question that would allow me to hear their stories, learn about their discernment experiences and identify themes that can help other pastors navigate their discernment journey. The collected data from the focus groups suggest that the discernment experiences of contemporary African American pastors could provide invaluable wisdom and insight for current and future pastors as they develop their pastoral identity and practice.

Although the study of pastoral identity and pastoral practice could be projects on their own, within the context of the African American pastoral vocation, they are intrinsically intertwined. This link has been caused by centuries of systemic racism, inequities and hardships, which necessitated that the African American pastor also serve as a civic religious leader. As a leader within the African American church and community, one essential responsibility of the African American pastor was the practice of pastoral mentorship.⁷ Historically, for many African American pastors access to formal education was limited; therefore, it was critical to have an experienced pastor who could help those in their early years in ministry navigate the perceptions and challenges of leading in the African American church and community. This integral relationship between identity and practice continues into contemporary times.

The Importance and Impact of The Question

As long as African Americans have encountered systemic and institutional injustices and inequities, God has continued to call pastors into civic leadership. Therefore, I engaged in

⁷ Charitey Simmons, "Leaders For Black Churches: Mentors And Managers," *The Christian Century*, (1995); 112(4):100 -102. <http://www.christiancentury.org/>

research that would help African American pastors beginning their pastoral ministry discern and embrace their call to a pastoral ministry of prophetic civic leadership. To guide this investigation, I chose the following research question: **“What Can Be Learned Through Focus Groups With African American Pastors Using A Story-Linking Process About Discerning The Distinctive Call To Prophetic Civic Leadership While Faithfully Serving A Congregation Within The African American Pastoral Tradition?”**

The purpose of this research study was to uncover aspects of the discernment process of African American pastors who demonstrate a calling to prophetic civic leadership while continuing to serve a local congregation. I discovered, through the telling of everyday stories, how each pastor understood God to have orchestrated their ministry experience. Based on their stories, I learned how each pastor understood the historical prophetic role of the African American pastor and how they viewed themselves within this perspective of ministry. In addition, I learned how pastors have balanced both civic and church responsibilities within the scope of this expansive calling. I identified the importance of the role of mentorship and how they have and will continue to incorporate mentorship in their practice.

During this research project I received a clearer understanding of how the African American church perceives the African American pastoral vocation. In the African American church tradition, a pastor is ordained to administer baptism, the Lord’s Supper, weddings, funerals and any other sacred duties necessary to serve a local congregation. I learned from the participants in this study how the authority and authentication bestowed upon an African American pastor through ordination influences their calling to civic leadership. Furthermore, I gained a greater understanding of how pastors perceived the responsibility of the pastor to represent the African American church and community in the public square, both theologically

and experientially. Lastly, I identified strategies, wisdom and lessons learned from each pastor on how to have an effective prophetic pastoral ministry. Such wisdom and lessons learned transcends generations.

Through this research project I explored practices among African American pastors across generations who are leaders in their community. Through the use of focus groups, I identified similarities and differences in their practices. This research project is significant as it provides an opportunity to relate the contemporary prophetic voice of the African American pastor to the historical voices recorded in literature. This project provided a space for pastors who have engaged the public square during times like the Civil Rights Movement (1950-1970) and Black Lives Matter, to participate in meaningful dialogue around the function and responsibilities of the African American pastor. This research project does not focus on how the pastors have fulfilled any specific demonstrations of social action or civic leadership. Instead this research project will examine how African American pastors have discerned and embodied their calling to a prophetic pastoral ministry to both the church and the public square.

As I document multigenerational 21st century voices, with lived experiences from around the state of Texas, I gained insight and wisdom that will enrich the broader landscape of historical and contemporary literature around the perception of the African American pastor. To date, little is known about the discernment of the call to prophetic civic leadership within the African American pastoral tradition. However, with this project, I learned a unique contextual perspective on discerning a call to prophetic civic leadership within the African American pastoral tradition that could be added to the larger body of literature.

CHAPTER 2: HISTORY OF THE AFRICAN AMERICAN PASTORAL TRADITION

In this chapter I will discuss limited aspects of the history of the African American pastor in the United States. I will discuss the impact and role of the African American pastor in relationship to Pan-African enslavement, the establishment of the first African American Church, the declaration of the Emancipation Proclamation, Reconstruction and Jim Crow, the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Social Gospel Movement.

Pan-African Enslavement

The voice of the African American preacher has been for centuries a voice of hope, faith, love, unity and resistance. This voice, originally heard in generations past inspiring enslaved persons on plantation fields and in hush harbors during secret prayer meetings in the woods, has been a significant presence for African Americans, or Pan-Africans, since the time of slavery. For this study, Pan-African describes people born in Africa or of African descent. W.E.B. Du Bois describes the development of the African American church and preacher in the following way:

The plantation organization replaced the clan and tribe, and the White master replaced the chief with far greater and despotic powers. Forced and long-continued toil became the rule of life, the old ties of blood relationship and kinship disappeared, and instead of family appeared a new polygamy and polyandry, which, in some cases, almost reached promiscuity. It was a terrific social revolution, and yet some traces were retained of the former life, and the chief remaining institution was the Priest or Medicine-man. He early appeared on the plantation and found his function as the healer of the sick, the interpreter of the Unknown, the comforter of the sorrowing, the supernatural avenger of wrong, and the one who rudely but picturesquely expressed the longing, disappointment, and the resentment of a stolen and oppressed people. Thus, as bard, physician, judge, and priest, within the narrow limits allowed by the slave system, rose the Negro preacher, and under him the first Afro-American institution, the Negro Church.⁸

⁸ William E B DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: McClury, 1924), 119.

The African American preacher originally appears on the plantation landscape out of a need to fulfill the physical, spiritual, emotional and social needs of the people. The preacher, although in an oppressive environment, would adapt to the arduous circumstances and develop into an influential figure among the enslaved community.

Although the preacher would become an authoritative figure among the enslaved people on the plantation, this authority required an ability to manage the expectations of both the plantation owner and the enslaved community. From the beginning, the African American preacher would be found in the middle of a challenging environment. Albert Raboteau explains the predicament of the preacher in this way,

Presiding over slave baptisms, funerals, and weddings was the slave preacher, leader of the slaves' religious life and an influential figure in the slave community. Usually illiterate, the slave preacher often had native wit and unusual eloquence. Licensed or unlicensed, with or without permission, preachers held prayer meetings, preached and ministered in a very difficult situation. Carefully watched and viewed with suspicion, the preacher had to straddle the conflict between the demands of conscience and the orders of the masters.⁹

The preacher would operate in an environment of extreme tension working to meet the needs of the people while being sure not to publicly betray the trust or demands of the plantation owner.

The preacher lived somewhat of a double life, performing "allowed" duties in the presence of the plantation owner while praying and preaching about deliverance and justice to the enslaved people in private. Du Bois wrote about this double life,

...the Negro is sort of a seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, – a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, – an American, a Negro, two souls, two thoughts,

⁹ Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 230-1.

two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.¹⁰

One mission of the African American preacher was, and continues to be, to redeem the God-given humanity of the African American people through resistance and refuting the repressive historical narrative of the dominant culture that led to and perpetuated the enslavement and mistreatment of African Americans in the United States.

For this project, the word “redeem” is defined as, to improve oneself or to buy back something¹¹. In addition to this established definition, I want to reference its theological connotation as it intensifies the meaning, especially in the context of African American history.

Lawrence O. Richard defines “redemption” in the following way:

Redemption is a family matter, an expression of the deepest possible relationship. It is never a stranger who has the right to come to the aid of a person who is owned by another or burdened with an unpayable debt. Only the near kinsman, with the resources to rescue, is able to act.¹²

This definition of redemption is significant. For persons of Pan-African descent, this focus on family relationships is especially necessary. By uncovering and appreciating their ancestral history, they can liberate it from the bondage of the dominant culture’s retelling of their history.

Resistance in this project is defined as, meaning to fight against, oppose or withstand the force of someone or something else¹³. Refute in its standard definition means to prove wrong or

10 William E B DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: McClury, 1924), 2.

11 “redeem”, Britannica Academic, last updated 2017, accessed May 20, 2020, <http://academic.eb.com.ezproxy.tcu.edu/levels/collegiate/search/dictionary?query=redeem&includeLevelThree=1&page=1>

12 Lawrence O. Richards, *New International Encyclopedia of Bible Words* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 517.

13 “resistance”, Britannica Academic, last updated 2017, accessed May 20, 2020, <http://academic.eb.com.ezproxy.tcu.edu/levels/collegiate/search/dictionary?query=resistance&includeLevelThree=1&page=1>

show to be false¹⁴. Repress is defined in its standard use meaning to put down by force, prevent natural expression or exclude from consciousness.¹⁵

For hundreds of years in this country, through systemic and institutionalized racism, a prevailing narrative has been perpetuated that African Americans are less than others. Since the time of slavery, when enslaved people were relegated to nothing more than property, African Americans have been regarded as an inferior people. More specifically, at times in the history of the United States, African Americans were considered as only three-fifths of a person, not allowed to use the same bathrooms, drink from the same water fountains or sit at the same counters as the dominant culture. The mistreatment of African Americans has been chronicled in the United States since the first enslaved people arrived in Jamestown, Virginia in 1619¹⁶. These chronicled stories have unequivocally shown that the darkness of one's skin has been a burden for Pan-African people for centuries. More than a millennium before the first enslaved persons arrived in Jamestown, Gregory of Elvira provided a look into the theological significance of persons with a dark complexion when he writes, "I admit to being confused. How can the Church say she is *black and beautiful*, whereas she who is black cannot be beautiful? How can she be black if she is beautiful, or beautiful if she is black?"¹⁷ There is a connection for early church fathers and Christian authors between sin, evil and black skin.

¹⁴ "refute", Britannica Academic, last updated 2017, accessed May 20, 2020, <http://academic.eb.com.ezproxy.tcu.edu/levels/collegiate/search/dictionary?query=refute&includeLevelThree=1&page=1>

¹⁵ "repress", Britannica Academic, last updated 2017, accessed May 20, 2020, <http://academic.eb.com.ezproxy.tcu.edu/levels/collegiate/search/dictionary?query=repress&includeLevelThree=1&page=1>

¹⁶ Tim Hashaw, *The Birth of Black America: The First African Americans and the Pursuit of Freedom at Jamestown* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2007), 93.

¹⁷ Gregory of Elvira as quoted in Gay L. Byron, *Symbolic Blackness and Ethnic Difference in Early Christian Literature* (London: Routledge, 2002), 43.

Noted patristic writers and theologians, like Jerome, embraced an ethno-political rhetoric and described a person who strayed away from God or their faith as Ethiopian or blackened.¹⁸ In a homily on Psalm 86 of the Bible, Jerome echoed the sentiments of Origen when he declared,

At one time we were Ethiopians in our vices and sins. How so? Because our sins had blackened us. But afterwards we heard the words: “Wash yourselves clean!” And we said: “Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” We are Ethiopians, therefore, who have been transformed from blackness into whiteness.¹⁹

It is this same disparaging and destructive behavior towards people of Pan-African descent that survived a thousand years and the trans-Atlantic slave trade that still survives in the United States, well into the 20th and 21st centuries.

Although African American history is often devalued by negativity and the untruth of inferiority, hope can be resurrected from within the Word of God, the treasured annals of African American history and the prophetic voice of the African American preacher. Maya Angelou describes the realization of this hope when she writes, “Leaving behind nights of terror and fear. I rise. Into a daybreak that wondrously clear. I rise. Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave, I am the dream and the hope of the slave. I rise. I rise. I rise.”²⁰ Over time the African American preacher and Church would begin to rise and establish themselves, even if not fully recognized as free persons or capable pastors and churches.

The First African American Church

As the hope of African Americans began to rise in the late 18th century, one example of the growing independence and continued struggles of the African American preacher and church

¹⁸ Ibid., 55.

¹⁹ Jerome as quoted in Gay L. Byron, 55.

²⁰ Maya Angelou, *The Complete Collected Poems of Maya Angelou* (New York: Random House, 1994), 163.

is Rev. Andrew Bryan and the First African Church of Savannah, Georgia. The First African Church of Savannah, Georgia was officially recognized as a church January 20, 1788 under the leadership of Rev. Bryan.²¹ For over a decade before being recognized as a legal congregation, the enslaved members of this church had suffered harsh and cruel treatment along with their founder, the Rev. George Leile. Edgar Thomas details the violence experienced by this African American congregation when he writes,

Various methods were tried in order to discourage and stop their congregating; but nothing seemed adequate to cope with the situation. Opposition grew stronger and stronger. Individuals were punished by their masters. Some were intimidated and cruelly dealt with by the militia. They were often waylaid and severely flogged on their way to and from their humble meetings. But none of these things moved them! Indeed, the severer the persecution, the more resolutely did these saints rely upon God and stick to their worship. Finally, one day their humble shepherd and about fifty followers were seized in the public square and so severely beaten that their blood ran down and puddled on the ground about them. But while Andrew, already inhumanly cut, and his body so lacerated that his clothes were saturated in his own blood, with uplifted hands cried to his persecutors: "If you would stop me from preaching, cut off my head! For I am willing not only to be whipped, but would freely suffer death for the cause of the Lord Jesus."²²

As the first African American churches were being established, systemic obstructions were utilized to ensure enslaved persons could not experience religious and social independence. White-controlled associations, predominantly in the Baptist tradition, imposed unnecessary limitations on African American congregations as a reminder they were separate but not equal.

Rev. Andrew Bryan, Leile's successor, increased the number of congregants at the First African Church during his 24 year pastorate. With an increasing membership and a lack of safe or reliable transportation, two sister churches were birthed, the Second African and Ogeechee

²¹ Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford, 2004), 189.

²² Edgar Garfield Thomas, *The First African Baptist Church in North America* (Savannah:1925), 34.

(Third) African Church, from this landmark congregation.²³ The resistance and resilience of First African Church of Savannah, the oldest African American church in the United States, establishes their legacy in the history of the African American church. And although they fought well to become established, unfortunately their fighting days were not over.

The unprecedented growth of the African American church in the United States during this time period began to dismantle the dominant narrative that enslaved persons lacked the ability and intelligence to preach, teach and understand the Gospel. Historical documents indicated that African American churches during this time period actually made up nearly 75% of the churches in their affiliated associations, although the White churches retained all the authority. The growth of the African American churches, even in the midst of oppression, validated the fear of most slave owners. Allowing enslaved persons to participate in the preaching, teaching and hearing of the Gospel would offset the balance of power. As more enslaved persons heard the Gospel, learned to read, became educated and embraced the hope of God's deliverance, the less effective the tactics of their oppressors would become.²⁴

From a theological perspective, this moment in the life of the African American church is significant. This movement reminded African Americans, both free and enslaved, that God heard their prayers and freedom could become a reality. The growth of the African American church throughout the United States validated their relationship with God and strengthened their hope of experiencing justice and freedom this side of heaven.

²³ Ibid., 39-40.

²⁴ Ibid., 40.

Emancipation Proclamation

The African American pastor would continue to preach and lead the church and community toward that great day when God would answer their prayers and grant complete freedom. Nearly 75 years after the recognition of the First African Church in Savannah, Georgia in 1788, a monumental step toward liberation for African Americans would be announced by President Abraham Lincoln. John L. Thomas describes this important event in the context of earlier calls for freedom and the faith of enslaved Africans:

The first concrete validation of the Negro slave's belief that just as God saved the Hebrews from their captivity in Egypt, so God also would provide a way for their own escape from slavery, occurred in 1862-1863 when Abraham Lincoln declared the Emancipation Proclamation, outlawing slavery and giving Negroes the constitutional authority to claim their freedom. It is imperative to understand that this decree was not the origin of the Negro's claim to freedom; it merely provided a political basis for them to begin constructing an existence outside the walls of the plantation. Long before, voices of liberation and freedom had been proclaiming among the ranks of Negro slaves and other abolitionist efforts. In this sense, the Emancipation Proclamation served only to affirm what had already germinated in their being.²⁵

The African American pastor had been prophetically proclaiming that the day of freedom for enslaved people would come. As African Americans continued to grow in population and were allowed to congregate apart from the direct supervision of White congregations, the message of the pastor would also take on a greater role in society.

The African American pastor, with the declaration of the Emancipation Proclamation, would now have a legal platform in the public square. The same prophetic message being preached in the African American pulpit could now be preached in the streets, the newspaper and to the entire nation. John L. Thomas writes:

²⁵ John L. Thomas, *Voices In The Wilderness: Why Black Preaching Still Matters* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2018), 68.

The greatest value of the Emancipation Proclamation for the Negro slave was the way in which it redefined sociologically and politically their own participation in bringing about their freedom. The exhortation by Lincoln to “abstain from all violence, unless in necessary self-defense” conveyed to the Negro slave for the first time the notion that freedom was something to be defended and fought for. If for no other reason, the Negro slave could now actively pursue freedom and, in a theological sense, begin searching for ways in which they could struggle along with God to bring it about. This is the first definitive stage in the development of the Negro church’s role as a transforming agent in society.

Although it remained otherworldly in its theology for the next 100 years, the Emancipation Proclamation created the opportunity for the Negro church to construct an identity in a larger social context. This enabled free Negro people to turn toward more organized and intentional efforts to secure their rights. As a “visible” institution, the Negro church proved to be vital in the total emancipation of former slaves.²⁶

The African American pastor and church was now legally emancipated to advocate for themselves.

The time had come when African Americans could publicly confront those who had enslaved and dehumanized them for more than 170 years. Although it was now “legal” for African Americans to speak and act on their own behalf, the pursuit of equality and justice would remain a difficult and violent challenge. For the next 100 years the prophetic voice of the African American pastor would become more outspoken and the church became more visibly active in the public pursuit of freedom and justice.

Reconstruction and Jim Crow Laws

Many voices would help lead and join the fight for equality and civil rights moving into the 20th century. Powerful voices like Fredrick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, Marcus Garvey, Ida B. Wells, Madam C. J. Walker, Zora Neale Hurston, James Weldon Johnson, Grace

²⁶ Ibid., 69.

Nail Johnson and Langston Hughes contributed to the fight in significant and invaluable ways. The work of these authors, activists, educators and business leaders would complement and pave the way for some of the most influential and prophetic voices of the Civil Rights Movement, including the African American pastor.

The voices crying out for equality and justice became bolder and louder. Marches and protests became normal occurrences in the 1940s, especially in the southern region of the United States, where Jim Crow laws continued the oppression of African Americans that began centuries before. These de facto laws, put in place to segregate African Americans from Whites, had continued the hardships, suffering and violence experienced by African Americans from the end of Reconstruction (1877) through the 1950s.²⁷

The role the African American church would play in opposing Jim Crow was outlined by non-African American ally Abraham Johannes Muste. A pacifist, Muste wrote an essay in 1943 that detailed the faith, mindset and action necessary to confront and conquer Jim Crow. Muste wrote, “You can overcome evil if you care enough. Care enough to be willing to die in order that the evil may be overcome...This is the way of the cross.”²⁸ Muste states that a person of faith who opposes Jim Crow must be willing to give all, including their life, to conquer such an evil. He observed that there were many people who say they support a cause while looking for a minimal way to participate.²⁹ Muste continued, “They think God will be indulgent; that in this

²⁷ “Jim Crow Law”, Britannica Academic, last updated 2017, accessed May 25, 2020, <http://academic.eb.com.ezproxy.tcu.edu/levels/collegiate/search/dictionary?query=JimCrowLaw&includeLevelThree=1&page=1>

²⁸ Jeffrey D. Meyers, ed., *The Way of Peace: A. J. Muste's Writings for the Church* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2016), 187-188.

²⁹ Ibid., 187-188.

case there will be remission of sins without shedding of blood. But if there is any sense in the Christian symbol of the cross at all, this cannot be.”³⁰

Muste argued that the way to overcome the evil of racism was not through violence in retaliation. Instead, to overcome this evil one must become fearless, look to the cross and be willing to suffer death to affirm that all people, including African Americans, are part of the family of God.³¹ Muste closed his essay with words that would set the stage for the soon approaching Civil Rights Movement. He wrote,

To put it another way, the capacity to suffer unto death on behalf of our fellows is the real power that makes human life possible, and creates and maintains human society... Thus it is that whenever love that will suffer unto death is manifested, whenever a true crucifixion takes place, unconquerable power is released into the stream of history. The intuition that says that God has been let loose on the earth when such devotion is manifested is absolutely sound. This is the true road to liberation. Chiefly, humankind must always depend on its minorities, on the downtrodden, to show the way, since the privileged are too much bound by their vested interests... If the black churches of this country were to give the lead to their own people and their friends in the use of this basically Christian way of redemption, it would constitute another great step toward the achievement of a revolution greater and more beneficent than all the revolutions of the past.³²

Muste was correct when he said the African American Church could lead the nation in a revolution the United States had not yet experienced. This revolution, known as the Civil Rights Movement, caught the attention of every citizen in the country, and the African American Church and pastor would be at the center.

³⁰ Ibid., 188

³¹ Ibid., 188

³² Ibid., 188

Civil Rights Movement

The Civil Rights Movement in the United States is documented as occurring primarily during the 1950's and 1960's in response to the Jim Crow laws that were used to enforce segregation.³³ It was during this same time period that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. began his pastoral journey and experienced a shift in his plans, similar to many African American pastors before him. Raboteau writes,

King's life...was turned from its expected trajectory – in his case, by an unexpected event: the 1955 Montgomery bus boycott, which King neither started nor suggested, but that irrevocably changed him from the successful pastor of a moderately comfortable congregation to the leader of a national movement for racial justice.³⁴

For the African American pastor, accepting the pastoral call is an act of submitting one's entire life to God. This often includes a deviation from personal plans and ambitions. For King, one could say this deviation occurred with the arrest of Rosa Parks, soon after he accepted the pastorate at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama in 1954.³⁵

In August of 1955, Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a bus and her arrest provided the ideal opportunity to initiate an already planned bus boycott by the Women's Political Council and the Montgomery chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).³⁶ Once Parks was bailed out of jail, the plan to boycott the buses circulated quickly throughout the African American community, and the African American pastors of Montgomery were called together to provide support.³⁷ Although the pastors, together

³³ "Civil Rights Movement," Civil Rights Movement, History, last modified January 29, 2020, <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/civil-rights-movement>.

³⁴ Albert J. Raboteau, *American Prophets: Seven Religious Radicals & Their Struggle For Social and Political Justice* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2016), 153.

³⁵ Gary Dorrien, *Breaking White Supremacy: Martin Luther King Jr. and the Black Social Gospel* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 288.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 288.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 288.

with local activists had already come together and formed the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA), they were in need of a strong leader who could speak for the group before a community that was prepared to take action.³⁸ After King, the newest pastor in Montgomery, unexpectedly accepted the nomination as MIA spokesperson, he quickly gathered himself and gave a speech that excited the 5,000 persons inside the Holt Street Baptist Church to get ready for action.³⁹ With that speech the boycott began and King's role as the face and voice of MIA and the African American community of Montgomery began.⁴⁰

Although Dr. King's speech was well received and the community was encouraged to stand against segregation and participate in the bus boycott, King would also recognize the dangers of giving leadership in the Civil Rights Movement. Soon after the Montgomery bus boycott started King began to receive numerous phone calls, both day and night, threatening to kill him and his family.⁴¹ Then one night, King sat at his kitchen table and reflected on how his life had changed. Gary Dorrien describes this significant moment in Dr. King's life in the following way:

King quietly confessed to God that he was weak, faltering, losing his nerve, and at the end of his powers: "I have nothing left. I've come to the point where I can't face it alone." He had barely uttered the words when he felt a surge of seemingly divine something he had never experienced previously. An inner voice spoke to him, saying, "Stand up for righteousness, stand up for truth; and I will be at your side forever." It was the voice of Jesus, King believed.⁴²

38 Ibid., 289.

39 Ibid., 290-292

40 Ibid., 290-292.

41 Ibid., 292.

42 Ibid., 292-293.

The African American pastor draws on the divine voice to stand, especially when their own power is gone. One could say this quiet moment in his kitchen propelled Dr. King to stand before the nation confident he was not alone.

The revolution for Civil Rights in the United States had become an international phenomenon as people around the globe watched the tense and often times violent incidents experienced by demonstrators. Birmingham, Alabama is an example of one city in the southern United States that had its share of incidents. On Sunday, September 15, 1963, Birmingham would experience the fulfillment of the words of A. J. Muste from two decades earlier, as quoted above. A bomb was detonated in the basement of the 16th Street Baptist Church that killed four girls and injured another. From the rubble and smoke of this violent act stood an African American pastor, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who offered words of consolation, courage and challenge to an entire nation during the funeral of those young martyrs.⁴³ During the eulogy for Addie Mae Collins, Carole Robertson, Cynthia Wesley and Denise McNair, "...King contrasted the innocent beauty of the murdered girls with the vicious savagery of the killers, praying that the crime would impel America to take 'the high road of peace and brotherhood.'"⁴⁴ At a moment when the attention of the world was focused on the injustices in America, it is the African American pastor who is called to declare words of comfort and conviction.

Dr. King used his influence and words as an African American pastor to call an entire nation to action. He extended an invitation for all people to actively participate in the Civil Rights Movement. According to John L. Thomas, the African American pastor is often involved

⁴³ Albert J. Raboteau, *American Prophets: Seven Religious Radicals & Their Struggle For Social and Political Justice* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2016), 143-144.

⁴⁴ Dorrien, *Breaking White Supremacy*, 355.

in community movements. Thomas offered the following insights on the impact of the African American pastor:

Particularly interesting to me has been the impact of the Black preachers on social, religious, and political movements. The sphere of their influence reaches beyond the pulpit into the community in ways that no other personality has or does. There are many reasons for this. First, the role of the preacher in the Black community emerged out of a necessity for survival during slavery. There were few other leaders better suited for articulating the needs of the people, which enabled them to organize and sustain slaves during antebellum existence. This continues to be an important role of the preacher in the life of the community. Secondly, the holistic worldview of the Black preacher allows a broader perspective about the preaching task. All of life is sacred, and therefore must be included in the sermon. Preaching is not regulated to addressing only the “spiritual” matters.⁴⁵

The preaching moment for the African American pastor extends past the most remote pew or seat in the sanctuary. The sermon has an extended reach into the community where persons want to hear what God is doing about their current circumstance. Throughout history, as occurred with Dr. King, the African American pastor has been given a call that can transform a eulogy into a movement for justice. During the Civil Rights Movement this call did not diminish, instead the voice and presence of the African American pastor matured.

Black Social Gospel

The voice of the African American pastor, including Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was directly tied to the Black Social Gospel. According to Dorrien:

Historically the black social gospel was rooted in abolitionist black religion and the teaching of the Bible that God favors the poor and the oppressed. It emerged from the ravages of the transatlantic slave trade, the birth of African American Christianity, and the legacy of the abolitionist tradition, addressing the crisis of a new era.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ John L. Thomas, *Voices In The Wilderness: Why Black Preaching Still Matters* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2018), 4.

⁴⁶ Dorrien, *Breaking White Supremacy*, 2.

The Black Social Gospel resonated with African American pastors because of its belief in God's concern for the oppressed and the poor. Dorrien continues,

The social gospel mattered to King because it was inherently social, it held fast to the gospel belief in salvation, and it was unabashedly political, a call to transform the structures of society in the direction of social justice...the social gospel acquired its name by proposing to change society, making society a subject of redemption."⁴⁷

Like King, many African American pastors believed the systemic structures in society could be transformed by salvation through the Gospel. Dorrien writes, "The black social gospel affirmed the dignity, sacred personhood, creativity, and moral agency of African Americans and responded to racial oppression."⁴⁸ The Black Social Gospel affirmed the African American pastor's call to be political and maintain the hope of redeeming a society in crisis.

This social and political voice of the African American pastor, as presented in this chapter, emerged through significant moments in history including: the years of Pan-African enslavement, the establishment of the First African American Church, the hope that came with the Emancipation Proclamation, Reconstruction and the cruel backlash of Jim Crow, and the Civil Rights Movement with its clear articulation of the Black Social Gospel. Dorrien suggests, that the Black Social Gospel has often been historically overlooked because much of the story has not been written.⁴⁹ Although many may not be aware of the formal name for this prophetic voice, it has been present throughout history, and was still speaking into the 20th and 21st centuries.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 21.

⁴⁸ Gary Dorrien, *The New Abolition : W.E.B. Du Bois and the Black Social Gospel* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 2.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 2.

In the 21st century African American pastors like Dr. Gardner C. Taylor, Dr. James Cone and Rev. William J. Barber II have been visible examples of African American pastors whose voices contribute to the living legacy of the Black Social Gospel. However, this Black social Gospel has been significantly challenged since the 1960's. Heath W. Carter writes,

Black social gospelers continued to prophesy against structural racism but their message largely failed to gain traction with a white Christian majority persuaded that the nation had addressed its original sin back in the Civil Rights era. Incontrovertible visual evidence of police brutality changed some white minds in the early twenty-first century. But in its initial phase at least, the Black Lives Matter movement succeeded more at calling attention to violations of individual rights than to the structural underpinnings of persistent racial inequality.⁵⁰

With the move into the 21st century and the support of visual evidence through technology, the Black Social Gospel still had to endure the mindset of some that the battle for racial injustice had already been overcome. Even with a belief by some that this issue is no longer a societal sin, the movement still continues as evidenced by a gathering reported by Carter:

But hope persists, even in the wilderness...As the mass meeting got underway at Selma's Tabernacle Baptist Church...It was March 5, 2015, nearly fifty years to the day since the infamous "Bloody Sunday" march...Many of the saints who powered the local movement long before Martin Luther King, Jr., ever set foot in Selma were seated in the first two rows...Someone was wheeling Amelia Boynton—frail now at 103 years old, but in her prime the most formidable thorn in the side of the area's white supremacist ruling class—to the front. Eyes that had not yet dried watered freely once more as the multiracial assembly belted out the lyrics of the old freedom song, "We Shall Overcome," and as NAACP President Cornell William Brooks invoked the memory of Medgar Evers, the martyred activist whose last words, as he lay bleeding, were "Sit me up! Turn me loose!" Stirring reflections from luminaries such as Jeremiah Wright and Bernice King followed, but it was the Reverend William J. Barber II who brought down the house. He began softly, even tentatively, but soon enough was thundering against contemporary manifestations of inequality, including the 2013 Supreme Court decision that had eviscerated the hard-won 1965 Voting Rights Act. Over and over Barber vowed that God's people must see this historic anniversary not as a "commemoration" but rather as a "consecration" to the work of justice and

⁵⁰ Heath W. Carter, "Christianity and Inequality in the Modern United States," in *Faith, Finance, and Economy: Beliefs and Economic Well-Being*, eds. T. Akram T, S. Rashid (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 190.

righteousness in our time. By the time he reached the climax of his address, the crowd was on its feet, applauding vigorously and shouting “Amen.”⁵¹

The statement of Carter suggest the Black Social Gospel is still alive. This movement is strengthened each time the African American community unites under the sound of old freedom songs, the memorable voices of their martyrs and the message of a contemporary African American pastor compelling them to march on.

As briefly described in this chapter, the African American pastor was present and had an influential leadership role during historic movements in the life of the African American church and community. The voice of the African American pastor was prominent during the years of Pan-African enslavement, the founding of the first African American Church, the declaration of the Emancipation Proclamation, Reconstruction and Jim Crow laws, the Civil Rights Movement and continues in the Black Social Gospel movement.

51 Heath W. Carter, “Christianity and Inequality in the Modern United States,” in *Faith, Finance, and Economy: Beliefs and Economic Well-Being*, eds. T. Akram T, S. Rashid (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 191-192.

CHAPTER 3: THE METHODOLOGY

For this research study I chose to gather data through focus groups. Each focus group consisted of 3 - 4 African American pastors who have demonstrated civic leadership while also pastoring an African American church. The discussions in these focus groups were facilitated using the Story-Linking Method. The Story-Linking Method is a process developed by Dr. Anne E. Streaty Wimberly and described in her book *Soul Stories*. In this chapter I will discuss the Story-Linking Method, the design of this project, the means for evaluation, the selection of participants and how the project was carried out.

Dr. Wimberly's Story-Linking Method and this Project

An Introduction to the Story-Linking Method

For this research study I used the Story-Linking Method as described by Anne E. Streaty Wimberly. In her book *Soul Stories*, she defines story-linking as follows:

...story-linking is a process whereby we connect parts of our everyday stories with the Christian faith story in the Bible and the lives of exemplars of the Christian faith outside the Bible. In this process, we link with Bible stories by using them as mirrors through which we reflect critically on the liberation we have already found or are still seeking, as well as glean wisdom that guides our ongoing liberation efforts. We also link with our Christian faith heritage by learning about exemplars who chose a hope-building way of living based on the liberating wisdom and understanding of vocation they found in Scripture. By linking with Christian faith heritage stories, we may be encouraged and inspired by predecessors who have faced the circumstances with which we readily identify.⁵²

This method emphasizes the engagement of Christian faith stories in the Bible with Christian faith African American heritage stories and current lived experience stories, or everyday stories.

The linking of each of these stories together, within an African American cultural context,

⁵² Anne E. Streaty Wimberly, *Soul Stories: African American Christian Education* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 30.

provides the focus group participants in the process an opportunity to glean meaning and wisdom for their own lived experiences.

Dr. Wimberly describes story-linking as an effective method of discerning vocation and finding answers to critical life questions within the African American culture. In the introduction to her book *Soul Stories*, Wimberly writes,

This book presents a model of Christian education from an African American perspective that seeks to answer the questions. The model draws on Christian education approaches begun during the slave era and built on the story orientation of African culture.⁵³

Through the sharing of stories older and younger generations together impart wisdom through lived experiences and provide guidance for those who are making important life decisions. An educational experience emerges during these sharing moments because listeners are able to discover their own stories within the stories of others and learn life lessons. Wimberly states, “The intent is for African Americans to be encouraged and inspired by the lives of people who faced life circumstances with which they can readily identify.”⁵⁴ These interactive listening moments provide cherished opportunities where families share and learn about their communal history, heritage and faith.

Since the time of slavery, African American families have spent cherished time gathered together to hear the stories of their ancestors from the elders in their family. This practice of storytelling can be traced to various traditions of West African religions where preserving the stories of the ancestors is taken seriously. According to Raboteau, “Elderly people are respected and revered in part because they preserve the memory of the dead and are closer chronologically

⁵³ Ibid., 4.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 5.

to the ancestors. The ancestors are watchful guardians of the customs of the people.”⁵⁵ Through storytelling the elders provide a critical form of education in the African American family that interconnects the personal, social and religious aspects of life. Following a trip to Zimbabwe, Wimberly wrote about the significance of storytelling,

During this event, I was also reminded of the significance of storytelling to communal vitality and storytelling as a channel through which God speaks. Zimbabweans are a storytelling people—a current reality that follows the oral patterns of traditional African culture. Continuation of the dual pattern of storytelling and story-listening in communal rituals is a meaningful way of engendering active participation and teaching/learning and of acting on the attribute of interdependency on which communal vitality rests. The storyteller captures the attention of the story-listener, whereupon the story-listener learns the art of storytelling and, in turn, becomes the storyteller.⁵⁶

Wimberly embraces this technique of culturally relevant learning with the story-linking method.

Wimberly recognizes an important link between Christian education and storytelling. Based on research and personal lived experiences, Wimberly believes God provides the answers to African American’s quest for liberation and vocational direction in the holy scriptures of the Bible. Therefore, the story-linking method combines Christian faith and the retelling of stories that demonstrate an active faith that pursues direction and answers. For this process of discernment Wimberly describes the use of three types of stories. Although each story is different, each story presents a perspective of God’s involvement in the human discernment process. Wimberly defines these stories as everyday life stories, Christian faith stories in the Bible and Christian faith stories from the African American heritage.

⁵⁵ Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 12-13.

⁵⁶ Anne Streaty Wimberly, "Discovering Communal Vitality in African Rituals: Seeing and Hearing God Through Zimbabwean Christians," *Religious Education* 96, no. 3(Sum 2001): 375.

Understanding the use of the everyday life story, Christian faith story in the Bible and Christian faith story in the African American heritage, Wimberly reveals the two main tasks of the story-linking method. She describes them as follows:

The task is to engage African Americans in story-linking in ways that help us reflect critically on our particular life stories in light of the Christian faith story. A second task is to guide us as African Americans toward envisioning and deciding actions that hold promise for our forming liberating wisdom that moves us toward liberation and hopebuilding vocation in the midst of our particular life situations.⁵⁷

The story-linking method is proposed as a discernment process that guides African Americans, through storytelling, to a place of wisdom and visionary decision making.

Wimberly suggests beginning a focus group using the story-linking process with an everyday life story. This story describes a commonly lived experience, either heard or personally experienced by the leader of the focus group. Wimberly advises starting with the everyday life story for the following reason:

My point in this book is that a vital Christian education for liberating wisdom and hopebuilding vocation is one that offers a process that has at its center our lived stories. That is, the starting point of Christian education for liberating wisdom and hopebuilding vocation should be the everyday life stories we face. Such a process should make possible our arriving at insights, discerning choices, and making ethical decisions—wise decisions about what is right to do to promote and sustain liberation for ourselves and others. The process should also enable us to arrive at insights, discern choices, and make the kinds of ethical decisions that lead to our involvement in vocation that centers on and brings a sense of hope in what often seems to be hopeless life situations.⁵⁸

Christian education and discernment begins with the telling of common experiences we have in common. Education and discernment can occur when a participant relates to the everyday life story and discovers the same decisions made in the story are also options for them. Examining

⁵⁷ Anne E. Streaty Wimberly, *Soul Stories: African American Christian Education* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 30.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 28.

the decisions of others, especially those who have experienced what the participant is currently experiencing, can inspire hope and clarity in the listener's life.

Although the everyday life story can provide clarity for the participants, the story can also give insight into the perspectives of the focus group leader. Through the everyday life story, the leader personally contributes to the discernment process and offers their perspective on the intersection of faith, education and heritage. Wimberly describes the impact of the everyday life story in the following way:

We either consciously or unconsciously use our own personal stories as a lens through which we view what is being focused on in Christian education. We interpret the Bible, struggle with its meaning, and respond to God's word contained in it in light of the realities and demands of our everyday lives. We look at our lives in comparison to the lives of our predecessors and to the ways they lived the Christian story. By placing our stories up front, the intention is not to compromise the importance of the Christian faith story disclosed in the Bible. Rather, the intent is to acknowledge that Christian education leaders/teachers and participants already have an agenda when they come to Christian education. Our stories are the agenda we bring to our study of the Christian faith story in the Bible and our Christian faith heritage.⁵⁹

The choice of every story used in the story-linking process is important. The everyday life story invites the personal struggles and beliefs of the focus group leader into this educational process. This initial story lays the foundation for the remainder of the process and introduces a personal example of the role of Christian faith in decision making.

Understanding the critical role of the everyday life story in the story-linking process the leader of the focus group must ensure this story positively contributes to the process of discovering liberation and vocation. According to Wimberly,

There are a number of key components of our lives that give shape to our everyday stories. I am proposing six broad, interrelated factors that contribute to our stories and that can have either facilitating or inhibiting effects on our liberation and vocation.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Ibid., 30-31.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 31.

The six components Wimberly identifies as factors that impact the effectiveness of the everyday life story are identity, social contexts, interpersonal relationships, life events, life meanings and our unfolding story plot.⁶¹

Wimberly defines identity as one's perception of self as shaped by their cultural, social and personal context and their relationship to the world.⁶² Social contexts are described as the environments where one participates in life events, interacts with others and accesses the resources and opportunities available to their family and community.⁶³ Interpersonal relationships represent former and current relationships, both intimate and distant, in all areas of one's life including familial, social, political, religious and spiritual contexts.⁶⁴ "Life events are positive and negative incidents that happen to us over the course of our lives."⁶⁵ Life meanings are explained as the way persons make sense of their life as perceived through personal reflections, judgments, thoughts, feelings and purpose.⁶⁶ Our unfolding life plot is dependent on how a person views their life, which can be positive or negative, and influences how one assigns meaning and responds to events in life.⁶⁷ Considering these components when determining an everyday life story for a focus group will be helpful.

⁶¹ Ibid., 32-33.

⁶² Ibid., 32.

⁶³ Ibid., 32.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 32.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 33.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 33.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 33.

Using the Story-Linking Method to Draw Wisdom from a Focus Group

Wimberly's Story-Linking Method was initially created as a method to enhance Christian Education in the African American church. The method was designed to encourage the revealing and sharing of wisdom among participants in a group; therefore, the method could also be used for focus groups. The Story-Linking Method is particularly helpful for this project because:

- 1) this method is intentionally designed for use in the African American culture and context,
- 2) this method is intended as a Christian education tool that facilitates a discernment process around vocation, and
- 3) this method can be used in a focus group setting.

The story-linking method was preferred for this project because this project is interested in the African American pastor, who demonstrates civic leadership in an African American community, while effectively pastoring an African American church. This method was designed for the particular cultural context of this project.

This method was chosen for this project because one of the purposes of this project is to identify and encourage discussion around the discernment experiences of African American pastors. The story-linking method is designed to help Christians reflect upon their Christian vocation. Since the purpose of this focus group is to hear pastors reflect on their discernment process around their vocation as a minister, this method is especially apt. The data from this project could provide vocational understanding and liberating wisdom for early in ministry pastors. This method was designed to encourage the transfer of knowledge and inspiration among African Americans with shared lived experiences across generations.

The story-linking method was also selected for this project because, when used in a focus group setting, it allows participants to engage in conversation about their personal pastoral discernment process which could lead to spiritual, pastoral, historical, social and cultural

learning. The story-linking method provides a safe environment where each participant can share their personal experiences about collaborating with God in their pastoral vocation and civic leadership.

The Design of the Story-Linking Process for this Project

For this project, the everyday life story I selected was a portion of my own personal pastoral story. Wimberly invites focus group leaders to use their own personal story because it allows participants the freedom to visualize and discuss their own story through a connection with the leader's story.⁶⁸ I chose my own personal story because it was relatable. As an African American pastor whose ministry continues to develop under the mentorship of an experienced senior pastor, and whose voice has extended beyond the local pulpit into the greater faith and civic community, it is conceivable the pastors in this study would be able to relate to that narrative.

The Christian faith story in the Bible is the second story Dr. Wimberly suggests the leader of the focus group should discuss during the story-linking process. This story is a narrative found in scripture in the Bible and serves as the link to "...the Story of God and the good news of Jesus Christ found in Scripture."⁶⁹ Wimberly suggests the following five steps for the second stage of the story-telling method: "the Bible story is disclosed; participants focus on the story or text as a mirror; they enter into partnership with the characters of the Bible story; they envision God's action today; and they anticipate their ongoing response to God."⁷⁰ The Christian faith

⁶⁸ Ibid., 33.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 34.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 36.

story chosen should be contextually relevant to life as an African American and provide guidance for the specific life questions the participants are looking to answer.

The story does not have to be chosen by the leader, instead if the participants demonstrate a strong biblical knowledge the leader can ask the participants to suggest a passage. Wimberley describes the importance of the Christian faith story in the Bible in the following way:

How may Scripture inform our choices and decisions as African Americans about what is right to do to bring about liberating wisdom that leads to liberation and the enactment of authentic and hope-building Christian vocation? To address these questions is to respond to our deepest needs for God's presence and direction in our liberation and vocational quest. By choosing and entering Bible stories/texts that reveal the hardships and sufferings of an earlier people and God's activity in the midst of anguish, we are enabled to envision God's presence and activity now. We are enabled to envision ourselves, as did those in earlier times, in an unfolding story that is undertaken on faith and in faith and in faithful, hopeful cooperation with God's direction.⁷¹

The use of the Christian faith story in the Bible provides a first-hand account of God's involvement in the human experience, especially for those who are burdened and marginalized. The story provides a reminder that wrestling with life decisions is normal and that God has a history of interceding in the lives of those who seek God's help. When she described the influence a Christian faith story in the Bible had on a focus group she facilitated, Wimberly stated the following:

The Bible story in turn provided the basis for the group to reflect on their life events and struggles through the lens of faith. Group members used the Bible story as a mirror and entered into partnership with the story. They saw in the story how God acts in life, and they envisioned and anticipated how they would cooperate with God.⁷²

A transition can occur in the focus group when the participants are able to envision God's presence and activity in their own personal story. The possibility of liberation becomes more

⁷¹ Ibid., 29-30.

⁷² Ibid., 34.

believable as participants reflect and engage in dialogue around the Christian faith story in the Bible.

For this project, I chose the call narrative of Moses as recorded in the book of Exodus in the Bible as the Christian faith story. I chose Moses because of the prophetic call he received from God to return to Egypt and confront Pharaoh on behalf of his oppressed community, the children of Israel. Moses stands as a prophet before the Israelites and the political leader of his day, preaching a message of deliverance and justice. Moses is also commissioned by God to lead the Israelites to the land of promise, a place where they can worship God freely. Moses's experience as a prophet mirrors the prophetic call of the African American pastor; therefore, it may be relatable to the participants in this focus group.

I also chose this story of Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt and through the wilderness because of the historical significance this biblical story holds for the African American community since the time of slavery. John L. Thomas explains the connectedness of these shared experiences in the following way:

The wilderness as a sociological phenomenon is a useful metaphor for explaining the uniqueness of black suffering. The wilderness experiences of the Hebrews and Jesus in the New Testament mark a decisive turning point in the biblical story. Although wilderness is a place of environmental challenge and instar-psychic struggle, it also has the potential for social transformation. Much of Black preaching has been shaped and informed by the wilderness experience. The preacher's task has always been to bring hope in the midst of suffering. The biblical image of the wilderness presupposes the crossing of the Jordan River.⁷³

The contemporary African American experience still includes suffering and longs for hope in the midst of the struggle. Therefore, the story of Moses seemed a relevant choice as the Christian faith story in the Bible for this project.

⁷³ John L. Thomas, *Voices In The Wilderness: Why Black Preaching Still Matters* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2018), 65-66.

The third story Wimberly suggests the leader of the focus group should discuss is the Christian faith story from the African American heritage. The story-linking method was created as a method to strengthen Christian education in the African American community. Therefore, incorporating a story that accentuates the Christian faith of an African American ancestor is appropriate. Although there are many sources where this story can be found, it is important this story is told from the African American culture.⁷⁴

Wimberly describes the role of the Christian faith story from the African American heritage as follows:

The intent of Christian education for liberating wisdom that leads to liberation and hope-building vocation is to place us in touch with our African American forebears' faith and their experience of God's action in their liberating wisdom and hope-building vocation. Linking with our forebears' story helps to inspire us and to foster our commitment to continue on the Christian faith walk. This linkage also promotes our openness and expectation to be continually formed and informed by the Story of God and the good news of Jesus Christ. Of particular importance are exemplars from the African American heritage who struggled with and overcame tremendous blocks to liberation and who engaged in the kind of ethical decision making that led them into hope-filled vocation. Also, of particular importance are predecessors who interpreted and acted on difficult and oppressive life issues by identifying with stories/texts found in Scripture. Our intent is to see as applicable to ourselves what it meant for them to place their lives in dialogue with Bible stories/texts. We want to see how they made a connection between life hoped for and life valuable enough to continue striving for, and what this means for us today.⁷⁵

With the continued contemporary struggles experienced by African Americans in the United States, the Christian faith story from the African American heritage is a significant story in the story-linking method. This story can validate the injustices, envision the liberation and inspire the hope necessary to remain faithful. Wimberly shared the following response about a focus group she facilitated:

⁷⁴ Anne E. Streaty Wimberly, *Soul Stories: African American Christian Education* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 36.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

The group gained understanding and inspiration from the liberation and vocation themes in the midst of trials and tribulation on which the story centered and which lie at the heart of the gospel proclaimed in Scripture. They recognized that the journey of forebears was difficult, but that it was not allowed to thwart efforts to continue on in faith and to lead others in a hope-filled direction.⁷⁶

Wimberly's statement suggests that with each story in the story-linking method the participant makes a connection to someone that strengthens their own resolve, reminds them their struggle is not unique and they are not alone. The Christian faith story in the African American heritage connects participants to the many heroes of their heritage and faith and encourages them to imitate their courage and resilience.

For this project, I chose Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as the Christian faith story in the African American heritage because of his demonstrated prophetic pastoral call he received from God. His call enlarged his public presence beyond the pulpits of the Dexter Avenue and Ebenezer Baptist Churches to a platform where he addressed the injustices faced by the African American community throughout the United States. The story of Dr. King was relevant for this focus group because of the fact that he was an African American Baptist pastor who occupied a pulpit while leading in the community. Raboteau describes King this way:

Like his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather, King entered the ministry, and throughout the years of his leadership in the civil rights movement, he remained a preacher, regularly occupying the pulpit for Sunday worship, and drawing on the Black Church tradition in which he was formed for both the style and content of the political speeches he delivered at demonstrations and appearances in the public square.⁷⁷

For this project, Dr. King's story provides a pastoral experience through which participants for this focus group will be able to see a portion of their own African American pastoral journey.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 36

⁷⁷ Albert J. Raboteau, *American Prophets: Seven Religious Radicals & Their Struggle For Social and Political Justice* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2016), 151.

Eight questions were developed in order to facilitate sharing among the participants. Each participant had an opportunity, if they choose, to answer each question and participate in the dialogue based on the everyday life story, Christian faith story in the Bible and Christian faith story in the African American heritage described in Appendix A. Throughout the process each participant was invited to reflect on their personal pastoral discernment process and to engage one another in dialogue that inspired the sharing of wisdom around vocation and liberation.

Project Design

This study was designed for the sole purpose of capturing the contemporary voice of the African American pastor who is discerning the call to prophetic civic leadership while faithfully serving a congregation within the African American pastoral tradition. Through this study I desired to learn about the persons who have inspired them, the challenges that have matured them, and the ways they understand God has called and continues to lead them. In an effort to discover wisdom for future pastors, I wanted to hear from pastors who are currently serving the African American Church, able to share valuable lessons learned and what they believe church leaders must do and be to lead the African American Church into the future.

To be included in this study the pastor had to be currently serving a congregation in some capacity and demonstrating civic leadership. Civic leadership is defined as serving in a leadership position within a civil rights, governmental, non-profit, interfaith, denominational or grassroots organization, that operates independent of a local congregation. Each pastor had to have a combined minimum of 15 years of pastoral experience, not limited to service with one congregation. They had to serve churches that self-identify as predominantly African American,

meaning at least 51% of the congregation identifies as African American and have been in existence for at least fifty years.

For this project I wanted to recruit participants who had been pastoring long enough that they have become established in the African American Church and community. In my personal experience as an African American pastor, I have heard from senior pastors for years that it takes at least ten years to truly become the pastor in an African American Baptist church. Pastoral experience suggests that a number of years are required for a congregation to release their emotional and spiritual connections to their former pastor and establish their relationship with the succeeding pastor. Therefore, I based my criteria for length of time in pastoral ministry on information or wisdom I gained through personal experience.

For this project I wanted to pursue participants who were serving African American Baptist churches recognized as historical places of worship and engaged civically in their communities. The Civil Rights Movement in the United States is documented as occurring primarily during the 1950's and 1960's, with one of the most significant moments, the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., happening in April of 1968.⁷⁸ With this understanding, I pursued pastors who were pastoring churches that were worshipping with and serving communities during this critical time in the life of African Americans in this country. Therefore, I based my criteria for the minimum number of years a church has been established at fifty with the hope the churches the participants serve will have a history of civic engagement and leadership in their communities.

⁷⁸ "Civil Rights Movement," Civil Rights Movement, History, last modified January 29, 2020, <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/civil-rights-movement>.

In an effort to narrow my focus and complete this research project in a timely manner, I focused the participant criteria primarily on race and ethnicity. This project is focused on African American pastors, serving historically African American churches, using the story-linking method, which was created for use in the African American cultural context. Therefore, I have chosen to limit the inclusion criteria in an effort to limit the influence of other variables that may direct the conversations away from race and ethnicity. I fully acknowledge there are many forms of discrimination prevalent in this country. However, I chose to focus on the basis of discrimination that has impacted my personal life and ministry more than any other; race and ethnicity.

Brendan O’Flaherty argued, “There is a long history of race determining who should be treated with respect, who was truly human, whose rights should be protected...”⁷⁹ The primary injustice, which began before slavery in the United States and continues to exist through systemic and institutionalized methods, was initially constructed based on the color of one’s skin. Harek writes, “Despite extensive efforts to counteract the effects of racism, African Americans today experience differential treatment because of their race. Compared to Whites, Blacks are economically and socially disadvantaged.”⁸⁰ I am well aware that I might have missed a valuable opportunity to document the stories of many leaders who represent a vast number of backgrounds, experiences and communities.

With the intention of completing this project in a timely fashion, I recruited potential participants from my established networks of African American pastors and churches.

⁷⁹ Brendan O’Flaherty, *The Economics of Race in the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 4.

⁸⁰ “Race and Sexual Orientation: Commonalities, Comparisons, and Contrasts Relevant to Military Policy,” *Sexual Orientation: Science, Education and Policy*, Gregory M. Harek, accessed February 13, 2019, http://psychology.ucdavis.edu/rainbow/html/military_race_comparison.html.

Specifically, these networks included the St. John Regular Baptist District Association, Baptist Ministers' Union of Austin and Vicinity (BMU), National Baptist Convention of America Incorporated International (NBCA) and Missionary Baptist General Convention of Texas (MBGCT). I recognize recruiting participants through these affiliated denominational convention bodies will reduce the diversity of potential participants⁸¹. For instance, traditionally, within these specifically identified African American denominational conventions, men who self-identify as LGBTQ+ and women are not acknowledged as pastors. Although the recruitment materials distributed for this project (i.e. fliers, e-mails, announcements) did not explicitly exclude women and members of the LGBTQ+ community, as anticipated, the pastors who responded verbally self-identified as straight males during the introductory moments of each focus group. Understanding that the results of the recruitment efforts might limit the broad application of the study's findings, it may also offer a helpful limitation for the scope of this project. Recognizing that female and LGBTQ+ clergy are not acknowledged as pastors within the particular denominational conventions chosen for recruitment opportunities, it is possible women and members of the LGBTQ+ community might encounter similar or significantly greater challenges as leaders in an African American Baptist church and community.

Based on the inclusion criteria previously mentioned, I recruited pastors by distributing printed and digital advertisements through my pre-established relationships with the leadership of the selected particular denominational conventions. I asked the presidents and executive leadership of these conventions to share my recruitment flier (see Appendices F,G) and letter by e-mail (see Appendix H) and printed copy with all pastors associated with these conventions.

⁸¹ Melody E. Morton Ninomiya, Nathaniel J. Pollock, "Reconciling community-based Indigenous Research and Academic Practices: Knowing Principles is not Always Enough," *Social Science & Medicine* 172, (January 2017):29, www.elsevier.com/locate/socscimed

The leadership of these conventions also made public announcements to encourage participation in this study.

As a result of these recruitment efforts, this qualitative Doctor of Ministry project consisted of two focus groups with three ordained African American pastors in each focus group ($N=6$). Both focus groups were conducted confidentially. Focus group one was convened at a church, while focus group two was convened at a hotel. Light refreshments and water were provided for the pastors during the focus groups. Each pastor received a \$40.00 Visa gift card after he signed a consent form, acknowledgement of receipt form and completed a demographic data questionnaire (see Appendices C,D,E). Although each pastor had previously stated, either verbally or by text message, that they satisfied the criteria for the study, each pastor was asked to provide written confirmation when they arrived for the focus group. The demographic data for each pastor was collected on a questionnaire that included the following questions:

- What is your age in years?
- How many years have you served as a Pastor?
- How many years have you served as a civic leader?
- What is the highest level of education you have completed? (general equivalency/high school diploma, some college, associate, bachelor, graduate degree)

After the pastors completed the demographic information forms, the focus groups were conducted and lasted 111 and 133 minutes in length, respectively. Field notes were taken during both focus group meetings, as well as recorded with a digital audio recorder. The audio recordings from the focus groups were transcribed by a professional service. Analysis of the collected data was done within three months of the conclusion of each focus group meeting.

From the collected data themes were identified. The findings were evaluated, and the implications and lessons learned from this study were documented.

Evaluation

The evaluation process for this research project consisted of organizing and analyzing the responses of the pastors during the focus groups. A professional transcription company [GMR Transcription Services, Inc.]⁸² transcribed the audio recordings of the focus groups. I verified the transcriptions by listening to the audio recordings and reading the transcriptions simultaneously. Once the verification was completed, I utilized Documentary Analysis, as detailed by Tim Sensing in *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*, to analyze and code the data.

Through this qualitative data analysis process, I coded the data into themes using *f4analyse* software (version 2.5.5 Education)⁸³. I identified themes among the pastors' responses as they described their discernment of their prophetic call to pastoral and civic leadership. I was able to then compare the findings between the focus groups. Finally, to reduce researcher bias, I met with expert qualitative researchers who provided feedback and verification regarding my identified themes. These qualitative researchers are PhD level assistant professors at a leading research university in Texas. After engaging in a discussion about this final project, the experts that were utilized became interested in the subject matter and offered to assist me as I worked to verify my data. Although neither researcher has a seminary background, each of them have been published and conducted research related to connections between race and religious belief.

⁸² www.gmrtranscription.com

⁸³ *f4analyse*, <https://www.audiotranskription.de/english/f4-analyse>

Selection Process Of Participants

Upon approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for my final project, I distributed the recruitment flier and letter through printed and digital advertisements to the pastors associated with the St. John Regular Baptist District Association, the Baptist Ministers' Union of Austin and Vicinity (BMU), and National Baptist Convention of America Incorporated International (NBCA). Though, I also received permission from the leadership of the Missionary Baptist General Convention of Texas (MBGCT) to distribute the recruitment flier and letter to pastors with their membership, a comprehensive e-mail distribution list was not available at the time recruitment took place. In this case, I had to mostly recruit pastors in person during convention meetings with printed copies. The leadership of each convention also made public announcements during convention meetings to encourage pastors to participate in this study.

My recruitment efforts with the St. John Regular Baptist District Association occurred during their 152nd annual Association meeting July 22nd through 28th, 2019. The recruitment flier and letter were digitally distributed by e-mail to all churches affiliated with the Association and printed copies were placed at the registration table and given directly to pastors during the Pastors Conference sessions. It should be noted that during this Association meeting no pastors committed to participate in this study.

My recruitment efforts with the BMU occurred July 2019 through September 2019. Because the BMU does not meet during the summer months, the recruitment flier and letter were digitally distributed to the pastors affiliated with the Baptist Ministers' Union. During this recruitment period no pastors affiliated with the BMU committed to participate in this study.

Although pastors from the BMU did not respond to this recruitment effort, many of the pastors in the BMU are also affiliated with the state and national conventions.

My recruitment efforts with the NBCA occurred September 2019 through October 2019. In September 2019, the recruitment flier and letter were digitally distributed to the churches affiliated with the NBCA. Printed copies of the recruitment flier and letter were placed at the registration table and given directly to pastors throughout the Pastors Conference sessions during the 114th Annual Convention meeting in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. During the Annual Convention meeting a public announcement was made from the podium by the leadership during the general assembly session to encourage participation in this study. From this recruitment effort three pastors committed to participate in this study.

My recruitment efforts with the MBGCT occurred July 2019 through October 2019. Since there was not a comprehensive e-mail distribution list for the MBGCT, the recruitment flier and letter were digitally sent by e-mail to three pastors who serve in leadership positions in the convention, and they each expressed a personal interest in this study. They committed to distributing the recruitment advertisements digitally within their personal pastoral network. Printed copies of the recruitment flier and letter were placed on the registration table and handed directly to pastors throughout the Pastors Conference session during the 104th annual State Congress of Christian Workers and Youth Convention meeting July 29th through August 1st in Austin, Texas. In addition, printed copies of the recruitment flier and letter were placed at the registration table and handed directly to pastors throughout the 126th annual Convention Meeting October 21st through 24th in Beaumont, Texas. From this recruitment effort three pastors committed to participate in this study.

How the Project was Carried Out

As pastors committed to participate in this study, I collected their personal contact information. I established two focus groups, based on the pastors' geographical locations, that consisted of three pastors each. I then coordinated a date and time with the pastors in each group through text messaging to conduct the focus groups. Once the pastors agreed to the date and time for each focus group, I identified facilities convenient to the pastors' geographical locations and secured space to conduct the focus groups. I sent reminder notifications to each pastor the morning of their scheduled focus group.

As the interviewer, I initiated each focus group session by welcoming the pastors to the focus group and reminded them that the purpose of the focus group is to hear about their personal discernment process while serving as the pastor of a local church and leading or serving in their community. I then shared with each focus group that I would be using the Story-Linking Method, as described by Anne Wimberly, to direct our time together. I shared with each focus group that this method was chosen because it allows them to share their call experiences through the practice of storytelling. I explained to each focus group that I would be sharing with them a personal everyday life story, a Christian faith story in the Bible and a Christian faith story in the African American heritage, after which I would be asking them questions pertaining to their pastoral experience. I explained that we would be addressing as many questions as possible in the allotted time we had agreed to meet. I then asked if anyone had any questions, paused for a verbal or visual response, then proceeded with the questions and stories documented in Appendices A and B.

Focus group one was conducted in the afternoon on October 1, 2019 in Austin, Texas, in a classroom space on the campus of a historical African American Baptist church that was

established in 1873, with an observer present to record field notes. The three pastors in this focus group live and serve a congregation in the same city where the focus group was conducted. Each pastor arranged their own transportation to the designated site and met me in the classroom space I reserved for our time together.

The pastors sat on one side of two rectangular six-foot tables, with me as the interviewer sitting across the tables from the participants with an audio recording device between us on the table. Light refreshments were placed on the table for the pastors. The observer sat at another table in the room with a pen and paper to take notes. Once seated, I explained the consent form to each pastor, answered any questions and asked them to review, sign and date the consent form (see Appendix C). After signing the consent form, I provided each pastor a \$40.00 Visa gift card, thanked them for their participation, and asked them to sign the acknowledgement of receipt form for the gift card (see Appendix D). I then explained the demographic questionnaire to each pastor, answered any questions and asked them to complete it (see Appendix E).

I asked each pastor to determine a pseudonym to identify themselves during the focus group and to write their chosen name on a tent card I provided. I then reminded each pastor to address one another by their pseudonyms in order to maintain anonymity in this study. I reminded the pastors that the focus group would be recorded, by the audio recorder and the observer, and that all field notes and recordings from the focus group would be kept confidential and stored separately and securely as detailed in my Internal Review Board (IRB) application. After I received a verbal or visual acknowledgement I turned on the audio recorder and began the focus group.

Focus group one completed all eight questions listed in Appendix A and heard all three stories listed in Appendix B. The focus group lasted 111 minutes. After I asked the final question

to the pastors I thanked each pastor for their time and participation and turned off the digital audio recorder.

Focus group two was conducted on the afternoon of October 24, 2019, in Beaumont, Texas, in a small conference room of the hotel where the MBGCT Annual Convention meeting was held. Since the convention was held at this hotel I was able to coordinate with hotel management to secure a conference room for the focus group. Each pastor provided their own transportation to the focus group and were at the hotel as attendees of the convention meeting. The focus group was conducted soon after the concluding worship service of the convention meeting. The three pastors that participated in focus group two live and serve congregations in three different cities in Texas.

I communicated with the pastors in focus group two by text messaging and met them in the conference I reserved for this purpose. Due to the challenges I experienced with the quality of the audio recording with focus group one, I invited the pastors to sit closer together around one, three-foot rectangular table with the audio recorder placed in the middle of the table. I did not have an observer present for focus group two. Water was made available to the participants of the focus group.

Once seated, I explained the consent form to each pastor, answered any questions and asked them to review, sign and date the consent form (see Appendix C). After signing the consent form, I provided each pastor a \$40.00 Visa gift card, thanked them for their participation, and asked them to sign the acknowledgement of receipt form for the gift card (see Appendix D). I then explained the demographic questionnaire to each pastor, answered any questions and asked them to complete it (see Appendix E).

I asked each pastor to determine a pseudonym to identify themselves during the focus group and write it on a name tent card I provided. I then reminded each pastor to address one another by their pseudonyms in order to maintain anonymity in this study. I reminded the pastors that the focus group would be recorded by the audio recorder and that any field notes and recordings from the focus group will be kept confidential and stored separately and securely as detailed in my Internal Review Board (IRB) application. After I received a verbal or visual acknowledgement I turned on the audio recorder and began the focus group.

Focus group two completed six of the eight questions listed in Appendix A and heard all three stories listed in Appendix B. The focus group lasted 133 minutes. After I asked the final question to the pastors I thanked each pastor for their time and participation and turned off the digital audio recorder.

CHAPTER 4: THE FINDINGS

This chapter describes the results from the data analyses relevant to each research question. While the scope of this study involved just two focus groups of three participants each, a careful reading of the data was still undertaken. The first section provides the characteristics of the focus group participants. The second section discusses the themes that emerged from the data analyses.

The three pastors in focus group one varied in age from 67 to 90 years old, had 27 to 60 years of pastoral experience, and had been engaged in civic leadership between 43 and 65 years. Each pastor in focus group one had a graduate level degree. See *Table 1* for demographic characteristics for group one.

Table 1. Focus Group One Demographic Characteristics

Participant	Age	Pastoral Years	Civic Leadership Years	Highest Education Degree
1	67	27	43	Graduate Degree
2	70	49	50	Graduate Degree
3	90	60	65	Graduate Degree

The pastors in focus group two ranged in age from 52 to 59 years of age, had 15 to 33 years of pastoral experience and had been engaged in civic leadership between 10 and 25 years. At the time of the focus group, one pastor had an associate degree and two pastors had a graduate level degree. See *Table 2* for demographic characteristics for group two.

Table 2. Focus Group Two Demographic Characteristics

Participant	Age	Pastoral Years	Civic Leadership Years	Highest Education Degree
4	59	33	25	Graduate Degree
5	57	15	20	Graduate Degree
6	52	24	10	Associates Degree

The pastors in focus group one were thoughtful with each response. Each time I presented a question, the pastors would take a moment to ponder their thoughts, then look to one another and defer to the person who appeared to be most ready to respond. In general, the pastors in focus group one referenced pastors and persons of past generations more frequently than the pastors in focus group two. Focus group two was a little more energetic, with each pastor eager to share his thoughts for every question, compared to focus group one. It is possible the pastors in focus group two were energetic due to the fact we began our focus group shortly after closing out the Baptist state convention session in worship.

During both focus groups, I shared the everyday life story, Christian faith story in the Bible and the Christian faith story in African American heritage, and then proceeded to ask the discussion questions found in Appendix A. The purpose of the focus group questions was to investigate how pastors discern their prophetic call to civic leadership. Both focus groups repeatedly emphasized that this prophetic call is not chosen by the pastor, instead a pastor is chosen by God. This prophetic call is often recognized and resisted by the pastor, until the pastor finally surrenders to this divine call initiated by God. The questions created for this project invited each pastor to discuss in more depth their personal discernment experiences, including

their response to God's call and how their call manifested itself in pastoral ministry.

After both focus groups were completed, I had the recorded focus groups transcribed by a professional service [GMR Transcription Services, Inc.].⁸⁴ Then I verified the accuracy of the transcription for both focus groups. After reviewing the transcripts, I analyzed and coded the data, using the *f4analyse*⁸⁵ software and content qualitative methods described by Sensing. While conducting data analysis, I identified the words, phrases and themes that appeared frequently in the data for each focus group and organized them using *f4analyse*⁸⁶. The following eight themes emerged from the data: 1) **From Knowledge to Surrender**, 2) **A Needed and Neglected Word**, 3) **Others Saw it First**, 4) **A Consistent Call**, 5) **Inspired by Their Presence**, 6) **Preparation and Priorities**, 7) **Solitude and Sharing**, and 8) **A Distinct Call**.

From Knowledge to Surrender

One theme that emerged from the focus group data in the focus groups was *from knowledge to surrender*. This theme describes the journey each pastor experienced as they evolved from just having a knowledge of the prophetic pastoral call, to surrendering to the call to pastoral ministry themselves. When asked, how do you understand or interpret the prophetic call and responsibility of the African American pastor to serve and lead outside of the local congregation, the pastors responded using the following words or phrases repeatedly: convinced, saw, felt, praying, resisted, sensed, expectation, placed, responsibility, learning, leading and

⁸⁴ www.gmrtranscription.com

⁸⁵ *f4analyse*, <https://www.audiotranskription.de/english/f4-analyse>

⁸⁶ *f4analyse*, <https://www.audiotranskription.de/english/f4-analyse>

inherited. The pastors in both focus groups talked about their knowledge of and exposure to pastoral ministry. Pastor Paul⁸⁷ began the discussion in focus group one with this statement:

Seems to me that the geographic area – the size of the city, the mutual involvement of say a public school staff and the church, as well as the church involvement in the city, and the way the city views the church can help define and clarify a basis for the call or the path to lead outside of the church. In fact, it seems to me that probably more then than now, because in my earlier...pastoring first, two small community churches where the leadership of the school, the leadership of the city could be immediately engaged in the church, and then coupled with a need to supplement income to take care of family needs all would give credence to affirming our leadership in a public arena. That's the earlier years.

And I think because of that kind of involvement, I'm able to see – I was able to see then, how the church can be impactful outside of the local church leadership. When you work in the public setting you make discoveries about the need for spirituality that you wouldn't foresee just being in a local church setting. I think depending on these feelings that mandate it, I feel the call becomes very valid and clear – that ministry is needed here in a fashion that is critical enough for you to get engaged out there because you might not be able to touch that life at the church. Or that cause for that matter...

Pastor Paul's statement suggests that the call to lead outside of the church can be clarified when the pastor is involved in the community. Spiritual needs in the community can be discovered when the pastor is engaged outside of the church. Pastor Lazarus⁸⁸ then said,

And growing up in a pastor's home, it was what I inherited – it was what I saw. And so, my first impressions and examples that were of those men, who were prophetic – at least attempted to be – and long before I even came to understand the biblical basis, it was what I understood the role to be. It was what I heard expected in the community, and so, it allowed the pastor to access and be accessed for the benefit of the community. And in my upbringing, it was not uncommon that the preacher/pastor was the most educated and the one able to speak the common language in the community and use that place to do that.

I inherited a tradition, as far as African American pastors are concerned, it being two different ways. One: I think that the role of being prophetic is what we saw with the first African American preachers, typically the deep South. And we have seen in a lot of ways out of that heritage no wall of separation between leading inside the church and outside. And so, as I understand how the African American preacher has functioned from first that

⁸⁷ The names of the pastors in this document are pseudonyms to maintain the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants.

⁸⁸ The names of the pastors in this document are pseudonyms to maintain the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants.

we know of in America, that has been part of what has been the call, and also the expectation.

Pastor Malachi⁸⁹ added, “And growing up and coming of age in the late ‘50s and ‘60s, was to see that preacher not just at the local church, but also being a community leader – that the community could look up to.” The pastor’s comments indicated that pastors developed knowledge of the pastoral call through lived experiences and because they witnessed other pastors, real-life examples who actively demonstrated the call of the African American pastor in their homes, communities and churches.

The pastors perceived that through this divine call God identifies, develops, calls and places a pastor in the environment, generation and community of God’s choosing. Pastor Joe⁹⁰ said it this way,

Well, I believe that one of the main beliefs I have as it relates to the prophetic call of the African American pastor to lead outside of just the congregation work is that most pastors, most African American pastors still take seriously a call from God. It’s not a decision or an occupational choice. It’s not a decision that we come upon ourselves. We believe that we are called by God to serve the church but each church is tied to a community. And so, we understand that when we are called to a church that that church is tied to a community, a city, a county, a state.

And so, the call is not just to be an inside entity or influence but that we are to influence our surroundings. And so, our churches are light and salt. And we must impact the community that’s surrounding us, our city governments, our counties, even as low as even your homeowners’ association. If your church is in that vicinity then, you should speak to that group. And the people, if they are members of your church or not, you being a good citizen and a good leader must speak to those individuals that are there.

Pastor Will⁹¹ added,

89 The names of the pastors in this document are pseudonyms to maintain the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants.

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Upon being asked that question, I automatically talked about Amos 7 and 14 whereby my brother here has already alluded to I was not a prophet, nor the son of a prophet. But when you're talking about a prophet at call, God rarely stays with protocol. He's always stepping outside of the bounds of human limitations, gratefully so. And I believe that once – our denomination, Baptist, our culture that raised their loose term African American race, the Black race, really embraces and believes in the call to ministry whereby there is this power from God that speaks to the humanity of an individual and says this is what you were put on earth to do.

And that is to proclaim my word. That is the sole and primary responsibility. Now, that prophetic call often comes out of that to move into what Amos did and that was to address some of the social ills of the day where you have this disparagement between the wealthy and the poor, the have and the have nots. Our history dictates, the African American history dictates that the voice that has addressed those ills has always been the black pulpit.

Just as God called prophets in the Old Testament scriptures of the Bible to specific contexts, the pastors in this study perceived through their personal experiences that God still calls pastors in the same manner.

Both focus groups agreed on the divine origin of the call and emphasized the responsibility of the pastor to be the public and visible voice of the local church and community.

Pastor Midnight⁹² described in detail the responsibility of the African American pastor as the following:

I would go as far to say as well, with the prophecy, when you mentioned the prophecy, it reminds me of the prophets that God called prophets to lead. He placed them in an area of learning but yet leading. And then, he speaks to them differently but really with the same intent in mind. And as leaders, as God calls us and as we have seen in scripture, teach them to observe all things. That places the focus on us. And let's admit those that really trust God, those that really believe and trust in the man of God, especially in the African American or the black church, they look up to the preacher for advice.

Our responsibility because we are “the prophet, preacher, pastor”, because we are the leader and we are leaders in, not only that church but in that community. Even folks that really don't like the pastor and do not go to that church, when a problem arises in that neighborhood in some kind of way, they find themselves coming to the church. And when they get there, they don't want to talk to the servants. They want to talk to the

⁹² The names of the pastors in this document are pseudonyms to maintain the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants.

prophet, preacher, pastor. And it's our responsibility to not just go into a church or be born and formed in the church just to preach and to lead. But our responsibility is to know the community and the neighborhoods.

We need to know the schools. We need to know the gang members. We need to know the good guys and the bad. We need to know where the seniors are. We need to know where the children are. We really need to know exclusively what's in that community. And when people see that you're real in that responsibility because we are leaders that God has called, they will gravitate to your influence. So, our prophecy is what we were called out of. Some prophets were country preachers doing their own thing. Some were farmers. I'm like the farmer that didn't have a dad in the ministry.

But God prepared way back when. My story is very unique but when I got to where I am, I wasn't looking for what I had. But when God speaks to us, He also sends people that you can talk to that need our expertise in whatever field it is. And that places a responsibility out of our loyalty to God and our leadership that he's placed us in. And because of that, our prophecy and our responsibility changes from being perpendicular and starts being parallel that we are both now the prophet, pastor, preacher with a prophecy, which only means another purpose. And as our leadership role, it runs parallel because our responsibility is to lead in the areas that we are needed in. So, that's what I get out of that prophecy and our responsibility.

Pastor Malachi added this comment,

... it looks like the community reaches and helps you to see your call beyond just the local pulpit into community involvement in various ways that you don't really send out for. But, they kinda pull you off into it and it becomes the normal expectation, I guess, and we inherit that as African-Americans, I believe, quite easily – the expectations upon us to, if there's a community need.

The pastors in both groups shared, as noted by the quotes from the participants above, the historical expectation placed on the pastor to be the voice of the church and community.

The pastors also addressed the financial support and freedom provided by the “Black community” to the pastor to fulfill this expectation. Pastor Will articulated it this way,

African American history dictates that the voice that has addressed those ills has always been the Black pulpit. It's always been the African American preacher because he's not been tied to the social economic restraints whereby he's speaking up for the people. So, the Black community has empowered the Black pastor so that he does not have those restraints. So, we'll take care of you financially. We'll cover you with prayer.

Pastor Will's statement suggests that although this great expectation is placed on the African

American pastor to be the leader and public voice for both the church and community, the church and community are also expected to care for the pastor. Pastor Will continued his statement,

You speak for us, not just the people but for the community, even people that are unchurched. Pastor Midnight said that, also Pastor Joe said that when they don't even know you, they say I've heard of Pastor Joe. And when my son has been mistreated by the establishment, I want somebody to talk. And who is going to talk and who is going to be able to get into city council. Who is going to be able to see the police chief from our community because we're not even on the economic radar because our tax base is normally not there?

But there is a voice. And that voice becomes a prophetic call. It's our responsibility. Shame on the preacher who is African American who feels like his field of labor is only in his church and only in his pulpit. He's missing the call because God calls us to be like Amos. Don't be afraid. Go and tell that what's going on is not right. Not just right for our people, it's not right for any people because those who have suffered just as much eternally as those who don't have when there is mistreatment to any man but they don't get it.

And so, we've got to be the voice. And you can't be scared. That to me is a prophetic call. You've got to have it because if you don't have it, you're going to be scatterful. You ain't going to go in there and tell somebody who is making \$750,000.00 a year I don't like what you're doing to my people and he can just go downtown and call your property abandoned because you don't meet OSHA and you've been sitting in there all of these years. It doesn't matter if somebody is walking in a sinner. So, it's got to be a prophetic call. And I believe God gives us that prophetic call.

Pastor Will articulated the historical responsibility of the African American pastor to be the voice of an entire community, including those persons considered as unchurched. The African American pastor is called by God to speak with a prophetic voice that is not afraid to represent any persons who suffer mistreatment.

As seen in the quotes from the participants above, the pastors in both focus groups placed great emphasis on the divine prophetic calling of the African American pastor. Each of them had knowledge of the call from early moments in their life, however, it was not until later when they, in their own time, surrendered to the divine call from God to serve both church and community.

Pastor Paul in focus group one commented,

I think that in concert with both of you, there's an urging that comes. I grew up in a pastor's home and committed never to be a preacher or pastor. My goal, I started college, business administration, and I intended to make a lot of money quick, and then just live it up. After time in the military, and some experiences there, then got out. The whole notion – of call was still not desirable, still resisted. And I had no intention – so I was in my late twenties before I even began to seriously, in fact, I was in college when I embraced – what I felt could be the call, and it happened with some encouragement of people who I didn't know, who perceived me to be more religious and more representing of the faith than I really was.

And began to share that with me, and as a result of it, even after a baccalaureate degree, going to seminary, I didn't even know what seminary was, and I'm on way to seminary because providentially I got a scholarship. And when my consulting professor said, "I can get you a scholarship to a seminary in Boston, Massachusetts if you're interested." "Yeah, I'm interested." I'm gone get a graduate degree. Still hadn't acknowledged the call and I was in seminary. And this confirmation during that first year with the help of my dad's firmness, and not resistance, but not encouraging me to make such an acknowledgment.

And it's one of the strangest things happened to me, is a relative of mine – sister Collette that challenged me one day, and the result of that conversation – I left her and I was angry and went to the river. Deliberately set there for about 3 hours and sitting there, musing on that conversation, praying and meditating not even knowing that's why I was there. I left that place and went back to her house, still believing I was called. Never was something I wanted.

Pastor Paul's comment suggests that God can providentially place a pastor in an environment and provide personal experiences that help a pastor recognize and surrender to the pastoral call.

Pastor Lazarus shared his experience,

I can relate to the making of that. I never had pressure – other preachers in the family, both sides – I never had pressure from my father or mother to go into the ministry, and I've never left the church. My involvement reduced over years, but I never left the church. I was always at a church, typically on a Sunday morning, college and beyond that. But I look back on it and have come to understand when I think I first recognized the possibility of a calling. I didn't wanna be a preacher because I seen the positives and the negatives of my father's pastoring and I said, "No way am I gonna deal with that.

And so, my junior or senior year of college, I was invited to go back to the state I was raised in – in my father's – to speak on Men's Day at the first church my father pastored. And they had me up in the pulpit, and I'm just a layman – lay guy – a college student – and I felt something. And, in my mind, I resolved it as just being sentimental, "This is where your Daddy started pastoring, his ministry," and thinking about all this, and this was the town where I was born. And so, I went ahead and came back and did some other things... So, I was walking around campus one day, trying to figure out, "What are you

gonna do? Where are you gonna go? And so, I happened to see a sign that said, ‘vocational tests being offered’. And, so I said, “Let me go and I’ll take that.” And the results of that ended up being the top two – have been the top two things that I’ve done, one of which was ministry, so that was off the list. And I’d rather not do that...

Then when I went to another school after that, I was involved with a United Methodist Church. And got close to the pastor, the pastor said to me, “At one point, you may even start preaching.” After that, moved to another state, another city, got close to that pastor, asked the same question. I’m dismissing that, I moved to Austin, get the same question, and I tried to blow them off, and the last semester of my schooling here, I knew it was rumbling when I had a conversation with my pastor and my father and the ministry. And I was in the choir singing, and that Sunday morning it was raining down, and I said to him – He smiled – that I gotta give in to my call. And I was content because I was able to do two things, so I was an associate minister at the church, preaching whenever an opportunity came, and that was enough for me... He saw in me a pastoral calling – started speaking to me about it, but I was content.

And then, the opportunity came and I had to pray about that and ended up offering myself actually on the last day. But at that time, I was convinced the call, that I had no clue as to how it works, and I remember knowing what I would do. And as I remember, I said to the interview team, I said, “I’m absolutely convinced that I was called into this church, but I don’t know what the people want.” And then, that was the beginning of that journey.

Pastor Lazarus’s reflections on his own experiences suggest that pastors may have moments in their lives when they dismiss their pastoral call from God. This is a time when pastors weigh their information and perception about the call against what they have personally experienced and heard from persons around them. Pastor Lazarus continued,

I think a struggle happens – and I’ve seen this – where the pastor, on a personal basis, does not embrace that expectation. Because what I’ve seen is an emphasis in some African-American churches on – what I would call soul development, character development, but not community involvement. And when the community is calling for that leadership, that pastor is uncomfortable. And I know that even with Dr. King, he went to pastor – the people drove him in that situation, into that circumstance. So, maybe that’s what often happens, maybe the people push some of us into that and we decide whether or not we’re gonna rise to it.

Pastor Lazarus’s thoughts suggest that the burden of this pastoral call is a serious and heavy burden. A call to lead both church and community can be uncomfortable.

According to the pastors that participated in this study, this prophetic pastoral call is not a choice, they sense they have been chosen by God. As you will read in the quotes from the participants below, both groups indicated that pastors often initially resist, or run from this call from God. Until finally, through prayer, meditation with God and conversations with seasoned and respected pastors, each pastor acknowledged and surrendered to the call. For example, Pastor Malachi shared his story,

Having resisted the call – it was very plain to me. I can remember having instances as a youngster – 10, 11, 12 years of age – being in worship – church – when I was in the choir, they'd send me up with – as a junior usher. Seemingly – well, it was real to me – that for a time, the preacher standing there became me. I could – almost an out-of-body – see myself being the preacher standing there.

And because I had no close family that I could I relate to, to have an idea of really what it meant to be a preacher – I didn't grow up in a pastor's home – I had this notion that it was a radical change; so radical that I didn't think I could surrender because I felt that life was to be lived and then you surrendered – become this serious and sober person.

And so, I resisted from those early years until finally I could not resist any longer and surrendered. But I did not sense my call as a call to become pastor. I sensed my call to become a preacher – a proclaimer. I became a pastor young in the ministry, but that wasn't my sense of call. My sense of call was the Lord had made choice of me for whatever reason... And I guess, feeling that the preacher had perhaps had the greater freedom in that he didn't work for someone who could fire him if he said the wrong thing or if he got out of line.

So, my discerning the call beyond just standing Sunday after Sunday at the pulpit was, for me, growing up in a small town situation where you were called into – in some instances – breaking new ground, being in places that you felt not just for yourself, but for the community, especially for your people. And that was with me very early on – actually, even before I became a pastor, was the thing that if someone needed to be that person in that slot, in that position, I began to see myself in some way accepting or surrendering to. And so, I surrendered at the age of 19 after resisting for so very long.

Pastor Malachi's statement suggests that a pastor may become aware of their pastoral call early in their life even if it takes many years for the pastor to surrender.

Pastor Will shared these words, “I believe He [God] gives us a supernatural power to stand before people and tell them what they don’t want to hear. But they can’t do anything about it because there’s a power that speaks within you that they cannot fight against.” Pastor Malachi shared the following story,

I think about in [city name removed] – my children were in school and there was a middle school – I’m thinking around the month of October, Halloween – and there was a costume day and here comes – as my children reported it to me – a student dressed in a full Klan outfit for Halloween observance. And they bring it home to me and I go and challenge the principal about allowing it and no kind of reaction to a kid actually. The real thing is what they reported to me, wasn’t like they had conformed and made a sheet or something, but had what was perceived to be an official Klan outfit and I said, “I got an issue about that. I’ve got a problem about that.”

And having to stand up against because they had a black coach at the school and the principal pointing, “Well you have an issue but Coach so-and-so didn’t say anything about it. It seemed like he was accepting.” I said, “Well, he may not, but I do, as far as what are you going to do about this?” And for it to be learned that I had resisted, kinda added to the community expectation that if there’s going to be someone who has the boldness or the courage to not just talk in church but talk in a community – kind of an expectation along that line.

According to the pastor’s comments, they were convinced that the call of the African American pastor is tied to a supernatural power that speaks to the pastor, church and the community.

The pastors in both focus groups described how they each experienced a transformation that moved them from having knowledge of the pastoral call to a surrender to their own personal call. This journey to surrender included times of self-reflection, wisdom and guidance from senior pastors and life experiences that pushed them into a position to be a prophetic voice for their family, church and community.

A Needed and Neglected Voice

Another theme that emerged from the focus groups was *a needed and neglected voice*.

This theme was defined as the importance of the prophetic voice of the African American pastor in the presence of several issues including: changing behavioral patterns between generations, apathetic attitudes by members who irregularly attend church, disparaging messages toward minority groups from politicians, a division in the community between generations and a culture that promotes self-centered behavior. Both focus groups, as shared in the quotes from the participants below, agreed there is still a need for the prophetic voice of the African American pastor in the contemporary church, community and culture. The pastors in both focus groups, as you will see in the quotes from the participants below, agreed the prophetic voice is currently being neglected or unheard, both by the church and the community. When asked, is there still a need for the prophetic voice of the African American pastor considering the current condition of the church, culture, and government in this country, the pastors in both focus groups nodded their heads and verbally affirmed the need for the prophetic voice still exists.

Pastor Paul initiated this discussion in focus group one when he said,

I basically feel the need is more critical now than it's ever been. I think that simply because the call and the processing of the call, I think that that's what I call a defining moment; a moment that gets your attention and kind of is a major right turn in the journey of your professional awareness and growth – that that it's the defining moment and it's kind of providential. God kinda thrusts you without you making any particular efforts and situations where you find yourself standing in a community with the community looking at you and waiting for you to give guidance.

Not something that you seek – I think there's a providential pull, but I think there's some people – community need to pull that becomes – that becomes irresistible and I think that's what happened to major Black pastors historically. They moved into those positions not necessarily by choice as much as by need and they look around and there's nobody else can take that role and not be penalized by the powers that be. So, the point that it impacts what goes on at your house. So, I think all along this, my discernment, I could see moments

when I'm in settings and in situations and addressing bodies outside the church that I never would have otherwise.

Several times I've gone to NAACP meetings and asked to be the principal speaker at the banquet. I'm a pastor. I'm not a civic leader maybe, but I pastor a church. And I think even today, more than any time in my discernment of history, there's a need for a voice that's tied to something more than politics, cult. And I think that's as it is simply what their call taught of that voice and it's prophetic, and it's part of the answer, and it's Divine.

When asked if there is still a need for the prophetic voice of the African American pastor, Pastor Will began the discussion in focus group two with this brief affirmation, "The first answer is yes, a resounding yes." Although both groups agreed on the need, as indicated by the quotes following, each group shared similar and different reasons for the continued need for a prophetic voice.

The pastors in focus group one believed the prophetic voice is still necessary because the challenges facing the African American community today are the same concerns of previous African American generations in the United States, such as racism, immigration, socio-economic disparities and political climate (the Trump administration). Pastor Lazarus shared,

But my concern had been before these days, that the generations now – the younger generations – were not connected, and so they would listen to us, they would watch TV shows, marches, and that's, "Okay, that happened then." And they had no real sense, particularly post-segregation of what it means to be Black in America. And so, what I have said to the congregation I pastor is, "We've been this way before as a people."

And so, when I was growing up, segregation was really – racism was more in my face than now. What I'm experiencing now, I don't like it, but it really doesn't compare to what I experienced as a child. So, it's like I've been this way before, and I'm still standing, and so, what I have often bemoaned is that we have not been people of the written word. Because I've often wondered, going as far back as we could go, we have some words, John Jasper and others, that preached and their words were recorded, but most preachers – African-American preachers – we don't know what they said, that they've been this way before.

And it bothers me because I'm not able to know, how did they speak to their times. And I guess, a year or so ago, I talked with – had a conversation with Otis Foster Jr. He used to pastor while I was at church in Cleveland and was part of Dr. King's group and I asked

him – I said, “If you were pastoring now, what would you be preaching?” He said, “I’d be preaching the prophets.” Whether or not you agree with that, I understood what he was saying about that, and I think what he was saying under that was, “We’ve been this way before as people are divided – that the prophets had to speak of circumstances like this.

The pastors in focus group one articulated that in this country African Americans are still facing the same challenges of past generations. They also shared in the testimony that the same prophetic word God endorsed in the Old Testament that was relevant during segregation is still relevant today.

Focus group one voiced a concern that many of the strong prophetic voices of past years have been lost. There is a need for a captivating voice who can lead on a national platform like the one found by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Pastor Malachi explained when he said,

I believe, yes, certainly, and the times in which we live in help me to think that that solitary, that effective voice, such as Dr. King, who went beyond Dexter Avenue, went beyond Ebenezer, into national, and even international, he was being heard. He was being called into for his assistance, his help, his affirmation. You mentioned the Prophets. And I say, these days do need, because I think of Elijah, he spoke out against the king who was leading the nation, with prophetic voice and Divine enablement, miraculously so. But he was not just down at the local synagogue, he was going to the palace and confronting the king. And when I think about Jeremiah, and studying Jeremiah, only problem with Jeremiah was that there were some other prophets who were preaching a message that was diametrically opposed to what Jeremiah was saying.

And so, I look at evangelicals, powerful personalities supporting and endorsing, and affirming this present administration [the Trump administration], and to me surrendering what it means to be God-fearing and abiding by the Word. And not just major race Anglos, but we’ve got some of us who are singing the praises. So, I’m wondering, where is that prophetic voice that is loudly proclaiming, “This is not right. This is not right when persons fleeing violence and fleeing for their lives to come into a safe place, are being told ‘go back. Don’t come here. We cannot help you. We wanna prevent your coming and are publicly acting that all of you are evil and we want to screen you out of our country”

When this country is saying that it’s good to give tax breaks to the top 1% and at the same time, trying to deny health coverage and reducing the level of benefits, I don’t know where it would come from. Because I don’t believe Dr. King volunteered, I believe he was drafted – that it wasn’t something that he sought after. And I think that there must be one day, that voice that stands against the current and takes the risk because it’s right

and because it's needful and speaks to power...The great Black preachers that I can bring to mind that have pattern, that had that reputation, they're limited now.

Along with the need for that unifying voice, focus group one also shared a concern about finding this next prophetic voice. Pastor Malachi continued, "So, yes, emphatically so, I say there is that need and I wonder where it's gonna come from." The pastor's comments suggest the need remains great for an African American pastoral prophetic voice. There is a concern among the pastors if and when someone in the next generation(s) of pastors will stand and become that voice.

Focus group two, as described in the quotes from the participants below, agreed that the prophetic voice is still necessary today. They in turn shared that the voice is necessary because the current generation is emotionally, financially, socially and spiritually disconnected from the struggles and challenges experienced by past generations of the Civil Rights and Jim Crow Era. The pastors in focus group two believed there is a sense of complacency among the current generation, who lives as if the struggle for equality and justice is over, and God is no longer needed as a deliverer of the oppressed. For example, Pastor Will stated,

I'll try to address it in the order you gave. Our church, yes, more so because we're speaking to a generation that is here now that does not have the foundation that the African American church made such an impact in the world. They don't have that impact anymore because we're preaching to Gen X's, millennials who have not experienced some of the things as it relates to God's delivery of our people. And so, they came into the world with certain liberties that our parents, our grandparents, our great grandparents didn't have.

So, yes, the prophetic voice needs to be in the pulpit today, even though we're not facing a colored or white water fountain situation, or we're not facing Jim Crowism in a sense anymore. Even though we're not facing the Civil Rights struggle in a sense as we once did in the '60s, we still need to be able to equip a new generation that's not familiar with that. So, the church, yes. Our culture, yes.

Pastor Joe added,

I totally agree with Pastor Will. The answer is a resounding yes. And we have to continue to engage. The beginning, the whole idea of millennials and Gen X's and even some non-committed baby boomers. They think that we have arrived. That everything is good now. And you think about it, many of our parishioners are no longer living in what we call the hood. And so, since they may not be facing what their parents faced, their grandparents faced, many live very affluent lives.

And so, they think that this from 1600 Pennsylvania, it doesn't really affect me that much or this politic – and we only have a couple more years and we're going to get him out. They are not facing the reality of what history teaches us when you have a person like that in place. And if you don't speak, historically, then the possibility of a Hitler type person – because think about how this slipped up on the Jewish people. Hey, they were business owners. They had money. Everything was cool with them until it was not.

And so, unless the church and the pastor reminds people that if we're not careful, what happened – and I don't want to sound like an alarmist but this sneaking in, this horrible agenda, we can't be quiet. We have to speak against it. And so, our culture – we had no idea that people would really fault the way they're thinking as it relates to think. But what you see now is a formal majority feeling threatened and especially those of us in Texas. When you're no longer the majority, what do you do? And so, the pastor as a leader of community, as a leader of not just his church, we have to remind them that, hey, let's not go to sleep as they say. We've got to be woken to what's going on in the culture and government and politics. And the church has to be the center of that activity.

Pastor Midnight, in agreement with the discussion shared,

Well, I totally agree. And I say yes to the third power. Yes, on all three. Pastor Joe and Pastor Will have really set the tone. There is definitely a need for the prophetic voice in our churches because we don't have the same members every Sunday. The seniors are still on the first and third Sunday. Those that come are a different crowd depending upon what sporting season it is. And then, you have another crowd that they say they're members but they only come when they're having problems. And we have been guilty to say we love our children but whenever it's children Sunday, we visit.

And the problem is the voices are no longer being heard by folks that study their Bibles. Two things hurt us. Integration didn't really hurt us. It's the process they used. Most of our school districts that are large and of color that we think are bad districts, they're not bad. They're designed to do what they're doing. They're doing just what they're designed to do.

The pastors' statements illustrate that the disconnect between generations and a relative improvement in economic prosperity have fostered a decline in the African American community's general dependence on God and the church.

While the pastors in focus group one earlier stated the prophetic voice of the African American Church is missing, the pastors in focus group two expressed that the prophetic voice is actually present today although the contemporary church and culture do not demonstrate the impact of past generations. Pastor Will said,

The church has to unify a voice and has to say something since we have the “power to vote”, even if it is manipulated. I think that when the Christians stand up that God will empower that move and power that vote to despise what’s going on, despite of what may go on with manipulation or background checks of certain opponents. It doesn’t matter. God is going to get in the middle of it, but we have a responsibility to speak and vote and get out as a people. Our culture is telling us that they don’t know God and they really need to know God. You said government, and Lord knows what happens with Christians are not praying for leadership.

We end up having people who are in office who try to deify themselves and make themselves God. And anyone who dares to come against that, God-like or their God in itself made godness, then, you’re going to have a problem with them. Our rhetoric of late at the government that comes down from the primary office of our United States has been a rhetoric that’s been very divisive. It’s been very belittling, not only to different races, it’s been very belittling to genders. And so, our community has to speak up. The preacher has to speak up.

And most of the encouragement to the African American community about getting involved in government comes from the church, especially certain pastors have so much influence in their cities that these politicians know that they better make a visit if they’re going to get in at all. They know they better get by there and say something to the African American church. Yes, the current condition is dictating that the church has to be a voice and the preacher has to be that voice.

Pastor Midnight contributed the following thoughts,

But now, because of instantaneousness, it has crept into the church, that we have to minister to instantaneous, microwave Christians. They come in late and leave early and think the Lord owes them something. So, without the prophetic voice to explain, and let’s remember, grandmother is 33 now. She’s not 53. So, when babies are having babies and they have not grown yet, all unfit parents not on drugs, you got some unfit parents sitting in church every Sunday. They need to hear the word of a prophetic voice. So, there is a prophetic voice for the church and now even in our culture that we have to change the mentality by even reaching inside of the church to take back to the culture.

It’s so easy that some of them don’t even know the difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament. They call Amos, they might go to the back of the

Bible first and come back for it. They need to hear the prophetic voice. We need to know the lingo. You didn't call me a dog back in the day because it meant something different. But now, it's cool. What's going on? Bet. When you say a bet to us, we're probably shooting pennies or some dice. But you say bet now, you're saying that's good. So, the prophetic voice is necessary that we can even not just adapt to their culture but utilize it to give the information.

I preached a sermon some years ago and the name of the sermon, I'll never forget it, it was, *there is hope for the hoochie*. Now, them young folk went crazy. But my mom and them didn't go crazy and I knew it because I already had it set. I said, "now some of you all are looking at me, but your mama called her Jezebel". Both groups had – so, the prophetic voice of the church has to be for every generation that's there. And then, it has to infiltrate our culture that we as a prophetic voice let them know that you can be black or African American and have sins.

Pastor Midnight and Pastor Will's comments suggest that in order to continue the impact of past generations, the African American pastor must continue to preach the prophetic word in relevant terms. In return, congregation members must be actively engaged in the church and hearing and embracing this prophetic word, if the culture will be impacted.

The pastors in both focus groups, as noted in the quotes from the participants above, unanimously agreed that the church, community and nation are in desperate need of the prophetic voice of the African American pastor. Whether this prophetic voice is actually missing or just going unheard is a matter of perspective. However, it is clear from every pastor in both focus groups, as stated from the quotes from the participants above, that the prophetic voice of the contemporary African American pastor remains in great demand and is currently being neglected.

Others Saw it First

Another theme that emerged from the data in these focus groups was *others saw it first*. This theme was defined as a person(s) in the pastor's life who recognized the prophetic pastoral

call on the pastor's life, often before the pastor, and encouraged, mentored or supported the pastor during their discernment journey. When asked to describe briefly one significant person in your life who would not be surprised how God has allowed you to serve and lead, and who in your life believed and foretold that pastoral and civic leadership was in your destiny before you could see or comprehend it, the pastors in both focus groups named their parents, wife, grandparents and senior pastors. The pastors in both focus groups, as noted in the quotes from the participants below, responded similarly as they reflected on words spoken to them by their parents, wife, pastor or a pastoral mentor.

One of the most influential persons in the life of each pastor was their pastor. During the process of discerning their call to pastoral ministry it was common for each pastor to spend time with their pastor, pastoral mentor or another senior pastor with whom they had a close relationship. Pastor Joe shared,

I would concur. Mine would be [name removed], my pastor. Before he died, he received an award from the Urban League. And a part of the award was he had to give an award. He received an award but then, there was a torch award that was connected with his award. And they said to him, "Who do you see passing your torch to?" Pastor [name removed] had over 50 sons in the ministry and pastors all over this nation. And out of all of them, he selected me. And he said to me years before I even received the award [Torch Award] or years before I ever was a pastor, he said he saw something special in me. And before – he said it early in my ministry.

And then, right at the end of his ministry when he had an opportunity to give me that award in front of all of those people, he just simply blew me away. As a matter of fact, every once in a while, I don't have it at the church, I have it in my study at home and I look up and it will encourage me to know that someone else saw in me what I – it's not that I didn't sense it but he confirmed what I may have thought. But his belief that this was something that the Lord was doing and what he would say. And I can hear him now saying that the benediction of my spirit, the Lord is resting upon you. Sort of like an Elijah, Elisha. And that just – I get chills just saying it because not everybody can see in you what the Lord is showing others. And so, for him, it's just – so, yes.

Pastor Joe's comment suggests that a senior pastor will often see what God is doing in the life of a young pastor before it is actually evident to the young pastor. Pastor Midnight added,

He [my pastor] didn't tell me until his last year of living that he would not even tell me that God was dealing with me. But while I was wrestling with the streets and the church, he had already told his wife "what you going to do when my eyes are closed and he becomes your pastor?" And I can't tell you her words on recorded information, but she said, "That blank? No. Never." He also told me, "You are going to expand this church further than I ever have. And you will double the power that I have in this city. You don't see it now. I won't be here with you when you get there but you're going to get there. But always remember, power don't last always but serving the Lord will."

And Pastor Will talked about the influence of a senior pastor when he said,

Sure, yeah. And I think as it has been stated by pastor by Pastor Midnight and Pastor Joe, there is an undeniable influence that comes along with our pastors, especially for those of us who are called to preach. There is a unique relationship that there is a father/son relationship like as under that of Paul and Timothy that you can only understand once you've experienced it. My heart goes out to guys who don't have a pastor in the model and image that you guys at the table have and, of course, as you as well as our interviewer. Dr. [name removed], my pastor, he's gone on to be with the Lord, both on camera and off camera, he was genuine.

He was always forthcoming. He was always telling us exactly what ministry was. So, that's why I don't have this clouded view of ministry that some prosperous journey that all things are going to be well. He kind of gave that to us. He said something in the sense of your story and rising to some kind of civil influencer or social influence. He [my pastor] said, "God is going to put you in all of the right places. I don't know what they're going to be, and I may not be there to see you do it but he's going to do that for you." I've seen that happen and often. You guys were present with us last night. I've heard a lot of guys say things about nerves when they get up.

But just the fact of who – the task was given to me because of the influence that Dr. [name removed] has. It was a heavy weight, a very heavy weight. So, you think about these guys who have that kind of expectation like my pastor and they told you things. Man, it's just heavy when you start to see that unfold. I remember your pastor, too. Your pastor and my pastor were friends as well as your pastor. And they were friends, man. And we stood far off and marveled at those guys. And when they said those things, they were, in themselves, prophetic.

Pastor Lazarus answered the question in this manner, "I'd probably add my predecessor, Father in the ministry Pastor [name removed] - I don't know that he would've seen all of this [my

current ministry], but I think he saw possibilities that I didn't see." The pastor's comments suggest that the mentor relationship between pastors is critical as it stretches beyond the mere transference of information, it also nurtures a unique spiritual bond.

The pastor's statements suggest the prophetic pastoral call is an interesting phenomenon. Many times, the call appears obvious to everyone around them except the one whom God is calling. Pastor Paul shared,

My dad and a preacher named [name removed] always told me there's no, they had no thought of what I might be, but the one person who first gave me a possible consciousness of my being anything at all was the wife of the late – and she's gone too, Rev. Dr. [name removed], he pastored the [name removed] Church, and I did a revival there. And my wife and I were going to the car and Mrs. [name removed] caught up with us and said to my wife "Your husband is gonna be the President of the [name removed]". And I hadn't been preaching. And that stayed with me until this day.

Understanding the typical closeness of family, it is not unusual that the person who sees the call in the pastor is a family member. Pastor Lazarus said,

I'd say my father...And he saw what was going on in several areas at that time. And he probably saw more than I saw...I remember, I preached my first sermon, he was here. And told me – said two things to me – said, "One, you are arguing the case," which I guess, I was sounding like a lawyer. And he said, "Two, make sure you get theological training." He said, "I'm drawing a distinction between Bible, school." He said, "You need theological training to reach where God wants you to be." He said, "Be careful about trying to move off your natural gifts.

Pastor Malachi added to the discussion,

My grandmother, that my brother and I were taken in by after our mother died young, kept hinting that I was different. And she made note of some things that would make me believe that she would not be surprised, maybe to the point or the level, but of course, she did live to see me declare and become a local pastor. But, even before then, she – I don't think she would be surprised. She said, "I was a little different." I didn't want to say that she felt that it – my brother was interested in places to go, and she'd come across me, and I'd be maybe in study, I'd be reading, I'd be quietly maybe at home, but she said I was different. So, I don't think she'd be surprised.

Pastor Will answered the question describing his mother and wife when he said the following:

My mother is another. My mother was a single parent for most of my upbringing. I watched her model her faith. I watched my mom be [name removed] Civil Rights kind of heroine in a sense. My mom was the first African American to be hired by [name removed] in 1971. And she experienced a whole lot with that. Some of those things were frightening. But I watched my mom model her faith and I also watched my mom tell me that when you're faced with these things, this is how you handle that. When you're treated less than you know you are and that is as a law abiding, God honoring human. When you're treated otherwise, this is how you handle that. She worked for a city in a hostile situation for 38 years.

Of course, the first years were the most turbulent. After that, things kind of settled down as much as they could. So, my mom is a great influence. And my wife sees me at my best and also not at my best. And she had a marvelous revelation one day as God often gives our spouses that he [God] doesn't give us concerning us. She said, "I notice when you talk to people they listen." And I didn't think nothing about it until I got in a setting where people should not have probably been listening because of some of, not the tone but the subject matter. And it was influential to them to make some very heavy government changes.

And she said, "I told you people listen to you when you talk." And I said, "Oh, I just thought that was you." She said, "No, it ain't that. We do but it's something else God is doing." It's amazing, man. That's a great story and those are the people that influenced me.

The pastors in both focus groups, as mentioned previously, stated it was common for someone significant to the pastor to see the prophetic pastoral call on their life, often before the pastor himself saw it. The pastors in both groups described the encouragement and confirmation they received when persons close to them revealed what they perceived about the pastor's call. Pastor Joe shared,

And I think that's true because I just was picking someone outside of my circle blood line. But my parents, dad and mom both, saw what I didn't see. I just saw the rascal. And then my wife, 39 years now, but have known her since fourth grade. And I've mentioned the other Sunday that she, in my memory book, do you remember those? – wrote things about my future. And this is 1979. She wrote things about my future that I would say, that'd be cool if that happens, but she saw and never will, to this day, allow me to undercut what she has seen and expects even sometimes to my – I say you - she says, "You know. You know." So, these people who have known you before you became who you are, who knew you before the mayor knew you, knew you before the governor walked into your office, knew you before then, it inspires you to keep doing what they see.

Pastor Joe's comments suggests that spouses often witness the transformation of a pastor before they accepted their calling. Pastor Midnight also commented on the experience of a spouse,

I like that. And I've known my wife since she was in the second and I was in the third. But when I got to junior high, which is now middle school then, I hung with her brother a year and a half ahead of me because I started using these hands and that's what he liked to do...And I went to school that next day, man, and I started knocking folk out, putting them in lockers. I was a straight A student, the best point guard that school had but the worst fool in between classes. So, she kind of saw that part of me. And then, the other stuff that I was doing, I was a master in that stuff.

So, she saw me change from a tadpole to a frog and she was continuing to say he has something. And I want to know who the hell is he. And she is so humble and it could have been and would have been if you knew where I came from in between, she could have easily been taken advantage of by me because I was like him. I was the rascal. The one walking down the street with an oozie on him in broad daylight. Ignorant. And she has been in church as a Sunday school teacher since the ninth grade.

Oh, man. And I took her to some of the places that she only heard about on television in the Red Light District and stuff with her mouth hanging open. And she was so green that it could have. But God had to put that type of lady in my life to make sure I stayed humble. She and a cousin of mine were the only two that could calm me because I was kind of like a pit bull. I had nugget rings but I had razors in my rings. And if I hit you, you were going to bleed because there were razors. And I had needles under my boots so if I stomped you in your leg – ignorant. And that's all she would say. Carnal man, just come back. And that little soft voice would calm me. But she saw stuff. I didn't see it. I didn't want to see it. So, yeah.

Pastor Midnight's statement suggests that God provided a spouse for the pastor who could see the call on the pastor's life and be a calming presence during the times of ignorance in their life.

The pastors in both focus groups, as mentioned by the quotes from the participants above, shared about the meaningful influence of others who saw the prophetic pastoral call in the pastor's life. Some persons provided encouragement, while others helped the pastor discern and embrace the call of God on their life. Whatever the senior pastors' contribution, the pastors in this focus group agreed they could not get where they were on their own.

A Consistent Call

Another theme that emerged from the data in these focus groups was *a consistent call*.

This theme was defined as the impact on pastors as they identified consistent ways God has called persons into ministerial service in the Bible and how these narratives reflected their own pastoral call and discernment journey. When asked, do you believe it is significant to have a Bible story or call narrative that resonates with a pastoral call, and if yes, what biblical story or passage of scripture resonates with and/or inspires your call to pastoral ministry and leadership outside of the local pulpit, the pastors in both focus groups replied with a yes and identified the call narratives of Moses, Joshua, Jeremiah and the Apostle Paul.

Although, some pastors shared they did not personally identify with a specific biblical call narrative early in their pastoral ministry, each pastor agreed they did have or could recall one at the time of this study. Pastor Lazarus replied,

I say the one you read [Moses] – would be my story. I didn't have a biblical story in mind at the beginning of my calling. This answer is a result of looking back. " I remember after I preached my first sermon, my father said to me – these were his words: "Learn as much – stay faithful to Pastor [*name removed*] – learn as much as you can from him." I call it draining his brain, which is what I did for 10 years.

I had a preacher outta Dallas, we were talking about some other pastors and he was talking about a guy who followed his predecessor, and he made this comment to me. He said, "You know, one reason the successor has been able to handle his context is because he had the heart of his Moses."

And so, the people – and I started – I've been thinking about that, and I will say it this way: he smelled like Moses to the people, and the people could smell the scent, and they liked Moses, so it helped him to have that inheritance. And so, his heart for people, his heart for ministries since he had been trained, under him, like Joshua and Moses. When he handed it over, he had the same heart – as a matter of fact, this is what this preacher said, he says, "Joshua's God was Moses' God."

And I thought about me, and that of the three pastors that influenced me. And I probably would conclude that if I look back, the Moses-Joshua, and I said this to various people, Moses-Joshua probably is the scripture that I would embrace as my journey.

Pastor Malachi shared,

Well, mine has changed. I resonated – and I thought it was important for me – because relatively speaking, I started preaching at a younger age and I became a pastor at a younger age. And Jeremiah’s calling, and the things that he had from God, to challenge him to not be fearful of their faces, helped me in very younger years because my first pastorate was, of course, persons who were my seniors, elder members of my family, but I was called to be pastor. So, it’s changed now that I’m older, but in the early ministry I resonated with the story of the call of Jeremiah.

Pastor Paul added to the conversation with the following comments:

I didn’t have a biblical story too, initially, I think. I know I had inspiration first as I perceived my responsibility as a pastor and my responsibility to the church that I pastored. The inspiration led me in a direction that could be characterized – Moses, Elijah, all as confirmation stories and enrichment experiences of what inspiration had directed me. I probably would claim Paul’s story as a story I’d like to triumph as pastor, because of his relationship with death.

The pastor’s statements suggest that all pastors can be inspired at any stage in their ministry by biblical call narratives. It is not unusual for the story that resonates with the pastor to change as their ministry matures.

The pastors in focus group two, as noted in the quotes from the participants below, agreed it would be restrictive to mandate that every pastor identify with a biblical call narrative.

Pastor Will began the discussion in focus group two by stating,

I want to speak to that narrative, Moses and the burning bush and his life as he gave some tutelage to Joshua to follow. To answer your first question, should a pastor called of God have a biblical narrative. I don’t know if I would want to be as restrictive as to force that on someone to identify with a biblical narrative. I have a biblical narrative. And normally, where that narrative will first be public, is in a first or what we call maybe a trial sermon.

Usually, God lays that upon, in my case – usually, God lays that – my first sermon, which I never tried to even touch that text again, was Saul when he was selected as Israel’s first king. There is a passage there that says they were looking for him after he had been selected by the people. And there is a little passage that says that he was hid among the stuff. And that was kind of my pre ministry call life and to some degree, after hearing the call and trying to negotiate that call with God, I’ll serve you on my terms if you let me go

with this. That whole thing. But I was hid among the stuff and that was the stuff of the world.

And having heard the call numerous nights as I was out involved in a lot of debauched things and heard it and just turned the music up and tried to squelch it. But I was really hid among the stuff. I wouldn't want to restrict a pastor to that. But since there is nothing new under the sun and God is the same yesterday, today, and forever, I would really bet heavily that a pastor that's genuinely called, which is a word that we don't hear much about. We hear a lot of people saying now – on the Southern Baptist side of the street, you hear a lot of people say...you hear a lot of people say they were led to ministry. I felt led.

With us, with Missionary Baptists, we still believe in the call. We still believe that God speaks to human heart concerning His [God] plan for your life. Jeremiah 1:5, before I knew you, I knew your mama. And when you were conceived, I formed you in your mama's womb and I wanted you to come out and be a prophet to the nation. Our God did that. So, if God did that then, I'm really – it's just not in God's history with me and the biblical record of Him [God] changing his methodology as it relates to dealing with humans. It's about love. It's about redemption. It's about salvation and forgiveness.

And it's about the call of the human. And so, I think there is going to be some biblical narratives, and Pastor Midnight and Pastor Joe are probably going to say yeah, I resonate with this scripture because I heard God and that call. And some of them may be Paul on the road to Damascus. Some of them may be Moses. We kind of heard you allude to a little bit of that. Moses kind of strikes me as being someone who had an Egyptian ring that may have had razors [in it] when he heard the call to deliver his people. And he's got some stuff on record that he did and hid the man in the sand, boy.

And so, there's – so, God is known for lining up even the people of the 21st century, 2019, lining them up with what has already happened to let us know that he's [God] faithful, he's [God] the same, what he's [God] done with wrecked lives in the past, how he's transformed and turned them around. He can still do that with you, even though yours is a wreck as well. So, I resonate with Saul, not in a kingly way but in a way that he tried to run from his responsibility when the people that had made selection of him. So, I see that in him.

The pastors in both focus groups, as mentioned earlier, did find meaning and validation in identifying a biblical call narrative that reflected their personal pastoral call.

After each Pastor discussed the relationship between their personal pastoral call and a biblical call narrative, the most frequently recited biblical call narrative among both focus groups was the call narrative of the Prophet Jeremiah found in Jeremiah chapter one. Similar to

Jeremiah's call experience, the pastors in both focus groups believed God placed this prophetic pastoral call on their life before they were born. This prophetic call is not one that can be earned or deserved, it is decided solely by God. Pastor Joe shared,

I would agree with the Jeremiah piece from the very beginning. And then, when you get to that point where from 1:5 and then, that whole piece where you're trying to say okay, Lord, I see how they do preachers. I don't want this. And then, I'm thinking my heart, I kind of messed up too much. So, Lord, you probably want to find a better candidate to do this. But this treasure, I need you to understand that this gospel and this prophetic word that I'm giving you is just a treasure. You're the earthen vessel but the treasure, the prophetic word is from me. So, no matter what happens, don't ever get it twisted.

It's not I'm [God] calling you because you're perfect or because you got it all together right now. But this is my call in your life. And so, the whole narrative of this is what I called you to do from your mother's womb. And don't try to talk me out of what I'm calling you to do. And I said well, I'll be a good deacon. And I'm talking to the – I'm trying to – I'll be the best Sunday school teacher you ever want to have. I promise you, Lord. I said because this is what I don't need to happen. And you might need to hear Paul's. I don't want to be standing up giving the invitation and somebody walks down that aisle – you understand. And but the Lord has been – and then, I said, "Okay, Lord. If you do it, can you send me to another town where I don't know nobody?"

But the idea is I think God is all – in my life, and you said this is personal. So, in my life, I think that he had to convince me that the prophet preacher, the person with the prophetic voice, you're representing me, not you. So, when you're speaking to power, when you're speaking truth to power, you're speaking my truth to the power. And so, yeah. From your mother's womb. And I already knew what you were going to do from your mother's womb until you said yes to me. But still, that's my decision. And so, yeah, Jeremiah 1. My [God] words, they're not your words anyway. It's my word.

Pastor Joe's statements suggest that God is aware of the preachers' shortcomings and they do not disqualify one from God's call. Pastor Midnight agreed with Pastor Joe and stated the following,

I totally agree with that particular narrative. And you [interviewer] just did mine. And that's Moses and Joshua. I'm not looking to become the next one. I just serve where I serve. A military strategist. One that was trusted to go spy. Wasn't looking for nothing. I learned how to ride in the second chair without trying to be first in line. Not looking for nothing. Yeah. But never once did I think God was making preparation all of the time. And with that Moses to Joshua story, I understand why the Lord had to tell Joshua a couple of times. I understand why he had to encourage him... But when it came before the Lord's people because he was no longer in charge, the Lord was. And that story, in

fact my favorite scripture, is Joshua 24:15. So, that's my story. That's my biblical narrative of where I've come from to where I am.

I've been a fighter but knowing I have the support. And as Joshua, I would kill a dead stump over Moses. I would do that... Maybe I won't hold you to a biblical narrative but I think before they come out, they ought to look at one because I would say 95 percent of the pastors and preachers at the time, but who were not pastors then, if they're real with their past, you'll find yourself in your word. You'll find it. You'll find it.

The first guy that told me you're going to preach, I hit him. Guess where I was. In the church. The first person I fought in the church was the assistant pastor. They had to run around the corner and get my uncle. That's Moses. Joshua wasn't saved, he was just singing. And Joshua was singing because he knew at the end of every song, after he got through singing, he'd be doing something with somebody in the choir. So, ignorant while Moses was preaching after Joshua got through singing, he was on the bus doing it while he was preaching. You ain't calling me. No.

And he says I'm going to leave the stuff with you. Those 11 exes that wouldn't leave, I'm going to leave them right there. So, if you can lead them 11 exes, you'll know it's not you, it's me. Eleven, I had twelve. I buried one. And my wife knows all of them. As I was with Moses. Moses had a background. I know you have one. But I'm with you just as I was with him. You do what I say because you didn't ask for this but I had it prepared for you. That biblical narrative got me through degrees before.

Pastor Midnight's comments suggest that God's demonstrated behavior in a biblical call narrative could help a pastor identify and accept God's participation in their own life.

Although most pastors had a personal connection to the call narrative of Jeremiah, there were other narratives mentioned during the focus groups. The pastors, as stated from the quotes from the participants above, found similarities between their personal pastoral call and the biblical narratives of the Apostle Paul, Moses, Elijah, Moses and Joshua. Regardless of the specific biblical narrative the pastors personally related to, the pastors believed God to be consistent in the methods used to call prophets and validate their ministry.

Inspired by Their Presence

Another theme that emerged from the focus groups was *inspired by their presence*. This

theme was defined as African American figures who modeled the prophetic pastoral call and created a legacy for contemporary pastors to follow. When asked, how significant do you believe the African American heritage story to be in the life and call of the African American Pastor, and to briefly describe a person in history who inspired you to serve the greater African American community outside of your local congregation, the following words, phrases and names were shared: I observed, our stories, I've seen, people knew, he sacrificed, he believed, Harry Wright, Gardener Taylor, Angus Clay, Benjamin Hays, S.M. Wright, F. N. William, Sr., Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Dr. E. Stanley Branch. Although this prophetic pastoral call is not sought after God provided African American pastoral models from whom the pastors could learn.

During both focus groups, as shared in the quotes from the participants below, pastors discussed the significance of national and local African American leaders who, through the uniqueness of the African American experience, role modeled a life of service, sacrifice and fighting for justice. Pastor Joe stated, "But you need, I believe, you always need that leader that's willing to go and fight...To go and say this is not right." Pastor Paul commented on significant pastoral leaders in his life,

I'll go a little large, and I have four. All right – this is – number four is Benjamin Mays. Number three is Harry Wright. Number two is Gardner Taylor, and number one is [name removed]...Didn't have a grade school education – formal – got through the second primer, as it were, but my recalling him as a preacher, still causes me to marvel. Not only how he sacrificed, but how he was able to stand in places and speak, where I stood in the back of the audience wondering if he was going to break a verb and do something that's out of character. And every one of those instances came through like gang busters and his words to me was always, "Operate within yourself. Don't try to be who you ain't."

Pastor Malachi shared his thoughts in the following way:

I will – our stories – African-Americans – is unique and I believe that there are a lot of unidentified who did not get the recognition – the platform – but in their sphere of influence made a great difference. I observed instances where that if you're going to go to a certain town, you want something to happen in the African-American community,

there's a certain preacher/pastor that the downtown people know to call, and the people at the state capitol know to call. And I've been in the presence, overhearing almost the constant ringing of the phone of young preachers, or preachers reaching out to this preacher for conversation and wisdom and the like, who may never be known as Dr. King was known.

But where he has served and he is serving, he's making a difference – a courageous difference. I saw it when they wanted to put a Confederate Flag symbol on the license plates of the state of Texas and the political leaders who knew of it wanted a show of persons to go down to where the decision was being made. And one standout speech was made that literally defeated that because it was so genuine and so respected. I've seen that kind African American presence and thankful to have been close to understand that there are times when in local communities and in districts and regions, people know who to call.

People know who to look for and people know to question, 'is such-and-such a person with this or not?' And if he's not with it, they know not to bring it up to have success. So, I think it still works, but I think it works more local level and not quite as wide a range as Dr. King could be on the steps in Washington DC, and all the cameras, and thousands and thousands of people tuning in. But I think it happens a whole lot more than what the average person would know.

Pastor Malachi's comments suggest that for the African American pastor there has been no shortage of issues that confront the African American community. And each pastor is called to approach every issue using their own God given influence and set of gifts. Pastor Lazarus added,

I would say – I have a collage of preachers. I don't have one that I would hold up. I've seen and read about a variety of them who come at it – the issue of prophecy and prophetic proclamation differently – each of whom came in a way, like Phillip Brooks describes preaching, proclamation through your personality, which then has given me comfort; I don't need to be anybody but me. And so – and you have the three of us. Each of us has lived out his prophetic calling in different ways, but we still have been, or worked at trying to be prophetic.

And so, to our earlier conversation, whether or not we were inclined to accept that mantle, the people have expected that of us. And, it's easy if you feel you are called to that and you don't have to struggle against the tide, so to speak. But I would say that there are just so many – and some of whom are nationally known, that we've all watched or seen thereabout – but there are others that don't get media-play that have stood up on issues. And so, there are just a variety of preachers – Black preachers – that have – I don't say model, because I don't necessarily look at trying to model anybody – but I've seen how they approach it and my sense is, as God called them, God called me to be me.

Pastor Lazarus's comments suggest that by observing the boldness and methods of the African American pastors who faithfully served in the past, the pastors in this study recognized that they too could impact their communities.

The pastors also discussed the importance and challenge of living into the legacy of the prophetic pastoral call, which includes the acceptance of and passing on of the prophetic mantle from African American pastoral mentors. Pastor Will made the following point,

So, Mr. Interviewer, you brought up the example of Dexter Avenue and Dr. Martin Luther King being pastor and both a civil activist. Pulpit and public, I don't think that we can ever separate the two because the pulpit is public. So, I think to a certain degree as pastors, we'll have to decide to maximize that publicity or minimize it as it relates to affecting change in the overall grand scheme of things, not just the pulpit.

As I stated earlier, I think any pastor or preacher that has been given a pulpit to occupy on a consistent basis, if he limits his ministry to that place only then, he's not living up to what God called him to do because standing behind that fashion, wood or glass, that is just your hour to do what you've been called to do to that group. You shepherd 24 hours a day. You speak into their lives on that kind of basis once, twice, three times a week or however many times you meet. If you limit it there, you've done God a disservice and the community that depends on you. So, I don't think you can separate the two pulpit from public.

Pastor Will points out that the African American pastor must not limit their ministry and impact to standing behind the local pulpit. God has called the pastor to serve a greater community who depends on the pastor to maximize their opportunity to speak into their lives on a continuous basis. Pastor Will continued his thoughts,

Now, I think we do, and you brought up Dr. King, I think we do Dr. King a disservice to limit him to streets and holidays because in 1Samuels 17, there is this story about David as he's a young warrior. And then, there is Saul who is very secular in his thinking as it goes into warfare who tries to fit him with his armor. It doesn't work. And David is not accustomed to it. I think when we limit Dr. King to streets and holidays and all of these things, I think we're trying to fight a new fight in old armor.

I really do. I think the reason that we're losing the advancement of our people from the perch or the platform of the pulpit is because we're still trying to fight this battle in Saul's armor. David had enough sense to know I ain't never won it like that before. Lion, bear, I

didn't have that. So, we don't have what King had. King was for, as the Book of Ruth [sic] says, King was for such a time as this...So, when you're dealing with 2019, man, thank God for Dr. King but he was for a time as that. And so, we're addressing things now from a technological point of view. We're trying to get people – the agenda maybe is still the same but the mindset of the people have changed. There is a generation who only know King because of the holiday. And that's it. And so, as I'm trying to fight that, I don't think so. I think that we do have modern day.

Pastor Will recognized the legacy of Dr. King should go beyond the naming of streets and a holiday. The African American pastor should learn from King's example of pastoral leadership and adjust their methods to address the current mindsets and concerns of the people. Pastor Will continued his statement,

I listed a couple of the modern day people who influenced me to get involved outside of the pulpit. There was a commissioner in my hometown, [name removed] was the first African American brother that I saw who spoke so well that people said we don't know what you said but whatever it is, it's got to be right...And then, there was this other guy. Man, let me tell you something. We had a guy...who led the NAACP...But man, he led it with so much strength that it affected change. But each one of those guys fought today's agenda. Do you know what I mean?

When [name removed] fought for my home, it's because African Americans in the '70s were not being able to build homes because they were getting denied mortgages. So, he had a way to address that. We're fighting the same thing, man, but we can't limit it to King, man. And I pity the guy who has a pulpit, man, who is not engaged in these kinds of things outside of the church because your gifts, your approval rating in the pew, that ain't got nothing to do with making things better for people in our town. Nothing, man. Nothing at all. So, if we limit it to that – and a lot of guys are doing that, man, and it just burns me up because they got a voice.

And all they want to tell you is Doc, the house was packed this morning. Doc, the Lord came through. Doc, this is what I told them. And then, through the week, what are you doing? Is that your climax shouting at people on Sunday? And you got somebody sitting in that pew, that a man is getting ready to condemn their house, and you can carry your wagon down to City Hall to say you can't condemn this side of town. You can't shut the Boys' and Girls' Club down on this side of town because our kids ain't got no babysitters. That's where they go when school is out. And you're hollering at them? They're closing down, they're running down now. And then, she got to go back and say school is out for three months. I work on a job where I can't get off. I don't have nobody in my family to keep my kids. And they're talking about shutting the YMCA down, and I'm talking about a revival meeting I'm doing or I'm fixing to go look at the 2019 automobile that's the shiniest or going to meet somebody to make some doggone clothes for me. I don't get it. I

don't get it. So, yes, King set a torch and one of our gentlemen in this conference talked about passing the torch. He did a good job yesterday.

And if he [Dr. King] didn't do anything else but to have us name streets after him, we ain't done nothing. Pass the torch, man. Get out and fight the fight that's now. We have a new fight now, man, and we can't run around talking about the man. We know some responsibility is there, but if I'm going to fight that – we ain't going to never win that fight because you can't convince somebody of something that they never owned. So, every time I say you are racist. You're keeping us back. They don't see that. Their picture of racism is hanging somebody from a tree. And people in 2019, for the most part, have not done that. And so, if we fight that same fight, they'll say what are you talking about. I ain't never done that.

Pastor Will's comments advocate that the African American pastor must use the voice God has given them to fight the everyday problems faced by persons in the community. The African American pastor should accept the torch that has been passed from Dr. King and recognize their responsibility to fight against inequality and racism remains today. God has given the African American pastor a platform inside and outside of the church where their prophetic voice must be heard and their presence felt.

Pastor Midnight added,

And you mentioned that same house I'm talking about that I lived in, that I thought we were rich because we had two holes [in the ground]. To keep us from playing with their children, they had quicksand between the houses. They didn't have to tell us not to come play. We couldn't get over there. And if you tried, if they didn't get you out soon enough, you were going to die in the quicksand. That's racist. Well, everybody saying I ain't ever hung nobody.

Pastor Midnight reflected on contemporary manifestations of racism and the fatal consequences experienced by persons in the African American community. Then Pastor Will responded,

Yeah. But the modern quicksand is in the form of homeowners' association out in your area, out in the hills. That's mortgage denial, promotion – so, I can't – But I've got to learn – brother interviewer, and that's why it is so important for African American pastors to be sitting in strategic locations and to learn the verbiage and jargon that resonates with those people. And it doesn't come out in anger. Man, look, you got to be able to sit there and - one of the reasons why I'm serving on the [name removed]

Economic Development Board, and I don't even know how I got on that, because all of the criteria of the people that I'm sitting around, I don't have either one of them. I don't have heritage. I don't have wealth. And I don't have a lot of education in the sense of going to an Ivy League school.

I don't have that. And so, I'm sitting around people who have this, who by stroke of pen can make things happen. There I am sitting there, an African American preacher. And so, what happens in those settings is God places us there, not because of what we know, but because he wants to use us as vessels to guide things in this day and time. So, we've been able to affect some change there. We've been able to get some things done on the southside there. Not by going in with a Malcolm or Martin agenda. Ain't nobody putting a water hose on our people. Nobody turned the dogs loose on our people.

But what they have done is made it very, very difficult for those with a 75602 zip to secure mortgage loans. That's the fight today. Why is it that my people can buy a \$70,000.00 or \$80,000.00 car but you won't sell them a \$50,000.00 house? Nobody ever talks about that.

Pastor Will's response suggests that God may place African American pastors in positions of influence in the community as a vessel of change to combat systemic and contemporary forms of racism experienced in the African American community. Although some changes have occurred, the pastors stated that African American pastors must continue to speak on the issues that are often neglected and perpetuate inequality.

Pastors in both focus groups, as shared earlier, agreed it was important to identify African American leaders who were role models, especially persons in their local context who are widely recognized as persons of influence in their city. Pastor Joe spoke about a pastor who served as a prophetic role model in a city where he served when he said,

I think in my case, one that might be a little controversial...[name removed] was not a Martin Luther King, Jr. But his influence on a city kind of gives a role model of how to do prophetic engagement in a city like [name removed]. And this is what I mean. Some of the things that happened in some of the other cities in the south never happened in [name removed]. And there are those who kind of feel cheated that it didn't happen that way.

But because you had a model that could get things done in a different way, just as vocal, just as visible but not necessarily as – no streets got burned. No dogs were sent out. The

one march that I remember, and now I'm not that old, but I do remember the march was so peaceful. And there were whites and blacks in a city where African Americans were hung downtown [name removed]. But because of the [name removed], there were things that were done that we learned from.

But some of the other things were not done because you had leadership that modeled a way to go to downtown...because the model has changed. But you need, I believe, you always need that leader that's willing to go and fight....To go and say this is not right.

This is not right. This is what's needed...During my tenure...there were times when we did do things. We put a couple of recalls out and we ended up influencing a couple of races that turned – as a matter of fact, no mayor has been elected in [name removed] that has not won the south. If you don't win the south, you don't become mayor. And there was an African American that was running for mayor in [name removed] and would not come to the south. He only sent surrogates. And I got up in church and I said, "okay, now I need you all to understand". And the surrogate was sitting right there. I said, "I need you all to understand that this man who grew up in the projects would not come to this neighborhood. He sent a surrogate. He would not come back home." I said, "So, when you go into the ballot, I'm not telling you who to vote for, but I need you to understand that this man would not come back home." When he came to our ministers, when it came time for our conference, our alliance, he sent a surrogate.

But he would hang in the north with the white folks. Why did he come in last place and the guy who would come to the church is now the mayor...? So...I guess to answer the question, yes. So, yeah. There are models that we need...

Pastor Joe's statement suggests that African Americans pastors can influence important decisions in their community when they stand united. Each pastor recalled the names of past prophetic pastoral leaders, their personal role models, who stood courageously and fought for their community. Both focus groups, as noted by the quote below, remembered pastors who were personable, accessible and unafraid to confront the injustices of their time. Pastor Midnight articulated it this way,

That person of great influence and the names that we called I'm quite sure were one of those heroes in our life. And because I knew all three of them, all three of them fought for the underdog, the underclass, and the African American. And then, I wanted folks like FN Williams, Sr., who fought, who marched with Dr. Martin Luther King, who fought. And these are some of the people. Dr. E. Stanley Branch. Those are three that I've watched that, to me, growing up because I did not know him personally were even more so important to me at the time than Dr. Martin Luther King.

Among the pastors in both focus groups great reverence was expressed for the African American pastors, their heroes, who demonstrated courageous pastoral and civic leadership. It is the legacy of these heroes that inspired each pastor to serve and lead the church and community.

Preparation and Priorities

Another theme that emerged from the focus groups was *preparation and priorities*. This theme was defined as knowledge gained through the pastoral experience of seasoned pastors believed to be invaluable guidance for early in ministry pastors. When asked, as you consider your pastoral ministry, personal discernment process and path to civic leadership, please share two wisdom lessons you have acquired, either learned or earned, that you believe to be invaluable for a young pastor discerning a call to ministry beyond the pulpit, the following words or phrases were stated frequently: I'm accountable, knowledge, study, be faithful, equip yourself, do your homework, take your time, be deliberate, trust the power of the Word, exegete your context, respect elders/pastors, family first, finances. The pastors in both focus groups, as noted by the quotes below, eagerly shared the knowledge they had accumulated during their years of pastoral ministry, each from their particular perspectives. The difference in the data for this theme reflects a generational gap between both focus groups. The pastors in focus group one are relatively older than the pastors in focus group two, therefore the data appears to represent a difference in priorities among generations of pastors.

The pastors in focus group one emphasized the importance of learning the stories and history of the people the pastor serves in the church and community and learning how processes

work in the governmental and city settings. Pastor Malachi spoke to this need to understand how politics work,

One experience that was a lesson for me, getting involved in something outside of a local church was preparation, and learning what you're dealing with and what you're up against. As a young pastor, I was appointed precinct leader, a representative of something to go to, to the state Democratic Convention of – and they were doing something that we didn't agree with. And we felt that we could halt it or stop it, raise objection to it.

And I learned that they had that business prepared and down, that they knew who was going to make the motion, they knew who was going to go to second. And it was like a steamroller effect that, as a novice, naïve – trying to raise up against something I had not studied, I had not the experience to know how those things worked. And so, life lesson to me – and I carried it from that – is do your homework. Study, and I think that's a biblical principle, that Nehemiah studied what the work was in his midnight survey.

Gideon, who was reluctant, but God gave him opportunity to be exposed to the enemy. And so, one life lesson to me – and especially the short while that I was in [*name removed*] and involved with NAACP, that local chapter – was do your homework. If you're gonna go downtown, or if you're gonna – make sure you do your homework. The second thing that I would say – and my first church was a small church, small town, country town – and one of the things that I hold a strong conviction about is God's word is our pattern and our guide.

And I was standing very strong that we would not, in any shape, form, or fashion, be a church supported by selling dinners. We were gonna be tithes and offerings, a church supported by giving, which they thought, to some extent that, if we're not allowed to sell dinners, making good money, lunches and whatever, we'll just take it to our homes and prepare it there, and we'll do it from our homes. And I said, “No, whatever you do in the name of this church, I'm accountable for. And I will not allow you to use the name of this church, even if you use it from your house. To perpetuate, we're going to be tithes and offerings.”

And what I'm getting to is – to say to a young pastor – learning patience, that it takes time sometimes for people to become converted, and that you have them persuaded. There was a senior deacon that was a member of that church who voiced his difference of not continuing to sell. And I always remember as a lesson to me, it was six years later. It was six years later that he came to me, and said he couldn't see it then, but he'd come to recognize that it really works. And what I picked up from that six years was that don't think that something can be turned around in an instant. Sometimes people who you feel are your opposition, can be persuaded to come to your side, but you have to allow God to work and be patient. So, patience and do your homework.

Pastor Malachi's comments suggest that if the pastor is going to be an effective leader in the church and community they must learn to exercise patience and understand how things work, at the church and in the community, behind the scenes.

The pastors in focus group one encouraged a young pastor to spend time getting to know the people in their church and community. The pastors believed this acquired knowledge was critical in developing an effective pastoral ministry. Pastor Paul shared his wisdom lessons when he said,

I think there are a number of things – a couple – two or three I ought to mention. This first one is the title pastor doesn't make you pastor. You earn that. Being called to a church gives you the privilege, but you have to earn the pastoral role. That's a major thing. Second is, kin to what Malachi just said, take your time, be deliberate in asserting yourself. Don't rush to the head table. And thirdly, out of many I could share, be faithful to the Word and trust the power of the Word.

Pastor Paul's statement suggests that a title does not automatically give the pastor the right to lead the congregation. Through time and faithfulness, the congregation will learn to respect the pastor's leadership and grant them the privilege of pastoring them. Pastor Lazarus stated,

I would say ditto to what the sage Paul and Malachi said, and what they have said is still in practice for me. The two things I would add to that would be, equip yourself or be equipped, both for the church and the community. And that's pregnant with a lot and you all understand, so I'll just leave it right there. The other would be to exegete your context. And I what I mean by that is, exegete – even new pastors going in, in my mind, need to exegete their church, and the way that I did, was to know the stories of the people.

The advantage I had, was I had compounded knowledge because I was there under someone who had been there almost 30 years, with whom I had a close relationship, and stories from days before me were given to me. So, there were things I already knew, collected from what he knew, and then there were stories I learned by being out among the people and just listening to them, talking, and figuring out why that piece of furniture was there, or whatever. So, I was exegeting my context by looking at distant stories. That's also what I've done in the community as I've talked to people who have knowledge and there is no person from whom you cannot get some knowledge. And I'm talking about just people who can tell you the stories of what happened in this city, because there's always something that happened before you got there, before coming

there. Exegete not only the church, the community, but the people, the institutions, and to extent that you can identify the systems that are in operation, both formal and informal.

You need to study them because as Malachi said, politically operating is a system. And you need to study, how does it really operate, above and beneath? And we all know that oftentimes there are meetings that take place in the church before the meeting. And so, you also need to know, even though so-and-so sits across the sanctuary, they may have a closer relationship, and helps you kinda operate and navigate those who hold formal roles in the church, in the city. And those form the informal roles, that may be the power behind the throne.

And so, I would say you need to be equipped for that, and part of the equipment – I remember when I was going through my process, at [name removed] the one prayer, the one prayer I had was, “Guard my heart.” And what I meant by that was, keep me from pain and keep me from trying to be vindictive. And I think that’s something that are the words to keep throughout a pastorate.

Pastor Lazarus’s comments suggest the pastor must study and determine who the influential people are and the true politics of how work is accomplished.

Sharing from a different generational perspective, the pastors in focus group two emphasized the importance of a pastor taking care of their family and having respect for the senior pastors of the Church. The pastors in focus group two, who on average were younger than the pastors in focus group one, unanimously agreed young pastors must prioritize their family.

Pastor Will stated,

...I would say to him, if you’re married and you have a family, put your family always first before your ministry responsibilities, always. Now, that flies in the face of what every one of us at this table was taught, because every one of us was taught by those senior pastors that the church is first and your family will just have to understand that God called you to preach. I disagree with that on a biblical basis. And the biblical basis is that God created family before He created the church.

So, the reason I say that, brothers, is because if you haven’t noticed, Satan is destroying the preachers’ and the pastors’ family through and by divorce, the estrangement from the gospel of their children. That’s our first ministry. And so many times in African American culture, we want our family to understand the church, the church, the church. No. It ought to be your family, your family, your family because when they vote you out, guess who gets in the car and go and wait in that church with you. Your family. The

church belongs to God. God gave me my family as a husband, as a dad. I bought into that.

My pastor taught – and he loved me. He loved us. He said, “Your wife is just going to have to understand. It’s going to be times that the church has got to come before her.” I loved my pastor. I visit his grave site often and just stand there and cry. But time has taught me that that little piece of wisdom may have been a little misguided because times have changed. And women are not what they used to be. And men are not what they used to be. So, you all can respectfully disagree with me. But I’m saying put your family first. Don’t do foolish stuff like I did.

Young married couple, Valentine’s Day comes up and I’ve got to go to a wake. The folk dead. I should have said to their family I’ll be at the funeral tomorrow but tonight is Valentine night and I’m going to spend that time with my wife. I had to cancel reservations and all of that. It just ruined it. Your children are there. They grow up and see how friendly you are with everybody else and they’re on the floor with their toys. You ain’t got time because you’re working on a sermon. Not because your time is that crunched. It’s because you wasted it somewhere else and now, your family has got to pay for it. I’d tell them watch out for your family. Guard your family. That’s your family and then, guard your finances...

According to Pastor Will’s statement, the pastors in focus group two emphasized a generational shift in thinking regarding how a pastor should balance family and ministry responsibilities. The pastors recalled that conventional wisdom had taught that the pastor’s family just had to understand where they fit in the pastor’s priority. The pastors in focus group two encouraged a young pastor, from life experience, to put their family first.

The pastors in focus group two also discussed the importance of respect for pastoral leadership or the elders of the Church, to use them as a valuable source of wisdom and guidance. Pastor Will advised,

I would say to get with a senior pastor to review that call with him. A senior pastor that has a proven track record like these two gentlemen that are sitting here. You don’t have to know them, don’t have to have a relationship. Just say hey, Pastor Joe, Pastor Midnight, I am John Doe. I go to church across town. I won’t name that church. I feel led to ministry. I feel called to ministry. I feel it. Tell me what happened. Let them go and let them determine based on their experiences is this something that needs more prayer. Do we need to bathe this more in prayer? Or do we need to guide this guy in a direction and get him on the path to pursue that? That’s what I would say.

Pastor Will's comments suggest a young pastor needs a senior pastor to talk to and pray with them as they make ministry decisions. Pastor Will also shared financial wisdom based on personal experience,

Don't put your church in debt young pastor. If you can't go to the meeting, do like we did. Me and the boy that preached used to room together when coming here with our pastor. We used to room together. Split it down the middle. The church wasn't paying for it. Sometimes, there would be three of us in there, four of us in there. We didn't go out to eat and everything. The ladies would make us a thing to eat through the week. And my pastor and all of them would be going out to eat. We didn't go out to eat, man. We're sitting in the room saying hey, boys, do you all want something back? I'll bring you all something back and all of that. We loved it.

And so, we need to talk to these young guys and tell them do not try to look like what you ain't. You see a [name removed] walking around here dressed all up. He's 90 years old been in one church almost 50 years...What are you going to try to do to keep up with that and you're 25 or 30 or 40 or 50 or 60? What are you going to try to keep up with that for? You can't. And they want to come out like that. Oh, Doc, you bad. They look at this guy[at the table]. They want to come out like him, see his cars and all of this stuff and don't know. And I know for a fact that one of the cars he got God blessed him with it, because a person gave it to him and he's driving it. And then, I see that other 25-year-old and I go out and mortgage all of my stuff including my wedding band to drive like this guy is driving.

Pastor Will's testimony intimated that managing finances at home and at the church is an important task for the pastor. The pastors in focus group two cautioned a young pastor to have financial discipline and do not place your family or the church in an unfortunate situation.

The pastors advised young pastors to be patient, not eager to be recognized or sit in places of distinction. Pastor Midnight said,

One thing that I would love to say we learned, I speak for all three of us I know on this, we didn't get to go up [to the pulpit] before it was our time. We are guilty of ruining some of these young preachers because we like them. And I've watched in [city name removed] three that have been rewarded for splitting churches. I watched some of the youngsters that run up to the stage this week, this very week to try to be big when small is eating them alive. And the problem is he was not asked up, neither one of the two. The only time I went up was when the Lord called me. Now, we were taught that. And we respected leadership enough to wait to be called up. And sometimes, if by chance we

got to preach, if by chance – very slim. It wouldn't have been in parent Body [main conference session]. But if it was, when you got through, you went back to the floor. And watch this. Respect the elders that blazed the trail before us.

Pastor Joe added, "...in the day when the pulpit was respected and the leadership was respected. I wish we would have walked up there. They even taught us it's better to be asked up than to be asked down. But we don't even tell them to move." According to Pastor Midnight and Pastor Joe's comments, a young pastor early in his ministry must respect leadership and wait to be asked up. The pastors advised young pastors to be content waiting for their time to be called up to the pulpit and given opportunities to preach.

In addition to respect for senior pastors, the pastors in focus group two also discussed the responsibility of one generation of pastors to teach the next generation. The pastors also discussed the importance of a pastor learning to protect the integrity of one's name. Pastor Midnight, as he referred to their perception of the lack of accountability currently directed toward the younger generation of pastors said, "That's it. It's our fault. We learned but we don't use what we learned." Pastor Midnight's comment suggests that within the African American pastoral tradition sharing what is learned is an essential way to preserve the integrity of their rich pastoral heritage.

Pastor Joe provided wisdom on the importance of a young pastor protecting their name when he added,

I would say the word of wisdom I would say to a young, prophetic preacher pastor is don't hook up. Don't give your influence and power to junk. And what I mean is if there is an issue that your name being connected to it will end up damaging your name...you're endorsing raggedy life people, and I mean from a political standpoint and from a cultural standpoint...You cannot sell your soul. You cannot do it. You are God's man. You are God's prophet before you are a Republican, a Democrat, Libertarian, Socialist, whatever you may want to be. You have to put yourself, brother young preacher, in a place where it is clear that you stand for God over anybody and anything. So, that's the first thing I would say. Don't allow your name to be associated with

wickedness, wicked people, wicked – you know. And some guys because they get a nickel from somebody, they'll endorse them and pat them on the back. But this is my deal, you all. I would tell them don't be connected with political junk.

Pastor Joe emphasized the necessity for a pastor to recognize the importance of protecting their name and reputation. A pastor should not compromise their divine calling as God's prophet by endorsing or associating with wicked persons for perceived personal gains.

A pastor's relationship and commitment to his family may, at first, not seem very important to his calling to serve the church and community. According to at least two of the pastors in focus group two, however, family is essential. Expanding on his comments about protecting one's reputation, Pastor Joe said,

And the second thing I would concur, that no matter how connected you are with the culture, government, with the church, you do have to – your family has to be a priority. As long as you got them, you have to make that person or those people, they have to know because this is what the other folk in your church are seeing. They are actually seeing this pastor really put them first. Because Christ is going to take care of his brides. And that whole piece we're married to the church, one pastor told me – I said I read he, it's the bride of Christ. And if the bride got two husbands then, she's committing adultery. If the bride has two husbands, she's committing adultery. And I'm telling you I'm just watching the bride until the bridegroom comes back. That's our job. I'm a steward. I'm attending to the bride. Lord, what do you want me to do with this bride? I'm not going to mistreat the bride because it's His bride.

Pastor Joe stated that the pastor is a role model for the church membership on how to prioritize one's family. The pastor must trust they are called to be a good steward and God will take care of the church. Pastor Will continued this discussion,

And to the background of that, that was what you're experiencing in your area with those three, watch Satan's plan. Now, each one of those guys you're talking about either are not with their wives or they are on their way to not being with their wives. It's a design. Let me tell you, that's why I'm so strong on family. I made a lot of mistakes as a young minister and young pastor one of which I named. But what that opens up the door for, and you watched it – I'm watching this, man, as these young – that's why, you need to be doing this on a larger scale, man. I'm going to try to make that happen for maybe another setting other than just preaching, man.

We need a dialogue in our ministers' conference that speaks to the heart of what's really going in. And when we do that, we know how to – we know how to preach, we know how to get something. We need to talk to the real issues. That is when the pastors are not putting their families first, you said a minute ago, Pastor Joe, what does the church think. I'll tell you what the church thinks. Some woman sitting there who does not have a connection with a husband or a significant person that's leading the marriage, courtship, fiancé, or any of that, they're sitting there looking and saying, "he never says anything about her, he's never with her". I just got back last week from Memphis and did three nights up there [pastor states from pulpit].

And so, they're looking and Satan is saying to her maybe I can say something to get in. That's what Satan is saying to her. And these things lead to – that's why you have what you're talking about because I think all of that stuff starts at the family because when I mess up there, I have no choice but to bring that to my vineyard. Look, we're husbands first, dads if we have children. Look, man, if my stewardship is not there, there's no way I can be effective here. And I know that there are a lot of different dynamics go on. Sometimes, guys jump in there and get married because they think they've got to be married. They made a terrible decision. They ain't prayed, ain't talked to nobody, ain't done – so, the inevitable is going – but I'm talking about when you got these issues like these and nobody is saying anything like hey, man, we love you. What's going on, man? I never see you with your wife and everything and you speak kind of harsh to you when I do see you. Let me pull you over here and talk to you about this.

Because if we don't, man, if we are truly stewards of God's church and we understand that life is fleeting, according to the Book of James, life is fleeting, if we understand that, I have best 35 to 40 years pastorage at best. You'll be an anomaly if you do like a [name removed] and go 70 something years at one church, pastoring 80 something years. You're an anomaly, as a pastor. But we ain't got long. So, if we're going to turn this over to these kind of guys that we're talking about, what do you think is going to happen to the world for real?

Pastor Joe and Pastor Will emphasized the expected short tenure of a pastor and the importance of their pastoral stewardship during this limited number of years. This pastoral stewardship includes senior pastors walking beside early in ministry pastors and sharing wisdom learned from personal experiences. The pastor should be mindful of the destruction that may await a pastor who does not prioritize their family in a visible way in front of the church membership.

The pastors in focus group two discussed the challenges they perceive in the church due to a lack of accountability among pastors. Pastor Midnight remarked,

And then, this is my last one. Stop bullying. Grandchildren can bully you. Grandchildren can bully you because they pull at your heart strings. Dr. [name removed] said some years ago, he said, “I love my grandchildren so much, I wish I had them first.” They can bully you. Guess who I found out who can bully? The young preacher can make you feel so sorry for them that they’ll tug at your heart string that you’ll find yourself putting him in another church when he didn’t deserve the first one. And you know who that hurt? It hurt him. And I heard him [Pastor Will] say something, you did not run or even eat with the senior pastors.

I watched it. I got a boy in the city that has a very prominent church. He’s a preacher. He’s a preacher, Lord, he’s a preacher. And he has two pastors now that went to churches...And because of what he can do, the others that ran with him tried to emulate it and messed themselves up...Accountability...I think the problem is, and I kind of mentioned it over there when I said that they don’t need us to be their buddies.

Pastor Midnight’s remarks intimate the need for senior pastors to love early in ministry pastors enough to hold them accountable for their behavior and ministry practices. Pastor Will responded,

But here’s the thing, man. All of us around this table have pastors like you who are going to call us into accountability. So, what do you do with a situation when the pastor didn’t call him into accountability? And so, we can give him some guidance but it’s like this, man. If you’re an elementary school teacher and the kid comes to school and they’re unclean, they’re unprepared for school. If you, the teacher shower them or make sure they’re clean and if they go back home into a dirty environment, man, who do you think is going to win, because they’re at home more than – so, when you’ve got a pastor that’s leading these guys out, it doesn’t matter what you do.

You can say, hey, man, I don’t think that’s a good thing. We appreciate what you’re trying to do. You’re trying to be secretive with whatever you’re doing but you can’t hide sin from God. For public purposes, you’re drinking out of an unknown cup. That’s great. But what I discovered is if a guy is willing to do that kind of stuff in the presence of senior pastors, the problem is bigger than we know because if he does not have any fear or respect – man, look, man, I didn’t even – we’re talking about a different day and I know we’re old folks. But we didn’t even have no conversation in my pastor’s office.

When we were sitting around in there as associates [non pastors], wasn’t nobody even talking. Bro, what’s on y’all mind? Nothing, everything is good, Pastor. You all ain’t got nothing? No, sir. Everything is good, pastor. Yeah. What did you all think about the game? Well, they won, pastor. That was it.

Pastor Will expressed his concern for the current trend of disrespectful public and private behavior by early in ministry pastors. They discussed their perception of the lack of respect currently demonstrated in the presence of senior pastors. Pastor Joe added,

Do you remember Matt Carter? Yeah, do you all remember him? I'll never forget what he said one time. He was in a minister's conference. And he said, "Brothers, you cannot out preach a ragged life." That's what you got with them three guys. If your life is raggedy, you can be gifted, but you can't out preach a raggedy life.

Pastor Joe reminded focus group two that a pastor must not attempt to hide immoral personal behavior, there is not enough preaching or talent to hide a ragged life.

According to the statements by the pastors in both focus groups the pastor should work diligently to protect the reputations of themselves and the church they serve. The pastors emphasized that a pastor's gift of preaching will not cover up a lack of discipline or sinful behavior. This type of neglect falls short of the discipline and training the pastors in focus group two experienced as younger pastors. The pastors believe these behaviors could be detrimental to early to ministry pastors and the churches they lead if not changed.

Solitude And Sharing

Another theme that emerged from the focus groups was *solitude and sharing*. This theme was defined as any habits, hobbies and methods the pastors implemented in their daily practices that helped them to discern their prophetic pastoral call. When asked, as you consider your personal discernment process, what spiritual practices have you incorporated or relied on to receive clarity and direction in your call to civic leadership, the following words or phrases were frequently shared: solitude, practicing an instrument, prayer, music and conversations with others. This category definition was developed by using data solely from focus group one. Due to focus group two reaching the agreed upon time commitment, they were unable to answer question.

The pastors in focus group one, as mentioned in the quotes below, emphasized the importance of solitude, prayer, music and confidential conversations with senior pastors. Pastor Lazarus shared,

I would throw out two things. I started playing the alto saxophone in the third grade all the way through college, and in order to be good at that, I had to practice. And practicing that instrument required me to be willing to spend time alone for hours. It may be that part of my personality is like this, but also the discipline that I had to develop by playing that instrument taught me about solitude. I like – I like people – but there’s a part of my personality that likes being alone, and I like solitude. And fortunately, even to the extent of – I mean, I’ll take vacations without my wife, I’ll go out of state for a week or so, because I’m just being – I need the solitude.

My church, if I choose to do – and I have done it in the past – when I’m trying to prepare for something coming up, whether it’s preaching series or whether it’s something I’m preparing for, I’m allowed to go away, in the weekend, three or four days at their expense. Because I’m going through a process of trying to just hear God in that. And what I learned with the music in my background, is that music of all types, helps me process. And so, I use solitude, getting away and I use music, in addition to prayer, and even discernment from conversations with others.

Pastor Lazarus’s comments suggest that solitude and music require discipline and can calm the soul. David, in 1 Samuel 16:23 played the harp to calm and refresh King Saul. Each of these can be ways for the pastor to better hear the voice of God. Pastors also need solitude, just as Jesus often spent time alone (Matthew 14:23; 15:29). Pastor Paul added,

I think all of us – and for me, most especially – I’ve had to embrace, because I study pretty consistently, pretty hard, so I had to embrace the time that I could comprehend and retain information for presentation. I had to develop a pattern, pretty dang early most of those times, because about 3:30 I’m a wake up, 3:30 to about 9:00 are moments that I can pick up or start writing and be at my best. I feel that a person ought to search for that moment of reception, that moment of comprehension, because pastorally in both the community as the church we are called to respond extemporaneously, and we got to be equipped to do that, and so reading a varieties of stuff. I think that’s necessary to deliver ministry.

Pastor Paul’s statement suggests that pastors need to identify and embrace the best time for solitude and study.

The pastors in focus group one discussed that a young pastor through conversations with a senior pastor can find a listening ear and wisdom. Pastor Malachi shared his experiences,

Of course, those things that are traditional you've named – I guess this would also be my experience of ministry and life, decisions sometimes leads me to go to someone I have confidence in to share their wisdom and sometimes the conversation may bring affirmation. I threw it out one time, with unofficial counseling, that I think I need to get a house – short answer: “if that's what you wanna do, go get it”.

But there've been instances of receiving counsel that, you don't have it in black and white in the word, but you need to sound it out with someone. And so, where I'm serving now is our fourth church, and there've been instances of, should I, or should I not? Should I stay, should I go? And then, I find it profitable that a minister ought to have someone – in skin, in flesh, alive – if he can that is trusted and will give wise council.

Pastor Malachi's statement suggests a young pastor needs someone they can talk to for guidance in making life and ministry decisions. It may be good to spend time alone, but every pastor may need a physical person they can share with. Pastors make a lot of decisions; it is good to have a relationship with another pastor who gives wise council. Pastor Paul joined the discussion with these words,

I think - I think that's imperative. I call it an accountability partner. I had a friend who lives 180 miles from me and we were real close and we literally had no secrets. I could be lying in bed or he could be lying in bed, with our wives, and wrestling with something, and I would call him long distance and say, "boy you need to meet me, we need to talk". And that could happen any time. And he'd get in his car and I would drive 100 miles and he would drive 80 miles and we would meet up. Sometimes we met up, and we could be there from the time that we got there until 1:00 at night, or sometimes all night on into the morning, or whatever, until we feel comfortable with the situation. Sometimes, he would say, "you must be losing your mind", or I would say to him, "you crazy", and so we bounced stuff off each other, together.

The other thing that was good about that is, and I would often say this at [name removed] often times. Everybody needs to dump, probably more often than you think, because emotionally and mentally we carry a lot of junk and it loads us down and can cause us dysfunction. You need somewhere where you can pull the level and dump it so that won't happen.

Pastor Paul's statement suggests that pastors have to carry a lot of burdens and have to manage them in a healthy way. According to the pastors in focus group one, as quoted above, having moments of solitude and another pastor to share these burdens with is essential.

A Distinct Call

Another theme that emerged from focus group one was *a distinct call*. This theme was defined as the implied expectation of the African American pastor to engage in prophetic civic leadership and the congregation's support of such leadership. When asked, how did you communicate your civic leadership responsibilities with the congregation you serve and how did the congregation respond, the following words or thoughts were frequently shared: African American distinctive, biblically distinctive, tradition, I don't recall doing that, soliciting prayer, inherited context, expected to do and generally known. The definition for this theme was developed by using data only from focus group one. Due to focus group two reaching the agreed upon time commitment, they were unable to answer the related question.

The pastors in focus group one, as mentioned in the quotes below, spoke of an implied expectation the African American Church has of its pastor to be an active leader in the community. This expectation is implied because the pastors did not seek guidance or approval from their churches before giving themselves to civic leadership, and the churches did not ask the pastors to get involved in civic issues. For the pastors in focus group one there were no discussions, just an unwritten understanding that leading in the community was part of the historical and cultural job description of the African American pastor. When asked, the pastors in focus group one unanimously agreed they did not ask for approval or permission from a congregation before accepting civic leadership opportunities in their community.

Pastor Lazarus described his experience this way,

Now this – I don't know if I'm an oddball here, wouldn't be surprised. I don't recall ever doing that. I inherited a context in which the pastor being involved in the community was part of what happens. I was also involved in the community before I became pastor. And since becoming, that's why I kind of what I try to lead the congregation into being as a witness, and part of my involvement has continued that. And so, I tried though, to make those decisions and selections carefully – not offensively – in terms of what I understand we believe and represent, and not every opportunity do I accept. There could've been some that I might accept and I might oppose – some issues.

And so, I have not, for lack of a better word, been spanked by the congregation in my selections. And so, they have encouraged me with my approach as being acceptable to them. So I've never – I mean, I may speak in some way – but I don't even necessarily come back and tell them I'm involved with 'x.' They may know about it, but it's not that I'm getting all, "I need you all to know what I'm thinking about – I need you all to know." I don't recall ever doing that.

You may – your question may have brought us to a distinctive about the African American church and pastor, because we connected what we were expected to do – if it's right. And I think that maybe sometimes, some congregations might let their pastors be more engaged. So, I think, when I speak to my non-African American pastors, take an approach as to the way we can – particularly this issue, and this kind of issue – so I think this may be a distinctive that goes back from the very beginning of the first African American preacher and the tradition and the heritage [African American pastor] that we inherited.

Each pastor stated that the congregations they served fully supported their civic leadership in the community. The pastors also believed this pastoral freedom to be a culturally distinctive characteristic of the African American pastoral office. Pastor Malachi added,

I can't remember. It's an interesting question. In my years of ministry, were – it was not generally known, so that there was no need for an announcement, as if I'm bringing to you new information that you – because it would be generally known. And those things that are chosen to be involved in see the church as always – accepted that it was a good place for me to be, and it was good for me to be involved in. There's never been any controversy or things in my history that I can think of where they would've been an issue. Involved with the city, those things, NAACP, those things, but I guess if requesting prayer for the participation, but I can't remember just standing making an announcement that I'm going to join this, I'm going to be involved in this. That's not been my history.

That made me smile in remembering, especially seminary, the first time we tried to do it on campus. And one of the semesters were staying in what they called a commuter's

dorm. One of the buildings, they had a large open room that had cots in it, and if you were a commuter, you'd have a place to sleep. Your home and your family would be back wherever, but in order for you to be at school and spend the night cheaply – I think they charged \$3.00 a night or something like that. But it fostered conversation.

And so, I'm a young, Black pastor and I have a young, Black pastor's perspective of what it means to be – I manage to hear these Anglo pastors and students think it normal that they would have to get approval of their congregation to belong to – to participate in the some things, or else they could be cut off. And there's kinda like a marvelous idea, you mean what? you mean. So, you hit it for me, you hit the nail on the head, our sense of African American pastor description/definition is very different than some people and maybe are distinctive. But man, that almost like – You have to ask permission?

Pastor Lazarus and Pastor Malachi's experiences are consistent with the view that many African American pastors, when compared to other pastors, have a distinct and significant amount of autonomy in that they do not have to ask their congregation for approval of their daily schedules and activities.

This distinction, through the experiences of these pastors, that unlike "Anglo" pastors, African American pastors do not have to receive permission to engage in civic leadership. Pastor Paul added to the discussion the following:

I think you really nailed it when you talk about distinctive. Our counterparts, White or Hispanic, my experience is, would love to have the position the Black pastor has in the Black church. I remember playing golf in [name removed] with a pastor friend of mine on a regular basis, and the pastor, every now and then, from the White church would join us. And he always marveled that we could play every Monday, every Saturday, Tuesday and he told us he had to take sick leave or something.

He couldn't get – so I think it's – not only do I think it's distinctive, but it's biblically distinctive, and that clearly is not experienced because one of things I think has been guarded in the black church is the pastoral role. I also think it's been corrupted, but it's been guarded in that we feel that the shepherd is a shepherd and sheep are sheep. And shepherds are not told what to do by sheep. Sheep have input...

The pastors believed this distinctive, between African American and White pastors, comes as a result of the historical need, and expectation by African American congregations that their pastor must be a leader in the community.

Although each pastor agreed the African American pastor is expected to serve in the community and has the freedom to do so, they also agreed it is important to ask the congregation to pray for the pastor as they engage in civic leadership. Pastor Paul shared,

I don't recall doing it [asking permission] either. There have been times that I would mention it [civic leadership activity] after the fact. And especially, an engagement that's heavy, and I need support, I would ask for prayer and tell them what's going on. But most of the leadership roles I've been in outside of the church have been kinda like old news coming, except one, and that was with state government, which had to do with Civil Rights opportunities that at the time, going back in the '70s, the challenge was pretty great. So, when I was asked to assume a role in that area, it's also after the fact, but I solicited prayer with the church, but it was after.

By asking for prayer, the pastor is being transparent and making his civic leadership role clear to his congregation. At the same time, the congregation responding in prayer for their pastor can be seen as the congregation's recognition and support of their pastor's civic role.

A common insight shared by these pastors found throughout discussions related to all eight of these themes is that, for African American pastors, there is no separation between church and community. The conversations in the focus groups suggest that when a pastor is called to serve the church, the pastor is called to serve the entire African American community. This is a distinctive to the call of the African American pastor.

CHAPTER 5: EMERGING THEMES IN CONVERSATION WITH SECONDARY LITERATURE

While the scope of this study involved just two focus groups of three participants each, a careful reading of the data was still undertaken. As I explored the culturally distinctive pastoral identity of the African American pastor, eight themes emerged from the data during the focus groups for this project. These themes were defined and their associated data presented, in the form of quotes from the participating pastors, in Chapter 4: Findings of this project. In this chapter, these eight themes will be reviewed and discussed through a conversation with secondary literature sources.

From Knowledge to Surrender

The pastors in the focus groups discussed their knowledge of the divinely initiated call of the African American pastor and the understood roles, responsibilities and expectations found in both the church and community. John L. Thomas writes concerning the significance of the African American pastor,

There has been no other more phenomenal voice of protest, encouragement, outcry, and mythological spectacle than the Black preacher in the African American church. Regardless of the region of the country or the denominational affiliation, the preacher speaks as the voice of God and reason to many of its constituents. Known for creativity, imagination, and powerful exploitation of metaphor and repetition, the preacher stands as community spokesperson in defense of those facing unjust treatment and adverse public policies. There is no more dangerous, fearless, and compassionate leader than the Black preacher.⁹³

Similar to the results found in this study, Brook Harmon writes that the influence and authority of the African American pastor, to lead in both the church and community, comes directly from

⁹³ John L. Thomas, *Why Black Preaching Still Matters: Voices In The Wilderness* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2018), ix.

the pastor's divine connection to God.⁹⁴ Research indicates, the church and community's expectations for the African American pastor to engage in civic leadership and speak prophetically against injustice comes from the belief that God has divinely placed and developed each pastor for that work in each particular context. This theme resonated with the words of Dr. King when he said,

When I went to Montgomery as a pastor, I had not the slightest idea that I would later become involved in a crisis in which nonviolent resistance would be applicable. I neither started the protest nor suggested it. I simply responded to the call of the people for a spokesman.⁹⁵

Dr. King recognized part of his role as an African American pastor was to be a spokesperson for the community.

Since the time of slavery, there has been a dynamic spiritual relationship in the calling of the African American pastor. God calls the pastor. The pastor wrestles with the call. The pastor finally surrenders to the call. Research suggests the legacy of this African American pastoral call has endured through the generations because of its resemblance to so many of the mysterious and divine call narratives of the Bible. There exists a relationship between the way God called the prophets of the Old and New Testaments and how God continues to call the African American pastor today.

A Needed and Neglected Word

The pastors discussed the need in these contemporary times for the prophetic voice of the African American pastor that can speak truth to the church, hope to the community and unity across generations. The African American pastor, according to Stephen Gardner, must become

⁹⁴ Brook E. Harmon, "Leading God's People: Perceptions of Influence Among African American Pastors," *Journal of Religion and Health* 57, no 4 (2018): 1515, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/29388002>.

⁹⁵ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), 89.

both a spiritual and socio-political leader in order to meet the complete needs of the people in the Church and community.⁹⁶ The pastors in this study agreed on the need of the prophetic voice and offered two intriguing perspectives. In focus group one, which consisted of relatively older pastors, they believed the prophetic voice of the African American pastor is desperately needed, but presently absent. Under this theme, the data from focus group one supports the thoughts of Dorrien as he writes about proponents of the Black Social Gospel,

They fought to abolish Jim Crow, lynching, and economic injustice. They established that progressive theology could be combined with social justice politics in a Black church context. They built up Black Christian communities and urged them to welcome the migrant stranger.⁹⁷

The data from the pastors in focus group one also found agreement with Obery Hendricks, Jr. when he wrote,

He [Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.] is best known as a civil rights leader, but he was much more than that. When he fought for equal rights, he wasn't concerned just with integrating the social order so Blacks could sit next to Whites at lunch counters. He was more concerned with integrating the *economic* order so all could eat of the fullest fruits of the tree of life. That is what brought him to Memphis on that fateful night: he was there to support poor Black garbage haulers who were seeking a fair wage and humane working conditions.

Nor did Martin want equal voting rights just so Black folks could participate in a civic ritual. He sought full voting rights because voters can sway governmental policies, and governmental policies go far in determining who will get jobs, who will get economic opportunities, who will get government and corporate contracts; voters can help determine who will get decent housing and protection from economic exploitation and spacious corporate practices.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Stephen E. Gardner, *Leading The Practice Of Social Justice Through Evangelical Congregations: A Multi-Case Study*. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing; 2016

⁹⁷ Gary Dorrien, *Breaking White Supremacy: Martin Luther King Jr. and the Black Social Gospel* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 6.

⁹⁸ Obery M. Hendricks, Jr., *The Universe Bends Toward Justice: Radical Reflections on the Bible, the Church, and the Body Politic* (New York: Orbis, 2011), 200-201.

Both Dorrien and Hendricks resonated with the pastors in focus group one who equated the prophetic voice to visible social and economic change for the African American community.

In focus group two, which consisted of relatively younger pastors compared to focus group one, they also believed the prophetic voice was needed. They thought the prophetic voice was present, but currently ineffective because of generational, socio-political and cultural challenges facing the Church and community. Under this theme, the data from focus group two suggests the need for a voice similar to that of Dr. King. Dorrien shares what made King successful when he wrote, “He succeeded because he uniquely bridged the disparities between black and white church communities, between middle-class blacks and white liberals, between black nationalists and black conservatives, between church communities and the academy...”⁹⁹

Hendricks would also find agreement with the data from the pastors in focus groups two when he wrote,

Martin Luther King did know Jesus – *the same Jesus who said that the Spirit of the Lord sent him to liberate those who are oppressed*, for the same spirit anointed Martin with the burning quest for the liberation of humanity that was the animating force of his entire adult walk in this world. In Martin’s vocabulary, besides “God” and “Love,” “Freedom” was the word he used most. Freedom from segregation, freedom from enforced poverty, freedom from systemic ill-treatment, by a government that is supposed to serve us, not crush us.

Freedom from nooses around necks, freedom from bullwhips and hoses, from snarling dogs and little girls bombed dead in churches. Freedom from being called “boy” when you’re long been a man, from being “gal” and “auntie” when elsewhere you’re addressed as “sister” and “mother of the church.” Freedom from second-class facilities and third-rate opportunities. Freedom from hatred, from hard-heartedness, from every custom, law and policy that distorts the human personality and stands in the way of love.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Gary Dorrien, *Breaking White Supremacy: Martin Luther King Jr. and the Black Social Gospel* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 18.

¹⁰⁰ Obery M. Hendricks, Jr., *The Universe Bends Toward Justice: Radical Reflections on the Bible, the Church, and the Body Politic* (New York: Orbis, 2011), 202.

Hendricks and Dorrien echo the data from the pastors in focus group two who equated the prophetic voice as one who can bridge the gap between social, cultural and religious disparities.

The data that emerged in this theme reports differences in perspective is primarily generational. The pastors in focus group one lived and pastored through the Civil Rights Movement and Segregation, therefore the prophetic pastoral voice they experienced then is not the same voice of the contemporary church, so it appears the prophetic voice was absent or has been lost. Pastor Malachi in focus group one said, “I’m wondering, where is that prophetic voice that is loudly proclaiming, ‘This is not right...’” The pastors in focus group two believe they are pastoring a different generation in the church who is emotionally, financially, socially and spiritually disconnected from the struggles and challenges experienced by past generations of the Civil Rights and Jim Crow Era, and they are working to develop an effective prophetic voice. Pastor Will said, “...we’re preaching to Gen X’s, millennials who have not experienced some of the things as it relates to God’s delivery of our people.” Therefore, although all the pastors see the need, they are examining and interpreting the prophetic voice from different perspectives.

Others Saw it First

The pastors discussed persons in their life who validated and often foretold of the prophetic pastoral calling on their life. These individuals represent meaningful relationships that helped to guide the pastors as they navigated their spiritual discernment journey. Wardlaw discusses the mystery and significance of another person validating the voice of God calling the pastor, just as Eli validated the call of Samuel in 1 Samuel chapter 3.¹⁰¹ Although Wardlaw is not

¹⁰¹ Theodore J. Wardlaw, “News From Our Forebears: The Calling Voice,” *Journal for Preachers*, (2003): 26(2):48-53. <http://www.ctsnet.edu/>

specifically speaking to the African American prophetic pastoral call, the discernment processes are similar. Each of the pastors in this study recalled persons who helped them discern the prophetic pastoral calling on their life. The data in this category demonstrates God has been consistent from biblical times through present generations, in the way God calls a pastor into ministry.

A Consistent Call

The pastors in this study discussed the ways various biblical call narratives validated the way God interacted and called them into prophetic pastoral leadership. Akao states the biblical call narrative represents the endorsement of a prophet through a private divine interaction that ordains the prophet as an official representative of the God who calls the prophet.¹⁰² A private divine interaction is a consistent characteristic of the prophetic call of the African American pastor. The following intimate experience of Dr. King in his kitchen, as quoted in chapter 2, supports the data that emerged in this theme.

King quietly confessed to God that he was weak, faltering, losing his nerve, and at the end of his powers: “I have nothing left. I’ve come to the point where I can’t face it alone.” He had barely uttered the words when he felt a surge of seemingly divine something he had never experienced previously. An inner voice spoke to him, saying, “Stand up for righteousness, stand up for truth; and I will be at your side forever.” It was the voice of Jesus, King believed.¹⁰³

The pastors in this study stated they have a biblical call narrative that resonates with their own personal divine interaction and prophetic pastoral call story.

¹⁰² John O. Akao, “Biblical Call Narratives: An Investigation Into The Underlying Structures,” *Ogbomoso Journal of Theology*, (1993): 81.

¹⁰³ Gary Dorrien, *Breaking White Supremacy: Martin Luther King Jr. and the Black Social Gospel* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 292-293.

Although each pastor agreed there should not be a mandate that all pastors have a connection to a biblical call narrative, there appears to be divine validation for a pastor when that association is recognized. The data shows there is, even if only symbolic, an important connection for any pastor who can identify a biblical call narrative that mirrors their own personal prophetic pastoral call. If a pastor can match their personal call to a biblical call narrative then one can also claim the same relationship, credentials and authority as the prophet in the biblical text.

Inspired by Their Presence

The pastors in this study identified African American leaders, nationally and locally known, who have demonstrated leadership in the community and/or in the church. Each of these identified leaders had a personal impact on the lives of each pastor in this study and motivated them to embrace the prophetic pastoral calling on their lives. The data shows the pastors consistently identified leaders who embody the messianic tradition as described by Harris-Lacewell. Harris-Lacewell writes about the unique God ordained mission of the African American messianic figure who brings relief from the discrimination and persecution endured for generations by African Americans in the United States.¹⁰⁴

The pastors in this study often referred to their “father in the ministry”, or the pastor under whose tutelage they announced and accepted their call to ministry. This practice demonstrates the importance of apostolic succession¹⁰⁵ in the African American pastoral

¹⁰⁴ Melissa Victoria Harris-Lacewell, *Barbershops, Bibles, and BET: Everyday Talk and Black Political Thought*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press; 2006), 188-9.

¹⁰⁵ R. Trevijano, Angelo Di Berardino, “Succession, Apostolic,” *Encyclopedia Of Ancient Christianity*, (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press; 2014).

tradition. Apostolic succession is the practice of tracing one's spiritual or pastoral lineage to a significant figure in order to authenticate one's ministry. The data shows this is significant because it allows contemporary pastors to remain connected to the family tree of prophetic pastoral leaders throughout the history of this country, which may encourage them to strongly embrace their calling.

The pastors in this study discussed treasured words from mentors and parents, guidance from senior pastors and knowledge gained through actual pastoral experiences. In the African American pastoral tradition mentoring is an essential part of pastoral development. Coleman, in his book on evangelism says, "one cannot transform a world except as individuals in the world are transformed, and individuals cannot be changed except as they are molded in the hands of the master."¹⁰⁶ Although Coleman is speaking about evangelism and one's life being spiritually transformed by God, the same is true of transforming someone into a prophetic pastoral leader.

In the African American Baptist Church tradition, there is no standard formal educational or training requirement before one becomes a licensed preacher or called to a church as a pastor.¹⁰⁷ The individual professes a call from God before a local congregation and begins to live out the divine call with the support of an experienced pastor and congregation.¹⁰⁸ Since there is no formal training the senior pastor carries the burden of mentoring, training and equipping new preachers for service. Just as the pastors did in this study, sharing wisdom lessons from life experience is an integral component of mentoring.

¹⁰⁶ Robert Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1964), 23-24

¹⁰⁷ William Timothy Harrison, *How African American Pastors Learn The Role Of Ministry*. University of Georgia; 2010

¹⁰⁸ James Haskins, Kathleen Benson, *African American Religious Leaders*, Black Stars, (2008):1st ed

Preparation and Priorities

The pastors in both focus groups shared wisdom for a young pastor from their pastoral experience. Through their sharing, the data revealed a different priorities among the two focus groups. The pastors in focus group one emphasized that a young pastor must learn about the people they serve and the politics in the community. The young pastor must understand how systems and entities function and who operates within the systems, both in the church and in the community. Adam Bond concurs with the data from focus group one when he writes,

Samuel D. Proctor...with a desire to enhance the work of Christian ministry in America...wanted to pass along the knowledge he had accumulated over his long and fruitful career. The instruction he sought to provide for up-and-coming church leaders brought together his public, practical, and pastoral theologies. He especially wanted to convey his understanding of preaching and the role that preachers should play in society. During the latter part of his career, he returned to and/or expanded his understanding of the importance of the preacher in the public sphere. This understanding entailed the desire to develop a literate clergy that could address the problems in society. Proctor wanted to produce public theologians, black public theologians specifically, who would discern the ills of the American environment and proclaim a truth that would resolve the problems in the black community and in the world.¹⁰⁹

Bond, in his description of the work of Proctor, presented an example of a pastor who educated and developed young African American pastors to become public theologians capable of resolving issues.

Raboteau wrote about the ability and necessity of the African American pastor during slavery to navigate their complex role in the community. His writing relates to the data from focus group one when he said, “Carefully watched and viewed with suspicion, the preacher had to straddle the conflict between the demands of conscience and the orders of the masters.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Adam L. Bond, *The Imposing Preacher: Samuel DeWitt Proctor and Black Public Faith* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2013), 149.

¹¹⁰ Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 230-1.

Raboteau recognized that since the time of slavery the African American pastor had to understand how to manage the multifaceted expectations and responsibilities placed upon them and walk strategically in two worlds. The pastors in focus group one, who are relatively older than the pastors in focus group two, endured the Civil Rights Era and segregation. They have served as prophetic pastoral leaders during a time in the United States when access and information was intentionally limited and withheld from African Americans. They emphasized more the importance of exegeting one's local context to gain information.

The difference in the data for this theme reflects a generational gap. The pastors in focus group two stated that a young pastor must prioritize their family above all else, even before the Church. They shared this wisdom, admitting it challenged the guidance they were given that the Church should be a pastor's first priority. The pastors in focus group two, who are relatively younger than those in focus group one, married and began families during a time when both spouses have careers and divorce is on the increase. These pastors have experienced a changing church culture, with high turnover in the pulpit and fragile relationships between pastor and congregation. Each of these challenges makes a secure family life even more important for the pastors in focus group two.

Solitude and Sharing

The pastors in focus group one shared and discussed the ways they received clarity as they discerned their prophetic pastoral call. Each pastor identified the importance of prayer and solitude. In order to achieve solitude, the pastors in focus group one learned to play an instrument, went on personal retreats and confided in trusted senior pastors or friends. As stated

earlier in this study, focus group two reached the agreed upon time commitment and were unable to answer the related question.

For centuries prayer has been an essential part of the African American spiritual experience. Barnes describes prayer as an opportunity to tell God about one's troubles and acquire the necessary strength to endure the adversities faced by an individual and the community.¹¹¹ Jesus also confirms the necessity for prayer, in the Gospel of Luke chapter 11, when a disciple finds him praying in solitude. The disciple then asks Jesus to teach him to pray.

The data that emerged in this theme is an expression of the discipline and maturity among the pastors in this study who have embraced a prophetic pastoral call. The pastors in focus group one represented a combined 136 years of pastoral ministry. Alongside this impressive number of years of pastoral experience, the data suggests these pastors recognized the source of their strength and longevity was spending time with God. The data that emerged in this theme also demonstrates that the pastors in focus group one understood the impact of prayer and solitude on their physical, mental and spiritual health. Pastors in the United States have experienced burnout, taken leaves of absence and walked away from ministry at alarming rates for many years.¹¹² I was encouraged by their focus on personal health represented by the data in this category.

A Distinct Call

The pastors in focus group one discussed the expectation placed on them to engage in prophetic pastoral civic leadership and how their congregations supported their efforts. Each pastor talked about the freedom they experienced to prayerfully choose their involvement in the

111 Sandra L. Barnes, "Black Church Culture and Community Action," *Social Forces*, (2005): 84(2):967-994

112 Diane J. Chandler, "The Impact Of Pastor's Spiritual Practices On Burnout," *The Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling*, (2010): 64(2). <http://pcc.sagepub.com/>

community, and the ways the church's support endorsed the pastor's message. Dr. King, after he accepted the pastorate at Dexter Avenue Church, gives an example of the church supporting a transition toward greater community engagement,

Among the new functions I decided to recommend were a committee to revitalize religious education; a social service committee to channel and invigorate service to the sick and needy; a social and political action committee; a committee to raise and administer scholarship funds for high school graduates; and a cultural committee to give encouragement to promising artists. Since many points in the new program represented a definite departure from the traditional way of doing things, I was somewhat dubious about its acceptance. I therefore presented my recommendations with some trepidation; but, to my surprise, they were heartily approved.¹¹³

Mark Noll says that it was the congregations who actually transformed the nation through prayers and presence during the Civil Rights Movement.¹¹⁴ Their support provided the platform for the prophetic pastors to be heard and seen.¹¹⁵

The data that emerged in this theme illuminates a few of the unique characteristics of the African American pastoral tradition. The magnitude of the expectation and hope the African American pastoral ministry places on the shoulders of the pastor to represent God and an entire community is immense. For generations the African American pastor is presumed to be literally and figuratively available to their congregation and community 24 hours a day. In addition to the data bringing to light the burden of the African American pastor, The data could also represent a renewed focus on self-care among pastors, who understand the importance of self-care.

¹¹³ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), 12.

¹¹⁴ Mark Noll, *God And Race In American Politics*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press; 2008), 118.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 121.

CHAPTER 6: THE IMPLICATIONS OF THIS STUDY

This chapter describes some of the observed limitations of this study. This chapter also describes some possible future projects that could be developed or implemented as a result of the data that emerged from the focus groups.

Limitations of this Study

Several limitations can be identified for this study. First, only pastors of particularly identified Missionary Baptist district, state and national affiliated conventions participated in the focus groups. Having more denominational diversity could introduce valuable information concerning the lineage and customs that make up the African American pastoral tradition. Second, only pastors who self-identified as African American and male participated in this study. Including variables such as gender and sexual orientation (e.g., female, LGBTQ+) could capture voices that are commonly unheard and engage perspectives that would provide more valuable data. Third, each pastor who participated in this study resides in the state of Texas. Having pastors from other geographic locations participate in future studies could possibly capture regional perspectives operating within the African American culture and Baptist Church traditions.

Possible Future Projects from this Study

Despite these limitations, this study provides the groundwork for at least five future projects that can support the development of African American pastors who embrace a call to prophetic civic leadership. Initially, this research demonstrates the value in hearing and reading

as African American pastors share their stories of call and ministry. With that in mind, a program which interviews and records senior pastors as they respond to modified versions of preselected questions from this study. Such a program could be titled The Pastoral Witness Project. The Pastoral Witness Project would be valuable to African American pastors as a method to share and document a pastor's unique story in a condensed amount of time. In this study data revealed the significant influence found in African American pastors sharing their stories. As Pastor Malachi stated, "...our stories – African-Americans – is unique and I believe that there are a lot of unidentified [pastors] who did not get the recognition – the platform – but in their sphere of influence made a great difference." Through the Pastoral Witness Project pastors of all ages, time in ministry and impact will be able to share their stories for the benefit of others.

The Pastoral Witness Project would be a one-on-one interview process where senior pastors would be recorded as they respond to the following three statements derived from this study: 1) Describe one significant person in your life who would not be surprised how God has allowed you to serve and lead as a pastor, 2) Please share two wisdom lessons you have acquired, either learned or earned, that you believe to be invaluable for a young pastor to embrace, 3) Please describe a biblical call narrative or passage of scripture that resonates with and/or inspires your call to pastoral ministry. Access to pastors for this project would be accomplished through denominational convention meetings. During each district, state or national convention meeting a space would be secured where a senior pastor would respond to the earlier identified statements.

These particular statements were chosen for the Pastoral Witness Project because they represent an opportunity for each pastor to discuss three key areas in their life. These statements

will encourage pastors to discuss their family or close relationships, their personal pastoral ministry experiences and their personal relationship to scripture. Each of these statements also present an opportunity to record valuable wisdom that may help other African American pastors as they discern moments in their pastoral journey. The data recorded during the Pastoral Witness Project would be made available to any pastor as a digital resource on the websites of each of the denominational conventions. The data recorded could also be developed into a video documentary that could be made available online and through electronic correspondence to any pastor who desires access.

Second, benefit could be found in a formal program that encouraged and equipped more African American pastors to write books that document their pastoral experiences and words of wisdom. In this study, the data revealed the significant influence found in African American pastors sharing their stories. One example is when Pastor Lazarus shared a concern around the inability to find the written words of former pastors who have experienced similar challenges when he said,

I've often wondered, going as far back as we could go, we have some words, John Jasper and others, that preached and their words were recorded, but most preachers – African-American preachers – we don't know what they said, that they've been this way before. And it bothers me because I'm not able to know how did they speak to their times.

The sermons and experiential wisdom phrases of pastors could be a valuable resource for both early in ministry and seasoned pastors, especially as a way of hearing from those who are no longer living. This program could provide financial and research related resources, access to publishers and practical guidance and instruction about authorship. Pastor Will discussed the need for young pastors to sit with and learn from a senior pastor when he said,

I would say to get with a senior pastor to review that call with him. A senior pastor that has a proven track record like these two gentlemen that are sitting here. You don't have

to know them, don't have to have a relationship. Just say hey, Pastor Joe, Pastor Midnight, I am John Doe. I go to church across town. I won't name that church. I feel led to ministry. I feel called to ministry. I feel it. Tell me what happened. Let them go and let them determine based on their experiences is this something that needs more prayer. Do we need to bathe this more in prayer? Or do we need to guide this guy in a direction and get him on the path to pursue that?

If more pastors documented their pastoral journey by writing books, then more pastors could have access to them without personal or geographical restraints. An initiative that encourages pastors to document their pastoral discernment journey could be an important resource for developing pastors and preserving the legacy of the African American pastoral leader.

Third, a formal African American pastoral mentorship program could be implemented in district, state or national convention settings. The data in this study shows that mentorship among African American pastors provides meaningful benefits (e.g., pastoral guidance, confidential problem solving). Pastor Will stated during focus group two,

And I think as it has been stated by Pastor Midnight and Pastor Joe, there is an undeniable influence that comes along with our pastors, especially for those of us who are called to preach. There is a unique relationship, that there is a father/son relationship like as under that of Paul and Timothy that you can only understand once you've experienced it. My heart goes out to guys who don't have a pastor in the model and image that you guys at the table have and, of course, as you as well as our interviewer. Dr. [name removed], my pastor, he's gone on to be with the Lord, both on camera and off camera, he was genuine.

He was always forthcoming. He was always telling us exactly what ministry was. So, that's why I don't have this clouded view of ministry that some prosperous journey that all things are going to be well. He kind of gave that to us. He said something in the sense of your story and rising to some kind of civil influencer or social influence.

A formal mentorship program, that intentionally develops relationships, structured within an established convention setting could allow pastors affiliated with a convention to be partnered with a senior pastor. Both, senior and early ministry pastors could have identified and agreed

upon responsibilities to one another that will encourage relationship building and pastoral development.

Fourth, workshops, similar to the focus group format conducted in this study, could be held at least once a year during district, state and national convention meetings. The pastors could be divided into small groups with a facilitator, ensuring the pastors represent varied generations and years of pastoral experience. The facilitator, would engage the pastors in dialogue using the Story-Linking Method with the expectation that each pastor in the small groups gains wisdom and builds relationships through hearing the other persons story. Pastor Malachi shared at the conclusion of focus group one, “I wanna thank you for letting me be a part of this experience. I believe that I’ve been helped...” Pastor Will added this statement, “We need a dialogue in our ministers’ conference that speaks to the heart of what’s really going on. And when we do that, we know how to – we know how to preach, we know how to get something. We need to talk to the real issues.” The data shows these focus groups could provide an enriching experience for any pastor who participates.

The need for a workshop similar to this study was confirmed near the conclusion of focus group one when Pastor Paul stated,

Not necessarily related to our being here for your purpose, but my perception of the three of us being brought together, engaged in this kind of dialogue has for me, has been enhancement. That I would love to see some other pastors experience [this type of discussion]...that’s genius. That’s a unique and very opportune experience that somebody could have, I doubt if it will ever happen again. I’m glad to have been a part of it, and it has been enriching to me.

These workshops could provide an opportunity for pastors, of all levels of ministry experience and age ranges to gain knowledge, wisdom and insight into their own discernment journey by hearing the stories of other pastors.

Fifth, it could be beneficial to develop a program similar to the Pastoral Leaders in Public Life (PLPL) at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Austin, Texas,¹¹⁶ specifically for African American pastors. The data in this study confirmed the implied expectation for African American pastors to be engaged in civic leadership. PLPL is an 18-month program designed for early in ministry pastors that exposes pastors to public issues like immigration, education, health care and the criminal justice system. During this program resources and guidance are provided to increase their awareness and knowledge of social issues, develop their leadership skills and equip the pastors to effectively participate in civic leadership.

The need for a program in similar likeness to PLPL arose when Pastor Malachi shared,

One experience that was a lesson for me, getting involved in something outside of a local church was preparation, and learning what you're dealing with and what you're up against...do your homework. Study, and I think that's a biblical principle, that Nehemiah studied what the work was in his midnight survey.

In order for pastors to be effective leaders in the community they must become knowledgeable about city government and the systems one must navigate to impact change. Through the PLPL program, pastors in previous cohorts participated in travel seminars to State and National Capitol buildings and met with legislators and policy makers, the United States and Mexico border and engaged in immigration issues and state and city agencies and discussed education, environment and criminal justice reform issues. Pastor Will advocated for the need of a program like this when he shared,

Pulpit and public, I don't think that we can ever separate the two because the pulpit is public. So, I think to a certain degree as pastors, we'll have to decide to maximize that publicity or minimize it as it relates to affecting change in the overall grand scheme of things, not just the pulpit. As I stated earlier, I think any pastor or preacher that has been given a pulpit to occupy on a consistent basis, if he limits his ministry to that place only

¹¹⁶ Pastoral Leadership for Public Life, Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary Web site. <https://www.austinseminary.edu/lifelong-learning/collaborative-learning/pastoral-leadership-for-public-life>. Updated 2019. Accessed March 18, 2020

then, he's not living up to what God called him to do because standing behind that fashion, wood or glass, that is just your hour to do what you've been called to do to that group. You shepherd 24 hours a day. You speak into their lives on that kind of basis once, twice, three times a week or however many times you meet. If you limit it there, you've done God a disservice and the community that depends on you. So, I don't think you can separate the two pulpit from public.

Although PLPL is available to any pastor who meets their admission criteria, it is not intended to speak specifically to the cultural pastoral experiences and expectations of the African American pastor. Therefore, my recommendation is the creation of a similar program that could address the specific needs of the African American pastor.

Conclusion

My desires for this final project were to support the future proclaimers of the prophetic pastoral voice in the African American Church and community. I wanted to inspire future pastors to embrace the legacy of this voice and hear from a collection of contemporary voices who are carrying the mantle. Since the 18th century, with the founding of the first separate Black Church in the United States in Georgia, there has been a liberating voice that speaks to and for the marginalized African American community.

This project allows for the presentation and preservation of the contemporary African American pastoral voices who echo and embrace the voices of generations past and provide guidance for prophetic voices still yet to be heard. It is my hope this project reminds African American preachers of the power and significance of this voice we have inherited.

In contemporary times African Americans, like other marginalized communities, still find themselves oppressed and in need of God's help and deliverance. With each passing generation God continues to call out African American prophetic pastoral leaders who stand before

congregations and secular leaders in the public square. To date, no studies have been conducted to determine how pastors discern the prophetic call to civic leadership among African American pastors. I hope this project has contributed to the collection of wisdom and guidance for the next generation of African American pastors who are learning to discern their prophetic call. My hope is that through this study readers will recognize the vital importance of the African American pastoral prophetic voice and the legacy it imparts to the Church of today and tomorrow.

OUTLINE

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The History, Role and Significance of the African American Pastor
Personal Context and Development of Research Question
The Importance and Impact of the Question

Chapter 2 – History of the African American Preacher

Pan-African Slavery
The First African American Church
Reconstruction and Jim Crow Laws
Emancipation Proclamation
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Black Social Gospel

Chapter 3 – The Methodology

Introduction of Story-Linking Method
Project Design
Evaluation
Selection Process of Participants
How It Was Done

Chapter 4 – The Findings

From Knowledge to Surrender
A Needed and Neglected Voice
Others Saw it First
A Consistent Call
Inspired By Their Presence
Preparation and Priorities
Solitude and Sharing
A Distinct Call

Chapter 5 – The Discussion

Chapter 6 – The Implications of This Study

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

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APPENDIX B - Focus Group Questions

APPENDIX C - Informed Consent Form

APPENDIX D - Acknowledgement of Receipt Form

APPENDIX E - Demographic Information Request Form

APPENDIX F - Volunteer Recruitment Flyer 1

APPENDIX G - Volunteer Recruitment Flyer 2

APPENDIX H - Volunteer Recruitment E-mail

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APPENDIX A

Story-Linking Method Stories

Everyday Story

A young African American Baptist preacher, sixteen years into his preaching ministry, feels the call to move his membership to another local congregation, served by a well-established and known senior Pastor. After joining the new congregation God expands his ministry and leadership opportunities within the congregation, as well as his exposure outside the congregation. He becomes involved and recognized in City government, ecumenical/religious and secular non-profit organizations, and among racially/ethnically diverse church leadership. With this increased exposure, this preacher begins to serve more visibly throughout the community and city, including leadership positions that provide an opportunity to represent his local church and the African American community in his city.

Christian Faith Story in the Bible

Recorded in the Biblical books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy you find the prophet Moses, who after an extended time of shepherding the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, experiences a unique calling from God to return to Egypt and liberate the children of Israel from the oppressive hand of Pharaoh. Although Moses expresses a lack of confidence in his ability to fulfill this incredible assignment, with the assurance of God's presence, words and power and the accompaniment of his family and brother Aaron, Moses returns to Egypt with a prophetic message. Moses confronts Pharaoh, equipped with the words and power of God, and leads the children of Israel out of Egypt, through the wilderness and into the Promised Land. Throughout this experience Moses mentors a young man named Joshua who eventually succeeds him as leader of the Israelites.

Christian Faith Story in the African American Heritage

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., a young African American Baptist Pastor from Atlanta, Georgia, finds himself a central and monumental figure in the Civil Rights movement in the United States. As a Pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, and the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia, Dr. King would acknowledge a call from God to preach, write, march and sacrifice his life on behalf of equitable treatment for all people in our country. As a Pastor he continued to preach and serve his local congregation while traveling throughout the United States to articulate and demonstrate a message of justice, equality and non-violence. A well-educated Preacher, Dr. King confronted racism and systemic inequities at all levels, from the White House to the sanitation department in Memphis, Tennessee. He accepted and embraced the unique prophetic calling God placed on his life and spent majority of it both in the pulpit and in the public square.

APPENDIX B

Focus Group Discussion Questions

The questions below were used to initiate a time of wisdom sharing and story-telling among the participants in each focus group. These questions were not intended to incite single word affirmative or negative answers. As anticipated each participant did thoughtfully consider each question and reflect on their personal ministry experiences and practices to provide insight each pastor believes will be valuable to a younger, less experienced pastor discerning a call to prophetic public ministry. Along with the everyday, biblical and African American heritage stories, these questions challenged each participant to elaborate on their unique call to pastoral ministry and civic leadership. The focus groups did not exceed two hours in length and each focus group, due to time, answered at least the first six questions.

1. How do you understand or interpret the prophetic call and responsibility of the African American pastor to serve and lead outside of the local congregation?
2. Looking at the current condition of the church, culture, and government in this country, is there still a need for the prophetic voice of the African American pastor? If so, why?
3. As you consider the spiritual discernment journey of the narrative shared today, describe briefly one significant person in your life who would not be surprised how God has allowed you to serve and lead? Who in your life believed and foretold that pastoral and civic leadership was in your destiny before you could see or comprehend it?
4. Based on the narratives shared today, do you believe it is significant to have a Bible story or call narrative that resonates with a pastoral call? If yes, what biblical story or passage of scripture

resonates with and/or inspires your call to pastoral ministry and leadership outside of the local pulpit?

5. In the African American heritage tradition, there are innumerable individuals who have led, served and sacrificed personal desires for the advancement of African American people because of their Christian faith. How significant do you believe the African American heritage story to be in the life and call of the African American Pastor? Briefly describe a person in history who inspired you to serve the greater African American community outside of your local congregation.
6. As you consider your pastoral ministry, personal discernment process and path to civic leadership, please share two wisdom lessons you have acquired, either learned or earned, that you believe to be invaluable for a young pastor discerning a call to ministry beyond the pulpit?
7. As you consider your personal discernment process, what spiritual practices have you incorporated or relied on to receive clarity and direction in your call to civic leadership?
8. How did you communicate your civic leadership responsibilities with the congregation you serve? How did the congregation respond?

APPENDIX C



Texas Christian University
Fort Worth, Texas

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title of Research:

Discerning The Prophetic Call To Civic Leadership Within The African American Pastoral Tradition

Principal Investigator: Dr. Russell Dalton

[Co-investigators:] Daryl Horton (Student Investigator)

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be an African American pastor who has demonstrated civic/public leadership in your community, with a minimum of 15 years pastoral experience in African American congregations, which have been established for a minimum of 50 years. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

A summary of things you should know:

- This is a research study involving human subjects that has been approved by TCU Institutional Review Board.
- The purpose of the study is to discover wisdom and insight, through dialogue in focus groups, related to the discernment practices of African American pastors who have served, or currently serve, in a position of civic/public leadership while pastoring. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to participate in a focus group of 3-4 pastors, at an agreed upon time, date and location to be confirmed. This will take no more than 2 hours.
- For this study, civic/public leadership can be defined as serving in a position within a civil rights, governmental, non-profit, interfaith, denominational or grassroots organization, that operates independent of a local congregation.
- Risks or discomforts from this research are minimal. There is potential for inconvenience depending on date, time and location of focus group. Be aware it is not possible for a researcher to promise confidentiality in a focus group setting, however, all participants will be asked and encouraged to keep focus group discussions confidential. All recordings and transcripts will be protected with identifiable information removed.

- The study will look to discover wisdom and insight from a focus group of seasoned pastors that may be valuable for emerging African American pastors who are discerning a call to civic or public leadership.
- Taking part in this research project is voluntary. You do not have to participate, and you can stop at any time.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

What is the purpose of the research? The main objectives of my research are to uncover aspects of the discernment process of African American pastors who demonstrate a calling to civic/public leadership while continuing to serve a local congregation. I hope to discover through the telling of everyday stories how God orchestrated their ministry experience, and their interpretation of the opportunities and challenges they encountered throughout their journey.

How many people will participate in this study?

If you decide to be in this study, you will be one of 6-8 participants in this research study.

What is my involvement for participating in this study?

If you agree to be in the study, we will ask you to do the following things: Participate in a focus group of 3-4 pastors. Engage in a meaningful dialogue around your everyday ministry story, and your discernment practices that shaped your call to civic/public leadership.

We expect your participation to take no more than 2 hours for a single focus group discussion. The data received will be recorded and presented in the final paper anonymously.

How long am I expected to be in this study for and how much of my time is required?

The expectation is to spend no more than 2 hours in one focus group discussion

What are the risks to me for participating in this study and how will they be minimized?

The risks from participating in this research study are minimal, not much different from the risks that you encounter in everyday life. There is potential for inconvenience depending on date, time and location of focus group. Although it is not possible for a researcher to promise complete confidentiality in a focus group setting, all participants will be asked and encouraged to keep focus group discussions confidential. All recordings and transcripts will be protected with identifiable information removed.

What are the benefits for participating in this study?

Although you will not directly benefit from being in this study, emerging African American pastors may be able to better discern their ministry direction and call to civic/public leadership from the insight and wisdom gained from your everyday ministry story.

Will I be compensated for participating in this study?

You will receive a payment of one \$40.00 Visa gift card for your participation at the conclusion of the focus group discussion. You will not be responsible for any costs to participate in this study.

What is an alternative procedure(s) that I can choose instead of participating in this study?

There are no known alternatives available to you other than not taking part in this study. However, any significant new findings developed during the course of the research which may relate to your willingness to continue participation will be provided to you.

How will my confidentiality be protected? I plan to publish the results of this study. Your name and other information that can directly identify you will be deleted from the research data collected as part of the project. We cannot promise complete secrecy.

What will happen to the information collected about me after the study is over?

Your name and other information that can directly identify you will be deleted from the research data collected as part of the project.

Is my participation voluntary?

Yes, it is totally up to you to decide to be in this research study. Participating in this study is completely voluntary. Even if you decide to be part of the study now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. If you decide to withdraw before this study is completed you may communicate that decision to the Interviewer by e-mail, printed letter, text message, phone call or in person conversation. If the Interviewer discovers, before the completion of the focus group, that you do not meet all the requirements of a participant your participation in the study may be terminated, at the discretion of the interviewer, without the consent of the participant.

Who should I contact if I have questions regarding the study?

You can contact Daryl Horton at daryl.horton@tcu.edu or [*insert phone number*] at with any questions that you have about the study.

Who should I contact if I have concerns regarding my rights as a study participant?

Dr. Michael Faggella-Luby, Chair, TCU Institutional Review Board, (817) 257-4355, m.faggella-luby@tcu.edu; or Ms. Lorrie Branson, JD, TCU Research Integrity Officer, (817) 257-4266, lbranson@tcu.edu.

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. A copy also will be kept with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I understand what the study is about, and my questions so far have been answered. I agree to take part in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature

Date

Printed Name of person obtaining consent

Signature

Date

Consent to be audio/video recorded

I agree to be audio/video recorded. Yes _____ No _____

Signature

Date

APPENDIX D



Texas Christian University
Fort Worth, Texas

Acknowledgment of Receipt Form

Title of Research:

Discerning The Prophetic Call To Civic Leadership Within The African American Pastoral Tradition

Principal Investigator: Dr. Russell Dalton

[Co-investigators:] Daryl Horton (Student Investigator)

I acknowledge, by my signature below, that I have completed my participation in this Doctor of Ministry Focus Group and have received a \$40 Visa gift card as promised.

Participant Signature

Date

APPENDIX E



Texas Christian University
Fort Worth, Texas

FOCUS GROUP DEMOGRAPHICS QUESTIONNAIRE

Title of Research:

Discerning The Prophetic Call To Civic Leadership Within The African American Pastoral Tradition

Principal Investigator: Dr. Russell Dalton

[Co-investigators:] Daryl Horton (Student Investigator)

Please fill in the blanks below or place an "X" in the box that best identifies your answer. Thank you.

1. What is your age in years? _____

2. How many total years have you served as a pastor? _____

3. How many years have you served in public/civic leadership? _____

4. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

General Equivalency/High School Diploma _____

Some College _____

Associates Degree _____

Bachelor's Degree _____

Graduate Degree _____

APPENDIX F



VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH STUDY Discerning The Prophetic Call To Civic Leadership Within The African American Pastoral Tradition

- Daryl Horton, a Doctor of Ministry student at Brite Divinity School at Texas Christian University, is conducting research to discover wisdom and insight through dialogue in focus groups, related to the discernment practices of African American pastors who have served, or currently serve, in a position of civic/public leadership while pastoring.
- I am currently recruiting African American pastors who have demonstrated civic/public leadership in their community, with a minimum of 15 years pastoral experience in African American congregations, which have been established for a minimum of 50 years. For this study, civic/public leadership can be defined as serving in a position within a civil rights, governmental, non-profit, interfaith, denominational or grassroots organization, that operates independent of a local congregation.
- You will be asked to participate in a focus group of 3-4 pastors, at an agreed upon time, date and location to be confirmed. Focus group discussions will last approximately 2 hours.
- Risks or discomforts from this research are minimal. There is potential for inconvenience depending on date, time and location of focus group. It is not possible for a researcher to promise complete confidentiality in a focus group setting, however, all participants will be asked and encouraged to keep focus group discussions confidential. All recordings and transcripts will be protected with identifiable information removed.
- Each participant will receive a \$40 Visa gift card at the conclusion of the focus group discussion.
- All interested pastors please contact Daryl Horton for more information by e-mail at daryl.horton@tcu.edu or by phone (512)657-6396.

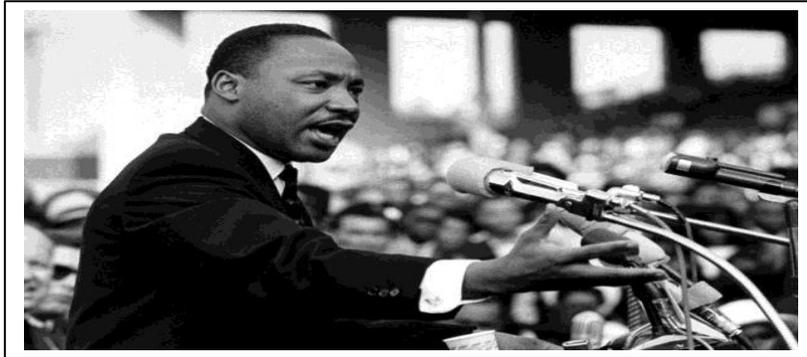
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TCU does not discriminate based upon any protected status. Please see
<http://www.tcu.edu/notice-of-nondiscrimination.asp>

APPENDIX G



Volunteers Needed for Research Study Discerning The Prophetic Call To Civic Leadership Within The African American Pastoral Tradition



Daryl Horton, a Doctor of Ministry student at Brite Divinity School at Texas Christian University, is conducting research to document the discernment practices of African American pastors who have served in civic/public leadership while pastoring.

I am currently recruiting African American pastors with a minimum of 15 years pastoral experience in African American congregations, which have been established for a minimum of 50 years. For this study, civic/public leadership can be defined as serving within a civil rights, governmental, non-profit, interfaith, denominational or grassroots organization, that operates independent of a local congregation.

You will be asked to participate in a focus group of 3-4 pastors, at an agreed upon time, date and location to be confirmed. Focus group discussions will last approximately 2 hours.

Each participant will receive a \$40 Visa gift card at the conclusion of the focus group discussion.

**Please call 512-657-6396 or
email daryl.horton@tcu.edu with any questions**

Texas Christian University

TCU does not discriminate based upon any protected status. Please see
<http://www.tcu.edu/notice-of-nondiscrimination.asp>

APPENDIX H



TCU-IRB

RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Dear Pastor:

My name is Daryl Horton and I am a Doctor of Ministry student working with Dr. Russell Dalton at Brite Divinity School at Texas Christian University (TCU).

We are conducting a research study on Discerning The Prophetic Call To Civic Leadership Within The African American Pastoral Tradition. Participation will take approximately 2 hours in the form of a focus group of 3-4 pastors. The purpose of the study is to discover wisdom and insight, through dialogue in focus groups, related to the discernment practices of African American pastors who have served, or currently serve, in a position of civic/public leadership while pastoring. Participation is completely voluntary.

If you are interested in participating in this research study as a focus group participant please contact me by e-mail (daryl.horton@tcu.edu) or phone (512-657-6396). If interested, more information concerning this study will be provided in a separate e-mail or letter.

Each participant will be paid one (1) \$40.00 gift card at the completion of their participation in the focus group. Risks or discomforts from this research are minimal. There is potential for inconvenience depending on date, time and location of focus group. Be aware it is not possible for a researcher to promise confidentiality in a focus group setting, however, all participants will be asked and encouraged to keep focus group discussions confidential. All recordings and transcripts will be protected with identifiable information removed.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me or Dr. Russell Dalton (r.dalton@tcu.edu).

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Daryl Horton
Doctor of Ministry Student
Brite Divinity School - TCU University