

Grit in Ministry Research Snapshot

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Practical Ministry Issue

Pastors face many challenges in their ministry – managing people conflict or isolation are examples. What helps pastoral ministers to keep going in ministry? Grit, defined as perseverance and passion for long-term-goals, contributes to success in personal and professional roles (Duckworth et al., 2007). Furthermore, grit can be grown and developed. This study sought to understand grit in ministry and how it can be developed amongst pastors in the New Zealand Pacific Union Conference (NZPUC) of the Seventh-day Adventist church.

How the study was done

This qualitative study conducted in-depth individual interviews with 15 pastors (field and lead) drawn from four of the five missions/conferences within the NZPUC. The interviews collected narratives of grit in ministry. Reflexive thematic analysis of these narratives has generated insight into what grit looks like in practice, what has contributed to grit in ministry, and how it can be developed for pastors in the socio-cultural contexts of the NZPUC.

Key Findings

The findings advance understanding of how grit in ministry grows and develops.

- ◆ A sense of **God's calling** is at the heart of grit in ministry. Pastors' narratives show how sensing and remembering God's calling is the foundation of their grit in ministry.
 - "The one thing that keeps me staying amidst all the chaos is feeling that you've been called"
 - "He showed me that even when you think you're not capable, He will equip"
 - "I actually burned out... God said, 'You just need some time out...you're called, but learn to trust me'"
 - "What has allowed me to sustain my ministry, is my time that I spend with God"
- ◆ Grit in ministry grows from a range of **experiences**, often difficult and challenging circumstances, where learning eventuates.
 - "My family were just in a very deep-rooted domestic violence situation...pastoring was easy compared to that. The experience put things into perspective"
 - "It's not so much about the theological knowledge, but more about the personal experiences I've had with God."

- ◆ **Family** – spouse, parents, children or extended family – were intricately woven into stories of grit in ministry.
 - "I had good role models; my father was always persevering in everything."
 - "She helps me a lot in organising... God gave me a big slap in the face and said, 'You don't have all the gifts... be humble enough to see that your wife has those gifts.'"
 - "I don't have any counsellors in my life, except for God and my wife... She's been a source of strength, of courage, for me in my ministry all these years."
- ◆ **Community** contributions to growing and developing grit in ministry includes mentors such as other pastors, elders, church members or life coaches and professional external supervisors.
 - "I seek advice from retired pastors... to find the solution that causes the least collateral damage"
 - "He doesn't say the right thing, he says what you need to hear"
 - "I went through a downer period... He said, 'We need people like you in ministry'... It's people like that and mentors... who have encouraged me."
- ◆ **Ministry** itself also fed back into growing and developing grit.
 - "Discovering the joy of someone who finds God motivates you to keep going."

These ministry grit-growing elements are represented in the figure below.



Finally, ministry takes place in a particular socio-cultural context which shapes the understanding of grit in ministry in the NZPUC. Participant narratives included socio-cultural considerations for grit in ministry: the changing role of pastors; race and colonialism, and women in ministry.

Practical Ministry Recommendations

From the perspective of the participants, there are things the NZPUC and missions/conferences can do to strengthen their grit in ministry. Recommendations generated from the research for NZPUC and Mission/Conferences are listed here.

◆ Focus on pastoral worker wellbeing and development, including:

- **Value, acknowledge and recognise**
 - “Looking for strengths... people over resources, people over agendas, people over programmes... value people”
 - “When people say we’re here for you, make it real... If I’m not doing well in ministry and you care for me, make sure I’m the first person you come talk to.”
 - “Face-to-face or phone call conversations with people. How are you doing? I think it’s even little things that go a long way in developing grit”
- **Invest, train and develop**
 - “How many of these pastors have we got individual growth plans for how they’re developing?”
 - “From a spouse perspective, having more opportunity for them to be involved in pastoral retreats... contributes to grit. If your spouses feel plugged in then they are more in line with the vision”
- **Formal external supervision and coaching**
 - “Pastors are also concerned at times disclosing things... because they feel it might impact their employment”
 - “Professional supervision has really been fantastic”
- **Teamwork and peer support**
 - There was such a beautiful team atmosphere.”
 - “Encourage exchange between the pastors, because we can be very solitary in ministry”
 - “We must work together to be effective”

◆ Improve policy, processes and systems, including:

- **Human resource capabilities**
 - “I’m all for very clear instructions and job descriptions”
 - “Tidy up some of these important HR issues that spill across into ministry”
- **Consultation and communication.**
 - “Some of us actually don’t mind having the conversation”
 - “Create opportunities for pastors to discuss their challenges together”
 - “An honest contribution from us to our conference... of my failure and my success”

Participants also reflected what pastors can do to strengthen their own grit in ministry. Recommendations generated from the research for pastors are listed here.

◆ Rest

- **God time, hope, faith and trust**
 - “My first strategy for facing challenges is to connect with God”
 - “We need to minister from the overflow”
- **Play, music, hobbies, outdoors**
 - “I just love the bush. It’s a huge outlet and release”
 - “I enjoy working with wood... I spend all week at the office, being able to do this is really enjoyable”
- **Reflect**
 - “I stop for about 10 to 15 minutes every time... sit there quietly, sing, read... just to practise the stopping”
 - “Slowing down. Simplifying, more than speeding up”
- **Humour**
 - “You need a sense of humour... laugh at yourself and laugh together with others”
- **Health**
 - “I try to have a healthy lifestyle”

Learn

- ◆ **Learn**
 - “Be someone who’s willing to always learn”
 - “You learn your craft. You become more competent... and that makes it more enjoyable”
- **Open to feedback**
 - “I value other people’s opinions and other people’s advice”
- **Adapt**
 - “You have a mosaic of cultures here... I had to re-adjust, to re-learn again, to unlearn in order to be able to adapt here”

Organise

- ◆
 - “A lot of positive grittiness can come just from having more organisation over your own life”

Self-manage

- ◆ **Self-aware**
 - “Understand yourself and your limits and make sure that you look after yourself”
- ◆ **Die to self**
 - “The thing that you have to overcome in reality is yourself”

Accept help

- ◆
 - “We take in a lot, and we hardly offload”

Prioritise family

- ◆
 - “In the beginning of my ministry, I prioritised the church, followed by my family... Eventually, I understood that family should come first, followed by the church”

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Duckworth, A. L., Peterson, C., Matthews, M. D., & Kelly, D. R. (2007). Grit: perseverance and passion for long-term goals. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 92(6), 1087.