

“I’m a pastor approaching burnout. Help.”

That was a phrase I saw on a Google search page. Upon reading it, I sent out a request for input from my friends on Facebook and Twitter. The following is a compilation of that input. If you are a pastor and you feel you are approaching burnout, please read these responses and allow the Holy Spirit to speak into your situation so that you are able to continue serving strong. God bless!

I am not a pastor but have served in leadership positions for over 31 years and have experienced 'burnout'. The first time, I was living the burned out experience before I really recognized where I was and it took a long time to come back from it. For one thing, I did not want to go through it again! It was seven years before I turned around.

Have I gone through it since? Yes, but am now able to recognize, at some point, what is happening and start taking an inventory of my own spiritual condition. We are responsible, when we find ourselves in this position, so, when we take responsibility, the accuser loses some of his ability to condemn us.

We have to remind ourselves that He is able to complete that good work which He began in us and that no weapon (not even burn out) formed against us will prosper. We need to remind ourselves that this burned out condition did not catch God off guard. He had no illusions about us when He called us, knowing the roads we would take. Yet, He called us. The question comes down to, who do you say Jesus is? If He is the Christ to you, in spite of your burned out condition, then you are still in the game.

Know this one thing: we have to experience the strength of the storm (burnout) to appreciate the Power of the Anchor! It will hold. Do what you know to do: seek Him first and His Righteousness and He will add the rest that you have need of.

We cannot trust ourselves, but we can trust Him.

From my own experience, burnout (and the path toward it) is tightly connected to the paradox of the yoke of Christ. ("My yoke is easy, and my burden light.") The critical distinction between the yoke of Christ and the other burdens we typically carry runs along the axis of pride and shame. Pride (common to our oft-inflated egos) creates in us an unhealthy desire -- perhaps even an addiction -- to do more that what God has called us to do, to be who we are not. Like the volleyball player on a weak team, we have trouble staying in our assigned area, and heroically take on challenges and duties that are outside the reach of our strength. Shame (nearly unavoidable among those with high standards) has the opposite motive, but the same result. Deeply disappointed in our own shortcomings (and exacerbated by any evidence that others are disappointed in us), we apologize too much, over-correct, and over-compensate, hoping that by sheer devotion and determination ("I will never betray you!") we can overcome the weaknesses we so deeply regret.

Replacing the overgrown burdens that burn us out with the authentic yoke of Christ requires that we resign from the jobs we were not called to do, surrender the battles we were not called to fight, and release the claims we were not called to make. "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build." Then we can be free enough -- and strong enough -- to carry the yoke he gives us.

I think you're on the right track by identifying that you're on your way. Once we know where we are going, we need to stop and identify where we want to be going instead. Every day we make tons of decisions that lead us one way or the other. Find a ministry partner to review these decisions and make sure that everything you are doing is leading you to where you want to be. Let go of the things that don't get you there--even when it doesn't seem pastoral.

Take time to re-fuel and know that if you can't do it on your own, get a life coach to help you. You as an individual, your family, your ministry and the Kingdom is worth you doing what's best for you!

GOD will succeed in spite of you! Unhealthy kingdom worker = unhealthy kingdom production!!!

I recommend a coach. There are a few out there who don't require fees.

I agree with the one who mentioned how important Sabbath keeping is for everyone, especially clergy. If I may, I'd like to outline that in a bit more detail, because I think that this is key to getting perspective on priorities, refreshing the level of commitment to ministry, and diminishing the resentment factor.

The first thing I would do would be to make a commitment to rest, and that means accountability. Get the right folks involved. In my denomination (United Methodist), that means my bishop and my district superintendent. One must include the leaders of the church, so that means the Staff/Parish Relations committee. Your group might be the deacons, or the trustees, or whatever you call the folks who decide the pastor's fate from year to year.

Once you've assembled your accountability group, you have to get their help. They have to help you commit to a regular cycle of rest. That means attempting normalcy in serving the local church. What will it take to get closer to an eight hour day? How can the load be shared? What would it look like to delegate at least part of the pastoral care workload?

It also means weekly time off. How many of us work Monday through Friday, work like a dog around the house on Saturday, then put in a 12 hour Sunday? Family and self care are a must. You cannot commit to ministry with a family at your side unless you are willing to put in the effort to do your part within your family.

Yearly vacations are a must. And retreat time that is NOT considered vacation is equally valuable.

None of this can be done alone. Procuring accountability and permissions are vital to this process. And the process is flexible. Go with what works in your local setting, keeping a prayerful ear open to the leadership of the Spirit.

Some of you might be thinking, with all this resting, when does the pastor work? It is not about the quantity of working hours, it becomes a question of quality working hours. The time you spend in ministry will be vital, refreshed, passionate and 10 times more effective, especially over the course of a career.

If all that rest seems silly, you can always opt to work 60 hour weeks, 52 week years, and burnout in 10 years...

I think it's more complicated than just "adding" a few dashboard questions to my life.

For me, burnout comes from a lack of fulfillment. When I am neglecting the role that God has created me for and allowed the "needs" of my organization to direct my decisions and habits, I begin to experience burnout.

I would encourage you to temporarily setup some strong boundaries. Give yourself permission to only do the things that you are excellent at and called to do. Allow the other things to fall. One of three things (or a combination) will happen: 1) You will find out that those auxiliary things weren't that important to get done; 2) Someone will recognize that these things aren't being done and find their ministry within; 3) force you to invite others into ministry.

Another starting point for burnout in my life is when I feel the things I'm doing are accomplishing anything. Everyone wants their life to count for something. If I don't believe my life is making a difference, then I become more susceptible to burnout and feelings of waste. This probably piggybacks on the fulfillment issue, but I think it's equally important to take notice of.

Other than that, I'd probably tell you that if there's anything else you can do with your life and still be happy, go do that!

Whenever I have been challenged in this way, "burnout" or extreme frustration, hopelessness, etc. I always examine myself in my own relationship to or quality of fellowship with the Lord. I have personally found that there is nothing that has the capacity to pull one away from their own personal time and walk with the Lord, than being in ministry. Somehow the needs and demands of others tend to accumulate and often are allowed to take precedence over one's own needs or the needs of their marriage and family.

Along these same lines I go back to the basics to determine if I am where I should be (spiritually and naturally), doing what the Master has called and appointed me to do. I have that if I am not doing what the Lord has given me to do or not doing what He has called me to do in the way He would direct it to be done, there is little if any grace to do other than repent and realign myself with Him first and foremost, and His calling to serve secondarily.

One other thought, when is the last time you took some time off and refused to talk or to so much as think about ministry or stressors? Even the Lord God rested on the "7th" day. While Sunday is not an option for most of us in fulltime ministry, nor Saturday, Try taking Monday or at least one other day off to do nothing but rest or spend personal time being ministered to. For, golf is a great distraction and more often than not it's good for a great laugh. :)

Last but not least, seek out the fellowship of fellow ministers who should be able to at the least afford you some wise company and perhaps a bit of counsel and encouragement. You are not alone and even prophets of God have faced this dilemma (Elijah and the Juniper tree), and just as others have faced this and prevailed in the Lord's grace, I pray that you will.

This is very common if a pastor is going it alone and thinking he or she is the only one who can do the things needed doing. I am a lay minister who has learned in the last few months that simplicity is best and that you don't have to do things the same old same old way. We all need to be reminded that ministry is to be shared. One thing that is necessary for all people in ministry and care giving is to eat right (watch the coffee hour and potluck foods and carbs), don't skip meals, exercise daily! Yes Sunday is a good time to take walks and get outside. Set aside a personal Sabbath day just for you. Get a pastoral care team that can help shoulder the burden. Meet with other pastors for one on one time! For heaven's sake don't forget to take a vacation! If it isn't in your contract as part of your compensation then renegotiate! Remember Jesus needed help so he called the 12. Call your 12 or more!

If the model is not a biblical one, where one man is saddled with the responsibility to care for the saints by himself, without a mutual team of elders/pastors (call them what you like) to carry that load together, can we expect God to give us strength to do what He has not asked us to do? "We all know someone has to be in charge if anything is going to get done." Well, that isn't a scriptural basis, but a worldly one.

I applaud those saints who have taken on this role. I just don't think it is the role God called them to (but in most denominational settings, that is the way one understands the "next step" under that calling).

The solution, then, would be to develop those who share that load and with whom (yes, within the congregation) the pastor can be mutually accountable as peers.

OK, first...What pastor is NOT on their way to burning out? I serve church leaders and I don't think it matters whether you're a pastor, principal, corporate muckity-muck, doctor, lawyer or Indian chief...aren't we all, eventually on our way to a burn out? So...don't get too worked up. Step back and assess not so much what are you doing that's leading to the burn out, but what AREN'T you doing that's leading to the burn out.

Are you saving time for family and friends?

Are you saving time for time alone with God?

Are you saying NO to the good things to make room for the great thing?

I tend to burn out when I work too much alone, don't spend time with my family and friends, forget to slow down and listen for God and, most of all, I say YES to too many things.

Try and identify why you feel like this.

--are you doing too much

--encountering conflict in the church

--neglecting your time.

--Not disconnecting???

Take time off and go to a pastor retreat. Cedarly, or Under the broom tree, with your spouse.

Don't think about the church so much, do something you enjoy.

Read "Leading on Empty" by Wayne Cordeiro

Get another pastor to share with and pray with.

Get a Counselor if your marriage is in trouble.

Let people do more, and don't give in to a pastor's control-freakish tendencies.

It took me a long time to realize that - for me - when I am in burnout mode, too much of my activity is an effort to feel better about a wound that has not yet healed. Maybe that's not the case for this pastor but I would consider as an option that at least some of my burnout is self-induced.

I am learning new humility and clearer sense of urgency about being available to God. May God richly bless you!

Thanks to all who responded. May God bless you in your endeavors!