

5 Ministry Killers and How to Defeat Them

Charles Stone
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What an intriguing title for a volume directed to ministers! The sub-heading sums up the purpose of this book – Help for Frustrated Pastors – including new research from the Barna Group. Unlike the many books being written to address the current needs, frustrations and problems, this one centers its thoughts about ministry issues – “killing,” around current research. This approach strengthens the finding by including three major research works on ministry issues. Some in the pastorate might argue that there are more than 5 killers, but that is the focus of the author as he narrows his focus (all D.Min. Directors know what this is all about and are found encouraging D.Min. students to do that). Actually, the five come from a synthesis and summary of research.

Charles Stone possesses a D.Min. and serves as senior pastor of Ginger Creek Community Church in suburban Chicago. He has been in ministry 30 years and has written numerous articles in church and ministry magazines. Along with his daughter he co-authored a very interesting volume – Daughters Gone Wild – Dads Gone Crazy. His graduate degrees are from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and Trinity

Theological Seminary and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. He and his wife, Sherryl, have three adult children. His web site is www.charlesstone.net.

Dr. Stone is interested in what is causing so many ministers to “lose their joy” or “passion.” He discovered (and we know) that a large number of pastors (80%) are discouraged or dealing with depression. Focus on the Family estimates 1,500 pastors leave their assignment each month.

The author attacked this situation by amassing research about 1,900 pastors and 1,000 non-pastors in partnership with the Barna Group, LifeWay, Research and National Christian Poll.com from Christianity Today, Inc. With real life stories and research, he found that one of five categories “kill” the joy:

1. Head-in-the sand mentality that denies existing problems.
2. Emotional investment in the wrong issues.
3. Unhealthy responses to ministry frustrations.
4. A lone ranger attitude that says, “God and I can handle this.”
5. Attitudes and actions that lead to lonely, hurting spouses.

Stone’s approach is to cover what the research says about our frustrations in the church, how we respond to them and what we would like the people we serve to do differently. He then devotes the third part of the book to how we can defeat those killers and be more joy-filled servants of Christ.

This book’s chapter titles are very creative and descriptive:

Part 1: This Ain’t Kansas Anymore

Part II: “What We’ve Got Here Is...a Failure to Communicate” (What Almost 2,000 Pastors and More Than 600 Church Members Revealed.)

Part III: Whatcha Gonna Do When the Bad Boys Come for You?

Part IV: “Seize the Day, Boys. Make Your Lives Extraordinary.”

The chapters in each section had similar titles.

For dealing with ministerial challenges and issues, the author suggests a model of four decisions that need to be made in order to keep passion and emotional health vibrant:

Speak up with courage (what we want different)

Own up with humility (what frustrates us)

Show up with integrity (how we respond)

The core for these decisions is to open up with vulnerability

The four research studies are explained in the Appendix, but a summary of these is found early in the book. Study 1 – Barna Research Group surveyed by phone 615 pastors (2007). Study 2 – Barna Research surveyed by phone in 2008 1,005 U.S. adults (over age eighteen; 650 self-identified as Christians). Study 3 – In October 2008, LifeWay Research (research arm of the Southern Baptist Convention surveyed by phone 1,002 Protestant pastors. Study four – In January 2009 Christianity Today surveyed (online) 284 pastors.

Stone does an excellent job of comparing, contrasting and synthesizing the data. A good example of this is how he develops results from Barna and LifeWay to this question: “Think about the challenges pastors often face when it comes to their

relationships with people who attend the church. For you, what are the types of issues that cause the more disappointment or frustration between you and the people in your church?" Out of the two sets of results, he develops a chart of "Mega Themes:" Issues involving people's response to my leadership and their response to the church's organizational needs (60%); issues involving people's commitment to their walk with Jesus (30%); issues involving people's relationships with others in the church (15%).

Throughout the book there are many other such cases, complete with excellent tables and graphs. He models how to summarize data in a cohesive and clear way. His work could be used to assist DMin students in how to report their results in their D.Min. study. I suggest that those who teach and assist in research to check the book out for this purpose.

I really like his last chapter in which he and his wife dialogue about those frustrations and concerns for the home (spouses). In a survey from Global Pastors Wives Network, it stated that pastor's wives' issues are the number one reason pastors leave their ministries. I do find a weakness in that the research studies seem to refer to men only as pastors. I didn't find much to refer to women as pastors (not only spouses). This would be a great topic for another book.

This book can be read personally, but each chapter concludes with 'Questions to Ponder' and there could be an excellent group study for staff, lay leaders and other ministers. There are some excellent, usable quotes at the top of each chapter. There are also some excellent vignettes from pastors' struggles to strengthen the application of results.

How do I see the use in D.Min. studies? I have already mentioned the example for reporting DMin project research findings. It could also be a sub-text for courses dealing with Ministers' identity issues. DMin directors will find material (illustrations, quotes and life stories) to use in speaking to ministers or ministerial students.

The book is well written and deals with contemporary issues. I plan to use material I have marked. I am ready to recommend it to students and colleagues who teach in the area of Practical Theology. I believe that the book achieves what it intended as based on the goals of the author.