

Interview [Lion] Transcript

September 10, 2024, 6:03PM

<Interviewer 1 started transcription>

Interviewer 1 0:08 All right. Well, welcome lion. Thank you for agreeing to meet with us and participating in this study. Do you agree to having this interview recorded and transcribed?

[Lion] 0:21 Yes.

Interviewer 1 0:31 We are going to begin this interview by asking what have been your emotional and spiritual challenges in Christian ministry.

[Lion] 0:46 Yeah, I think, uh, emotional challenges. Uh would probably be just the wear and tear of caring for people and all the different stuff that goes on in their lives and trying to. Help people work through just the just the junk of life and the depth of the depravity. And then also trying to care for

Burnout

overwhelmed
work/life balance

Trauma

servant
heart

your own family and like turning that switch off and going home and being able to try to leave that stuff. You know that that emotionally over years, you know, takes its toll. Ohm, you know, had some really painful experiences within ministry. Where my uh wife was sexually assaulted and by person in the church and other staff and the elders. Just butchered it, didn't handle it well at all. So there. So there were things that were incredibly painful that we've experienced, I think spiritually, umm, you know you you're trying to listen to the will of God. You're trying to make sure you're discerning and hearing, and you know you don't get it right all the time. And I think just uh, you know, trying to

Category
Mental
Oppression

provide the best guidance and direction on behalf of the Lord as possible, knowing that you're a

flawed individual and. And so I think those are some of the spiritual, I think some I think to add to it,

exhaustion
overwhelmed

you've also got, umm, just the exhaustion of life and ministry and family that that can sometimes I'll

speaking about what it did to me. I realized that in the Lord really convicted me of this, that my

self-aware
revelation

relationship with Jesus, I think started becoming very professional and less personal, because the

moment I step off that stage. Uh, the next Sunday, I better have another really good message. And in

the midst of the week, you've got just a ton of meetings and you know, meeting with people,

boundaries
internal
conflict

emergency stuff comes up tragedy stuff comes up. But you still got to deliver on Sunday and. And so

you, I could find myself easily going to the word to really look at what's the next message I'm going

need vs.
want

to give versus I wanna really just spend time with my Heavenly Father. So. So I think those were

some of the, you know, just off the top of my head, some of the challenges.

Interviewer 1 3:39 That is, uh, quite a list actually. And I heard you talk about the wear and tear of

the ministry. The family how to balance family, how to switch from this to that and that constant

switching. You talked about depravity and maybe that exposure to the. That aspect of human

existence of life, some people's lives.

[Internet Connection Difficulty 4:31-6:02]

Interviewer 1 6:02 Some of what you are sharing is related to people and working with people, but other is related to the church and the mishandling of a horrendous event within your personal life and in the life of your wife.

[Lion] 6:19 Yep.

Interviewer 1 6:31 Would you be willing to say more about those experiences?

[Lion] 6:31 Sure.

Interviewer 1 6:36 I'm wondering which one of those items you would want to then expand a little bit more and talk more in depth about?

[Lion] 6:54 Yeah, I'm really open to whatever. I mean it's umm, you know, I think it's just been a part of the story and the journey. You know, there's another part that I didn't get into because, you know, when you when we start thinking of physically, you know, I hit which added to the emotional side but. I hit the wall and burned out and experienced depression and had to get on some medication to help work through that and you know, so you know it's just part of the kind of the part of the story of the what God has done. And through my life over these years, so really whatever you feel like would be most helpful.

conflicted
emotionally
dysregulated

Interviewer 1 7:38 Hmm. Alright, so the first one then that I would like to hear more about is your relationship with Jesus becoming professional rather than personal?

purpose

[Lion] 7:50 Yeah. So I was. So I became a senior pastor in my late 20s. It was something I never wanted to do. I thought I was gonna be a youth pastor for a really long time and many other people.

pressure
people-please

Uh started making it obvious that they really thought I should be and I wasn't seeking it out. And anyway, Long story short, God just kept bringing confirmation over and over and over again. That's

calling

what he was calling me too. So end up transitioning to becoming a senior pastor. And you know, for the first time, learning what does it mean to lead elders and what does it mean to lead the finance

overwhelmed
alone
under-
prepared
lack of
support

team? What does it mean to lead a staff and what does it mean to, you know, all these all these things

that you're just kind of thrust into significant amount of responsibility and so you know for me, I

found myself, you know, reading a ton trying to seek wisdom and counsel from others. Meanwhile,

you know youth ministry, you could get away with a 1520 minute message that would create a lot of

lack of
preparation

interest into then following up and breaking kids into small groups and having discussions that would

get by

drive those things home further biblically. Well, you can't do that. Well, we couldn't do that in a

Imposter
syndrome
unsure

Sunday morning. So you've got to really be prepped. You've got to be prepared. You've got to do your

theological training, so I just found myself immersed in uh, you know, really trying to make sure the

message was solid and it was good. It was effective. I was fortunate I've been able to lead growing

DRIVEN

churches and so, you know, so that to me there was a pressure and probably some of it's imposed on

by myself just, you know, I was an athlete. And so this this desire to perform. And so I just found

performance

myself. It was a it became. I found myself having a relationship where I felt like being in the

struggle

scriptures or ministry. Just became a grind. And so I remember wrestling through discipleship and are

Responsibility

we really discipline? And I feel like God's gonna hold me accountable. For what do we do with

longing
questioning
seeking

Matthew 28 and our church? And so which is a much longer story. However, when I was away at this two day, like immersive discipleship experience, if you will, it was at the at the end of it. I remember going out to my car. I was. I was in Idaho to very cold. It was November and I felt like the Lord said something. In you like that leaf that's dead on the ground needs to die. And again, it was really weird.

listening
rushing
Revelation
listening

Wasn't an audible voice. It was just. It was this moment that I felt like God was speaking through the Holy Spirit to say something, but I didn't have any clue what that meant. So later on that evening or that day, I get on a plane to fly home from Idaho to Florida. Uh, I've gotta preach the next Sunday. So I'm still working on my message on the plane and I'm reading and I felt like in the midst of all that, God makes it really clear what inside of me needed to die. And so the next day I'm preaching multiple

out
Job, list
passionless

services. And so I'm up front preaching and all of a sudden I'm. I'm. I'm up there and in the midst of law I'm preaching. I feel like the Lord's like I want you to tell the church what I told you last night. I'm like, no, you know, I'm like I'm preaching right now, you know? And and so obviously, you know

Release

he won. And so I just closed my Bible and and I just said, you know, hey, this is what's happened over this past few days. It was a powerful two days and let tons of conviction. Umm and I said the Lord

Vulnerable
daring

really impressed in my heart that if we're gonna become a disciple making church, it's gonna have to first start with me. And I've realized that my relationship with Jesus has become very professional and

humility
repentance

he's called me to greater intimacy, to not forget my first love. And you know if he's gonna do something here that's going to be around causing people to want to follow Jesus be changed by Jesus

& on mission with Jesus, then it's got a first start with me. And so I'm confessing that as your pastor
and repenting of that already did with the Lord. But I want I want to see this shift happen in my heart
and in ministry to where we make that the main thing & anyway kind of the short of that is that had a

Epiphany

significant change in my heart and in my life of just I think understanding that's what it was that's why
you know I think you know allowing. Umm, the weariness of the position and the weariness of trying

Restoration

empty
ownership

to deliver at a high level all the time every week, week after week. I just think it's not the Church's
fault. That was my own responsibility and I allowed it to get there. And so, yeah, so God just really

Relationship

convicted me of it. So just realized I had to make some significant changes and it had to first start with

learning what it meant to truly just spend time with Jesus, not for another message. But the Jews truly

topic

purpose

spend time with him. And so had to set up some new habits and uh patterns to see that change. And

it's revolutionize revolutionized my life.

Interviewer 1 14:07 I'm sorry you can't see me. In order to keep my Internet I'll have to keep my

video off. But, it seems it was very cathartic and this change in your ministry, when you listened and

we're obedient, uh kicking and screaming...

[Lion] 14:31 Yeah.

Interviewer 1 14:38 And you did it anyway and there was fruit. Can you expand on that?

Exuberant

[Lion] 14:39 Fair. Yeah. Yeah, yeah, I would say just personally the fruit. Ohh. So I get up every day

like I literally cannot wait to wake up and go downstairs, get my coffee, go into my study and my

consistent

protective

adoration

teachable

gratitude

Fruit

proud
delightedcalling
not
requirement

house and just spend time with the Lord. Spend time with his word to journal. Uh, and like, nobody gets that time. Like I will not schedule over it. I will not. I'll just get to my time with Jesus later. And you know, it's just, it's something that's incredibly special to me and that those, I mean, I just think of the years that I've had now of practicing of just spending time with him, not in a check. The box you did your quiet time, but like truly crawling up in the lap of the father and just spending time with him.

devotion

And in his word, and at times crying out to him at times. Umm, just pleading uh for guidance and wisdom and direction at times just being still and being quiet. At times, feeling like everything I'm reading, nothing's jumping off the pages. But I'm just grateful that I'm just with my father. Umm, you know? So it's been, it's been quite the journey for me that has as truly born incredible fruit. Uh, in so many aspects, you know, both in my just in my own personal life and healing my marriage are four kids. They're all married now. We've got 3 grandkids. Three of them are in full time professional ministry. One of them's. Very active in the church. She's an incredible disciple maker, but he's got a job outside the church, even though we tried to get all our kids not to be a church. Meaning the work we always wanted them to be inside of a church. It's not on staff, but. But you know, even the guys that I disciple are able to speak from a place of knowing what it feels like to. To feel like you, I had. I had to be spending time with God because it's an it's what you do when you're in my role. It's like an expectation. I would forfeit the responsibility if I'm not spending time with the Lord and so at times it was a duty. It was a responsibility. It was. It was. It was, uh. I don't wanna say an obligation, but there's aspects of that. And when the all that shifted to being something that like I long for and it's the

Lesson
Journey

very thing that I want to get up and & do. Yeah, that was a game changer for me, but it came through a ton of pain. Sadly enough, I wish I could have gotten there without all the pain involved.

Interviewer 1 18:09 Alright, so another thing you talked about were symptoms of depression.

[Lion] 18:27 Yeah.

Interviewer 1 18:30 Can you speak more about your experiences or the challenges of experiencing that?

embracing
role
priest
provider
+
protector

[Lion] 18:36 Yeah. So umm, I was lead Pastor transitioning a church. Uh, my. My natural wiring is

as a driver. Wanna get things done? So. You know, my kind of the my attitude or my the grain inside

of me is like you don't quit like you. You give it everything you got to give it your best, so trying to

do that in every area like I wanted my wife to feel loved and cared for one of my kids to feel loved

and cared for. I did not want them resenting God or the church because their dad spent more time with

Leader

Responsibility

Caring

other people. So I was very conscientious of that, trying to make sure I was investing into them.

squeezed dry

Trying to care for our staff trying to lead our elders and we were also a portable church at the time,

and so it was. It was just. It was just felt like I was constantly giving out & leading and trying to care

for so many people and so many things started a capital campaign trying to raise millions to buy our

spread
thin

land and build a facility. And so there were just. Meanwhile, was also coaching Muslim like kids

teams trying to, you know, we were building relationships with parents that were far from Jesus. And

so seeing tons of fruit, like seeing awesome stuff, my wife felt cared for, my kids felt cared for.

Seeing lots of people coming to Jesus and baptize and that was awesome. But all of a sudden I felt something inside of me like I was. I was tired, but I just thought that was just normal and my attitude was just, you know, just suck it up. That's just part of leadership. It's what happens. You know you need to keep working out, so I'd keep working out. You know, I was still spending time with Jesus in the morning. This is before this. This time was before I hit uh. When God really convicted me down the road, and so I remember we were dealing with something with our elders and I could find myself emotionally getting upset. And I could find myself like at times really, really hurt. And I started noticing like even at home or something would happen or something on the TV. And I'd start crying. I'm like, what is going on? And so it just, it just wasn't normal for me. Like I like. I cry. It's not like I'm not a crier like that. That's not a big deal, but it was over things that were just unusual for me and so I started to notice something was wrong, but I didn't know what it was, and my only solution was pushed through it like it'll pass. No big deal, so we get to kind of the late like after Easter wore out the whole deal having conflict with the elders because they. There was just some, just incredibly, what felt like to me, just incredibly just nonsense and I realized I was. I was getting in a place that was not good, and so I finally & I'd been due for a sabbatical for years, but it was never a good time for the church. So I so I never got it. Instead of just saying I'm sorry, I'm gonna do what's best for me like that. That concept did not. Uh, I didn't understand that concept before. So I went to them and said guys, I need a break. I'm wiped. I'm exhausted. I've been due for a sabbatical for over three years. It's never been good for the church, but I have to take it and they're like, no, I think you're right. So I had

martyr

empty
cup

stifled

Twist gates

self-
sacrificecompassion
fatigue

Rest

advocate

cry for
help

Refresh

a three month sabbatical, and so my mentor. Uh, he reached out to me and he says, hey, I want you

refresh

and you know, you and your wife to get on a plane. Uh, I want you to fly out here. I want you to

restoration

spend a few days with me and some of the people here at our on our staff, some counselors and so on

wounds of
2 brother

and so forth. So anyway, so we get out there. We're spending some time together and he says, I think

you're depressed. And I said there's no way I said. First off, I'm too young. You know, I was in my

late 30s. Uh, you know, I don't feel like I'm. I'm not wallow, you know? I just didn't. I didn't

understand depression. I didn't understand any of it. He's like, no, I really think you are. And I said, he

said, I go, I want you to go see a psychiatrist when you get back. And I'm like, no, I'm good. I just

covenant

need some rest and he's like, no, I want you to promise me you're gonna go see it. It's a way we had

compassion

this back and forth argument finally just said quit arguing with me. Just do it. And so I said, alright,

Trust

I'll do it. So sure enough, when we came back, I went to go see one, and sure enough, she said.

Without a doubt, you have a low form grade of depression because your serotonin levels are all jacked

Beyond
limits

up and you pushed your body and emotionally way farther than it should have gone. I'll, I'll give you a

perfect example. This is some of the foolishness of what I would do. So we'd take our family on

vacation. We drive to the East Coast from Texas to sea. My wife family, which was like 20 some

Lack
of
boundaries

hours and then. Then, uh, because we didn't have anybody at the time that could fill in on that specific

Sunday, I had to fly back to preach. Well then I got stuck in Louisiana at midnight. I had to get a

Pride

rental car drive all night. Preached 3 services. When I got there, by the time I got there, it showered,

preached 3 services, had to do a membership class and then somebody took me back to the airport,

luty
vs.
joy

flew back to the East Coast, then about 12 hours later, got some rest and then drove my family 26 hours back to the like that. Like when I think about that, I would tell anybody like that is just dumb. Like why in the world would you but from my mindset at that age and at that time was like I'm just like that's what you do when you're being responsible to care for your church and to step up and leadership and you know, you don't, you don't drop balls and all that kind of stuff. So it was that kind of thinking over all these years that I think just led to my exhaustion and one of the things that the psychiatrist said is, you have no concept of self care. And I said you're right that I said it's it feels selfish. So when I think of self care, it's going to come at the expense of my wife. It's going to come at the expense of my kids. It's gonna come at the expense of my job. It's gonna like who? Who am I gonna say? No, I'm sorry. I'm going to go take care of me and ignore like, that's how it felt because I didn't have. I never saw it modeled, and there's no books at the time that were definitely written on how to self care as a path like it just wasn't a thing, at least at least if it was. I was ignorant or unaware of it, and so, you know, trying to and I would think, well, yeah, I get up at 4:30 and go work out. I mean that's self care while I was getting up at 4:30, when I'm going to bed so late because my kids are, you know, so it's just I wasn't restful, but I was doing it out of. That's something I can do for myself to try to help me, you know? Do keep the long haul so anyway. So during the sabbatical went to counseling to try to figure out like, how did I? How did I find myself here in this place? Umm. Got on some medication which was helpful, but it was also at the end of that. So I had a three month sabbatical, was at the end of two months that I found out that my about what happened to my wife,

few of
self

which then led to a whole other slew of stuff. But I think what I've been able to do over the years is is

hopeless

really be able to help people like they're there was no amount of praying that was going to Get Me

rock
bottom

Out of that depression. Like I had prayed and prayed, and prayed and prayed, I really feel like there

are times to where yeah, prayer is still important and necessary, but there are times when you're gonna

accountability

need to get some medication to be able to help Reset some things. That because of my poor choices,

had really jacked some things up, and that's not true for everybody, but that was my situation. That

life-changing

and and so for me then it was it was so painful going through that like I don't ever wanna find myself

gut-wrenching

there again. And so now listening to the when the flags come up, uh, you know, when I'm like, whoa,

I'm starting to feel a certain way or. Oh my goodness, I'm starting to experience certain like now I'm

listening to those because the because the pain was enough to wear. I don't ever wanna find myself

there again. And you know, probably a couple years ago I started feeling somewhat in my fear was it

was right after COVID really didn't take a take much vacation through all that mess. And we went

DIVISIVE
Issues

through a lot here. Because we're a very diverse church and so dealing with the racism stuff, not only

the COVID stuff, you know, there was just a lot of stuff, like a lot of people did &. And so realizing

Discernment

coming around almost a year in 2021, like in May of just going, I know something's wrong. I know I

need a break, but my fear is a vacation isn't gonna solve this and so it was just, you know, coming to

grips with some of that stuff and trying to figure out what was wrong and. And so anyway, I don't

know, it might be more than what you wanted, but as some thoughts on the depression side?

Interviewer 1 28:49 That is what we want to hear, those experiences and how it was for you...the journey. But then also as a result of that there was some kind of warning system. You can feel the direction that this is going and you know you don't wanna go there...and you know you need to do something now to change that trajectory. So then moving into what you alluded again is the situation that happened with your wife and the challenges there...

[Lion] 29:42 Yeah.

Interviewer 1 29:44 And then also the way that the elders mishandled it.

[Lion] 29:48 Yeah.

Interviewer 1 29:49 Would you mind speaking more about that?

NOT
listening

[Lion] 29:54 Yeah. So you know, when I took my sabbatical, you know, shortly after I started, my wife had said, I don't. I don't wanna go back and I'm like, what do you mean you don't want to go back? Ohh I just feel like you know, and she would say some different stuff. And I'm like, sweetheart, you know, we don't run from our problems. You know. I we deal with them head on. I'll keep addressing some of this with our elders and I said, but you know, we're going back. And so she would periodically, through the couple months she would like, find these other pastor jobs, and she'd send it

Stubborn
two-way
street

ack of
communication
Two-way

to me. And I, you know, I just kind of laugh and I'm like, sweetheart, you know, I'm not entertaining this. And anyway, so Fast forward to the end of two months so that the objective was to meet with the

Abandoned
ack of
care

Angry

Justify
fraid to
face truth

ack
of
communication

Frustration

manipulation

elders at the end of the two months for a recap, well through those two months, not a single one of

those guys checked on me. They never reached out. Never said. Hey, how are you doing? & [wife]

would be like, hey, that's unhealthy, like, these guys aren't caring well for you, why aren't they

checking on you? Why aren't they asking how you're doing? Why aren't they just seeing how our

families doing? And I'm like, and I always make excuses. I'm like honey. They're busy. They got tons

of stuff they got going on, you know, we'll be OK. Don't worry about it. She's like, that's not OK, you

know? And and I would. Unfortunately, I would just kind of diminish that voice because you know, I

would just say, well, she doesn't really understand and you know, so on and so forth. But she

understood quite a bit, actually. So the so we were. So I took one of my sons on a fishing trip and my

wife had taken the rest of the kids to some friends of ours in another town. That wasn't that far away.

So she's like, hey, when you guys are done, just why don't you guys drive down and we'll hang out

over the weekend. And then when we go back, you know, she and I are gonna meet with the elders. I

said OK, that's great. Well, even while I was at this, this, you know, fishing trip, she would be sending

me these job opportunities. And I wasn't. You know, I'd, I'd see it, but I wasn't even looking into him.

And so when the week was over and we drive down there and we, you know, get to see each other,

you know it's late. So we end up saying hi to everybody. We go to bed and she's like, hey, did you

look at those opportunities? And I said no, she's like, why not? And I said, sweetheart, we're not

leaving. I said we're, I said I'm meeting with the elders on Monday. I said we're going back after the

third month of sabbatical. I said. We'll figure it out. You know, we don't run from our problems and

ack of order

and so and the and the main thing that kind of triggered it was they wanted her to stop working. And

Anger
Confusion

I'm like, this is ridiculous. You're not paying me more? None of the other people's spouses have to stop working. What? Like it just it just didn't make sense. It just seemed incredibly foolish. Umm,

NO
Authority

there are justification was a conflict of interest. I'm like, how is this a conflict like some of you? She was a designer, you know, you guys have used her in your own homes, you know? So it just didn't make sense to me and so I'm like, sweetheart, we're not leaving. We're gonna press into this and she's

childhood
Trauma

like, well, I need to tell you something. And I'm like, what now for context. My wife had been abused as a child by one of her brothers and the and so was her twin sister. What was communicated to her by

guilt

her brother was if you say anything to mom and dad, it'll destroy the family. So grateful for her. She

Strength
Fortitude

actually stopped the abuse, she told her brother one day. I'm not doing this anymore. You need to

stop, which was unbelievable. Uh. So Fast forward now. Uh, the guy that assaulted her was my best

hacking
stray

friend. He was a worship pastor. He and his wife and family would take vacations with our family.

Very, very close. Been doing ministry. For a number of years together, his kids were friends with our

kids and so of course, when she says, hey, do you remember, you know, this? When we were at this

place and blah, blah, blah, blah, I'm like, Yep, Yep. Yep. And she's like &, you know, he did this. And

again I was just. I went through a ton of emotion. One I'm hurting. One I was incredibly betrayed by

Anger
Confusion
Isolated
Fearful

my by my friend and teammate. I'm hurting from my wife because this happened to her. I was also

ticked at my wife for not telling me sooner. I was fearful of what is this going to do to our Community

because you know, once again, you know, people in leadership at churches, you know, just there was

Image

Image

& like, what am I gonna say to the elders? And so I'm just, there's all these different thoughts,

pattern of
lack of
care

feelings, emotions. And so for [wife], the reason she wanted to to get out was I don't trust the elders
that are going to care for us. I just rather get out of town and then she was going to tell me because

Repeating patterns

she was fearful of what it would do to the church and that what was being communicated before was,
if you say anything, it'll destroy the church. So just like when she was a child, if you say anything to

Angry
helpless

mom and dad, it will destroy the church. I mean it will destroy the family. So the counselor had to
help me with all that cause. I was just so ticked & and I was hurt for her. You know, it's like she's an
amazing woman. She's not. I mean, she was a virgin when we got married. She's not promiscuous.

She's not. She doesn't leap. I mean, it was just, it's just ridiculous. Of what happened. And so I'm

going through all this stuff. Just trying to wrestle through this, she tells him on a Friday night. So we

have Saturday and Sunday to kind of somewhat process and all that stuff. So Monday we head back.

We're having this meeting with the elders. They it they start off by saying, hey, why haven't you, you

know, stopped your wife's bit like, that was one of the first thing I'm like, are you kidding me? If that

First off, do you guys care how we're doing? Like ohh well, of course I said. OK, but let me answer

your question. We did stop. Well, it's still the website still up. I said. Go ahead and try it, I said. It's

defunct, I said. I don't know how to actually remove it off of the the web I said, but you can't use it

whatsoever. And then they were like, well, we also heard that you're interviewing at churches. And I

said no, never interviewed at one. Where do you get? Well, we have evidence that you are said give

me the evidence. I said I have an interview at one single church. Well, your daughter posted a thing I

set up
agenda
lack of
care
lack of
direction

Betrayal

inappropriate source

Accuser
of the
rethren

said. Are you talking about going and? Visit [wives] Mom and we went to our church and she took a picture and placed it on Facebook. So we attended her mother's church, and now you're accusing me of like it was just weird, like, just weird. And I said, what's going on here? Because this feels like an interrogation, not a check in to see how we're doing. Well, you know, we just, you know we've got

lack
of
vision

some questions and I said sure, but what I didn't realize that I found out later is that one of the guys while I was gone was trying to stir things up to be the lead guy, which ended up happening down the road. Umm. And the church ended up folding by the way, which is super sad, because if we were

AGENDA - stab in the back

running over, I don't know, 12-13 hundred people at the time. And anyway, umm, so the meetings not great. I'm super annoyed. We, you know, I just gotten two months of trying to get on track and this,

pinning out
of control

this one meeting kind of sends me backwards. And so my wife goes to go to the bathroom and one of the one of the elders comes up and says, what's what's going on? I said. What was that like? This was a joke and he's like, well, I'll, I'll share with you later. It's not great and you know, as easy as there

some issues within our elder board and and I said obviously he's like but what's going on with you, I

Compassion

can tell somethings wrong. I said Doc, you know, he was a doctor. I said I I can't go into it right now

and he's like, you can trust me. You can trust me. And so he takes me outside. He goes what's going

Passion
Zeal

on? So I tell him. And he's like what he goes. We're gonna fire him There is no way and I said, listen

to me. I said [wife] and I need to, I said. My first thing is to try to protect and care for her. I want to

make sure that she's being cared for and not prioritizing the church over her. At the same time, we

Justice?
Honesty?
Transparency?

want to protect the church so we don't know if we just need to quietly resign and leave. We don't

know how we need to go about this, I said. I just found out and I'm to be honest, my head's just really.

But I need some time. I will tell the elders, but I just need some time. This is absolutely no problem.

You can trust me, I said. I know. So [wife] comes out, we get into the car. She's like, what's that

about? I said I'll tell you in a few minutes and our house is probably 12 minutes away from this where

we were meeting and I started to tell. I said hey, Doctor Ray was asking and I told him he promised

me he wouldn't say anything & literally my phone rings and it's docked it. It's it's the gentleman I was

talking to the elder and he says, hey, I told the elders and they're on the phone. They wanna they want,

they want to hear it from you and [wife] goes. This is why I should have never said anything, and so I

tell them what happened and literally it wasn't like, we are so sorry as [wife] doing OK, you know,

none of that, it was just OK, we'll get back to you tomorrow. And I'm like, wow. I'm like, alright, so

of course my wife is hurting. She's super upset. You know, we're trying to protect our kids, you know,

from them, really finding out what's going on. And so the next day they call me and they wanna. Two

of them are going to meet with me, and so we go meet and they're asking me all kinds of questions.

Well, one of the elders is he worked for the fire department as an investigator to kind of figure out,

you know, if it's arson or not. And he's asking all kinds of questions, and I just literally look across the

table. I said, do you really think for a moment that my wife is lying? Because why would you say

that? I said because, you know, I know what you're doing. Is that you're interrogating me? As if we've

got something to win by accusing somebody of sexual assault, I said. What would [wife] ever have to

gain from any of this? I said, you know her and you know her story. That's not what I'm doing, I said.

Betrayal

cover
up

Interrogation
after
Betrayal

Accusatory

Ohh it is. Well, we're just trying to figure out what happened. I said I'm telling you what happened, he

said. Are you willing? Are you willing to go confront him? I said yes, as long as two of you go with

Brighteous

me, I said. I'm telling you guys, I'm gonna be very upfront if you guys do not handle this biblically,

I'm out like I'm only going to walk through this biblically, but I will not handle it any other way. OK,

that's fine. That's fine. So they set up a meeting couple days later and it's me and the seat. The other

guy that did this to [wife] is right across the table from me and the two elders are on either side of me.

Lack of Protection

No order

They said, go ahead. You know, he doesn't know why we're here, but go ahead and and I said, so. I I

confront him, I said. Said his name, and I said I wanna know, [wife's name] told me that you did this

and I want to know if that's true. And his eyes got big. He kind of leaned back in his chair. And his

Body language

Decent

response was I don't remember. And like you don't remember. Well, you know she's like a sister. I

family

said Ohh, don't even don't even use that as a as the example I said Jeff, it is taking everything in me

Fury

not to come across this table and literally beat the crap out of you and the other was like oh, I said, no,

no, no, no. I said I want you to know. Like what you did to me and my wife is awful and unspeakable.

Lack of
Appropriate
response
↓
concerned
with
image

desperate

And I said the fact that your answer is you can't, I said, lie. For heaven's sakes, tell me. No, but you've

you've you've admitted through the way you've handled it. I said, I'm done I I said, I think you guys

have heard enough. I leave and my mentor calls me and I tell him what happens. And he's like, Oh my

Done

gosh, she goes, that's the nail in the coffin. That's that's easy to to, you know, and another guy also

outside of our context, had reached out and told him the same thing, you know, like, oh, yeah, it's

nailing the coffin. So the elders call me the next day and they said hey, but, well, you know, it's really

cowards

his word against her where he he really didn't admit it. So we really can't do anything. And so I said,

reckoning

guys, it's simple. I said I'm done. I resign, I said. I I refuse to continue to do this. Whatever you're

doing and you, you guys don't have, and I apologize can know you both. You were ladies, but I said

Anger

you guys don't have the balls to be able to make the decisions that need to be made and and handle

Responsibility

this appropriately. I said I'm done, and so then I said, you know, I'd like to be able to resign, you

ack of
Responsibility

know, I'll, I'll write a letter. And I'd like to be able to tell the church thank you. And no. No, we'll,

- we'll, we'll take it from here. And like guys, I do not think that's a wise decision. I really think no. No,

we'll be fine. And we'll have somebody meet you at the office and pack up your like, they literally

treated me like I was a criminal. Like they had somebody pack up my office with me there had to

shame

walk me out. Take my keys like as if I had done something and and then they in front of the church

Lies

just butchered it. On that Sunday, they told people that [Lion]'s mentally not well. He, you know, just

went through a whole bunch of stuff. Well, my phone starts blowing up. Like what? The Hecks going

on the elders are lying like all this stuff, like it became a huge mess and and we had an agreement of

Burned bridges

what was going to be communicated and they just absolutely destroyed it. And so then they come

back and they're like, hey, would you mind coming the following week? You know, I think people

really do need to hear, and there was a part of me that wanted to say, screw you guys like you had the

Devastated

opportunity. I'm not gonna help you now. And and of course. Thankfully, you know the Lord worked

Compassion

on me. Enough not to respond that way. And and because we love this church, we love these people.

We didn't want, I said. But you know the worst of guy? He still hadn't missed a decent I will not be on

Boundaries

the same stage with him. So he can take a leave of absence that day. And so, you know we we. So I agreed to it, but even still like they wanted, which was fine. I mean, I wrote the letter they they got to see what I was gonna read. They had two elders standing on both sides of the stage in case I guess I

Control

went rogue or whatever. I mean, again, as I look back the way that I was treated was like I had done

something criminal when in reality is what was criminal was done to my wife and they would not do

Despicable

Self-protection

anything about it. And then so we ended up calling. So, you know, I resign. Church was super sweet. I

mean, they gave me a standing ovation and they were just incredibly kind. But part of the letter was. I

Truth

just want to be clear, I am resigning but it's not because I'm mentally unstable. It's not like there was

just numerous things that they had and I could have easily, like I could have easily sued them, but of

Forgiveness

course I'm not going to do that. And and I had about 3 or 400 people asked me if I'd go plan another

church and they said, you know, they gather a whole lot more people and we go plant another church.

And I'm like, as much as my flesh would love to to do that because I feel so wronged. I said that's not

Paw

the Lord, I said. I feel what's best for my family is is we need to leave town so that my wife can heal

and so, uh, so I really. So we we did that we so I resigned. I kept going back to the counselor cause I

Self-care

cause I knew I still needed to work through a lot of hurt. Uh was bringing my wife because, you

know, cause my kids now are what cause they're seeing their mother in a fetal position in the bedroom

because she was just so devastated of what had happened. And they're going. Dad, what's wrong?

Why aren't we able to go see our friends? Why can't we go back to the school? Because his wife

taught at the elementary school. And they're looking at me and they literally go. Dad, what did you

desperate

do? You know, and trying to help my kids not resent the church, trying to help my kids not think that I

did something. But the same time protect their mother. Umm, you know, it's just it was just a ton of

stuff in the midst of all of that, of trying to navigate that with as much grace and clarity. And you wisdom

know, there's just so much stuff. Umm, so. I really wanted out of ministry like I begged and pleaded

like I was. I was like, listen, Jesus, I'm gonna follow you. I still believe in your church. I just don't

fleeing
Jonah

think that pastoral ministry is like I'll be that volunteer that you know, because I had plenty of people

asking me to, you know, go into business and do other stuff. And I knew I could make money at it.

And umm, but unfortunately my mentor again in my life. Just as like [Lion], you're just hurt. This is

salve,
oalm

what God's called you to do. You're just you need some time to heal, you know? And and

unfortunately, he was right. You know, I just. I did. I couldn't turn it off like I'd go. We'd go visit

other churches. Well, you know, during this season of being out of work and and I couldn't like, I

calling

couldn't turn off the the mechanisms in my head to think about why are they doing this and they

should do this and you know obviously. Evaluating the preaching and all that stuff, but. So I got away

Respite

for about 3 days to a friend of Mines Lake house, and for three days I just fasted and prayed and work

through forgiveness. For each one of the for the for the guy that was my friend, and for each one of

the elders by name and just work through everything that they did and said that had caused such hurt

and pain to me and my family and just work through, you know, just trying to truly forgive them

sacrifice

because I knew that if I was gonna move forward. I this is for my benefit, not for, not for theirs. And

so that was powerful for me and, you know, and I and I told the counselor, I'm like, hey, I do feel like

wisdom

God's called me back in the ministry. But I'm not going to even start interviewing until you sign off

carins

that you think I'm healthy enough. Because I just don't want to take all this baggage and mistrust and

impose it on other elders or other churches or other Staffs. And so so anyway. So yeah, all that kind of

culminated and eventually had to start the interview process. And of course, it's painful because they

see your resume and it looks really, really good until they say so. What happened? Why did you?

just wrenching

Why did you resign from the church you were at?

Interviewer 1 49:52 Yeah.

[Lion] 49:53 And then you're like, well, buckle up because, you know, I know how I've been on both

sides of this. I know how this sounds on the other side and and I would tell him I know to some of you

I might be damaged goods. I know you're probably thinking there's two sides of this story, as there

ORDER

wisdom
thoughtful

always is. You're welcome to reach out, I said. In fact, I took some people with me. We went to go

confront the elders and you know, I took the counselor with me. I took a one of my my closest friends.

Who is incredibly spiritual, mature and I took two other people that were very invest in our life that

were much older and I brought them with us to confront just the what had happened. And and [wife]

went with me. She really wanted to go. And you know, we talked through a bunch of stuff, which was

just sad and and I think part of it was. You know, one of the questions they asked near the end was

what do you what is it that you want us to do? And my wife, she goes. I just want you to tell the truth

and and they said the church can't handle the truth. And I said, and that's where you're wrong. And

Dust off feet

this just reaffirmed and and the counselor walked out. And he's like, you know, it goes. I've been doing this for a really long time. He was. He was in much older man and he was a former pastor and he's just like that is some of the most dysfunctional group of men I've ever seen in my life. And you know, and I think the part that was challenging for me was I had been a part of that group and there was an aspect of I didn't have to take responsibility necessarily for how they handled my situation.

Responsibility

But I had to figure out how was I a part of that group and I did not better prepare them. How to handle these situations? And I think part of it was I just always felt like it was my job to take care of it when

Training

Teach a man to fish

stuff would come up. Don't worry, guys. I'll take care of it. I'll take care of it. I'll take. Well, they were never forced to have to really deal with really hard. Difficult sinful stuff because I would just take

care of it. Well, now I'm out of the picture. They don't have a choice to have anybody else. Now they have to and they weren't prepared, so I felt like that was at least a learning thing for me. Like I've got

Nothing wasted

Lesson learned

to do a better job of preparing our elders to know how to navigate some really hard stuff versus just always doing it for them. Umm, but it also was I you know, I needed to learn what self care looked

enabling

like. I had to learn. Yeah, I had to learn a lot, but it was incredibly painful. But God has used that &

both, but he's got his use that in our entire family like it's it's been it was very painful for my kids, but

now they're much older and we're able to talk through what those years were like for them. Umm, it's

been pretty powerful to see how even in spite of their hurt, confusion, anger. The God's still been able

to use that in a in a powerful way. So anyway, I know that was super long and I'm almost out of time

so.

God's way

Interviewer 1 53:05 Well, it does sound as if the [fallen] nature of people is also in the church. It seems that some of the challenges come from the interactions of working with people, and even through that though, you maintained your relationship with Jesus. Your relationship, your obedience to the calling, even when it felt as if this this must not be where, where my family needs to be and to keep to keep going.

[Lion] 53:24 Yeah.

Interviewer 1 53:43 We are, almost out of time.

[Lion] 53:44 Yeah.

Interviewer 1 53:47 And so I think what we'll do is we'll transcribe this interview and then we'll circle back around to see if we can follow up to set up another appointment.

[Lion] 54:03 Yeah, I appreciate it. And just so you know, I really appreciate what you guys are endeavoring to do I think. There is a massive need for what you're trying to accomplish, and I just applaud y'all for that's why I told [friend]. You know, when he we were talking, I was like, hey, there's anything I can be a part of helping in any of that. I'd be honored just because you know. I know I've seen a lot of guys get out and burn out and fail out. I just. I think what you're doing is huge, so I appreciate it.

support

humility

Interviewer 2 54:40 Yeah. We appreciate your willingness to meet with us for sure and we will we
will be in touch again the follow up.

[Lion] 54:44 Yeah. Sounds good.

Interviewer 1 54:52 OK. Thank you.

Interviewer 2 54:52 And thank you.

[Lion] 54:53 Thank you guys. <

<Interviewer 1 stopped transcription>

Intersection
of
Trauma/Faith

Need vs. Want

Calling Not a
Requirement

Lack of
Boundaries

Intersection of
Trauma/Faith

Personal
Psychological
Stress/
Work/Life

Codes

Burnout

Overwhelmed

Work/life balance

Trauma

Servant Heart

Exhaustion

Overwhelmed

Self-aware

Revelation

Boundaries

Internal Conflict

Need vs. Want

Conflicted

Emotionally Dysregulated

Purpose

Pressure

People-pleaser

Calling

Overwhelmed

Alone

Under-prepared

Lack of Support

Imposter Syndrome

Unsure

Driven

Performance
Struggle
Responsibility
Longing
Questioning
Seeking
Listening
Rushing
Revelation
Listening
Duty
Job
List
Passionless
Vulnerable
Daring
Humility
Repentance
Epiphany
Restoration
Empty
Ownership
Relationship
Hope
Purpose
Exuberant
Consistent

Protective
Adoration
Teachable
Gratitude
Fruit
Proud
Delighted
Calling not Requirement
Lesson
Journey
Embracing Role
Priest, Provider, Protector
Leader
Responsibility
Caring
Squeezed-Dry
Spread Thin
Martyr
Empty Cup
Stifled
Floodgates
Self-Sacrifice
Compassion Fatigue
Rest
Advocate
Cry for help
Refresh

Refresh

Restoration

Wounds of a brother

Covenant

Compassion

Trust

Beyond Limits

Lack of Boundaries

Pride

Duty vs. Joy

View of Self

Hopeless

Rock Bottom

Accountability

Life-changing

Gut-wrenching

Divisive Issues

Discernment

Not listening

Stubborn

Two-way street

Lack of communication

Two-way

Abandonment

Lack of care

Angry

Justify

Afraid to face the truth
Lack of communication
Frustration
Manipulation
Lack of Order
Anger
Confusion
No Authority
Childhood Trauma
Guilt
Strength
Fortitude
Shocking
Betrayal
Anger
Confusion
Isolated
Fearful
Image
Pattern of Lack of Care
Repeating patterns
Angry & Helpless
Set Up
Agenda
Lack of Care
Lack of Priorities
Accuser of the brethren

Lack of Vision

Spinning out of control

Compassion

Passion

Zeal

Justice

Honesty

Transparency

Betrayal

Cover Up

Interrogation

Utter Betrayal

Accusatory

Righteous

Lack of Protection

No Order

Deceit

Fury

Done

Reckoning

Anger

Responsibility

Lack of Responsibility

Shame

Boundaries

Control

Self-Protection

Forgiveness

Despicable

Raw

Self-Care

Desperate

Wisdom

Fleeing (Jonah)

Salve

Balm

Calling

Respite

Sacrifice

Wisdom

Caring

Gut-Wrenching

Order

Wisdom

Thoughtful

Dust off Feet

Truth

Responsibility

Training

Teach a man to fish

Nothing wasted

Lesson learned

Enabling

God's way

Humility

Support

Researcher Memo

Summary

This process of coding initially felt somewhat intimidating to me because I was not leading with a rubric, but with my instincts and with no expectations. I entered this process hoping to have a transparent experience with myself and with my partner Carly as we worked on this assignment together.

Positionality

My positionality is one of a positivist and transcendentalist; I want to participate in words only so that there is no influence from me on the study. I believe this helps increase trustworthiness and encourages me to examine any bias in me while I am reading, coding, and sharing my experience with Carly.

My Process

I printed my material with triple spaces and had all my highlighters stacked and ready to code. However, I kept picking it up and then setting it down, trying to determine what the “best” process was going to be for coding. Why was this process so daunting for me? I took a few minutes to reflect and re-read my notes that said there was no expectation on my part and chose just to be in the moment and experience the coding process.

I read the article in its entirety, line by line, with no expectation other than to absorb the information. Carly and I communicated several times and set a day to meet together initially to make a plan for our work together. We met via Teams and talked through both of our processes, and they seemed to align beautifully. As I read the article again, I began circling and marking the

document as words jumped out to me, and I lost track of time as I was immersed in the story. As I was reading, I felt a sense of compassion for the subject and his family. However, as the reading progressed, I noticed that I was feeling outraged at what was transpiring throughout the interview. I found myself wondering how “Lion” was feeling throughout the interview, recalling all that he experienced from friends and co-workers that he trusted. I can only imagine the sense of betrayal he may have felt, but I did not want to project my outrage into the process. What thoughts went through his mind when his wife shared her traumatic news with him? How was she feeling sharing it? I wonder how this impacted their marriage and if they recovered from this intensely traumatic experience.

I continued circling and writing words that seemed to make sense to me as I read the article in its entirety. Carly and I met together and compared our coding words together throughout the entire interview. I was surprised at how similar our coding was, and it was fun comparing our experiences and how we arrived at the different words that we wrote. We got through about half of the article during this meeting and planned to meet again in the next few days; we had to find a time when we would both be available. We met again to finalize our coding together and compare our process. After that, we both went through our documents again and created the themes that we noticed in our individual coding.

To find themes, I went through my handwritten notes and typed out all the codes on a separate document. My process was reading line by line, reflecting on each code and its application as I was creating the document. I found myself revising some of the codes as I went through the reading, and typing each word as I read the interview again was extremely helpful in that process. I found myself wondering what this experience was like for the interviewer; was it

challenging to hear the experiences of Lion and his family? Did they engage in self-care practice after the interview was concluded? Did this interview change their spiritual journey at all?

Carly and I met together to compare our themes, and they were similar in nature, but still very different in specific naming. I concluded that there were three over-arching themes in this interview, and they were need versus want; calling not a requirement; and lack of boundaries. Carly and I discussed how we both felt similar feelings reading the article, and our themes were very similar. Our agreement made it easier to find one main theme and it was the intersection of trauma and faith. The trauma seemed to be a recurring theme throughout the interview, and it was deeply tied to his spiritual and vocational journey. Carly and I both felt very somber as we discussed the particular details of this interview and we grieved for what the family experienced.

Methodologist

I would like to dive deeper into the different methodologists like Clark Moustakas and Max Van Manen. I am intrigued by Dr. Moustakas' work in play therapy, as I also work with pediatric patients and hope to read more about their work and their theories as I explore the world of qualitative research.

Conclusion

This process was one of my most memorable experiences in my PhD journey to date. I felt a sense of freedom as I allowed myself to fully experience the coding process, how it spoke to me, and what codes and themes made sense to me as I read the interview. The overall process of coding has opened a new doorway of possibility for me as I dip my toe in the ocean of qualitative research. While I was certain that this type of research was not my cup of tea, I have

enjoyed the process of experiential learning. I look forward to what opportunity will arise next for me in the qualitative world.