

Burnout: Prevention and Cure

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Burnout! Burning out! Burned out!

What do these words mean to you? What fears do they evoke? What visual images do they create? Do they conjure up pictures of charred and ruined homes on a hillside that have been ravaged by a run-away fire? Do *you* see majestic mansions once ornate and resplendent in architectural detail now scarred by black soot and empty? Or perhaps you see a truck abandoned on the side of a country road with its paint seared black, its metal rusting. All perfectly legitimate images, but they barely capture or describe the syndrome that inflicts all “people helpers” – the final penalty for those who must care too much as a part of their job: Burnout!

Burnout has been defined as a “syndrome of emotional exhaustion. Depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who do ‘people work’ of some kind.” It is a response to the chronic, emotional strain of dealing extensively with other human beings. If these human beings are troubled, then burnout can be particularly rapid and devastating.

But a definition doesn’t adequately capture the essence of our concern here. No amount of theorizing will help us to appreciate how destructive and debilitating the care of others can be. See the pastor once vibrant with power and enthusiasm, able to motivate others to service and godly living, given to caring and concern, become reduced to useless ineffective rubble emotionally exhausted and deeply fearful – and you’ll understand the ravages of emotional burnout. See the spouse of the pastor, once the perfect hostess able to calm troubled waters and apply the soothing balm of comforting words and listening ears, become jittery when the telephone rings, panicked by any hint that the doorbell clanging and desperately wanting to be left alone – and you’ll recognize the exhausting tentacles of the burnout monster. Or see the pastor who once patiently and kindly plodded her way through the prejudice and projections of ignorant and insensitive parishioners become a lonely, isolated, deeply depressed recluse who cannot get out of bed in the morning and who conceals her secret siestas like a closet alcoholic – and you’ll glimpse the reality of burnout.

I know because I’ve seen each one of them in the flesh. They are as real as the air I breathe.

A pattern of emotional overload with little reward or appreciation in the context of feelings of helplessness is at the heart of the burnout syndrome. Why are pastors particularly prone to burnout? Because:

- (1) They have not been taught to care for others in the right way.
- (2) They care too much out of guilt.
- (3) They care too much and feel helpless about providing solutions.
- (4) They care too much all of the time.
- (5) They do not care enough about their own self-recovery.

Pastors tend to get overly involved emotionally. They tend to overextend themselves and then feel overwhelmed by the emotional demands imposed by others. And the more people there are to “feel responsible for” the greater the opportunity for burnout. One pastor described it this way:

“There are just too many people to care for. It’s just too much. I’m spread too thin and there is not enough caring to go around. Every day I pray to God for an abundant supply of his love to give to others, but it’s as if the pipe isn’t large enough for it to flow through.”

Once burnout sets in, pastors don't believe they are able to give of themselves to others. It's not that they don't want to help; they can't. The gas is gone. The barrel is empty. It has also been called "compassion fatigue". The muscle of their loving heart goes weak and limp. No longer is it able to pump life-giving care and love to the rest of the needy body. The rhythm of the love-beat becomes erratic and irregular. Short bursts of compassion cease at the most inopportune times. The love machine is powerless and eerily silent waiting for a miracle to bring it to life again. For many the miracle never happens. It is then called "burnout".

But is all this talk about burnout for real? Could it be that our gullible Western minds have such a propensity for the faddish that we may be in danger of creating a monster simply by giving it a name? Will we not rush to excuse every moment of laziness or touch of incompetence simply as a symptom of burnout? Will it not take away responsible behavior? Will the cry "burnout" not become a smoke screen for "cop-out"? One pastor, in writing on the topic of burnout, claims he is becoming "bombed out" by all the talk of "burnout" and suggests that the present preoccupation with burnout creates the danger of being "sold out". He believes it becomes an excuse for going contrary to the very things the Gospel stands for. Burnout becomes an excuse to leave the ministry, abandon a marriage, or give up on any activity that demands persistent, unrelenting dedication.

I agree! Discipleship was never, is never, nor ever will be easy. The servants of God must not be deterred by fake disasters, invented obstacles, or exaggerated weaknesses. But burnout is none of these for the majority of pastors. It is real hazard, produced in well-meaning and dedicated to people-caring, whose motives are pure and Holy Spirit-dependence sound. They simply discover that the human frame has its limits, like every machine. When these limits are exceeded, the price is "burnout".

The warning not to allow the idea of "burnout" to be an excuse for a 'cop-out' is well heeded. But, on the other hand, prevention is better than cure. A thorough understanding of the phenomenon of burnout can help to pinpoint the pitfalls of this devastating and debilitating problem. My concern here is not so much that a discussion of the inevitable potential for burnout among pastors will provide a convenient cover-up for incompetence, but so that a few readers will readily acknowledge the reality of the syndrome and that they are victims of it. It is a lot easier to understand that machines reach a stage of lifelessness and uselessness by being overworked than it is to convince so many well-meaning and dedicated ministers and people-helpers that this could happen to them. There is something strangely paradoxical about believing you are a "servant of God" and acknowledging that you are on the road to burnout! Too many see it as a sign of failure rather than as a warning signal from an over-extended physique or psyche.

Is burned-outness the inevitable price one must pay for caring too much? Is it the ultimate penalty for being a channel of God's grace? Must it inexorably and unrelentingly take its toll when the motive for service is so pure and the purpose so transcending of worldly considerations? I think not. In fact, I would say "ABSOLUTELY NOT." There is a vast difference between wasting out (in which one careens headlong into a meaningless and wasteful use of energy), and controlled burning out where you deliberately and by design give of yourself to the maximum of your ability so that when your life is over you have a sense of having given all you can give. The first is self-destructive. The second is Christ – glorifying.

Our commitment to Christian ministry and service is to be a model to others, no matter what their calling. As we shall see in the pastes that follow the true servant of God does not have to be prematurely destroyed by ignorance of the basic principles that govern the physiological and spiritual aspects of our

existence, nor by unsanctified motives and guilt. We CAN be effective “people-carers” without burning out if we heed the fundamental principles I will describe.

Test Yourself: The Burnout Checklist

(NOTE: This focuses only on burnout: it is not a stress questionnaire)

Review the past 12 months of your TOTAL life-work, social situations, family and recreation. Reflect on each of the following questions and rate the emphasis on change that has occurred during the past six months.

Use the following scale and assign a number in the rating column that reflects the degree of change you have experienced. BE HONEST; the value of this self-assessment is negligible if you don't.

1	2	3	4	5
No or little change	Just noticeable change	Noticeable change	Fair degree of change	Great degree of change

RATING

1. Do you become more fatigued, tired or ‘worn out’ by the end of the day?
2. Have you lost interest in your present work?
3. Have you lost ambition in your overall career?
4. Do you find yourself becoming easily bored (spending long hours with nothing significant to do)?
5. Do you find that you have become more pessimistic, critical, or cynical of yourself or others?
6. Do you forget appointments, deadlines, or activities and don't feel very concerned about it?
7. Do you forget appointments, deadlines, or activities and don't feel very concerned about it?
8. Has any increase occurred in your general level of irritability, hostility, or aggressiveness?
9. Has your sense of humor become less obvious to yourself or others?
10. Do you become sick more easily (flu, colds, pain problems)?
11. Do you experience headaches more than usual?
12. Do you suffer from gastrointestinal problems (stomach pains, chronic diarrhea or colitis)?
13. Do you wake up feeling extremely tired and exhausted most mornings?
14. Do you find that you deliberately try to avoid people you previously did not mind being around?
15. Has there been a lessening of your sexual drive?
16. Do you find that you now tend to treat people as “impersonal objects” or with a fair degree of callousness?
17. Do you feel that you are not accomplishing anything worthwhile in your work and that you are ineffective in making any changes?
18. Do you feel that you are not accomplishing anything worthwhile in your personal life or that you have lost spontaneity in your activities?
19. Do you find that you spend much time each day thinking or worrying about your job, people, future or past?
20. Do you feel that you are at the “end of your tether” – that you are at the point of “breaking down” or “cracking up”?

TOTAL SCORE:

INTERPRETATION:

Please remember, no inventory is absolutely accurate or fool-proof. Your score on this “Burnout Checklist” is merely a guide to your experience of burnout. Take it as an indication that your life may be out of control. If your score is very high take steps toward finding help by consulting your family, physician, psychotherapist, spiritual counselor or personal advisor – the first step toward relief from burnout is to acknowledge, without being self-rejecting, that you have a problem.

20-30 There is not burnout. **YOU** may be taking your life or work too casually.

31-45 This is a normal score for anyone who works hard and seriously. Make sure you do relax periodically.

46-60 You are experiencing some mild burnout and could benefit from careful review of your lifestyle.

61-75 You are beginning to experience burnout. Take steps to better control your life.

76-90 You are burning out. You should seek help, reevaluate your present life and make changes.

Over 90 You are dangerously burned out and need immediate relief. Your burnout is threatening your physical and mental well-being.

Understanding Burnout

Whenever one hears or reads a discussion about burnout it soon becomes obvious that there is, in the minds of many, confusion between what constitutes burnout and what constitutes stress-or rather “distress” which is the damaging consequence of stress. There are some similarities between burnout and stress. There are also many differences. A few similarities are legitimate and real. Many are erroneous.

Why should we differentiate between burnout and stress? For three very important reasons:

1. The **CAUSES** of burnout are quite different from those of stress.
2. The **CURES** for burnout are significantly different from those for stress.
3. The acceptance of the essential differences between burnout and stress can help delineate more effective preventive mechanisms.

Not only is it common to confuse stress problems with those of, but many also confuse problems of depression with burnout. Pastors who are experiencing a simple (though quite painful) and straightforward depression could be inappropriately seeing it as a problem of burnout. This tends to complicate the problem unnecessarily since the blame is placed on the wrong cause. Many who should be seeking treatment for the problem of depression are left bewildered and confused by esoteric and confusing rationalizations concerning their alleged burnout. If the problem is depression the cure lies clearly in seeking treatment for the depression. But if the problem is burnout, the cure may require much more complex and significant life changes to be made. If the problem is depression, particularly of the endogenous type, effective relief may be only weeks away through appropriate medication. Burnout may require many months or even years of adjustment for effective recovery.

To assist the reader in developing a clearer understanding of the differences between stress, depression and burnout let me describe the essential features of each.

Stress

Hans Selye, the father of stress research, has defined stress as “the NONSPECIFIC response of the body to any demand.” He emphasized that the body can respond in the same manner to many types of pressure—both good and bad. The excitement of preaching a good sermon or watching your home football team play a winning game can be as stress-producing as meeting a publisher’s deadline or facing an angry member of your church board after a meeting. Although the one causes good stress (called “eustress”) and the other bad stress (called “distress”), both make the same demand on certain parts of your body system and move you away from your normal resting equilibrium. Too much of either type can work havoc in your body.

The most devastating form of stress is that caused by the “fight or flight” response. This is the emergency response system of the body that prepares you to deal with any threat physical or psychological. When you get very angry you trigger this response. When you become very afraid you trigger it. Complex changes within the body prepare you to either fight (including many variations of the anger response) or flee.

Unfortunately, this state of distress can be stimulating for many pastors. They literally become addicted to the high level of adrenaline in their blood stream and even find it stimulating and pleasurable. For them stress is the road to excitement. It is also the road to self-destruction.

While we cannot eliminate stress completely (you are only stress-free when you are dead), every effective leader needs to know how to recognize “overstress”; that is, when your physiology is unable to recover quickly from the over-demand. The symptoms of distress are designed to warn you of the excessive “wear and tear” and they provide complex self-regulating checks and balances to restore optimum functioning. These symptoms include headaches, teeth grinding, insomnia, muscle tension, gastric disturbances, high blood pressure and rapid heartbeat. The reaction of so many pastors is to see these symptoms as obstacles to be overcome, rather than as signals to be heeded. They either ignore or obliterate them with medication. These may relieve the symptoms but they don’t stop the excessive wear and tear of the body.

Burnout is qualitatively different. It is much more protective than destructive. It may intervene when you are on the road to stressful destruction and take you out of the stressful environment. When it does it is often a blessing. It instantly slows you down and produces a state of lethargy and disengagement. In this sense it may even be functional. The system “gives out” before it “blows up”.

Depression

Depression is nearly always present in burnout. It may only be present in some stress disorders. When it is present in burnout it is a SYMPTOM of the disorder and not necessarily a problem in and of itself.

The depression of stress is always the consequence of “adrenal exhaustion”. In other words, the body produces a state of depression in which the low mood, disinterest in regular activities, and physical fatigue is designed to pull the victim out of the rat-race and produce a state of lethargy. The lethargy, in turn, allows the body to rest and recover from the over-stress.

Sometimes stress will bring out an underlying endogenous depression. The depression is produced by complex disturbances within the body's chemistry that are in some way (which is not yet clearly understood) related to some weakness or defect in the neurotransmitters of the nervous system. When subjected to prolonged stress, depression of the biochemical sort may set in. Much depression seen in high-pressured, over-worked and ambitious people (including ministers), may be of this sort. It may be a precursor to burnout and may even hasten the final "giving up" that characterizes burnout. But it can also be free standing and independent, never producing the burnout syndrome.

Burnout

I have tried to show that stress and depression are different from burnout. While these maladies may finally converge on the burnout road they could just as easily be taking different routes entirely. Obviously, a body system exhausted by overwork, pushed beyond reasonable endurance and depleted of resources could become "burned out". But, we shall see, burnout can also be reached by roads quite different from those of stress and depression.

In essence, extreme states of burnout will compromise most if not all of the following

Demoralization – a belief that you are no longer effective as a pastor

Depersonalization – a treating of yourself and others in an impersonal way

Detachment – a withdrawing from all responsibilities

Distancing – an avoidance of social and interpersonal contacts

Defeatism – a feeling of being "beaten" and a giving up of any hope of being able to avoid defeat.

The following table describes more succinctly the essential differences between burnout and stress.

Differences Between Burnout and Stress

- Burnout is a defense characterized by disengagement.
- Stress is characterized by over engagement.
- In Burnout the emotions become blunted.
- In Stress the emotions become over-reactive.
- In Burnout the emotional damage is primary.
- In Stress the physical damage is primary.
- The exhaustion of Stress affects motivation and drive.
- The exhaustion of Stress affects physical energy.
- Burnout produces demoralization.
- Stress produces disintegration.
- Burnout can best be understood as a loss of ideals and hope.
- Stress can best be understood as a loss of fuel and energy.
- The depression of Burnout is caused by the grief of lost ideals and hope.
- The depression of Stress is caused by adrenal exhaustion and the body's need for self-protection and conservation of energy.
- Burnout produces a sense of helplessness and hopelessness.
- Stress produces a sense of urgency and hyperactivity.
- Burnout produces paranoia, depersonalization and detachment.
- Stress produces panic, phobic, and anxiety-type disorders.
- Burnout may never **kill** you but your long life may not seem worth living.
- Stress may **kill** you prematurely, and you won't finish what you started.

Who Suffers From Burnout?

Anyone and everyone is capable of experiencing burnout. However, in a culture it tends to occur more frequently in those vocations that involve “people helping”. Ministers are particularly vulnerable to burnout because they experience the greatest exposure to the needs of people and often have the least resources, from a human standpoint to offer.

The emotional antecedents of burnout in the “people helping” professions include situations in which emotional demands are made over long periods of time. High ideals are held by the helper and an excessive personal expectation that cannot tolerate failure. There is also a lack of adequate social support to aid the helper to accept the limitations of resources – both personal and organizational. Almost every minister I know could be rated as very high on every one of these antecedents. If it were not for the resources of the Gospel, the task of ministry would be an impossible one. It is not a reflection on the ineffectiveness of the Gospel when a pastor succumbs to burnout. It is merely an acknowledgement that the glory of the Gospel is contained in very earthen vessels. Don’t be surprised if now and again they tend to show the signs of weakness.

The Cure

As in the treatment of all diseases, the cure begins with an acknowledgment of the problem. Burnout should never be seen as a sign of failure. Sometimes burnout is God’s plan for your life. It is the only way He can get your attention!

Personally, I see it as a very important protective system – a warning signal telling us that we have lost control of our lives. Do not fear the cure of your burnout. If anything, give yourself permission to experience it – recognizing that it is protecting you from a far worse fate.

Pray for the wisdom and courage you will need to malign your life with God’s purpose and plan. Heeding the warning signals of your system’s disintegration is only the first step. Determinately following the remedy will require much patience and perseverance. I will explore the steps of the remedy in the next section.

Preventing Burnout

The cost of burnout can be high – both for the pastor and the church. Recovery is not without its price. All those involved in the life of the pastor – family, parishioner, and friends, will be affected by it. Sadly, many burnout victims exist in churches, the mission field, “people-helping” agencies, offices, and factories, but they go unrecognized and therefore unhelped. This often leads to drug or alcohol abuse (often secretive), or isolation depression that will eat into the psyche of the sufferer like a cancer. The Spirit of God may not find an eager and effective response from the hearts of these burnout victims. Prayer will seem like a nightmare; the Scriptures will sound hollow and even the thought of “fellowship” will evoke feelings of panic. What is even more unfortunate is that many will not even acknowledge that they could have such a problem. They will deny it, refuse to accept it, even blame others or circumstances for it, but not take the first step toward being honest with themselves and admitting that they are in a state of burnout.

A Friend in time of Need

Sometimes it may be necessary for a spouse or friend to confront the victim with some honest feedback. In fact, I have not encountered many pastors or missionaries who have themselves taken the initiative in seeking help for their burnout problem. Invariably it is in response to another's caring concern that they have taken action. "You see, " the customary pastor will say to me during the first visit, "my spouse is very worried about me. I don't think the problem is that serious but to please her (or him) I'm here." Bravo! Doing it for a spouse is better than not doing it at all.

Is Burnout a sign of failure?

Since Most burnout situations are more that product of bad circumstances than of bad people the pastor needs to be reassured that his or her burnout is not necessarily a sign of personal failure. Unfortunately, given the sensitive nature of the guilt mechanisms most of us are heir to, we are more likely to attribute burnout to defects in ourselves than to the circumstances or our work. This can lead to a great sense of personal loss and a deep depression. In such a depression the victim is hardly likely to seek help without persistent prodding by a caring spouse or friend. Reassurance that there is a way out of the abyss, without provoking further guilt feelings should open the door for further help.

Should you seek professional help?

Severe cases of burnout, where the pastor is in a state of emotional turmoil, extreme fatigue, negative, depressed and withdrawn, should be treated y a professional. Burnout can be the cause or consequence of so many other problems that self-help in severe cases will only aggravate-no help it. In fact wherever possible don't hesitate to seek the counsel of a competent professional.

For most, though, burnout will be a less serious problem. Attention to some basic principles could prevent it form worsening and could bring about relief and restoration of a vital, spontaneous and dynamic personal, spiritual and professional life. Since no two burnout situations are identical coping needs to be tailor-made and is most effective when it occurs at several levels. Attention must be given not only to personal aspects of the burnout but also to social and institutional aspects as well.

Personal Coping

It is important to realize that burnout begins slowly. This is good news and bad news. The good news is that you have plenty of time to take preventive steps. The bad news is that it can creep up so slowly you won't recognize it. It is an insidious disease. It does not strike like a bolt of lightning out of the sky – it creeps up on you like a snake in the grass. If the problem does develop quickly, say over a few days, it is more likely to be an endogenous depression than burnout.

Since burnout begins slowly, steps to effective prevention can be taken very early in the process. Prevention is effected by implementing the techniques of coping at an earlier stage in the burnout process.

"Coping" refers to efforts that are made to master the conditions causing the burnout when automatic responses are not readily available. Coping, in itself, does not demand success – just to make some effort to change the circumstances of the burnout. This can dramatically restore a sense of hope, even when the effort is not altogether successful. Helplessness seems to vanish when the smallest of attempts is made to control the cause.

Richard Lazarus, a prominent stress researcher, has suggested two general types of coping that can be applied to the problem of burnout:

1. Direct action and
2. Paliation or indirect action.

In direct action the person actively tries to change the source of the problem by confronting it and finding positive solutions. When the source of the problem is ignored or avoided the likelihood of burnout is increased.

In indirect action, the person tries to understand the source of the problem by talking about it adapting to the source by making adjustments to it, and by diverting attention from it by getting involved in other activities.

Neither of the above coping strategies is better than the other. Both are necessary for successful prevention or recovery from burnout. Needless to say, all coping is carried out in a spirit of dependence upon the source of all our strength. God alone knows the depth of our despair, and he can give us the power to rise from it if we would trust him for it.

From my experience in working with pastors I have found that particular attention should be given to three important areas of personal functioning if one is going to prevent burnout. These are: assertiveness, role conflicts, and the pitfalls of sympathy.

Assertiveness

Much stress and burnout in pastors and Christian workers can be caused by a misunderstanding of how to be assertive and yet have a Christ-like spirit. Consequently they have great difficulty in dealing with interpersonal conflicts, manipulative people, bossy or demanding superiors or powerful authority figures. They cannot say “no” to the many demands made of them and often feel abused, hounded, ridiculed, criticized and humiliated, but do not know how to handle either their feelings or their abusive situation. Suppressed anger and passive aggressive behaviors then emerge as a lifestyle that can predispose the pastor to burnout. The antidote is clear: learn how to be assertive in a manner consistent with your Christian spirit.

Role conflicts

I doubt if any other vocation has as many diverse roles attached to it as ministry. The pastor is expected to be a good preacher, teacher, counselor, administrator, business manager and friend to many. A multitude of expectations are imposed on the average pastor. Many of these can cause conflict and stress that can be very debilitating. Research in industrial settings has repeatedly demonstrated that role conflict leads to stress and burnout. This is also true of ministry. The following steps can be helpful in preventing role conflict:

1. Know what your goals are for your ministry. Clarify your internal expectations by talking them over with a trusted confidant. You will experience enough ambiguity from others as to what you should be doing-at least ensure that you are clear about your own goals.
2. Clarify the expectations others have of you and decide which you believe are consistent with your calling. Be assertive and ask this: “What do you expect of me?” Then be assertive in accepting or rejecting those you want to negotiate changes in these expectation so as to fulfill your calling.

3. Focus your roles. Scattered goals doth produce scattered people. Identify your strengths and the talents God has given you, and then concentrate on these. Since you must give an account to God of your own ministry and not to your congregation or any other institution, make sure you are free to exercise that ministry.
4. Educate your congregation in the complex issues of being a minister, the diversity of roles you must play, and in the debilitating effects of these. If they know what you experience they will be a lot more understanding and less demanding than if they don't know.

The pitfalls of sympathy

Much burnout in “people helpers: is due to an ability to keep personal emotions sufficiently detached to avoid over-involvement in the pain of others. Stated very bluntly, the issue is: How much can a pastor take of the emotional or spiritual pain of others before it starts to burn him or her out?

The Christian minister or missionary is particularly vulnerable here. He or she is called to “all things to all people”. They are supposed to “bear one another’s burdens” and “weep with them that weep”. But how much contact with troubled people can be tolerated if one must become emotionally involved with all of them? While not becoming indifferent to the pain of others, it is necessary for the minister to develop an appropriate degree of self-protection so that he or she does not become emotionally destroyed.

There are many reasons why ministers are overly affected by the pain of others. They may be guilt prone and use their own “weeping” over the pain of another as a way of alleviating their guilt feelings. Paradoxical, isn't it? Especially since they preach a Gospel that offers forgiveness. Or they may become overly involved with the pain of another to satisfy some deep personal need (conscious or unconscious). It can also be an excessive need offer attention, recognition or appreciation. In some strange way the vicarious pain helps to alleviate these needs and may even be a boost to self-esteem.

Perhaps the most important reason **is that pastors are not taught to differentiate sympathy from empathy**. They erroneously believe that they are required to feel “sympathy” for all who hurt. Psychologists prefer the concept of “empathy” as a special form of sympathy because it describes a way of relating to another that shows care and love but does not produce a reciprocal pain.

To understand the difference, consider the following: **Sympathy** (as it is most commonly experienced) is away of comforting another by showing that you also feel their pain. It too easily becomes patronizing. It robs others the right to feel their own pain and not have you diminish the importance of what they feel. The vicarious suffering with another in sympathy can easily become selfish and self-satisfying. Sympathy in effect says: “I know how you feel because I feel that way also” **Empathy** says “I can never know what you feel because your pain is unique. But I do want to understand how you feel. Clinical research has shown that empathy is much more helpful and comforting than sympathy. Hurting people only hurt more if they see that their hurt causes others hurt also. Hurting people are healed by understanding, not by someone else becoming emotionally affected by their hurt.

Conclusion

Although burnout can be a traumatic, devastating, depressing and even life threatening experience, it can also be the beginning of true maturity. It can be the start of true maturity and the discovery of what God really wants to do with your life.

TWELVE STEPS TOWARD RECOVERY FROM BURNOUT

1. Learn at least one relaxation technique and practice it on a regular basis. This helps to rest critical components of your body's emergency system.
2. Balance your life by exercising regularly. Good physical conditioning strengthens the body's immune system and increases endorphins that are the brain's natural tranquilizers.
3. Get proper rest. Allow adequate time for sleep. Contrary to what we have been taught in a previous generation, most of us need more sleep than we get. Adrenal arousal reduces our need for sleep – but this is a trap since we will ultimately pay the penalty for it.
4. Learn to be flexible. Only the Gospel is unchanging. Your ideas and priorities may need to change. Flexibility reduces the likelihood of frustration.
5. Slow down. Remember: God is never in a hurry. "Hurriedness" is a human characteristic caused by inadequate planning and poor time management. Hurry speeds up the "wear and tear" of our bodies and minds and increases the production of destructive adrenaline.
6. Learn constructive ways of dealing with your anger. Our Gospel is a Gospel of forgiveness – dispense it liberally to all who hurt you. Remember that anger is a 'signal' telling you something is wrong with your environment, or it is evidence that you are in a "fight or flight" mode. Identify the source and confront it assertively.
7. Pay attention to "little hassles" – they are more likely to kill you than the big ones. It is the everyday, minor irritations that are the deadliest. Keep them to a minimum.
8. Develop your ability to be empathetic in your care of others and keep sympathy under control. Understand your own neurotic needs so that they can be kept out of the way of your pasturing.
9. Focus your ministry on essentials. Reduce redundancies, eliminate unnecessary activities, avoid demands that will stretch you too thinly and learn how to say "NO" kindly, without giving offense and without experiencing a sense of guilt.
10. Stay in touch with reality. Do not let your ambitions outrun the limits of your capabilities. Seek honest feedback from trusted friends on your talents, then pray for wisdom and set your sights accordingly. Aiming too high at unrealistic goals to satisfy an unsanctified ambition will only lead to burnout.
11. Avoid states of helplessness by taking control and implementing a coping strategy no matter how minor. Helplessness is often an "erroneous belief" that you are trapped and no solutions are possible. Exercise faith, believe that solutions are possible, and you can break out of the helplessness cycle.
12. If you cannot resolve a major conflict area in your life, leave it. Move on if necessary. Notions of being super-human often keep us in severe conflict situations. We believe we should be able to master every circumstance and this can lead to a persistence that is destructive. Even Jesus was hindered in what he could do (Matt. 13:58) and had to move on. Why not you?

Finally, don't be afraid to seek professional help when you need it.