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THAT ALL MAY LIVE — THE FUTURE OF THE WOUNDED PASTORS

Catherine Wambui Njagi

Background

This chapter discusses a peculiar category of people, namely, the wounded pastors (with special reference to divorced pastors). It seeks to find out whether divorced pastors can live a full life as Jesus intended when he said that he came so that human beings can have life and have it in abundance (John 10: 10). The mission of Jesus, His death and resurrection was to enable all human beings to live and not just live but have a quality life before death and after death. For a human being to enjoy abundant life, they must live in touch with their deepest aspirations. Men and women have never been able to give up this hope and dream. Jesus Christ declared emphatically that his purpose in coming was to enable us to discover that this is not just a dream but a God-implanted aspiration that he has come to fulfill. Human beings have many aspirations in life but one of the major aspirations for almost all human beings is to have a successful career. When a person is prevented from carrying out his or her chosen career, a certain vacuum is created which prevents them from living a full life.

This chapter looks at the life of wounded pastors and concentrates on divorced pastors and their future in the church. It examines the definition of divorce and looks at the biblical and scholarly views of divorce and remarriage. It will also highlight the causes of divorce among pastors as received from interviews and then look at how the church treats divorced pastors and finally give suggestions on how the church should help divorced pastors live a full life as God intended for them. This chapter is guided by the functionalist theory of marriage and divorce and specifically applies the feminist theory that shows that tension can arise in marriage because of the struggle over money, property and power relations. The data in this chapter were gathered through field research interviews and filling in questionnaires, literature review, and demographic health survey reports, among others.

Introduction

The phrase, that all may live, is derived from Jesus' statement, "I came that all may have life and have it in abundance" (John 10: 10). In Matthew 9: 36, we see Jesus taking notice of the crowd's pathetic situation and having compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. In Matthew 10: 6, Jesus commands his disciples to go and handle the factors that made the crowd to look harassed and helpless. They were to do that by proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God, healing the sick, raising the dead, cleansing those with leprosy and driving out demons. This ties with Jesus' mission statement recorded in Luke 4:18-21, where Jesus stated his mission as proclaiming good news to the poor, proclaiming freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

The mission of Jesus, his death and resurrection was to enable all human beings to live and not just live, but have a quality life before death and after death. For a human being to enjoy abundant life, they must live being in touch with their deepest aspirations. John Huffman (nd, online) argues that no human being is ever to be saved except by the fulfillment of his/ her own nature, and not by the restraint of his/her nature. No human being is ever to be ransomed from his/her sins except by having opened to him/her a larger and fuller life into which he/she has entered. We seem to have displayed before us a large region into which we are tempted to enter, one which is so rich and inviting to us that we immediately begin to ask ourselves if it is possible that there should be such a region. Huffman (nd, online) went on to raise the possibility that perhaps this aspiration is a dream. If it is a dream, is it not amazing that every single person who has walked the face of this earth has had this dream of living life to the fullest that goes beyond contemporary success standards? Men and women have never been able to give up this hope and dream. Jesus Christ declared emphatically that his purpose in coming was to enable us to discover that this is not just a dream. This is a God-implanted aspiration that he has come to fulfill. He put it in these blunt terms: "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly" (John 10: 10).

Human beings have many aspirations in life but one of the major aspirations for almost all human beings is to have a successful career. When a person is prevented from carrying out the chosen career, a certain vacuum is created which prevents them from living a full life. This chapter looks

at the life of wounded pastors and specifies on divorced pastors and their future in the church. It will look at the definition of divorce and look at the biblical scholarly views of divorce and remarriage, it will also highlight the causes of divorce among pastors as received from interviews and then look at how the church treats divorced pastors and finally give suggestions on how the church should help divorced pastors live a full life as God intended for them.

Definition of Divorce

Divorce, also known as dissolution of marriage, is the process of terminating a marital union. Jay Adams (1986: 32) traces the meaning of divorce from Deuteronomy 24:1, Isaiah 50:1 and Jeremiah 3:8 which means to cut off and from the New Testament word *apolyo* which means to loose from, to put from, to put away, to send, release or dismiss. Divorce entails the cancelling of marriage between a married couple under the rule of law of the particular country or state. Divorce law differs in different countries, but in most countries, divorce requires the sanction of a court of law or other legal authorities. Divorce may involve issues of distribution of property, child custody, alimony (spousal support), and child support among other demands, but every country or state has its own guiding rules on these issues. Some countries have very stringent rules on divorce, while some countries allow couples to divorce easily but there are some countries that do not allow divorce such as Philippines, the Vatican City and the British Crown of Dependency of Sark. According to Peter Waithima of Daystar University Kenya, in a research carried out by Daystar University (<https://www.daystar.ac.ke>), 15% of Kenyans divorce every year and 42% of Kenyan divorces happen within the first five years of marriage, 77% between 6-10 years and 23% after ten years of marriage. Further, 20% of pastors in Kenya either divorce or separate.

The Biblical View on Divorce and Remarriage

There are many valid views concerning the biblical teaching on divorce and remarriage. Many scholars have given their views on the issue but, as Shannon (2006) and House (1990) have argued, scholars' views can be summarised into four main positions:

- i. No divorce and no remarriage. This position is held by Charles Ryrie, Bill Gothad and J. Carl Laney. These scholars teach that the Bible does not give any grounds of divorce or remarriage (Laney 1990: 15-54). According to them, marriage is indissoluble, and the covenant relationship is unbreakable until one spouse dies. These scholars hold unto this view despite some biblical texts such as Ezra 10:1-15 where Israelites are commanded to divorce their foreign wives and Matthew 19:9 where Jesus allows divorce on the grounds of adultery.
- ii. Divorce but no remarriage. The main proponent of this position is John Stott (1978). The others are John Piper and William Heth, as quoted by Shannon (2006). These scholars argue that Christians can divorce, but none of the parties must remarry as long as the partner is alive. They quote Matthew 5:32 where Jesus forbade people from divorcing, except for marital unfaithfulness and argues that whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. This view is also held by the Allegheny Wesleyan Methodist Connection in its 2014 discipline that says, “We believe that the only legitimate marriage is the joining of one man and one woman (Gen. 2:24; Rom. 7:2; 1 Cor. 7:10; Eph. 5:22, 23). We deplore the evils of divorce and remarriage. We regard adultery as the only scripturally justifiable grounds for divorce; and the party guilty of adultery has by his or her act forfeited membership in the church. In the case of divorce for other cause, neither party shall be permitted to marry again during the lifetime of the other; nor violation of this law shall be punished by expulsion from the church (Matt. 5:32; Mark 10:11, 12). In the carrying out of these principles, guilt shall be established in accordance with judicial procedures set forth in the discipline (House 1990).
- iii. Divorce and remarriage in a wide variety of circumstances. According to House (1990), this position is held by a number of scholars and public evangelical figures like James Dobson. They suggest that abuse, including physical, emotional, sexual and verbal abuse, is one of the many reasons for divorce. According to these scholars, every human being is entitled to a full life and living in an abusive relationship is not God’s will for God’s people.
- iv. Limited grounds for divorce. This position is represented by the Westminster Confession and reformed Bible teachers such as John MacArthur, Jay Adams, John Murray, Lorraine Boettner, and Thomas Edgar. This view sees the very limited grounds for divorce, and thus remarriage, as unrepentant sexual sins (Matt 19:9) or desertion by an unbeliever (1 Cor

7:15). This view is a response to when one spouse has forsaken his/her covenant obligations. It is simply an accommodation of humanity's sin for the protection of the other party. It is not, however, a commanded response nor is it part of God's original plan for marriage.

Causes of Divorce among Pastors

This section records the answers given by the divorced pastors through interviews and questionnaires. However, because of the sensitivity of the matter, I will use pseudonyms rather than their real names. I received the following feedback on the question, "what do you consider as the main cause of your divorce?"

Pastor Abel believes that his marital problems began after he was promoted from a church army captain to a full Anglican priest. His wife was unhappy and told him that her hope was that he would quit the church job and join her in business. According to Abel, she refused to join him in the new parish he was sent to as a vicar and also refused to offer any financial help towards the running of the family needs as she used to do before. Abel says that on the first day of reporting to his new parish, he called her and their two children to introduce them to the congregation. She refused and when his two children aged seven and nine went in front to be introduced, she went and took them back and shouted that he should no longer count them as his family. From that day onward, she would go to his office during the weekdays and harass the evangelist who was a woman. She would also harass the Mothers' Union members and female choir members, arguing that pastors usually sleep with female members of the congregation. This behaviour made Abel be rejected in a number of parishes. He tried reconciliation in vain and finally, she applied for divorce which was granted even though he did not sign for it.

Pastor Beryl says that she had to run away when her husband became extremely violent. The husband who works with the Kenya army tried to shoot her twice. He accused her of neglecting their children and demanded that she had to resign from her church job. To test the waters, she took a six-month unpaid leave but during that time, the husband insulted her, calling her lazy and refused to support her and the children. When Beryl returned to work, he was extremely infuriated and tried to shoot her and she escaped from the house. He would go out looking for

her and beat her in public, claiming that she was still his wife and that was the time she applied for divorce to save her life.

Pastor Carr says that his wife started giving him unrealistic demands and became extremely possessive. She became extremely nagging and arrogant and demanded that he must be at home by 7 pm. If he failed to uphold this rule, she locked the house and refused him entry. He was not allowed to attend overnight prayers or any other night fellowship, parties and other events. Before she left him, she gave him a one month notice to buy her a house and when he was not able to do it, she left, applied for divorce privately and later married a very rich man.

According to Pastor Daniella, her husband became insecure when she graduated with a PhD and her salary exceeded his. He started opposing everything she suggested and began abusing her. He told their children imaginary evils that their mother had committed and tried to turn the children against her. Daniella sought the intervention of his family members and senior clergy, but things became worse when he started threatening to kill her. She reported the issue to the chief and within one week, he carried almost all the household items, rented another house and started living with another woman.

Pastor Drogba admits that he had an improper relationship with one of the choir members but insists that it was a trap that was set by his wife and her accomplices. His wife would not be sexually intimate with him for more than one year and then there was a young woman from the same choir with his wife who appeared and befriended him. He says that he should have thought twice when the young woman started asking him what he would do if he was denied sex at home. One day, the girl persuaded him to take her home in his car and on the way, she seduced him until he fell into the trap. The planted camera recorded their short illicit sexual relationship which the wife took to the court as evidence as she applied for divorce. His effort for reconciliation was futile because his wife was looking for divorce.

Pastor Eunice regrets that she married a joker and a conman who left her while still on their honeymoon. She argues that her husband to be sent by the devil to torment her because after their first sexual intercourse, he complained that she was not good in bed and Eunice assured him that their sexual life would improve with time. However, when Eunice woke up the following morning, he had gone and carried the more than ksh. 300,000 they had been given during their wedding ceremony. She also

learnt with shock that he had transferred all the wedding gifts they had received from his house to an unknown place. Within one month, Eunice received an email from her would have been husband informing her that the marriage was declared null and void because it was not consummated. This is the time when it dawned on her that the man was a conman who just wanted property and money, especially from Eunice's rich family members. Eunice knew that there are some men who disappear with money before the wedding but did not know that someone could go all the way to the wedding day. Her husband later married while Eunice was left with no child or anything else from that arrangement. She has tried to persuade her church leaders to allow her to marry because her marriage was declared null and void, but they have refused to allow her to remarry.

According to Pastor Frank, the in-laws played a decisive role in his divorce. His wife's parents did not want her to marry him, claiming that he was poor and that the church was not a good place to work in. When she insisted on marrying him, she was sacked from the family business where she was working, but Frank was able to secure another job for her, though not as well paying as her former job. Although her family attended her wedding, Frank knew that his mother-in-law was completely opposed to their union. When their first-born daughter attained six years, the mother-in-law took her and insisted that she was to study from her home. Frank objected to this arrangement vehemently, but his wife accepted. She was then given another job in the family business and asked to leave her pastor husband. Frank says that his wife's family used corrupt means to get a divorce and he knew about it after it had happened. His wife then married her mother's choice of a suitor.

From the interviews and questionnaires, 90% of pastors are divorced by their partners who are not usually pastors. These pastors still have a call to serve God and given the opportunity, they would serve God.

How Does the Church Treat Divorced Pastors?

Most of the churches in Kenya, both mainstream and evangelical, are completely hostile to the divorced pastors. These pastors are judged as failures, rejects and social misfits. Pastor Galileo was dismissed from the

church ministry. He was not given any opportunity to explain the circumstances of his divorce. Pastor Galileo asserts that he was shocked because despite his church leaders' knowledge that his wife had asked him to choose either her or his church job and hence, she divorced him because he chose to serve God, they still dismissed him from the ministry. He kept on asking himself whether to have a strong call to serve God was a sin. After dismissal from his church, he started his own ministry which is doing well because the divorce did not take away his call.

Pastor Harriet was demoted to the lowest rank of the church after her divorce. Her church leaders had encouraged her to run away from her violent husband who threatened to kill her, but when she was granted divorce, she was demoted immediately and placed under the same people she was leading before her divorce. She says that her new bosses still accord her the same respect and consult her on almost every issue but then her salary was reduced by half, which is really demeaning.

Pastor Jones says that his church forced him to resign after his divorce. After resigning from the church, the church stigmatised him even more by writing to all the branches of his church in Kenya and advised the branches not to allow Pastor Jones to preach or even pray in any of the churches. Pastor Jones says that it was very unkind for the church because they did not give him a copy of the circular and they did not indicate the reason why he was not allowed to conduct any business in the church. The churches then formulated their own reasons why Jones was not allowed to conduct any church ceremonies. Some of them told their followers that Jones had stolen church funds, while others speculated that he may have committed adultery. This was extremely hurtful to Jones because his wife applied for divorce without his knowledge, and he had really objected to the divorce.

There are two pastors who have to report to their senior pastor's office every month and assure him that they were keeping the promise that they were not going to remarry for that would be the end of their ministry. It is unbelievable that the senior pastor traces their movements and whenever they meet, he mentions to them the people they seem to be relating closely with and reminds them that they must not think of remarrying. One of the two pastors did not have a child because her marriage was nullified and she is still young, yet the church will not allow her to marry.

Divorced pastors appreciate the few church leaders who understand them and allow them to continue serving God without demeaning them or frustrating them. Such leaders are few and scattered all over and therefore, it is very hard for them to come together and help the divorced pastors. On the contrary, most of the church leaders mistreat and disrespect the divorced pastors, forgetting that no pastor would like to be divorced and that most of the divorces are applied for by the pastors' partners who are usually not pastors. According to the divorced pastors, divorce is so painful and has negative consequences, especially on their children and they need help to overcome the pain and move on with their lives.

How the Church Should Help Divorced Pastors

How can the church help the divorced pastors so that they may live and have life in abundance? The church has been labelled as the only institution that abandons its wounded soldiers. This is because the church is known to defrock wounded pastors without any attempt to help them. We have seen that most of the pastors who have marital problems are either defrocked, forced to resign, demoted or frustrated until they leave the church ministry against their will. In this way, the church does not help these wounded pastors to have full lives as Jesus intended. If the church is continuing with the mission of Christ and helping all the people to have life in abundance, then the church must consider helping its wounded pastors and, specifically, the divorced pastors.

The church must constantly remind itself that pastors are human beings who marry human beings, and like all the other couples, the pastors' families live in this fallen world. The church must remember that although it takes two people to get married, it takes one person to nullify the marriage. This means that the pastor may not be willing to divorce, but the spouse may single handedly push the divorce to the end. The divorced pastors then do not need condemnation but tender care, spiritual and psychological support. The church should walk with the divorced pastors and help them to overcome the pain, struggle and other challenges that come with divorce.

The church should borrow St. Augustine theology which avers that the church is the hospital for the sinners and aim at extending a hand of healing to the divorced pastors. This theology is in line with Jesus' statement recorded in Mark 2:17 that Jesus came for the sick and the lost. The church should

rehabilitate them and prepare them for a different ministry in the cases where a divorced pastor cannot be accepted in the parish ministry. Other churches should borrow a leaf from the Roman Catholic Church who treat their wounded priests using a motto, “once a priest, always a priest”; hence, they help their wounded priests until they stand on their feet again.

The church should re-look at how it has interpreted some biblical texts that are used to penalise divorced pastors. One of the major texts is Malachi 2:13-16. According to Shannon (2006), proponents of the “no divorce ever” position like to quickly cover the discussion with the blanket of “God hates divorce,” as per Malachi 2:16. Yes, it is true that God hates divorce. It always leaves carnage in its wake, and brings a breach into the marriage covenant, which God, the architect, never intended. Additionally, it leaves its dreadful effect upon the spouse and any children involved. However, it is a particular kind of divorce that the prophet had in mind that was especially grievous to the Lord, as the context bears out (House 1990). There is no verse in Scripture that explicitly teaches that marriage is indissoluble - not even the “one flesh” passage that is so often used in the debate (Gen 2). Shannon (2006) continues to explain that in reference to God’s hatred of divorce (Malachi 2:13-16), Malachi was focusing on the divorcing of older, faithful wives in order to marry younger women. Note that “wives of their youth” is repeated, making clear that these were older couples. In that day, as in ours, there is a host of older men deserting their first wives in order to marry more sexually attractive, younger women. Also repeated is that they “failed to guard themselves in their spirits” as they went through the normal troubles and triumphs of life in a fallen world. Thus, what elicited the bitter rebuke by the prophet of God was humanity’s selfishness and sin. For those pastors living with violent abusive partners, the argument that God hates divorce, but also hates murders that are caused by a violent marriage partner, apply. We also know that God commanded that people should remain married until death, but surely their death should not be caused by the marriage partner!

One of the contributors to the debate on whether a divorced person can serve at a high level in church initiated by Charles Specht (2011, online) challenged the traditional interpretation of 1 Timothy 3:1-5. It says that if a person desires to be an overseer, he must be above reproach, a husband of one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that

his children obey him with proper respect. This text is used to deny divorced pastors an opportunity to serve. Unlike the popular belief, the contributor argues that this advice was given to the church at Ephesus that was going through some leadership crisis and that this advice was a remedial point of action, not necessarily an all-time universal advice. He argues that if this advice was to be taken literally, then it would mean that only married men with children and families were allowed to serve and no woman can be allowed to serve. This would be an exclusion of all types of people from church leadership, but we know that both Jesus and Paul rejected these types of marginalisation.

Matthew 5:32 is the most controversial text on issues of divorce and re-marriage. It states that anyone who divorces his wife except for marital unfaithfulness causes her to become an adulteress and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery. According to Shannon (2006) this text has been misinterpreted and misapplied over the years. Jesus was not addressing the outward tool of sin but the inner cause of offense. Culminating his teaching on humanity's adulterous heart, Jesus introduces what has become known as the "exception clause" (Matt 5:31-32), which is later expounded in Matthew 19:3-9 (and also found in Mk 10:11-12; Lk 16:18). In his teaching here, Jesus calls Moses' teaching as a witness (Duet 24:1-4). Humanity's wicked and hard heart, which Jesus just spoke about, had caused the multiplication of divorces for virtually any reason at all. Due to the chaos surrounding divorces, Moses gave a concession to humanity's hard heart in order to protect the innocent party. It was a provision, a gift of grace. He did not condemn divorce, nor did he command it (contrary to what the Pharisees foolishly/wrongly stated in Matt 19:7-8), but he permitted divorce and sought to regulate it. Adultery was not part of the original grounds for divorce, as the punishment for adultery under the law was death by stoning. Though Moses did not command divorce, the Mosaic principles that must be followed were: Limiting divorce to certain causes. Indecency (literally "matter of nakedness") must be proved in the presence of witnesses, giving a bill of divorce. This states that the wife is innocent of unfaithfulness, not allowing the husband to re-marry the wife he divorces. This highlights the seriousness of the marriage covenant. Deuteronomy 24:1-4 clearly teaches that a divorced woman who marries is so completely and permanently severed from her initial husband that if innocently divorced from her second husband she can marry another believer, but never her first husband.

The religious leaders of Jesus's day used the supposed authority of whatever rabbi they chose to quote in support of their argument. There were those who by and large followed Hillel, who stated that a man could divorce his wife for any reason at all. On the opposite end of the spectrum were the Jewish leaders who followed Shammai's rabbinic teaching that divorce was permissible only for a major offense. In contrast to all the false ideologies about marriage and the permissibility of divorce, Jesus taught that marriage is viewed by God as a lifelong commitment, and should not be terminated by humanity in divorce. God, the master-architect of marriage, designed marriage to be permanent until the death of one of the spouses. Jesus abrogated the death penalty for adultery and made it an exception for divorce. He gives this teaching in abbreviated form here and develops it further in Matthew 19. He says that the only grounds for divorce (into which no one is to rush, since it is merely an option, not an obligation), is sexual sin (porneia). This is a general term that includes many types of sexual sin such as adultery, incest, and many others. However, adultery seems to be the sexual sin that is emphasised, especially as confirmed in Matthew 19. Once the spouse has broken the intimate marriage covenant by sexual sin (translated "unchastity" here), the innocent party is released from his/her covenant obligation. If either spouse pursues divorce in an unbiblical way, they have sinned against their spouse and God. Furthermore, if they pursue another marriage without the marriage bond being broken, they commit adultery because the covenant of marriage is breached in an unbiblical manner. However, if the guilty spouse repents of his or her sin and seeks reconciliation with the former spouse, they can find grace, mercy, and forgiveness (5:23-24).

Conclusion

We have seen that in line with Jesus' statement that all may live and live their lives in full, wounded pastors, specifically the divorced pastors, need to be helped to heal. Further, they must be supported to continue with their ministries in the church because divorce does not curtail peoples' sense of calling. We have seen that most of the pastors are divorced by their spouses and that the church does not need to penalise them even more by defrocking them, demoting them or forcing them to resign from active church ministries. We have seen that the church will need to make use of St. Augustine's theology that the church is the hospital of the sick

and like Jesus, the church should walk and support the wounded pastors, and in that way, the church will be carrying out Jesus' mission of enabling all to live.

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