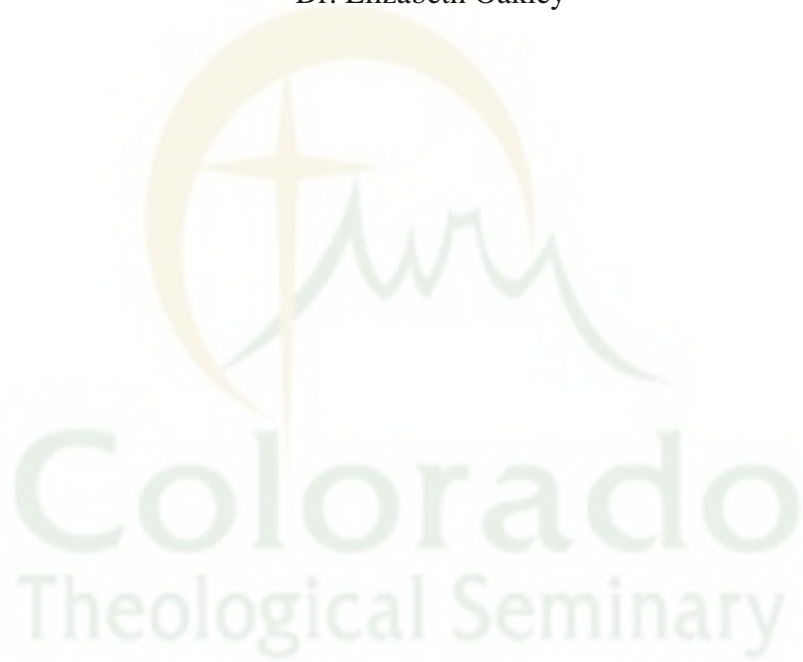




Judith Barrett

Doctor of Ministry Project Proposal

Dr. Elizabeth Oakley



1. Ministry Project Title:

Educating Christians on How to Handle Difficult Personalities Within the Church

2. Proposal

I propose to research Biblical and experiential texts to determine how to combat church problems that are rooted in divisive, angry and/or foolish behavior. I believe that the root of many of the problems churches face today is the result of not identifying and handling these types of situations. Correctly identifying the problem and learning how to deal with it Biblically will result in less pastor burn out as well as a more mature congregation that is ready to nurture fellow Christians and accept new believers. I believe that one of the stumbling blocks to faith in America is the fact that many Bible-based churches have portions of their congregation that do not get along. By educating the pastor, as well as the congregation, many of these problems should cease to exist, and congregations as a whole will experience increased freedom to move closer to Christ and reach the lost.

3. Reality

Many churches today experience discord on a regular basis. Pastors are leaving their ministry at an alarming rate due to burn out.

My experience: For over a year I served as the Sunday School Superintendent in a church of approximately 300. The project I headed involved writing our own curriculum. The children loved it and the anointing could be felt when you walked in the wing. Unfortunately the stresses placed on me by a few caused my husband, an elder at the time, and me, to decide it was best for our family to leave the church. In talking to the two pastors during this time, I found that they considered it normal to regularly lose sleep and have trouble eating because of the intensity of church problems. They felt that this was normal in ministry and told me to 'get used to it' if I was going to be used by God. When we left I feared that I was walking out on God, but knew that my first calling was to my seven children and that staying would have further negative repercussions. Graciously God placed me in a church with a pastor who had been a leader in business before being called into the pastorate. Although he does not enjoy it, he knows it is right, and best, to confront issues and handle them Biblically, even when it doesn't make everyone happy. He also teaches, repeatedly, that godly confrontation is good. His congregation is a warm, loving one with deep relationships. Ironically, most of the people in his congregation consider themselves young in Christ while in the first church most members viewed themselves as spiritually mature.

Through this experience, I began examining my life as well as talking to others. It became apparent that I am not alone in facing painful situations that were left unaddressed by leadership. Most of my friends who had strong leadership qualities admitted that they refused to be used by the church they are in for reasons similar to my own. Some of their husbands will no longer attend church for the same reason. What I noticed was a pattern. People, especially those in authority, were so afraid of hurting the

person who was causing the problem that they refused to address it, or addressed in so ineffectively that they made the problem worse as the offending party became angrier in the process. They neglected to see that in ‘protecting’ and ‘caring for’ the offender, they left a good, hard worker defenseless and hurting. Ideas such as ‘handling it with love,’ ‘allow the Holy Spirit to convict their hearts,’ ‘trust God to defend you’ etc. were common place, when in reality God has already placed instructions in His Word regarding how to handle church problems. By incorrectly applying scripture, those in authority merely avoided confrontation and placed the blame on the person being hurt. (i.e. the person was not trusting God to defend them, or not being patient enough.)

God also began dealing with me in my personal life and showed me where I was not setting clear boundaries. In thinking that I was ‘being nice,’ I was in reality enabling people to sin against me and allowing them to feel good about doing so! I was actually proud of the fact that I could walk away from an explosive situation with the person still happy with me! While I truly did not care (in many cases) that someone was being rude towards me, God opened my eyes and showed me that those around me suffer when I am abused. By saying little, or nothing, I condone what is being said. People close to me, including my children, then become confused as to what is true.

As an example: I was recently accused of not loving my two oldest children. (Ouch!) (My three oldest children are adopted, but the person believed I had gotten the youngest of the three early enough to love him.) This occurred in some of my children’s hearing and quickly spread to the others. I calmly said something to the effect of, ‘I don’t see how you could say that.’ The person proceeded to explain their bizarre idea while I graciously listened. After the conversation, the person left without incident and phoned later, asking

for a favor, obviously unaware that they had said anything that might damage our relationship. The problems in my home after showed me that, although I realized this was an absurd notion, my two teenage children were obviously hurt. This hurt me. We quickly regrouped and my husband and I went to talk to the person about not doing this again. While this was not easy, I felt freer than I had in years as I had set a much-needed boundary. It turns out, that while I do not get overly upset at the moment I, like most people, actually do not enjoy being put down. I also learned that my sister was having a similar problem with this person. By not setting boundaries myself, the person assumed that my sister was being 'touchy' when she tried to set boundaries in her life, since she was the only one getting upset. The reality is that many times, when we think we are being 'nice,' we are merely enabling behavior in others that causes problems beyond what we may see.

4. Theology

'God is not a God of disorder but of peace.' (1 Cor. 14:33) While the quote in 1 Corinthians has to do specifically with spiritual gifts, it is also important for God's leaders to know how to identify and deal with people who exhibit the behaviors that God's Word has instructed a believer to avoid. Among them are: laziness, strife, divisiveness, the angry person, the busybody and the fool.

The lazy: 2 Thessalonians 3: 6 admonishes us to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to God's Word. 2 Thessalonians 3:10 states that if a man does not work then he shall not eat. God does not expect us to feed and care for the

able-bodied that refuse to work. He also does not expect us to continually feed young widows, or those with family who can take care of them. (1 Timothy 5) Often though, people of God feel bad for those who are on hard times. While the church itself may not be writing checks, many members of the congregation are. Laziness is not a godly attribute. Further God makes it clear that the idle become busybodies and troublemakers. We are instead instructed to treat them like brothers and to raise them up through loving admonishment. This goes against most of the welfare laws in our nation, but it is the right thing to do.

Strife: 2 Timothy 2: 24 advises: 'but the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men...' Other areas of scripture make similar admonishments. Examples of strife in scripture usually deal with useless arguments over genealogies, scripture and law. As in the early church, there are those in the church today that continually argue about minutia in the church. In James 3, we find that strife is evil and from the devil. In 1 Timothy 6, we find that we are to flee from strife and have nothing to do with it. How then is a leader to do this? Matthew 18: 15-17 advises us to go to a brother alone and warn him once. If he does not listen we are to bring along one or two others and warn him again. If he continues, then we are to bring the matter before the church. If no change is evident, we are then to have nothing to do with him. Unfortunately this does not happen in most churches even when behaviors are extreme. I believe it is for two reasons. The first is that many times it is difficult to determine who is the cause of strife. For this the pastor must pray for wisdom and talk to those he trusts for guidance and information. The second is that in today's society this seems extreme. What is forgotten is that this is not meant to hurt the strifeful person, but to help him see his error and repent! What is

also forgotten is that God knows best. By ignoring His instructions we claim (by our actions) to know how to better handle the situation than He does. Arguments about the color of the carpet, or the name of a wing should not divide the church. A pastor that adequately teaches how not to behave, as well as how to behave and enforces the consequences of repeat and knowing disobedience will have fewer problems in this area. The fact is that in today's society it is easy to leave the church. In attempting to keep the strifeful person in the congregation, many others will leave because of the chaos he causes.

Divisiveness: While the strifeful argue, the divisive create situations that cause others to argue. Proverbs 6: 12-19 warns us about people who sow discord and tells us that this is something God hates. One of the difficulties in dealing with this type of behavior is identifying it. A divisive person often leaves others looking like they are strifeful after planting his seeds of discord. Psychologists identify certain types of divisive behavior as 'passive-aggressive.'

The angry person: Proverbs 22:24 warns us not to make friends with an angry man. Proverbs 29:22 tells us that an angry man stirs up strife. Obviously many ungodly behaviors lead to others. Angry people often get their way because no one wishes to deal with them. It is easier to appease their anger than to deal with them. Unfortunately this teaches the angry person that he, or she, can get whatever they want if they yell loud enough. Not only will you continually have to deal with his anger, but Proverbs warns us that we are likely to become angry ourselves. Anger is contagious and if you do not want to have a church full of it, you will have to deal with the angry person as soon as you can.

The busybody: 1 Peter 4: 15 advises us not to suffer because of our sins, but rather if we must suffer, let it be because of Christ. The busybody is listed as one of the lifestyles destined to suffer. Unfortunately, the busybody also makes others suffer with them. The Bible is clear that busybodies result from idleness. For this reason we are not to feed the lazy, and are to encourage the young widows to remarry. The best cure for a busybody is work.

The fool: Proverbs spends a lot of time discussing the fool. In studying this book I have come to the conclusion that a fool is a person who has been instructed in right and wrong, has the ability to learn it, but for whatever reason chooses to do wrong anyways. One problem in dealing with a fool is that we try to reason with him. This is in error. He knows to do right, he merely chooses not to do it! When it becomes obvious that a person understands what you are saying, but is refusing to heed godly advice, then your obligation to him is over.

5. Transformative Action

My plan is to write a Bible study that will include modern day examples, as well as Biblical ones to illustrate problem behaviors as well as suggestions on how to deal with and help heal them. Sample scenarios and possible ways to handle specific situations will also be included.

In order to do this, I plan to research the Biblical texts, as well as read authors who deal with similar problems and situations. Secular as well as Christian texts will be used

and compared. Psychological and historical texts will also be utilized. I will also be surveying and interviewing pastors and laity for examples and opinions.

To complete this work I am planning to put together a group of mature Christians who will read my work and give me feedback regarding the relevance to their lives.

Sample Outline

I. Laziness

A. What is lazy?

1. The difference between proper rest and laziness. i.e. God did not call you to be overworked.
2. Trusting God in your work. i.e. What is God's responsibility and what is yours?
3. How improper self-esteem (thinking too highly or too lowly of yourself) affects your productivity.

B. How should we handle the lazy?

1. How to handle them Biblically. i.e. You are not expected to support them.

2. Balancing scripture that tells us to give to all who ask and scripture that says if you don't work you don't eat.
3. Wives with lazy husbands and vice versa. How not to do it all.
4. Children: How to raise them to be productive.
 - a. Children are meant to be a blessing, let them serve you! i.e. chores are Biblical.
 - b. Empty praise versus sincere compliments
 - c. The consequences to their future if you allow them to be lazy: with spouse, job, children etc.
5. Biblical consequences: when is it right to walk away?
6. When the person is mentally ill, addicted, etc.

C. How to discourage laziness

1. Making sure you are rewarding the workers more than the lazy
 - a. It is right to praise
 - b. Life isn't fair. Reward those who work.
2. Not expecting those who receive to also work
 - a. Ask: Not everyone will volunteer
 - b. Remind: Most people are busy
 - c. Consequences for not working
 - d. When to show mercy

D. How to repent from laziness.

1. Accountability
2. Support
3. Fixing relationships with others
4. Finding the right balance
5. Self -esteem: How to begin to fix it

II. Strife

A. What is Strife?

1. Argumentative behavior
2. Legalism
3. The nagging wife
4. The unreasonably unsatisfied husband
5. The nagging mother
6. Driving your children to wrath

B. Hidden benefits of strife. Why people stay strifeful.

1. Attention. People do not like to leave an argument. They either wish to 'fix' it or win.
2. Authority. Strife people often get their way because most people don't like to argue.
3. Payback. Some people are motivated to make others feel the same way they have been made to feel by others.

C. Situations that Promote Strife

1. Lack of input/ Autocratic leadership
2. Lack of justice
3. Lack of attention
4. Lack of control
5. Lack of meeting a persons expectations

D. How to handle strife

1. How to stay under control, being firm but calm
2. How not to get dragged into pointless arguments. i.e. When it is right to walk away even if the person will see it as rude.
3. How to train up your children.
4. When to avoid a person.

E. How to repent of strife

1. Identifying what you are getting from being strifeful. I.e. Why are you doing this?
2. How to fulfill your emotional needs in more positive ways.
3. Fixing broken relationships.
 - a. Identifying which ones are broken.
 - b. How to encourage those you have bludgeoned to relax in your presence.

III. Divisiveness

A. What is divisiveness?

1. Urging people to argue
 - a. While strifeful people are straightforward, the divisive often work 'behind the scenes.
2. Slant, spin and half-truths
3. Gossip
 - a. How it hurts.
 - b. The difference between concern and gossip
 - c. Prayer chain versus gossip mill
 - d. When to put feet to your concern rather than talk/prayer

B. Who are the divisive?

1. The Queen Bee and the Best Friend
2. The martyr
3. The information gatherer
4. The passive-aggressive
5. The antagonist

C. How to handle the divisive.

1. How to confront.
 - a. Difficulty: This is difficult because the results of their actions involve other people's actions.

b. Deniability: Most divisive behavior is rooted in 'good' motives.

i. When the person believes they are doing right.

ii. When the person is using 'right' to cover their need for control or revenge/justice.

2. Teaching the congregation how to recognize and deal with it.

D. Situations that Promote Divisiveness

1. Lack of Control

2. Low self-esteem

3. False beliefs about how God works i.e. 'I know God's will/ what is right and will use any means to accomplish it.'

4. Lack of relationships. If others are arguing with each other the only one left that everyone likes is, at times, the one who planted the seeds for the argument, thus the divisive person obtains friends.

E. How to repent of divisiveness

1. Correct theology: learn it.

2. Give up your need to be right

3. Developing good relationships

4. Correcting false information: learning not to 'spin'

5. How not to gossip

IV. Angry People

A. What is anger?

1. Godly anger versus ungodly anger

- a. God gets angry but does not sin
- b. Jesus overturned tables

2. Sinful anger: Situational anger versus an angry personality

B. Who is angry?

- 1. Physical anger
- 2. Emotional anger
 - a. The yeller
 - b. The stuffer
 - c. The silent

C. How to handle the angry.

- 1. Do not appease or reward
- 2. Confront and Avoid
 - a. In church
 - b. Friends
 - c. Relatives
 - i. Marriage
 - ii. Other family

3. Children

D. Situations that promote angry personalities

- 1. Making sure that you are not the cause: No opportunity to succeed/
frustration
- 2. Self-esteem problems

3. Reinforcement: Learned behavior resulting from getting your way by being angry

E. How to repent from anger

1. Professional, Christian help

2. Separating yourself from 'trigger' situations

a. Admitting you cannot handle some things at this time

b. Communicating with others that this is your problem, not theirs

3. Support from others

a. Accountability

b. Accepting and respecting others' boundaries

c. It is unreasonable to expect others to not anger you.

V. The Fool

A. What is a fool?

1. Proverbs

a. Definition

b. Examples of foolish behavior

2. Raca: 'Do not call your brother a fool' (Mt. 5:22)

B. How to deal with a fool.

1. Matthew 18: Warn them three ways then avoid.

C. How not to raise foolish children

1. Natural consequences: allow some to happen

2. Teach, teach, teach

3. Use others as a model
4. Bond them with godly adults
5. Set limits on their freedom. Repeated exposure to fools does not produce wise men.
6. Threats verses promises
7. Encourage godly behavior
 - a. Friends: theirs and yours
 - b. Servant-hood: It's okay to volunteer your children for work.
 - c. Example: Set a good one and share what you do.
 - d. Explain when you make a mistake
 - e. Education: children purposely taught wisdom make fewer mistakes
 - f. Goals: people with goals see a reason not to make mistakes

D. Situations that encourage fools

1. Lack of consequences
2. Empty threats
3. False beliefs:
 - a. False: Every opinion is equally valuable
 - b. False: Everyone is equally good at everything
 - c. False: Telling someone they are wrong should be avoided because it hurts their feelings.
4. Equal rewards for unequal work

E. How to repent of foolishness

1. Pray for wisdom, and the truth to be revealed
2. Study and learn God's Word
3. Discipleship

VI. The Busybody

A. What is a busybody?

1. The difference between help and interference
2. When help is not helping
3. Help with a price

B. How to deal with a busybody

1. Giving them appropriate jobs
2. Setting limits/ boundaries
3. Not putting them in charge

C. Situations that promote 'busybody' behavior

1. Unmarried widows
2. The idle
3. Lack of boundaries

4. Gossip

D. How to repent of being a busybody

1. Getting involved in meaningful work/ ministry
2. Placing yourself under godly authority
3. Accountability

4. Fixing broken relationships

VII. Boundaries

A. What are they?

B. Why are they important?

1. We suffer when others sin against us.

2. We help others sin when we allow it

C. Examples

VIII. The Lie of 'Nice'

A. Enabling

B. Being a 'doormat'

C. How you are actually hurting those around you

1. Teaching others to 'suffer' by your example

2. Those who love you do not enjoy seeing you suffer

3. Teaching people it is okay to hurt you, and others, by not saying anything

D. The results of allowing others to hurt you

1. Decreased self-esteem

2. Hurting others because you are upset

3. Desensitization that allows you to do the same to others

4. Decreased productivity

5. Fear

E. The results of allowing others to be hurt

1. Losing good people in favor of ungodly ones
2. Losing respect from others
3. Fostering bad behavior in everyone involved

IX. Mercy and Forgiveness

A. How to forgive

1. The lie of ‘forgive and forget’: trust is something we earn
2. When consequences are no longer necessary and should be abandoned
3. Correct thinking: not dwelling on the past
4. Moving forward

B. Mercy

1. When is it appropriate to lessen or not have consequences
(2 Corinthians)
2. When is it appropriate to show much love to someone who has repented
and when is it not
3. Comfort and acceptance verses enabling
4. Exhorting and encouraging verses nagging and criticism

X. Godly Relationships

A. God’s definition of a friend

B. Biblical examples of friendship

C. Acknowledging when you do not have a relationship, but are being used

D. How to make friends (It's not what you think!)

1. Openness
2. Honesty
3. Time
4. True love

E. Marriage

1. Wife
2. Husband
3. Relatives' role

F. Children

1. Proper relationship verses improper
2. How to relate when they are adults

6. Why I Chose to do this Project this Way

I believe that this is an important topic that will help many in their personal lives, as well as help churches become safer and less chaotic. Ultimately, healthy, successful personal lives and peaceful churches will help others come to the Lord by removing a common stumbling block to non-believers. This stumbling block presents like this:

‘Why would I want to be like you? Your life is a mess and your church is mean to you.’

Christians love Bible studies. They do them in Sunday School and buy them to do at home. They also read Christian books, and self-help books fill the shelves in Christian

bookstores. It is for this reason that I have chosen this format. While the project lends itself to pamphlets, lectures, and smaller works, I wish to begin with an initial overview of the entire subject since much of the material is redundant, applying the same principles to different situations. Fortunately, people learn best by repetition. Also, it is often hard to apply principles without examples that mirror your own. The closer the problem is to your own, the harder it is to see the solution. (If the solution were obvious to you, most likely you would have solved the problem already!)

This work is meant to educate pastors on the need to deal with problem people. It is also meant to educate laity in two ways. The first is to teach them that their pastor is right to deal with the problem, not mean. The second is to help them help the pastor by not enabling the erring in the congregation. Too many times, a godly pastor is fighting a politically correct mindset that wishes him to refrain from administering discipline in any form. Finally, this work should help people on a personal level. Enabling sin is not only bad for the person sinning, but also for you. In making this project simple to read and easy to use in a format people are used to, I hope to counter some of the more destructive behaviors evident in our society that flourish in our church because we are 'too nice' to ask others to behave.

By using information from mature Christians, workers from other churches, and pastors, I hope to compile a work that contains real examples that others can relate to. It is my hope that this work will be a non-offensive way to help reduce problems that God addresses in Scripture that continue to exist today.

7. Evaluating the Project

My small group will aid me in evaluating my project. Their responses will help me to determine whether the advice I give is Biblical, practical and needed. Ultimately I would like to submit my work for publication, but due to other factors such as lack of connections and volume of works submitted, I will not consider the work to be a failure if it is not approved. The knowledge I gain from this project will inevitably aid me in whatever the Lord calls me to do in the future. What I am ultimately looking for is a change in me. I am admittedly 'too nice' and while most people would not see this as a fault, God is showing me a different way. It is a better way that I would like to share with others. Continued changes in my life, for the better, will also be a factor in determining whether or not this project is successful.

8. Support

While I am waiting for approval to finalize my support group, I have a wonderful pastor and a mature church. This project has been a passion of mine for a few years. When God placed me in my current church, I wondered why I was there since they do not need this project, nor are they lacking in areas where I am strong. They are (on the whole) mature, capable people who have deep relationships and who understand the need for boundaries and confrontation. They do not need my work; instead I need them to complete it. Their experience, openness and example will help this work to become

more than I could achieve on my own. I also have access to workers from other area churches, as I am active in a large home school community. Due to my past involvements in the Christian community, I also have relationships with other area pastors who may be willing to answer my questions and share their experiences.

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10. Appendix

Sample Questionnaires:

For Pastors:

1. Please give examples that you have encountered of the following:
Strife, anger, laziness, busybodies, divisive behavior (trouble-makers), fools
2. Explain how you address these problems.
3. What mistakes have you made, or seen made, in handling these situations?
4. After you make a mistake, how would you suggest you 'fix' it?

5. What would you like people in the congregation to understand regarding these situations? How can the congregation help you with these types of people?

For the Laity:

1. Have you ever left a church? If so, why?
2. Have you ever been in leadership? What are the biggest challenges you faced?
3. How are problems addressed in your church?
4. Have you ever brought a problem to the pastor and how did he respond?
If you were satisfied with the results, why?
If you were unsatisfied with the results, why?
What do you believe he should have done better?
What do you believe you should have done better?
5. What advice would you give to someone dealing with the following:
(feel free to give examples! This is your chance to pass on the wisdom you learned the hard way!)

- a. Someone who is argumentative (strifeful)
- b. Someone who is divisive (stirs up trouble)
- c. A Busy body
- d. A lazy adult
- e. A lazy child
- f. An angry person
- g. A violent spouse
- h. A fool (someone who knows what is right and refuses to do it

11. Proposed Time Table

October 2006: finish 8th course

December 2006: finish 9th course

February 2007: finish 10th course

If approved:

(August 2006- February 2007)

1. Update and send out questionnaires with cover letters
2. Collect and correlate results of questionnaires and interviews

February through August: Research and write preliminary Bible study

September 2007: run through Bible Study with a small focus group

December 2007: complete final editing and submit completed work