

THE IMPACT OF REGULAR PHYSICAL EXERCISE ON THE PASTOR AND HIS MINISTRY

BY

NATHAN F. LOERSCH

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PROF. PAUL E. ZELL, ADVISOR

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Abstract

The ministry can bring a great amount of stress into the life of a pastor. A pastor is often pulled from many directions. He is expected to do a great number of tasks, and what is more, to do them very well. On a weekly basis, a pastor may be called upon to preach a quality sermon, teach numerous Bible classes, perform outreach calls, visit people in the hospital, and give counseling sessions, among many other tasks. Stress in the life of a pastor may lead to burnout in his ministry. How can a pastor guard against the adverse effects of stress and burnout? There are many wonderful methods and resources for managing stress (Bible study and prayer are at the top of the list), at the head of which is the gospel of Jesus Christ. However, this thesis will seek to espouse the benefits of just one method—regular physical exercise. This thesis will communicate the biblical basis for physical exercise, demonstrate how research has shown regular physical exercise to provide a boost to emotional and mental health, present the personal testimony of Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) pastors in regards to how exercise has had an influence on their lives and ministries, and give encouragement as to how a pastor might go about exercising.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
LITERATURE REVIEW	7
WHAT DOES GOD’S WORD SAY?	8
THE BENEFITS OF EXERCISE.....	14
IS EXERCISE AN IMPORTANT PART OF YOUR LIFE AS A PASTOR?	18
WHY IS EXERCISE EMOTIONALLY AND MENTALLY BENEFICIAL?	21
WHAT KIND OF EXERCISE IS BENEFICIAL TO A PASTOR?	24
WHAT IS THE PROPER INTENSITY LEVEL AT WHICH A PASTOR SHOULD EXERCISE IN ORDER TO REAP PSYCHOLOGICAL GAINS?.....	25
BROTHERLY ENCOURAGEMENT AND GUIDELINES FOR EXERCISING.....	28
THE PROPER PLACE OF EXERCISE IN THE LIFE OF A PASTOR.....	32
REFERENCE LIST	36
ADDITIONAL READING.....	37

Introduction

What does it take to be a pastor? Paul lists a number of qualities in his explanation of what an overseer must be to Timothy: above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money, and other qualities as well. (1 Timothy 3:2,3)¹ A great gravity of responsibility exists in those words. God's qualifications for overseers of his people are not to be viewed lightly, and anyone attempting to fulfill those qualifications must expend a great amount of effort to do so.

The average person in the world today has varying ideas about who a pastor is, what he does, and how he does those things. Lucille Lavender, who lived as the wife of a pastor for 54 years, described pastors (with her tongue planted firmly in cheek) thus:

They have outstanding talents in every conceivable field of endeavor imaginable. Administration, writing, public speaking, diplomacy, psychology, economics, medicine, good bedside manners, building, maintenance, teaching, counseling, comforting, conciliation, coordination, and creating. Ministers have anatomical characteristics that others don't have. They are built not to wear out as easily as normal creatures. They are more resistant to sleep and relaxation, so they can work a sixteen-hour-a-day, seven-day week. And, if they are wakened in the middle of the night by the telephone and they can't get back to sleep, they work on a Sunday sermon. There is something unusual about their flesh, too. Their skin is extra thick and tough, so they can be roasted for dinner with a minimum of discomfort. And this helps them withstand possessive, particular, and peevish people. Under this thick skin is a special cushion of insulation that keeps them immune to feelings other earth people have—like never getting angry, despondent, disgusted, or discouraged. It also insulates them against needing love, acceptance, praise, encouragement, and raises in salary. Ministers are also all-knowing, all-wise, all-comforting, all-controlled, all-put-together, and always there.²

A degree of hyperbole is present in that description; that is, most likely no one actually thinks all of those words accurately describe who a pastor is. But to an extent, those words provide a grab-bag from which people often pull their vision of a pastor. Who could ever live up to that standard? The answer, of course, is "no one." What could possibly be the result of such a break between expectation and reality? Problems. Hardships. Issues. The following statistics are gleaned from seven surveys that spanned various Protestant denominations and thousands of pastors.

¹ All Bible quotations are taken from the NIV1984, unless otherwise noted.

² Lucille Lavender, *They Cry Too*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1976), 8.

75% report being “extremely stressed” or “highly stressed.”
90% work between 55 to 75 hours per week.
90% feel fatigued and worn out every week.
70% say they’re grossly underpaid.
40% report a serious conflict with a parishioner at least once a month.
78% were forced to resign and 63% at least twice, most commonly because of church conflict.
80% will not be in ministry ten years later and only a fraction make it a lifelong career.
100% of 1,050 Reformed and Evangelical pastors had a colleague who had left the ministry because of burnout, church conflict, or moral failure.
91% have experienced some form of burnout in ministry and 18% say they are “fried to a crisp right now.”
70% say they have a lower self-esteem now than when they entered ministry.
70% constantly fight depression.
50% feel so discouraged that they would leave their ministry if they could, but can’t find another job.
80% believe their pastoral ministry has negatively affected their families and 33% said it was an *outright hazard*.
80% of ministry spouses feel left out and unappreciated in their church.
77% feel they do not have a good marriage.
41% display anger problems in marriage (reported by the spouse).
38% are divorced or divorcing.
50% admit to using pornography and 37% report inappropriate sexual behavior with someone in the church.
70% do not have someone they consider a close friend.
50% do not meet regularly with an accountability person or group.
72% only study the Bible when preparing for sermons or lessons.
21% spend less than 15 minutes a day in prayer — the average is 39 minutes per day.
16% are “very satisfied” with their prayer life, 47% are “somewhat satisfied”, and 37% are either “somewhat dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied” (spending more time in quiet prayer or listening to God versus making requests was correlated with higher satisfaction).
44% of pastors do not take a regular day off.
31% do not exercise at all, while 37% exercise at least three or four days a week as recommended.
90% say they have not received adequate training to meet the demands of ministry.
85% have never taken a Sabbatical.³

³ Bill Gualtiere, *Pastor Stress Statistics* [article on-line] (Irvine, CA: Soul Shepherding, 2009, accessed 28 October 2014); available from <http://www.soulshepherding.org/2009/11/pastors-under-stress/>; Internet.

One may raise his eyebrows at the severity of some of those figures, and he might say that a few of them are not as greatly applicable to WELS pastors as they are to various Reformed and Evangelical pastors, but what he can *not* say is that none of these issues plague WELS pastors at all. WELS pastors are not superhuman. And if he still needed to be convinced why being a pastor can be very stressful, Rowland Croucher, an Australian pastor and also the founding director of *John Mark Ministries* (a counseling ministry for pastors, ex-pastors, church leaders and their wives), supplies further support:

The reasons may be as numerous and unique as there are pastors. However, recent research is unanimous in citing the following problem areas: the disparity between (somewhat idealistic) expectations and hard reality; lack of clearly defined boundaries—tasks are never done; workaholism ('bed-at-the-church' syndrome); the Peter Principle—feeling of incompetence in leading an army of volunteers; conflict in being a leader and servant at the same time ('line-support contamination'); intangibility (how do I know I'm getting somewhere?); confusion of role identity with self image—pastors derive too much self-esteem from what they do; time management problems (yet pastors have more 'discretionary time' than any other professional group); paucity of 'perks'; multiplicity of roles; inability to produce 'win-win' conflict resolutions; difficulty in managing interruptions; preoccupation with 'playing it safe' to avoid enraging powerful parishioners; 'administration overload'—too much energy expended in areas of low reward; loneliness—the pastor is less likely to have a close friend than any other person in the community.⁴

This writer has not even served as a pastor yet (so he is in no position to judge the merit of the above reason), but he can understand how each of those issues might cause stress in the life of a pastor. The pastoral ministry is surely a wonderful blessing, both to pastors themselves and to the people whom pastors serve. What a wonderful blessing to be a pastor! To have the opportunity to delve deeply into the Bible for a living! To have the opportunity to experience God's love yourself as you proclaim his love to the people whom you counsel! To have the opportunity to teach people about Jesus, whether it be the first time they have learned about him or the tenthousandth time. The pastoral ministry is surely a wonderful blessing, and yet, as you have read, the pastoral ministry is also stressful.

But not all stress is bad. If human beings did not have any stress in their lives, how boring life would be! If they never had to make a decision (and every decision involves some amount of

⁴ Rowland Croucher, *Stress and Burnout in Ministry* (Place and date of publishing unknown) [essay on-line]; available at http://orgcministerial.netadvent.org/site_data/768/assets/0012/8705/STRESSANDBURNOUTINMINISTRY.pdf; 1.

stress, no matter how minimal a decision it may seem), they would feel worthless! Some stress actually benefits people, and this type of stress is termed *eustress* (literally “good stress”). For example, some say that when they are “under the gun” and facing a deadline, they are able to complete their work with better quality. The butterflies a pastor experiences in his stomach before he steps to the ambo to begin his sermon are a good thing! When that member who has been avoiding the pastor actually calls and asks to come talk with him in just thirty minutes, the excitement and motivation a pastor feels that drives him to quickly prepare some words of counsel and encouragement is good stress! When a pastor’s schedule for the day includes three follow-up calls on worship visitors who seemed very eager to learn more about Jesus, he is energized to make those calls. Eustress is great for a pastor!

On the other hand, some stress is not helpful at all, and this type of stress is called “distress.” Nothing good comes from distress. Instead of motivating a pastor to complete his scheduled tasks, distress causes him to put off his work and do anything but be faithful in his labor. Instead of giving him butterflies in his stomach as a sign that he is properly engaged and ready to preach, distress wracks him with anxiety and concern and causes him to question everything about his sermon preparation and delivery. Instead of giving him a jolt of adrenaline that helps him perform his best in a spontaneous counseling session, distress strips him of his confidence and causes him to shy away from the situations in which he is most needed. Distress⁵ can be crippling for a pastor.

Every person can handle a certain amount of stress, but too much stress has negative results. Croucher explains:

Your body is designed to give warning signals of stress overload, which may include insomnia or disturbed sleep, digestive problems, headaches, low energy, chronic tiredness, psychosomatic illnesses, muscle tension, teeth grinding, high blood pressure, etc. Stress is 'hurry sickness'. The symptoms [of stress] are often seen by the victim as obstacles to performance and success that he or she merely wants to get rid of. Seldom does the disease of over-stress slow the victim down—not until the final blow is struck and the ulcer, stroke or heart attack occurs.⁶

⁵ For the duration of this paper, “distress” will simply be referred to as “stress.”

⁶ Croucher, 2.

Croucher jumped straight into the deep end of stress-related problems when he spoke of a stroke or heart attack assailing a victim of stress, but there are many other symptoms of too much stress in one's life, many of which affect one's emotions and personality. Richard Schleicher, a WELS pastor, observed the following concerning stress's effect on the pastor's emotions:

The out-going, extroverted person becomes quiet, sullen and withdrawn. At home, where he used to have energy for romps with the kids and household chores, he now sits listless and lethargic. He has lost interest. The person who had been an "under control" individual becomes irritable and often hostile. He interprets questions as challenges and suggestions as insubordination.⁷

Stress can have many adverse effects on pastors. And stress, if left unchecked, can take a wonderful pastor down a rough and tumble road that could lead to burnout, which could very well mean the end of that man's pastoral ministry.

What is burnout? One might propose any number of definitions, but former WELS pastor Rodney Busch gives the definition: "whatever it is called or contrasted with, it is generally agreed that burnout is physical and/or psychological exhaustion related to chronic, unrelieved pressures."⁸ Busch's broad definition lends credence to the idea that any person can become a burnout victim, because any person can experience physical or psychological exhaustion related to chronic pressure. However, burnout may be especially prevalent among Christians, and even more so among called workers. Busch states his reasons why burnout may especially affect called workers:

Christians to the degree that they are involved with other people are particularly susceptible to burnout. They expend great amounts of energy in helping others. This susceptibility becomes intensified for called workers. Our ministry focuses on giving and sharing rather than on receiving. So in an attempt to meet all the demands placed upon them, to rise to all the expectations, pastors become workaholics. They feel they have to attend every meeting; take part in every decision; and "make it all happen."⁹

⁷ Richard H. Schleicher, *Clergy Stress and Burnout or All Stressed Up and No Place to Blow* (presented to the Colonial North Pastoral Conference, Ottawa, Canada, 1985) [essay on-line]; available at <http://www.wlssays.net/files/SchleicherStress.pdf> ; 3.

⁸ Rodney Busch, *Burnout: A Pastor's Perspective* (presented to the South Atlantic District Pastor-Teacher Conference, Pompano Beach, FL, 1984) [essay online]; available at <http://www.wlssays.net/files/BuschBurnout.pdf> ; 1.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

In light of the possibility that burnout is more likely to happen to Christians, and especially called workers, allow one more definition of burnout that specifically speaks to the service of pastors. Pastor Busch quotes author Karl Albrecht's book *Stress and the Manager*¹⁰:

Of special interest to us in the preaching ministry is the definition given in a Christianity today (*sic*) article: 'Burnout is someone in a state of fatigue or frustration brought about by devotion to a cause, way of life, or relationship that failed to produce the expected reward.' It has many of the characteristics of depression, but is unusual enough to require specialized attention."¹¹

In light of that particular definition of burnout, one might consider the following questions. Is the average pastor devoted to the cause of preaching the gospel? (Probable answer: "yes") Is he engaged in the way of life of a full-time minister of that gospel? (Probable answer: "yes") Has he ever been fatigued by the ministry in any unhelpful or unhealthy way? (Probable answer: "yes") Has he ever been frustrated by any unfulfilled relationship or anything else in his ministry? (Probable answer: "yes") Burnout is a real danger for pastors and something that every pastor should be aware of as an adversary to his ministry.

This introduction has shed light on many negative symptoms and results of stress and burnout. The bottom line is, stress and burnout can negatively affect both the quality and quantity (length) of a pastor's ministry. How does one combat stress and burnout? That is the question this paper will seek to answer by exploring and expounding the benefits of regular physical exercise. Of note, however, is that fact that by no means does this paper mean to throw to the wayside the great importance of spiritual care, that is, of regular personal Bible study and devotional reading. This paper does not seek to downplay any other method of stress management and coping with all the demands of the pastoral vocation, whether that be spiritual care, the counsel received from other pastors and/or friends, professional counseling, a proper diet, good sleep patterns, allowing oneself time to recharge both physically and emotionally, or anything else. This paper will simply not address the specific benefits of any of those methods. Through Biblical evidence, secular support, and the personal testimony of WELS pastors, this thesis will establish that regular aerobic exercise and resistance training benefits the pastor's gospel ministry by improving his resistance to stress, his attitude, and his energy level.

¹⁰ Karl Albrecht was one of the pioneers in the development of stress-reduction training for managers, and his book, *Stress and the Manager*, published originally in 1979 by Simon & Schuster, is available for sale on amazon.com.

¹¹ Ibid., 2.

Literature Review

The body of this thesis utilizes four main areas of research: the Bible and commentaries on the Bible, secular scientific research, email interviews with ten WELS pastors, and face-to-face interviews with knowledgeable professionals in the field of bodily health.

While there exist no clear prescriptions for exercise in the Bible (perhaps the closest the Bible comes to making a prescription are Paul's words to Timothy, "Physical training is of *some* value"), one can nonetheless draw clear applications from God's words in order to encourage exercise. The Bible defines what the purpose of the pastoral ministry is and how one is to strive to fulfill that purpose. The Bible also speaks about the purpose of the human body (and of a human's whole life in general). Naturally, a pastor's body is a part of him, and so it follows that his body plays a role in carrying out his ministry (If a pastor didn't have a body, would he be able to serve? That is an almost ludicrous proposition, but it serves well to make the point). Exercise gives the pastor a great opportunity to glorify God and be the best pastor he can be through the many health benefits of exercise.

A plethora of research exists concerning the effects of physical exercise on the human body and in the human life. In addition, copious varieties of studies have been done in order to ascertain the positive and negative effects of exercise. Three-week studies on groups of 100 people. Sixteen-week studies with another check-in after a year on groups of many more people. Studies on low-intensity exercise like simply walking on a treadmill at one mile-per-hour for twenty minutes, during which the heart rate never rises above 120 beats per minute. Studies on moderate to high intensity exercise like briskly walking or running for a few miles, during which the subject's heart rate rises to between 160 and 180 beats per minute. There are numerous studies of exercise in a controlled environment and exercise in an "on-your-own" setting. The writer of this thesis primarily looked at research having to do with the effects of exercise on emotional and mental health, and not simply how exercise affects the body and its level of physical fitness. Many studies have found a correlation between exercise and improvement in mood, energy level, and a resistance and response to stress and depression. Although this thesis does not extensively address the effect of exercise on the clinically depressed, the research points

heavily to the fact that exercise seems to act very similarly to antidepressant medication and has benefitted people suffering with depression.

Although there is a great amount of research showing the correlation between exercise and improved mental health and emotional health, there is more research needed, because for the most part researchers still don't know *why* exercise seems to be beneficial. Numerous hypotheses exist, but there is no existence of hard and fast evidence that explains the science of *how* exercise emotionally and mentally benefits people. Most of the research studies themselves acknowledge this.

The most illuminating aspect of research was certainly the interviews conducted with WELS pastors, Mr. Dwight Sandvold, and Mr. Rick Loewen. Their personal insight was invaluable to this thesis and additionally simply very encouraging to the writer as a pastor-to-be.

What does God's Word say?

In order to put into context the motivation for the pastor to make regular aerobic and/or resistance exercise a regular part of his life, a very brief statement on the purpose of a pastor is needed. One could speak about the many and complex activities of a pastor and go into great detail of what the purpose of pastors is, but the purpose of a pastor is summed up simply by echoing the apostle John: The purpose of pastors is to preach and teach God's Word, so that others may believe and have life in Jesus' name!¹² Richard C.H. Lenski, a New Testament scholar, comments on John 20:31 and sums up John's purpose in writing his Gospel, and his statement also serves well to sum up the intentions of pastors: "John's intention was to write a Gospel setting forth the realities concerning Jesus so that they may produce faith in those who are not believers and may confirm faith in those who believe."¹³ A pastor's ultimate goal might be summed up as being much the same as John's: to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ with the

¹² The apostle John summed up the purpose of his Gospel and of the entire Bible when he wrote in John 20:31, "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

¹³ Richard C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel* (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern: 1942), 1396.

result that people either come to believe in him as their Savior or have their faith in him as their Savior strengthened.

What does God's Word say concerning our bodies?

In the context of encouraging the Corinthians to rid themselves of sexual immorality, Paul exhorts them, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.” (1 Corinthians 6:19,20) Although the specific context of these words is in fact an exhortation or even admonition to flee from the specific bodily misuse of sexual immorality, the larger context is the simple fact that everything human beings have and everything they are is not in fact theirs. It is all God's. And that includes the body, which God has given to human beings as a great gift. So why should a person not use his body as best as he can in thanks to God? New Testament scholar Simon Kistemaker sums up Paul's warning-turned-exhortation:

[Paul] has skillfully turned a negative discussion to a positive exhortation. He tells the Corinthians to use their bodies, which are the Spirit's holy temple, to honor God...A seventeenth-century catechism raises the question, ‘What is the chief end of man?’ The answer is, ‘To glorify God, and enjoy him forever.’ (Westminster Catechism)¹⁴

Simply put, one way for a human being to glorify God is to use his body in ways that please God. Carleton Toppe, former Professor and President at Northwestern College in Watertown, Wisconsin, says,

Because your body is meant for the Lord, because he has destined it for heaven, because it is a member of Christ, because it is made holy by the Spirit's indwelling, because it belongs to God—*therefore* avoid desecrating your body by sexual immorality. Paul can give no more compelling reasons for sexual purity and honor.¹⁵

As shown by the New Testament and its commentators, there is no more compelling reason for a pastor to glorify God by using his body to the advantage of his ministry as best as he can than the simple fact that God has given his body to him and made him a member of the heavenly kingdom.

¹⁴ Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993), 203.

¹⁵ Carleton A. Toppe, *1 Corinthians* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1987), 63.

What does God's Word say about the relationship between physical and spiritual exercise and health?

Perhaps the most well-known passage cited in reference to any specific encouragement towards physical exercise in the Bible is 1 Timothy 4:8. "For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come." What does Paul mean when he says, "Physical training is of some value"? Is he using "some" to mean "little," in order to say that physical training does not matter much at all? Is he using physical training as a comparative tool to emphasize the great importance of spiritual training? Is he speaking against the opinion and practice that excessive fasting and beating of one's body brings one closer to God by those very actions themselves? Perhaps to a certain extent, Paul means all of the above.

The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* speaks to the possibility that Paul is speaking against the belief that asceticism brings one closer to God. "The antithetical ἡ εὐσέβεια allows the linguistically most obvious rendering 'physical exercise.' The context, however, makes it clear that there is no attack on Hellenic development of the body, as lexical association might seem to demand (cf. v. 7), but rather a rejection of narrow encratic strivings."¹⁶

A point that cannot be argued against is that when compared to spiritual training, physical exercise pales. There is actually no legitimate comparison to be made. Although physical exercise is beneficial in some regard, spiritual training is beneficial on a much greater scale, because its reward is eternal, not temporal. William Hendriksen, a New Testament scholar of the 1950s, puts it this way.

It is not at all surprising that the apostle now draws a comparison between the value of *physical training* and *training for godly living*. He states that the former is *of some benefit*. It is useful for something. The latter, however, is of benefit *in every way*. It is useful for all things. He is by no means belittling the value of physical exercise. He is saying two things: (a) that the boon which bodily training bestows, however great it may be, is definitely inferior to the reward which the godly life promises. The former at best bestows health, vigor, beauty of physical form. These things are wonderful and to be appreciated. But the latter bestows life everlasting! (b) that the sphere in which bodily training is of benefit is far more restricted than that in which godly living confers its

¹⁶ G. Kittel, G. W. Bromiley & G. Friedrich, Ed., *Vol. 1: Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1964), 775-776.

reward. The former concerns the here and now. The latter concerns the here and now but also reaches far beyond it.¹⁷

Philip H. Towner, Dean of the Nida Institute for Biblical Scholarship of the American Bible Society, also illustrates this lesser-to-greater comparison of physical and spiritual training: “Paul admits that such exercise has ‘some value,’ but the purpose of saying this is mainly to limit its relevance within this discussion and shine the brighter light on exercise in godliness.”¹⁸ Timothy would have been very familiar with the physical training about which Paul was speaking. The Greek world placed a high emphasis on training for games, putting one’s body to the test, and being disciplined in the pursuit of bodily fitness. Paul used the well-known practice of physical fitness to throw light onto the much more important pursuit of godly, spiritual fitness.

While physical training is important, one ought to consider a note of warning: everything in moderation. Physicality has always had the potential to become an idol to Christians who are pursuing physical health and well-being. The devil tries to wedge into a Christian’s mind the idea that physical health and good looks are what is most important in life. Placing physical fitness higher up on the totem pole than spiritual life is all-to-easy a trap to fall into. An effort to exercise can be good, but too much of a good thing can eventually turn into a bad thing. Martin Luther comments: “Fasting and the like—this bodily training leads to the breaking and controlling of the body. This is good, but two points of moderation are involved: first, that there be no hostility here; and second, that one place no trust in this kind of life.”¹⁹ First of all, Luther warns that one should not harm his body by physical training, and in his time he would have meant asceticism and fasting gone too far. And secondly, Luther stresses there is no eternal reward in simply physical training. There is no higher place in heaven for those who have a lower body fat percentage. There is no mansion prepared especially for those whose faces have graced the cover of a magazine. Physical training has some value, but not when compared to spiritual training.

Luther spoke about how he perceived the value of physical training:

¹⁷ William Hendriksen, *Exposition of The Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1957), 151.

¹⁸ Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 306.

¹⁹ Hilton C. Oswald, Ed. *Luther’s Works, Vol. 28, Lectures on 1 Timothy* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1973), 321-322.

Of course, the other exercise is worth something too, but it profits only you. There is some fruit, but it is little in comparison with this. If a person reads or preaches, he accomplishes more than if he were to fast. If there is some fruit, it belongs to me, because I am chastising my own body, and I profit no one else.²⁰

However, consider this possible wrinkle: could a pastor's physical training be of spiritual benefit to others due to the possibility that a pastor's personal physical training enables him to serve others better in some way? Luther was probably not thinking along those lines when he spoke about physical training benefitting only the person actually doing the exercising. Armin Schuetze speaks to a possible spiritual benefit as a result of a pastor's personal physical training. "The pastor who does not take care of his body may cut short his time of service through such neglect. Yet the value of physical exercise and training is limited."²¹ If a pastor neglects his physical health to the point that he is no longer able to carry out his pastoral duties simply because of his poor physical condition, then he has done the spiritual health of people a great disservice, because spiritually enriching people is the top priority of a pastor's work. Luther portrays the purpose and priority of the pastor: "To teach others, to instruct them, visit them that they may know Christ and grow in Him and avoid sin, to preserve discipline in the church and at home—this all produces fruit for many people."²² Spiritual training is of the highest importance in the life of a pastor, but physical exercise also plays a part—perhaps most importantly in enabling a pastor to have the necessary health to carry out his calling of being a shepherd of souls as best he can, for as long as he can. Physical exercise can enhance a pastor's service both in quality and quantity.

What does God's Word say about the use of every means possible (which includes the body) to win people for the gospel?

Many people revere Paul as the greatest missionary this world has ever seen. And why would they not? Without any of the luxuries of modern travel, Paul criss-crossed the known world time and time again, ministering to congregations and people in numerous countries,

²⁰ Ibid., 322.

²¹ Armin W. Schuetze, *1 Timothy; 2 Timothy; Titus* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1991), 67.

²² Oswald, 322.

presenting a message contrary to everything his hearers had ever known. Paul risked his life over and over in order that he might spread the gospel to as many people as he could. And Paul made sacrifices in order to carry out his calling. Would his life have been more comfortable if he had stayed somewhere in Israel and simply done what he could to preach the gospel to the Jews there? Probably. Would Paul have had fewer near-death experiences if he had stayed in one area? Probably. Would Paul have been more financially stable if he had stayed in one area and been able to build a somewhat reputable business as a supplement to his ministry? Probably. Paul sacrificed convenience, safety, wealth, and more for one reason. He sacrificed for the sake of the gospel. He described his sacrifices in the ninth chapter of his first letter to the Corinthians.

Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews, I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings. Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize. (1 Corinthians 9:19-27)

Toppe comments: "In summary, Paul's passion to share the gospel with others moved him to forego his rights and liberties when working among them."²³ As Toppe noted, nothing was more important to Paul than winning souls for eternal life in heaven. New Testament scholar Gordon Fee states Paul's life focus: "For Paul everything is subordinated to this central concern of his life, this 'destiny' that God has laid upon him (saving souls)."²⁴ Paul understood that preaching the gospel in order to save souls was his most important pursuit, and so he did whatever necessary to best carry out his pastoral calling. Of course, he did nothing contrary to Scripture, but he did make considerable sacrifices to "save" as many as possible.

²³ Toppe, 87.

²⁴ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 431.

Every pastor has the same focus as Paul; that is, to save souls by sharing the gospel with them. Therefore, it follows that throughout his life every pastor makes considerable sacrifices, whatever they may be, in order to save as many souls as he can. In keeping with the focus of this thesis, it might be said that if a pastor recognizes the importance of his body as a valuable tool in his ministry and feels that physical exercise helps enable his body, mind, and emotions to withstand the rigors of ministry, then he will do what he can to use exercise to help his body carry out ministry. If he recognizes that physical exercise can benefit his ability to carry out ministry, then even if he doesn't necessarily enjoy it, he may make the sacrifice of exercising for the good of his ministry.

The Benefits of Exercise

Regular exercise has obvious benefits. The average human being has seen enough TV ads, received enough encouragements from the doctor, and heard enough testimonials, that he doesn't need to be convinced that exercise is generally good for the human body.²⁵ Exercise is a part of almost every weight-loss plan. Any plan that includes diet but no exercise will most likely fail. People know that if they want to lose weight, they should get outside or on a treadmill and walk around the block. Or run. Or play tennis. Or whatever else they'd like. The average person knows in his heart of hearts that exercise is good for him. What he needs to be convinced of is that exercise is *worth it*. He needs to be convinced that exercise is worth getting up early for, when all he really wants to do is hit snooze and sleep for another thirty minutes. That the benefits—both physical and emotional—of exercise outweigh its seemingly negative aspects, such as the discomfort and possibly outright pain exercise often induces. Through scientific evidence and the personal testimony of WELS pastors, this section of the thesis will seek to prove that regular physical exercise is *worth it* for a pastor.

²⁵ Of course, there are always exceptions to the rule. Many people have heard commercials with disclaimers and warnings like, "Consult your doctor to make sure you are healthy enough to begin an exercise program." And exercise, just like almost any other good thing, if overdone, can become a bad thing. Exercise can burn a person out, injure him, and leave him feeling chronically exhausted as well. Too much exercise can consume someone. But at issue here is not the exception; at issue is the general principle. The general principle is that exercise has physical benefits.

Although exercise does have obvious physical benefits, this thesis aims more specifically to address the never-ending issue of ongoing stress and pressure in the life of a pastor, as described in the introduction of the thesis. Exercise does indeed address those issues of stress and pressure. Studies have shown that exercise elevates one's general mood and improves the individual's response to stress and its symptoms. Dr. Michael W. Otto and Dr. Jasper A. J. Smits, who are Professors of Psychology at Boston University and the University of Texas, respectively, state quite clearly, "With regular exercise, you can expect to be better protected against stress and to experience fewer problems with mood and anxiety."²⁶ Dr. Peter Salmon, a retired psychologist, states:

The clearest evidence that physical exercise is enjoyable has emerged when mood has been measured immediately before and after regular exercisers undertake strenuous exercise at a level with which they are familiar. Although discrepant results exist, the overwhelming evidence confirms mood improvement.²⁷

In summary, exercising just *one time* has immediate mental and emotional benefits. Exercise that is strenuous to the proper degree²⁸ can relieve stress and anxiety and elevate one's mood right away.

Dwight Sandvold,²⁹ a WELS member from Hartland, WI, has worked in the field of sports medicine for about 25 years. After working in the field of orthopedic rehab for over a decade, for the last twelve years he has owned and operated FAST—Fitness and Sports Training. Sandvold shared numerous anecdotes about people who have not only turned around their physical appearance and health, but whose emotional well-being shoots upward during and after group exercise sessions at his studio. The following is one example.

People I'm working with can come in and the weight of the world is on their shoulders. One woman has an autistic son, and he was up half the night. She is incredibly stressed

²⁶ Michael W. Otto, Ph.D. and Jasper A. J. Smits, Ph.D., *Exercise for Mood and Anxiety – Proven Strategies for Overcoming Depression and Enhancing Well-being* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 18.

²⁷ Peter Salmon, "Effects of Physical Exercise on Anxiety, Depression, and Sensitivity to Stress: A Unifying Theory," *Clinical Psychology Review* Vol. 21, 1 (2001): 35.

²⁸ What constitutes "strenuous to the proper degree" will be discussed later. In order to whet the reader's appetite at this time, the writer will say that the proper degree does not mean pushing yourself to exhaustion all the time.

²⁹ If you are looking to start a personal exercise program, the author highly recommends you talk to Dwight. He is highly knowledgeable when it comes to health and training the human body, and what is more is that he is a very caring individual whose biggest goal is just to help you succeed and have a higher quality of life. More information concerning FAST can be found at fastandyou.com or on Facebook by searching "Dwight Sandvold's FAST."

out—she is just struggling immensely. And she will leave the studio 75 minutes later after having the opportunity to share and to talk with fellow participants, to produce some endorphins, to get some oxygen to her brain, and she walks out and she is a whole different person. She is recharged, and she can go and tackle another day with her challenges. It is social, but it's also a way to cope with her challenges.³⁰

The question of *why* physical activity is of mental and emotional benefit will be addressed in the next section of this thesis, but suffice it to say for now that besides its scientifically shown benefits, exercise can also be socially stimulating and uplifting.³¹ Exercising with other people can develop a common bond and friendship (both of which lift up the emotions) that would often be non-existent without the common gathering space of the exercise arena, whether that be a yoga mat, a basketball court, a walking trail through the woods, or the drinking fountain next to the rack of weights.

Numerous WELS pastors give personal testimony to the difference exercise has made and continues to make in their lives. Pastor Matthew Schwartz of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Downers Grove, Illinois, started exercising because he had become increasingly aware of heart problems in his family and his risk of heart trouble. “Realizing that problems with my heart could be in my future, it gave me some incentive to do something about my weight and my health and well-being.”³² But on top of helping protect against heart disease (and the weighty bodily change exercise produced—he lost over 100 pounds), Pastor Schwartz has noticed the profound impact exercise has had on his mood, energy level, and overall mental state since he started regularly exercising during his vicar year in Alaska.

One of the things I noticed immediately was confidence in who I was and what I did. I was able to carry myself with more pride and confidence not having to worry about people looking down on me for being overweight. Another difference I noted was the added energy I had. I didn't have to take as much rest time or naptime in the afternoons. I had more energy and stamina during the day. I was able to put more work into what I do and serve the Lord with more energy and enthusiasm. My overall mood, outlook, attitude, and perspective about life became much better. I didn't experience the lows and thoughts and feelings of frustration and worthlessness because of my weight.³³

Pastor Jay Zahn of Hope Lutheran Church in Columbia, South Carolina, also speaks highly of

³⁰ Dwight Sandvold, interview by author, Pewaukee, WI, November 14, 2014.

³¹ The author vividly remembers many meaningful, helpful, encouraging, and deep conversations held while running with friends and teammates on the roads surrounding New Ulm, MN during college.

³² Pastor Matthew Schwartz, email interview by author, November 2, 2014.

³³ Schwartz, interview.

the effect regular exercise has had on his mental and emotional state.

I feel more alert, more active, more disciplined, with greater self-control. Those qualities help maintain better health as well as healthier ways of working and handling stress and responsibilities. I feel like I'm far more productive, and I'm able to better manage and distinguish between work and home, better able to wrap up work stuff so it isn't consuming my home life too.³⁴

Pastor Nathan Strutz of Resurrection Lutheran Church in Verona, Wisconsin says:

[Exercise] provides stress relief. Gives me something other than ministry to focus on. Helps me with goal setting. When I'm running most seriously, I'm also planning ministry most seriously. The attitude of 'doing whatever it takes' spills over.³⁵

From the testimony of these three men, one can see that the discipline practiced in exercise also spills over into other areas of life—one's vocation of pastor as well as father and family man.³⁶

When asked if they felt a difference in their attitude, mood, or energy level between days when they did exercise and those days they didn't, numerous pastors shared answers in the affirmative. Pastor Schwartz said:

The difference between days when I exercise and days when I don't exercise is huge. I can feel it in my overall attitude and stress level. I'm usually a little grumpy and irritable when I don't get to exercise. I also don't feel good about myself, which doesn't help my overall attitude and mood. I've learned that you also need to push yourself through the excuse of being too tired to exercise. The first step is the toughest and the temptation will always be there to take a little nap instead of exercising. I've learned that I always feel much better after taking time to exercise. I have more energy after exercising, which outweighs any benefits I might have received from taking a nap and not exercising. You have to convince yourself that even though you are tired and have other things to do, your health and well-being is going to be so much better if you do [exercise]. You'll feel so much better about yourself and your work will be more productive, too. Remembering all this helps serve as incentive to get me going and keep me going when it comes to exercise.³⁷

Pastor Andrew Bauer of New Life Lutheran Church in Lake Zurich, Illinois, will schedule exercise into his day in order to specifically help himself with an upcoming task, and he notices general benefits of exercising in his life as well.

³⁴ Pastor Jason Zahn, email interview by author, October 30, 2014.

³⁵ Pastor Nathan Strutz, email interview by author, October 22, 2014.

³⁶ On a lighter note in reference to the effect exercise has on one's home life, Pastor Strutz shares, "Ask my wife how grumpy I get if I can't run. I'm not fun to be around."

³⁷ Schwartz, interview.

If I have something stressful coming up, I will try to work out prior to that to calm me down. I guess I notice that I am more irritable if I don't work out. Also, I sleep better when I am in a regular workout routine.³⁸

Each individual session of exercise is beneficial to a pastor (and every other person as well), but regularly exercising over a period of time also has its benefits. Jonathan Bourman, pastor of Peace Lutheran in Aiken, South Carolina, shared the long-term benefits of exercise he has noticed in his life.

I do get a small daily boost from exercising. More importantly, I think consistent exercise or lack thereof compounds over time. If I'm in a period when I get out of shape, I'm less resilient emotionally and physically. When I am in shape, I generally have higher concentration levels, higher energy levels, and better production in general along with a healthier emotional life.³⁹

“Is exercise an important part of your life as a pastor?”

When asked the question, “Is exercise an important part of your life as a pastor?” WELS pastors responded in a variety of ways. They shed light on a number of different benefits of exercise in the life of a pastor.

Pastor Bauer speaks about the possibility of meeting new people when out exercising and also the general health benefits to a pastor, which naturally also then benefits his congregation.

I primarily view it (exercise) as an opportunity to mix with and meet people in my community. If the pastor can do things to stay healthy and avoid sickness, the congregations benefits from that.⁴⁰

Pastor Daniel Habben of St. Peter Lutheran Church in St. Albert, Canada, speaks of the possible evangelism opportunities while exercising and also shared that he uses exercise as personal prayer time.

Exercise for me is important because I've built up a community of non-church friends at the gym. It's a window to the outside world. It's also a group of people I can witness to. But working out is also important because it's my prayer time. It's what I'm doing when I'm running or on the bike or doing my core stuff. In fact even when my body needs a break I'll still go in and do a light workout on the bike just so I get my prayer time in. For

³⁸ Pastor Andrew Bauer, email interview by author, October 22, 2014.

³⁹ Pastor Jonathan Bourman, email interview by author, October 27, 2014.

⁴⁰ Bauer, interview.

whatever reason I find it hard to pray if I'm just sitting.⁴¹

Pastor David Voss of Memorial Lutheran Church in Williamston, Michigan speaks to a plethora of benefits of exercise: fulfilling a natural motivation to keep the Commandments, having some “alone time” to think something through, and simply exercising to show appreciation to God for the gift of life and a body he has given you.

I don't know if it's accurate to say that I consider it an *important* aspect of my ministry. But staying as healthy as one can be and taking care of the health that the Lord has granted should be something that a child of God wants to pursue; it's a 5th Commandment issue since the Lord calls on us to protect all human life—including our own. I am able to do some thinking for the 30 minutes that I'm running, sometimes tightening up a sermon theme and parts or evaluating how to begin a counseling session.⁴²

Pastor Chuck Westra of Christ Our Savior Lutheran Church in Columbia, TN, touches on a myriad of ways exercise has benefitted him in his ministry, but also affirms and acknowledges the fact that just because exercise has benefitted him does not guarantee that the same practice would reap the same benefits for everyone.

I would consider exercise to be an important part of my life as a pastor. For me, it is a matter of stewardship. I think that I am more productive when I get some exercise. I feel better and I seem to have more energy. Exercise also serves as a great diversion for me. Public ministry has often meant long hours for me. I have found it very helpful to have a diversion that provides a release from the rigors of ministry duties. I know that others find the same release in other activities. I don't judge. We all need to know what is helpful in our individual circumstances.⁴³

Finally, Pastor Bourman appeals to the fact that exercise helps him produce a higher quality body of work as a pastor.

I consider [exercise] to be absolutely vital. I will not have the energy levels to execute my various vocations at their highest levels unless my body has that capacity built in through training. In other words, I can only go as far as my body will let me. High energy and strength levels = higher and more quality output.⁴⁴

The variety of these five pastors' answers does not show a contradiction in evidence, but rather supports the proposition that exercise is indeed important for a pastor to utilize as part of his

⁴¹ Pastor Daniel Habben, email interview by author, October 22, 2014.

⁴² Pastor David Voss, email interview by author, October 22, 2014.

⁴³ Pastor Chuck Westra, email interview by author, October 22, 2014.

⁴⁴ Bourman, interview.

regular routine. Their answers show that they have most definitely seen exercise positively impact the quality of their life and ministry, but also that they recognize that though exercise has benefitted them, exercise may not effect the same benefit in each pastor's life and ministry.

Beyond positively impacting the *quality* of a pastor's ministry, regular exercise can also increase the pastor's *quantity* of service. Pastor Paul Scharrer of St. Paul Lutheran Church in Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin, cites that fact as one reason he makes it a point to exercise regularly.

I took to heart the advice of a 96-year-old retired Lutheran pastor. He wrote these encouraging words: 'You need to take care of yourself. You need to exercise and live as long as you possibly can. Your light pointing to Jesus our Savior is needed in this dark world of sin as long as you can.' Now, it has become a great delight to do all I can to serve my Savior as long as I can.⁴⁵

Simply stated, exercise generally allows a pastor to stay active in his ministry for a longer period of time. Pastor Westra noted: "My goal is to stay in decent shape. I would like to be active into my 'older' years."⁴⁶ Pastor Voss stated: "I exercise to stay healthy, more than anything else."⁴⁷

Exercise can help a pastor maintain his general health and longevity. But besides guarding against what one might refer to as "normal" physical ailment,⁴⁸ exercise has also been shown to guard against stress-induced illnesses. Amanda Griffiths, Professor of Occupational Health Psychology at the University of Nottingham, stated:

Brown and Siegel suggested that one of the benefits of exercise is that it reduces the likelihood of a person becoming ill under periods of stress. Steptoe *et al.*⁴⁹ concluded that moderate aerobic exercise is associated with improvements in perceived ability to cope with stress and with reductions in tension, anxiety and depression.⁵⁰

In summary, the prolonged stress often evident in the life of a pastor can produce illness, and studies have shown that exercise can help guard against those illnesses but enhancing a person's ability to cope with stress in healthy ways that can help reduce tension, anxiety, and depression.

⁴⁵ Pastor Paul Scharrer, email interview by author, October 25, 2014.

⁴⁶ Westra, interview.

⁴⁷ Voss, interview.

⁴⁸ By this term the author is referring to the sicknesses, the loss of mobility as one ages, etc...the ailments which afflict the human body that are unrelated to and not brought on by stress at all.

⁴⁹ Steptoe *et al.* conducted a 1988 study in which they examined the relationship of aerobic exercise and the ability to cope with stress.

⁵⁰ Amanda Griffiths, *Employee Exercise Programmes: Organizational and Individual Perspectives*, 12. In *Workplace Health: Employee Fitness and Exercise*, ed. John Kerr, Tom Cox, Amanda Jane Griffiths, (London: Taylor & Francis, 1996).

Why is exercise emotionally and mentally beneficial?

Studies and personal testimony have shown that physical exercise is indeed emotionally and mentally beneficial, but *why* is that the case? One hypothesis is that exercise acts in a way similar to anti-depressant medication, and in fact, with just as much effectiveness. Otto and Smits give the general report:

The mood benefits of exercise are supported by striking scientific evidence. Exercise can be as powerful as antidepressant medications in treating depression, and, more broadly, regular exercise is linked with decreased anxiety, stress, and hostility.⁵¹

In the following paragraph, Otto and Smits more deeply hypothesize why regular exercise might act similarly to anti-depressant medication in combating against stress, anxiety, and depression.

One popular theory is that reduced levels of neurotransmitters, such as serotonin, play a role in causing or maintaining depressive and anxiety disorders. Antidepressant medications, such as Paxil (paroxetine), are thought to work by helping rebalance neurotransmitter levels. In fact, drugs like Prozac (fluoxetine), Paxil, and Zoloft (sertraline) belong to a class of medications called *serotonin selective reuptake inhibitors* (SSRIs). These drugs work for both depression and anxiety disorders. A number of studies have demonstrated that exercise may be the nondrug equivalent of antidepressant medications like these. That is, exercise increases production in a manner similar to the desired action of antidepressant medications.⁵²

The reader might have noticed the little words and phrases that are strewn throughout those last two quotations: “can be,” “theory,” “are thought to work,” and “may be.” In this area of science, more research is needed. Although doctors and scientists have found numerous correlations between exercise and improved mental health, they have not been able to specifically prove and articulate exactly *why* that correlation exists. Although it is nearly universally accepted that exercise acts in the same way as antidepressant medications, solid proof confirming that hypothesis does not yet exist.

Karen Flood and Bonita Long, Professors of Psychology at the University of British Columbia, propose three possible reasons that physical activity is efficacious in improving stress

⁵¹ Otto and Smits, 7.

⁵² Otto and Smits, 23.

management and overall mental health: the Distraction Hypothesis, the Cognitive Dissonance Theory, and the Expectancy Theory.

1. The Distraction Hypothesis states that exercise is simply a time-out from stress. Exercise is a distraction that takes your attention away from a stressful situation, and so you can better manage that stress.
2. The Cognitive Dissonance Theory proposes that when people are involved in studies, they report and/or derive benefit from exercise because they are subliminally trying to justify the time they spent exercising. A person wouldn't want to exercise for an hour and then stop, think about how he is feeling, and report that he is feeling the same or even *worse* than before he ran, would he? If that were how he felt, then he would have felt like he had exercised in vain because he gained no psychological advantage. The Cognitive Dissonance Theory states that even though people don't know for sure if they benefitted from their exercise, they are willing to say they did in fact benefit, because they can't justify their exercise if they don't feel a benefit from it.
3. The Expectancy Theory states that people expect benefit from exercise, and so there is benefit. Conversely, if people expected negative results from exercise, there would in fact be negative results.⁵³

Lynette Craft and Frank Perna, who are both doctors from the Division of Psychiatry at the Boston University School of Medicine, propose five hypotheses concerning why physical activity actually seems to help alleviate the symptoms of depression and in fact, the depression itself: the Thermogenic Hypothesis, the Endorphin Hypothesis, the Monoamine Hypothesis, the Distraction Hypothesis, and the Self-Efficacy Hypothesis.

1. The Thermogenic Hypothesis suggests that a rise in core body temperature following exercise is responsible for the reduction in symptoms of depression. Increases in temperature of specific brain regions, such as the brain stem, can lead to an overall feeling of relaxation and reduction in muscular tension. However, the research conducted on the thermogenic hypothesis has examined the effect of exercise only on feelings of anxiety rather than depression.
2. The Endorphin Hypothesis predicts that exercise has a positive effect on depression due to an increased release of endorphins following exercise. Endorphins are related to a positive mood and an overall enhanced sense of well-being. This line of research has not been without criticism. The debate remains as to whether plasma endorphins reflect endorphin activity in the brain. Some have argued that even if peripheral endorphin levels are not reflective of brain chemistry, they could still be associated

⁵³ Karen R. Flood and Bonita C. Long, *Understanding Exercise as a Method of Stress Management: A Constructivist Framework*, 76. In *Workplace Health: Employee Fitness And Exercise* ed. John Kerr, Tom Cox, Amanda Jane Griffiths, (London: Taylor & Francis, 1996).

with a change in mood or feelings of depression. Several studies have shown increases in plasma endorphins following acute and chronic exercise; yet, it remains unclear if these elevations in plasma endorphins are directly linked to a reduction in depression.

3. The Monoamine Hypothesis appears to be the most promising of the proposed physiologic mechanisms. This hypothesis states that exercise leads to an increase in the availability of brain neurotransmitters (e.g., serotonin, dopamine, and norepinephrine) that are diminished with depression. These neurotransmitters increase in plasma and urine following exercise, but whether exercise leads to an increase in neurotransmitters in the brain remains unknown. Animal studies suggest that exercise increases serotonin and norepinephrine in various brain regions, but, to date, this relationship has not been studied in humans.⁵⁴
4. The Distraction Hypothesis suggests that physical activity serves as a distraction from worries and depressing thoughts. In general, the use of distracting activities as a means of coping with depression has been shown to have a more positive influence on the management of depression and to result in a greater reduction in depression than the use of more self-focused or introspective activities such as journal keeping or identifying positive and negative adjectives that describe one's current mood. Exercise has been compared with other distracting activities such as relaxation, assertiveness training, health education, and social contact. Results have been inconclusive, with exercise being more effective than some activities and similar to others in its ability to aid in the reduction of depression.
5. The Self-Efficacy Hypothesis refers to the belief that one possesses the necessary skills to complete a task as well as the confidence that the task can actually be completed with the desired outcome obtained. Depressed people often feel inefficacious to bring about positive desired outcomes in their lives and have low efficacy to cope with the symptoms of their depression. This can lead to negative self-evaluation, negative ruminations, and faulty styles of thinking. It has been suggested that exercise may provide an effective mode through which self-efficacy can be enhanced based on its ability to provide the individual with a meaningful mastery experience. The findings of the few studies that have examined this relationship have been equivocal as to whether exercise leads to an enhancement of generalized feelings of efficacy. However, a recent study has reported that involvement in an exercise program was associated with enhanced feelings of coping self-efficacy, which, in turn, were inversely related to feelings of depression.⁵⁵

Craft and Perna summed up their hypotheses with the following conclusion:

⁵⁴ Craft and Perna cited methodological concerns as the reason for why this relationship has not yet been studied in humans. Currently, invasive procedures such as spinal taps are necessary to obtain samples for testing. Craft and Perna expressed hope that the increasing availability of less invasive neuroimaging techniques would aid future researchers in performing studies on humans.

⁵⁵ Lynette L. Craft, Lynette and Frank M. Perna, "The Benefits of Exercise for the Clinically Depressed." *Primary Care Companion to the Journal of Clinical Psychiatry* Vol. 6, 3, (2004): 107-108.

More research is needed to determine which, if any, of the mechanisms described herein are important moderators of the exercise effect. It is highly likely that a combination of biological, psychological, and sociological factors influence the relationship between exercise and depression. This is consistent with current treatment for depression in which the effects of pharmacotherapy and psychotherapy on depression are additive and address biological, psychological, and sociological aspects of the patient.⁵⁶

Why exactly is exercise beneficial to the human emotional and mental state? Scientists don't know for sure. But they are fairly certain they know that exercise is beneficial. Therefore, according to research, exercise can be a valuable tool in establishing and preserving emotional and mental health.

What kind of exercise is beneficial to a pastor?

At this point of the thesis, perhaps the reader is convinced that pastors should start exercising, but now the reader is asking the questions, "What exercises should pastors do? How should pastors go about exercising?"

Two basic types of exercise exist: aerobic⁵⁷ and anaerobic⁵⁸ (anaerobic exercise may also be referred to as resistance training). Both methods of exercise have their merits, and both are useful to someone who is looking to exercise in order to reap the mental and emotional benefits of exercise. As a man grows older, he loses muscle structure at an increasing rate, so it is important to include at least some form of muscle-building activity. When asked which form of exercise, if either, he recommended to a pastor beginning to exercise, Dwight Sandvold responded, "I think both. Depending on where you live and how accessible a gym is to you. Sometimes it's good to have strength training equipment at home."⁵⁹ When most people think of exercising, they think of getting outside and going for a run or some other aerobic activity.

⁵⁶ Craft and Perna, 109.

⁵⁷ A simple definition of aerobic exercise is exercise that places a premium on the body using oxygen. Continuous exercise that works the cardiovascular system, such as walking, jogging, or running at a slow to steady pace would be considered aerobic exercise. One would not grow a lot muscularly from aerobic exercise, but one's "engine," namely, his heart and lungs, would become much stronger and more adept at powering the body in prolonged activity.

⁵⁸ For the purposes of this thesis, anaerobic (literally "without oxygen") training could simply be called "weightlifting." During anaerobic exercise, the majority of the exercise is not performed with the heart rate continuously elevated, but with short bursts of energy (such as a set of ten squat repetitions or bench presses or a set of 30 situps). During anaerobic exercise the heart rate will rise for a short period of time, but then drop down again.

⁵⁹ Sandvold, interview.

However, Salmon shows that anaerobic exercise can be just as beneficial to one's mental and emotional state. "Although anaerobic exercise has received very little attention, the evidence that exists indicates an antidepressant effect comparable to that of aerobic exercise."⁶⁰ Let it suffice to say that whether one engages in aerobic or anaerobic activity is not of the utmost importance. What is important is that one is engaging in some sort of activity, whether it is aerobic, anaerobic, or both.

What is the proper intensity level at which a pastor should exercise in order to reap psychological gains?

How strenuous should a person's exercise be in order that he might reap the greatest benefits from it? Normally, people think they need to push themselves to exhaustion every time they exercise, and so when they don't, they feel guilty. That is an incredibly common belief held by people who are just beginning to establish a routine of running, and that belief is the reason that so few people stick with running. What is the proper level of intensity with which one should exercise, with the goal that he derive the greatest psychological benefit from his exercise?

Studies have drawn a distinction between physical *fitness* and physical *activity*. One can be in a state of physical fitness and not be gleaning any benefits from physical activity. One can be comparatively unfit, but yet be indeed gleaning much benefit from exercise. Although physical fitness and physical activity are inextricably linked (One simply cannot become more fit without exercising.), it seems that improved mental and emotional health is tied not to physical fitness, but to the physical activity itself. Health Psychology professors Dr. Kathryn Thirlaway and Dr. David Benton posit:

Physical activity was associated with mental health and fitness was not. It is impossible to measure physical activity without creating a measure of fitness, because physical activity is a large factor in determining fitness. By taking a second measure of fitness—a submaximal estimate of maximal oxygen uptake—the results of the study by Thirlaway and Benton (1992) showed clearly that the effect of physical activity on mental health and mood was not mediated by the effect that physical activity had on cardiovascular fitness. Thus it would appear that participating in physical activity rather than physical

⁶⁰ Salmon, 42.

fitness is associated with better mental health.⁶¹

Otto and Smits give their recommendation.

The dose we recommend stays below the level of exertion that makes exercise distressing to most people. In this way, we get the benefit of exercise while leaving behind one of the central complaints about exercise.⁶²

One of the central complaints of exercise is that it is too difficult. “I can’t keep up with this,” could be a common worry or cry from a gym program. “Ugh, I just dread going to work out every day—it’s so exhausting,” might be another. Numerous scholarly sources advocate a curbing of the intensity and duration of exercise. Thirlaway and Benton encourage the following:

The type, duration, and strenuousness of the exercise is important. If you’re exercising too hard, your mood is not going to be improved—you’re just going to be exhausted. Studies have found that the stress of participating in overvigorous exercise mitigated against any positive psychological benefits... They found no improvement in mood in a high-intensity exercise group although subjects participating in a moderate exercise programme did show improvements.⁶³

Amanda Griffiths urges:

It may be wise to question the merits of exercise programmes that encourage large gains in physical fitness (at the expense of a high drop-out rate) versus less demanding programmes that may be more popular, enjoyable and thus inherently motivating. Implementors of employee exercise programmes might therefore do well to emphasise the benefits of relatively low-intensity exercise and to ensure that there are options available to suit everyone.⁶⁴

In answer to the question, “What kind of exercise and what intensity of exercise is most beneficial to someone trying to improve their mood and lessen their stress level?” the research seems to point to less intense exercise being more beneficial. It seems that when exercising, one should generally exercise at a level similar to his current level of fitness. Exercising beyond such a level is unlikely to be valuable for improving mood and decreasing stress level. Salmon says,

Exercise that is more intense than participants' habitual level is less likely to improve mood and, indeed, is liable to worsen it. Exercise at competitive levels can worsen mood

⁶¹ Kathryn Thirlaway and David Benton, *Exercise and Mental Health: The Role of Activity and Fitness*, 79. In *Workplace Health: Employee Fitness and Exercise*, ed. John Kerr, Tom Cox, Amanda Jane Griffiths, (London: Taylor & Francis, 1996).

⁶² Otto and Smits, 17.

⁶³ Thirlaway and Benton, 71.

⁶⁴ Griffiths, 9-10.

in habitual exercisers, and strenuous exercise in people who are not selected for having intense exercise habits has commonly, although not invariably, been unpleasant; that is, it increased negative mood or decreased positive mood .⁶⁵

Competitive exercise, though it may drive a person to new heights of fitness and strength acumen, does not seem to always be beneficial mentally and emotionally, even to those who are competing at a high level of fitness and are used to the additional strain competition puts on exercise. Salmon reiterates:

Anxious mood is reduced by mild exercise training, insufficient to increase fitness, whereas training which *is* sufficiently intense to increase fitness is less effective at relieving anxiety.⁶⁶

Generally, exercise that is truly difficult enough to raise one's level of fitness is not as effective at relieving anxiety. People who regularly exercise to the point of exhaustion eventually grow to dread pushing themselves to exhaustion every day. However, the research has shown that there is no reason, either physical or mental, to push oneself to exhaustion every day in one's exercise. In fact, in order to reap the greatest mental and emotional benefits from exercising, one should *not* engage in anything greater than moderately strenuous exercise. Granted, one does not want to fall into the trap of having exercise be *too* easy, but the trap of working too hard once one has started exercising is the more common trap into which people fall. Dwight Sandvold puts it in more easily understood terms: “[When exercising] You shouldn't be able to smell all the roses—but some of them at least.”⁶⁷ This thesis is not advocating exercise for the sake of a pastor attaining a faster 5k race time, simply losing weight, or looking like a fitness model. This thesis is advocating exercise because exercise can improve a pastor's emotional and mental state, which in turn can improve the quality and quantity of his pastoral ministry. Therefore, with that goal of physical exercise in mind, the research seems to point to exercise of a generally low intensity being the most beneficial for a pastor.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 35.

⁶⁶ Salmon, 42.

⁶⁷ Sandvold, interview.

Brotherly Encouragement and Guidelines for Exercising

Often the toughest part of a task is getting started. One can say to himself, “I *should* read that book; I *should* get ahead on some work; I *should* plan worship for the upcoming season of the church year.” But humans have a tendency to continually put off and perhaps even dread tasks that really shouldn’t be a terrible ordeal in the first place. Humans continually put off the task...until they actually start doing it. And then the task isn’t so bad. The task is actually an enjoyable activity.

Humans have a tendency to procrastinate a seemingly undesirable activity in many areas of life, one of which is exercise. Even seasoned exercisers, who have been running or working out or competing in sports since they were kids, report difficulty in getting back into the groove of regularly exercising after taking some time off to let the body recover. The author speaks from experience. One knows full well that when he is exercising, he enjoys that activity, whatever the specific exercise activity may be. He knows full well the benefits it gives him. But yet it is still difficult to get off the couch, get moving, and let inertia work its course. If it is difficult for seasoned veterans of exercise who know the benefits of exercise and who know they actually enjoy exercising to actually get up and start exercising, then how much more difficult might it be for the “newbie” or for someone who is not convinced the supposed mental and emotional benefits of exercise are worthy of the troubles exercise might present? Some examples of troubles exercise might present are physical discomfort, fear of failure, mental anguish, and embarrassment in the face of peers. Those troubles can be real roadblocks to regular physical exercise. Therefore, encouragement and a strategy are necessary.

Dwight Sandvold offers four suggestions to help the pastor who is starting to exercise for the first time. 1—Schedule exercise. 2—Find a faithful exercise partner. 3—Find a type of activity that you enjoy. 4—Spend a little of your hard-earned income to equip yourself with the necessary, basic equipment that will make that activity enjoyable for you.⁶⁸ All four of these suggestions and guidelines from Sandvold are worth further consideration. The paragraphs below expand on each of them.

Sandvold stated that putting exercise on one’s schedule as an appointment is incredibly

⁶⁸ Sandvold, interview.

important. If a pastor schedules an activity, then whether that activity is exercise, a text study, an evangelism call, or anything else, he is far less likely to back out of that appointment. It is wise for a pastor to treat his appointed exercise time just like he would treat meeting with the new Sunday School teacher. He wouldn't simply skip that appointment because he didn't feel like honoring it. He would meet with the new teacher even if he were feeling rather tired at the time. Just as with any other appointment, it is sensible to find the time of day that works best for exercising and enter it into on the schedule.⁶⁹ One of the benefits of a pastor's schedule is the flexibility a pastor often has. There are a variety of times available to schedule exercise, and different pastors exercise at the time that works for them. Notice the variety in the exercise schedules of the following pastors.

Pastor Bauer: I like to go early afternoon, since the facility is least used at that time. I've gotten into the routine of going late on Saturday night as well, since I can study my sermon while on a treadmill.⁷⁰

Pastor Habben: [I exercise between] 5:30 am-7:00 am. Early morning is pretty quiet in the house so that allows me to get away.⁷¹

Pastor Bourman: I either do something in the late afternoon or first thing in the morning depending on the time of year. I schedule it by putting it on my calendar and prioritizing it so something doesn't take its place.⁷²

Pastor Zahn: I schedule exercise first thing in the morning so I'm able to lift with my son before he goes to school.⁷³

Pastor Westra: Our Saturday morning basketball game is designed so that we run in the morning and get home to our families. I usually run early so that it doesn't interfere with ministry. I don't usually find people that want to meet with me at 6 am.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Sandvold, interview.

⁷⁰ Bauer, interview.

⁷¹ Habben, interview.

⁷² Bourman, interview.

⁷³ Zahn, interview.

⁷⁴ Westra, interview.

Pastor Strutz: I really like running the first thing in the morning and having it done. Our youngest son runs cross country and track for school and has now started running more, so I run with him after school three days a week. It's nice my schedule allows me to be available after school. It's like anything, you make time for what you consider important.⁷⁵

In summary of Sandvold's first suggestion to pastors for establishing and maintaining a regular exercise routine, it has been shown that a pastor has a variety of options available for scheduling his exercise, and no matter which option(s) he picks, the most important thing is simply that he schedule the exercise exactly like an appointment and then hold to his schedule.

Sandvold's second suggestion stated that finding a faithful exercise partner can be very helpful in establishing a consistent exercise routine. He stated that having a faithful exercise partner follows right along with scheduling. If a man says to his friend, "Let's meet at 5:45 tomorrow morning for our workout," how likely is he not to show up? He is going to keep that appointment, because he is accountable to someone beside himself. Because he cares about his workout partner, he is not going to let him down by leaving him doing a workout by himself. Sandvold advised that one's regular exercise partner not be his spouse, because one is more likely to weasel out of working out if his exercise partner is his spouse.⁷⁶ The "appointment" doesn't have the same feel when a man is not making a concerted effort to meet someone outside of his immediate household.⁷⁷

Sandvold's third encouragement was to find an exercise activity that one enjoys. When exercising, one does not need to feel constrained by what other people say is "the best type of workout." For example, many people seem to say that running is the gold standard of exercise⁷⁸, but that is simply not the case. Sandvold cautions against allowing oneself to fall into the faulty idea that one type of exercise intrinsically trumps another.

For example, if John Q is 5'5" tall and built like a MACK truck—even though he's not heavy with a lot of extra fat—he has knock knees and flat feet...his body is not set up to run. He can say, "Running is the pinnacle of exercise, and I should be able to run" all he

⁷⁵ Strutz, interview.

⁷⁶ Sandvold, interview.

⁷⁷ This is not to say that one should never exercise with his spouse and/or children. Exercising as a family can be a wonderful activity. As well as quality time spent together, parents exercising can set a wonderful example that shows children the benefits of exercise and that exercise can be an enjoyable activity.

⁷⁸ No disrespect to running here—the author enjoys running very much. But it is of course not the only good option of physical exercise.

wants, but he's always going to be fighting his physiology. Maybe because he is a strong person, he can make a bicycle just whiz down the highway, or maybe he could be a very adept swimmer. He should pursue biking or swimming instead of running. Finding an activity that works for you is key, because you are more likely to enjoy it and thus stick with your program.⁷⁹

It is also a great idea to find more than one activity that one enjoys. Perhaps someone living where it snows regularly might say to himself, "This winter, instead of attempting to run on the snow and ice, I'm going to learn how to cross country ski." Broadening one's horizons and giving oneself variegated activities to choose from can also help to establish a consistent exercise routine.

Finally, Sandvold stated that spending some money can also help motivate a person to exercise. Having the equipment necessary to adequately exercise in the manner one wants to exercise makes that exercise easier. For example, if someone's plan is to bike, he is more likely to go out for a ride if he looks forward to riding the quality piece of equipment he himself purchased than if he is going to ride the old 10-speed his grandma gave him, whose front tire he has to pump up before every time he rides it. If someone's plan is to walk or run, it is advisable to get a pair of shoes that fit him properly and don't cause his feet and legs to hurt. Depending on where a person lives and how convenient its location is, that person might consider purchasing a gym membership or some free weights for use in his home.⁸⁰ When someone has the necessary tools and has also invested some of his own income into his pursuit of exercise, he is much more likely to establish a regular exercise routine.

In the beginning of this section composed of brotherly encouragements, the writer mentioned that it is easy to say, "I *should* do this; I *should* do that." As all of Sandvold's suggestions, guidelines, and encouragements demonstrate, it is wise to give oneself a higher motivation than just "should". It "should" be enough motivation to know that exercise will probably help one to be a better pastor by giving him more energy and helping him exhibit a better attitude when interacting with people. But the force of habit and ease of routine will fight tooth and nail to convince the pastor, "I don't really *need* to exercise today...or this week. I'm doing just fine." In order to combat that ease of habit and routine, it is good to provide oneself with more motivation than just a "should." Otto and Smits provide extensive ideas for providing

⁷⁹ Sandvold, interview.

⁸⁰ Sandvold, interview.

oneself with motivation to exercise:

The number of additional motivators of this kind are many: getting a break from your day for fresh air, having sun on your face, leaving the office for a lunchtime exercise break, being alone to think, time for music, time for a friend, experiencing a nice day, or, when traveling, sightseeing in a different city. The key is thinking of your exercise time as an opportunity to satisfy another desire: What motivations can you combine to further support your own exercise goals?⁸¹ Manipulate your environment to help make exercise easier. I could say that I *should run*. I could try to drill deep for motivation, or wait, hoping for some natural running motivation to spring forth. Instead of relying on a *should*, I put my effort into creating an extra motivation to run. [Listening to an] audio book...combines motivations (one easy and one difficult) to make going on a run much more desirable. And, I get a double mood benefit—joy from the audio book during the run, and an enhanced mood after the run.⁸²

Simply put, “should” is not the best motivator in the world. Finding multiple motivations to accompany “should” will benefit a pastor when he attempts to establish a regular exercise routine.

The Proper Place of Exercise in the Life of a Pastor

Otto and Smits advise: “Exercise should not be substituted for other problem-solving efforts, such as learning how to better manage stressors in your life.”⁸³ They most certainly have the right idea: exercise can be a great tool for managing stress in anyone’s life, but exercise should also not be placed on too high of a pedestal. Exercising should not take the place of recharging one’s batteries in God’s Word, and it should not take the place of healthy relationships with family and friends. Exercise should complement those blessings, not compete with them. Exercise can easily turn into an idol in the life of a pastor (as it also can in the life of any Christian). No matter what one’s body looks like, there is a temptation to worship the body by giving it too much attention. Regardless of whether one has definition in his midsection or not, human beings naturally struggle with a strain of narcissism. Therefore, it is prudent always

⁸¹ For further example: the author enjoys listening to sermon podcasts while he runs. A lady from the author’s church growing up would never wave or smile at anyone while she was walking—she was deep in prayer every time she was out on the sidewalks. Pastor Voss mentioned that he sometimes tightened up a sermon theme and parts while exercising. Pastor Habben said it is easiest for him to pray while on a treadmill. Pastor Strutz spends quality time with his son while running together.

⁸² Otto and Smits, 42.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 22.

to strive to maintain a proper perspective concerning exercise and to keep exercise in the proper place in life.

The task of keeping exercise in the proper perspective starts and ends with the motivation for exercising. Rick Loewen, Staff Minister at Crosswalk Lutheran Church in Phoenix, Arizona, and Coach for CrossTrain Ministries,⁸⁴ states his view concerning a pastor's motivation to exercise:

Your motivation for physical exercise has to first and foremost be out of love to God as an act of stewardship. Out of thankfulness that he's given us this healthy body to carry out the important ministry—whether public or private—to serve his purpose. This is not about looking like Mr. Olympian. This is just about being in good shape so that you can carry out the work. If I am going to stay physically fit, I can do ministry at a high level for a longer time than if I don't. I want to serve in a productive way as long as I can.⁸⁵

As a pastor strives to conduct his ministry at the highest level he can for the longest time that he can, he may see a need for physical exercise as a regular part of his life. Regular physical exercise can benefit a pastor's ministry and give glory to God when a pastor exercises with the proper perspective.

The life of a pastor is often stressful, and stress can hurt a pastor—even to the point that he contemplates or actually resigns from the ministry because of it. While there are many good tools to help a pastor manage his stress, this thesis has encouraged the use of regular physical exercise (whether that be in the form of aerobic or resistance training) in order to improve the pastor's resistance to stress, his attitude, and his energy level.

As pastors strive to carry out their role as full-time called ministers of gospel; that is, as they try to win as many people as possible to the gospel, this writer has proposed that it would be good for them to keep in mind that physical exercise can improve their ministry. Regular exercise can improve the quality of a pastor's ministry by enabling him to complete whatever specific tasks he has before him as best as he is able. Exercise can improve the quality of a pastor's ministry. Exercise can also improve the quantity of his ministry by enabling him to perform the tasks of ministry for a longer period of time, because exercise helps keep both the body and mind in good working order.

⁸⁴ CrossTrain Ministries helps WELS pastors develop healthy spiritual, emotional, and physical habits, along with transparent relationships, that foster spiritual resilience. These efforts all take place under the grace of God and among the connections of brotherly relationships. More information about CrossTrain can be found at crosstrainministries.com.

⁸⁵ Rick Loewen, interview by author, Milwaukee, WI, November 5, 2014.

As a pastor thinks about starting to exercise or getting back into exercise, he ought to keep in mind that there are many ways he can help himself stick with his chosen exercise activity. He can schedule it on his calendar as an appointment he must honor. He can find a faithful workout partner. He can participate in an activity he enjoys. He can commit himself to the activity and equip himself with the necessary tools by spending some money on those tools. He can keep in mind that it is not necessary to exercise until the point of exhaustion each and every day. In fact, low to moderate intensity exercise has been shown to improve one's mental state more than intense or competitive exercise.

A pastor keeps exercise in the proper perspective. He should guard against the temptation to make exercise or his body an idol. The body and its physical health are not the ultimate goal. The body and its physical health are means to attain the ultimate goal of winning souls for Jesus.

What is the motivation not only of a pastor, but also simply of a Christian human being? To glorify God in every single thing he does. No one has a greater reason to glorify God than this: "God sent Christ to be my Savior. Whatever I can possibly do for him is fantastic."

It has been said that the Church is not a building; the Church is people. How does a pastor strive to care for himself as an individual member of the Church in relation to how he cares for the church building? Loewen made the observation:

How many of you would let your building sit with the windows busted out, the plumbing busted, wires dangling everywhere—how many would let your building be like that? Nobody. Just as the church building is important, so also is the body God has given you. We need to take care of both.⁸⁶

One could say that the body of a pastor is more important than the church building, because unlike the building, the pastor himself is a living, breathing member of the body of Christ. Pastors themselves are viaducts through which God streams to the world the live-giving message of Christ crucified and risen. That is the simple purpose of a pastor: to preach and teach God's Word, so that others may believe and have life in Jesus' name! The goal of every pastor is to win souls to the gospel. In everything he does, including his physical exercise, may the pastor say, echoing the words of the apostle Paul, "I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel."

⁸⁶ Ibid., interview.

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