

# enrichment

A JOURNAL FOR PENTECOSTAL MINISTRY

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Stressed, *and*  
Burned Out:  
What's Going  
*on in* My Life?

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Deep River  
— Biblical *and*  
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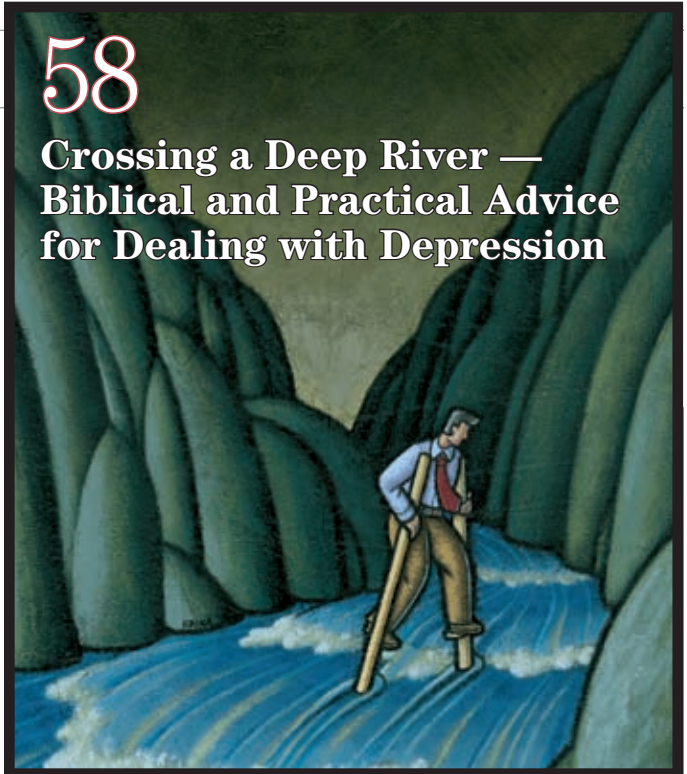
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### Student Ministries: Strategies for Leading Today's Youth

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• Use of the masculine pronoun for pastor is used throughout this issue and refers to both genders.

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# Minimizing Stress and Burnout

BY GARY R. ALLEN

Most pastors begin their ministries with high hopes and aspirations, never dreaming of the disappointments, disillusionments, and stresses they might encounter. The toll on ministers and their families can be overwhelming, debilitating, and often tragic. Recent studies show that:

- 1,700 pastors leave the ministry each month.
- Half of those who leave the ministry do so within the first 5 years.
- The primary reason for leaving the ministry is interpersonal conflict.

Interpersonal conflict creates such stress and tension that some degree of burnout and disillusionment is inevitable. God's call into ministry can become buried in one's pain and anger, and leaving the ministry under these conditions may often evoke little or no guilt.

## WHAT SHALL WE DO?

How can stress and the potential exodus from the ministry be minimized? While each circumstance is different and may require special attention, nine common steps can be taken to minimize stress and burnout. A pastor must:

1. continually affirm his ministry calling when facing adversity. Adversity can strengthen one's resolve and dependence on God's supernatural power.
2. know his mental and emotional limitations. Ministry is a constant roller coaster of highs and lows. One moment a pastor may be rejoicing with a young couple in the birth of their first-born child; the next moment he may be entering another hospital room where a person is dying a painful death.

3. determine to be better, not bitter. Ministry places a pastor in vulnerable situations that can create fear, insecurity, and anger. He must determine in advance what he will do with his pain and anger.

4. build strong relationships that support his calling and ministry. A pastor needs people in his life from his family, his church, and his peers who will be open and honest with him. He must be careful not to listen to only those who say what he wants to hear.

5. develop appropriate, healthy interests aside from his ministry. A pastor needs one or two activities in which he can find a mental and emotional escape from stress. These activities should help him refresh and refocus.

6. take regular time off each week even if it is only a few hours. Long vacations may not be feasible, but quality time each week is invaluable. Also, learn to "power nap." (See *Snooze You Win*, page 12.) A few minutes of intentional "time out" each day can save many restless, anxious hours.

7. periodically evaluate his spiritual, mental, and emotional well-being. He should allow others to provide him with objective observations since relying solely on self-evaluation can be dangerous.

8. be willing to reach out for help from others. Occasionally everyone needs help. During my ministry, I sought help from a psychiatrist friend. After several sessions and several months on medication, I was able to refocus my life and ministry. I will forever be grateful to him, my family, and our church for loving, supporting, and praying with me. Ministerial Enrichment Office has a counseling helpline (1-800-867-4011) to help Assemblies of God pastors and their families.

9. be a lifelong learner — not only academically, but also experientially through a life spent in the ever-sustaining presence of God. His grace and power have no limits. A pastor can make it through anything when God is with him. The operative word is *through*. Many difficult things in life cannot be avoided, but with God a minister can go through them.

## THE CHALLENGE

A pastor's great challenge is to attain effective ministry and sustain it with excellence. Ministry has unique challenges, but the people in the pews have unique life challenges as well. How the pastor processes the challenges he faces will influence others to pursue, attain, and sustain effectiveness and excellence in their lives.

Perhaps stress and pressure is causing you to consider changing your ministry or even leaving the ministry. I encourage you to prayerfully and carefully read the following issue of *Enrichment*, and honestly evaluate yourself and your ministry. It is possible to reconnect with your call, put aside the pain and anger you have experienced, and re-establish fulfilling, effective ministry.

**GARY R. ALLEN**, D.Min., is executive editor of *Enrichment* journal and director of the Ministerial Enrichment Office, Springfield, Missouri.

# LEADERLIFE MY VISION OF VISION

A study reported in the *Journal of Ministry Marketing and Management* showed the most important dimension of a pastor's leadership was "inspiring a shared vision among the people of his church."

In a recent *Fast Company* article, however, Linda Tischler noted that in the business world, "Boards have been burned too often by self-proclaimed titans whose personalities so dominate an organization that they shut out alternative or challenging points of view. So charisma is out."

In trying to reconcile these two arguments in my mind (the importance of vision versus the risks inherent in visionaries), I have come to my own vision of "vision."

**1. God's dream:** A Christian leader's vision must be the overflow of God's purposes as defined in Scripture and illuminated by the Holy Spirit, otherwise his plans may be nothing more than a burst of ambition.

**2. My dream:** George Barna believes, "Most people who are in positions of leadership in local churches aren't leaders. They're great people, but they're not really leaders." Vision is the missing attribute. Pastors cannot lead people into an alternative future if that future does not exist in them first.



**3. Our dream:** Unless the people around the pastor own his view of the future, they will never be able to work together to accomplish it. Leading an organization, then, involves bringing people into faith in a common future that encourages them to buy into it as a reality.

Being a visionary does not involve drowning others in one's big personality. A visionary is a dream keeper; a person who

embodies the combination of God's plan, God's people, and God's leadership to forge a future the church would have never known otherwise.

What is your vision?

*Be a leader worth following.*

**EARL CREPS**, doctor of ministry director, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield Missouri



# FIT FOR LIFE MOTIVATION TO REACH YOUR HEALTH GOALS

Motivation is the cheerleading that helps a person reach a goal or win a game. The root word of motivation is "motive." A motive causes a person to act. Many goals begin with external motivation, but internal motivation is required to reach long-term health goals (weight loss, lower blood pressure, etc.). Below are seven steps to boost one's motivation toward achieving health goals. Consult a doctor before making health changes that may interfere with a medical condition.

1. Set a goal, and write it down. SMART goals are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and tangible.
2. Establish a plan and record progress. Break goals into weekly and daily increments. Progress can be measured by tracking one's plan.
3. Get expert help. Consult a nutrition counselor, personal trainer, or wellness coach to guide and motivate goal accomplishment.
4. Invite accountability. Share goals with a trusted friend and ask for prayer support and encouragement.
5. Read success stories. Success stories are reminders that others are on the same journey.
6. Stay focused. When distractions occur, evaluate if they will hinder or help goal attainment. Then decide to accept or reject this consequence.
7. Reward progress. Celebrate progress and accomplishment with positive rewards. Rewards should not be food related. Rewards might include such things as enjoying a book, getting a massage, or buying fresh flowers.

**BRANDA POLK**, personal fitness trainer and wellness coach, Memphis, Tennessee



## UTHTRAX

### LOVE IS NOT ABUSE

A new trend affecting teen girls is relationship abuse. This abuse is so serious that it has been labeled an emerging health issue.

June 9, 2005, Reuters reported on the Teen Dating Abuse Survey 2005, which was commissioned by Liz Claiborne, Inc., and conducted by Teenage Research Unlimited.<sup>1</sup> Approximately 300,000 teens (between ages 13 to 18) from across the nation with various economic, religious, and racial boundaries were surveyed. According to this report, the amount of teen dating abuse is disturbing.

- Thirteen percent of teen girls have been physically abused by a boyfriend.
- Twenty-six percent have experienced repeated verbal abuse.
- Twenty-five percent have been forced to engage in sexual activity against their will.

More than half of those surveyed knew a friend who had been abused in some way by her significant other.

One third of the teens polled said they did not know what to do in an abusive relationship. They were not sure who they could turn to or how to find help for themselves or a friend. They also were unclear about how to end the abuse.

Does teen dating abuse affect our church youth? Unfortunately, the answer is yes.

Three years ago, I walked down a dark hallway in a church. I stumbled across a couple fighting. She was 16. He was 19. Neither of them saw me. He pushed her down the hall, kicked her once in the back, and called her a name. I called out his name, and they both turned in surprise.

When the incident was shared with her parents, the teen convinced them that it was just an argument. The



young man apologized. He said the report of the incident sounded worse than what actually happened. No action was taken.

Abuse is often hidden, so we miss it. When abuse is revealed, as in this case, the victim and even the parents may overlook it.

So what can those ministering to youth do?

We can teach young girls who are forming relationships about their value as a person and as a child of God. We must explain what real love is. We can share that abuse is not an acceptable way to relate, and then provide fun and healthy ways to connect. We can share resources so if abuse is occurring teens will know where to go for help and that they are not alone.

Last, we have an opportunity to model healthy relationships.

**T. SUZANNE ELLER**, Muskogee, Oklahoma

#### ENDNOTE

1. The eight-page survey is available online at [http://www.loveisnotabuse.com/surveyresults\\_teens.htm](http://www.loveisnotabuse.com/surveyresults_teens.htm)

## WIT & WISDOM

### REAL RULES FOR REAL MEN

1. A dumb guy buys lottery tickets; a real man tithes.
2. An ignorant man curses and swears; a real man prays.
3. A simple man gets drunk; a real man does not need alcohol.
4. A phony man imitates John Wayne; a real man follows Jesus.
5. An insecure man is a womanizer; a real man loves only one woman — his wife.
6. A weak man plays golf on Sunday; a real man takes his family to church.
7. A troubled man is bound by sin; a real man lives in the freedom of the Holy Spirit.
8. A macho man acts tough; a real man is strong in the Lord.
9. A confused man reads *Playboy* magazine; a real man reads the Bible.
10. A lost man goes to hell; a real man goes to heaven.

**CHARLES E. HACKETT**, former executive director, Assemblies of God U.S. Missions, Springfield, Missouri; and an executive presbyter



## A SINGLE PERSPECTIVE MARRIAGE, SINGLENESS, AND MINISTRY



Three examples of prominent unmarried people (single, divorced, and widowed) whom God greatly used in the Old Testament are Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea.

Jeremiah was commanded not to marry (Jeremiah 16:1,2). It is not known if God ever allowed him to marry; however, he was a great prophet who was single.

Marital status did not seem to be important in Ezekiel's ministry either. The Lord suddenly took his wife from him. He was not allowed to weep or mourn her death, but was to continue in the ministry God had assigned him (Ezekiel 24:15–18).

Hosea had a broken marriage (divorce), but continued in a recognized ministry. God told him to marry Gomer (a prostitute), whom He knew would later leave him for other men, illustrating the one-sided love that God had for Israel (Hosea 1–3).

In these examples, marital status was not an issue for effective ministry. God was interested in the prophets' integrity, obedience, and his ability to proclaim God's message. Without being intentional, many pastors may not consider single adults for leadership positions because they are unmarried. They may believe that married adults are more mature, spiritual, and complete; thus, married adults have more to offer than single adults. God's position in both the Old and New Testaments was more balanced. Marital status does not matter to God. Does it matter to you?

### ASK YOURSELF

- Are unmarried adults less spiritual or complete than married adults?
- Are married adults chosen first to fill important leadership positions? Why?
- Why did Paul indicate that single ministers are preferred over married ministers?
- Does the percentage of single adults in your church equal the percentage of single adults in leadership?

**DENNIS FRANCK**, director, Single Adult Ministries

## WHAT IN THE WORLD AN OLYMPIC SPIRIT (OR A HAUGHTY ONE)?

Twenty-year-old Lindsey Jacobellis could almost feel the gold medal around her neck. After years of conditioning and competitions at home and abroad, she was in Torino, Italy, for the 20th Olympic Winter Games. In the months leading up to the opening ceremonies, Lindsey had qualified for a new event that resembled roller derby and motocross on the side of a mountain. It was called snowboardcross. Making it to the medal heat in this event, this fresh-faced member of the U.S. Olympic Snowboard Team was flying high.

As Jacobellis raced down the icy mountain in the Italian Alps, she established a 3-second lead over the second place snowboarder from Switzerland. With the finish line in sight, Jacobellis began to celebrate prematurely. Coming off the next to last jump she attempted a trick called a "backside method grab" that included a 60-degree twist in front of the grand stands. Ironically, her hot-dogging caused her to lose her balance. When she attempted to land, she fell. While her teammates, parents, and coach watched in disbelief, the second-place contender sped past Lindsey and claimed the gold medal.

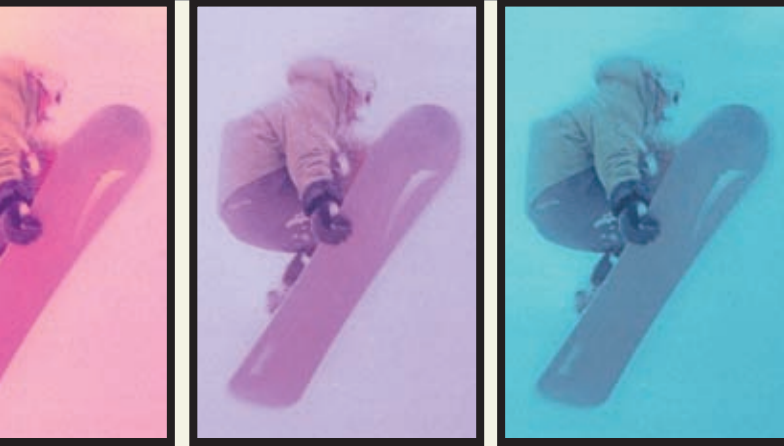
## U ASKED!

**Q:** *Scripture teaches we are to discipline those within the church who are immoral and not to judge those outside the church. Nevertheless, many people believe Christians are judgmental. How can the church provide moral leadership to our nation without appearing judgmental and unloving?*



**A:** It can be difficult to uphold a high moral standard and not seem condemning and judgmental to those outside the church. Christ is our great example. Jesus always held the bar of righteousness high for Israel's religious insiders. Yet, He scandalized many by befriending prostitutes and crooked tax collectors. Through His friendship to society's despised, He communicated God's grace.

The New Testament pictures the Early Church maintaining moral discipline within its ranks (1 Corinthians 5:12,13). The Early Church also taught clearly that sin separates people from God. Yet, believers were known



Although Jacobellis was able to right herself and cross the finish line before the third place snowboarder, the silver medal she won lacked a certain sparkle, and for good reason. Had she not been showboating before the spectators in a burst of premature pride, she could have easily won the gold medal.

Perhaps King Solomon learned the bitter truth Lindsey Jacobellis cannot seem to admit, "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18).

**GREG ASIMAKOUPoulos**, Mercer Island, Washington

by their great love. In contrast, many modern American churches have produced the worst possible combination. We have little discipline within the church and are widely viewed as being judgmental and unloving by outsiders.

An old slogan effectively captures New Testament teaching on this matter: "Hate the sin, but love the sinner." Too often, however, Christians who claim to live by this standard hate the sin and avoid the sinner. For example, homosexuals often accuse Christians of being homophobic. This accusation seems slightly off target, but it does not miss the mark completely. A more apt accusation is that Christians are homosexual avoiders. How often are lesbian couples invited to Christian homes for a barbecue? How often are gay men invited to men's fellowship gatherings? Not often enough.

Moral correction accompanied by avoidance is often interpreted as condemnation. On the other hand, acts of love without moral compromise are winsome and ennobling. The woman who takes coffee to prostitutes on cold nights; the man who visits prisoners just to talk; the person who takes cookies to the AIDS hospice can say they "hate the sin, but love the sinner," and their actions bear fruit. This is the pattern Christ set for us.

**GLEN MENZIES, PH.D.**, pastoral ministries department, North Central University, Minneapolis, Minnesota

## THE HIMS BEHIND THE HYMN

### SINGING THROUGH GATES OF SPLENDOR

Last January the Christian world marked a milestone. It had been 50 years since five missionaries were spared to death in the jungles of Ecuador by a savage group of Aucas Indians. Jim Elliot and Ed McCully were 28 years old; Pete Fleming, 27; Roger Youderian, 31; and Nate Saint was 32.

The somber anniversary called to remembrance the courageous devotion of the young martyrs who were convinced God had sent them to witness to the feared savages. It



Elliot

McCully

Fleming

Youderian

Saint

PHOTOS: EVERY TRIBE ENTERTAINMENT

seemed God had given the five favor with the Aucas. Since autumn 1955, the group had made flights over the jungle dropping buckets containing gifts. The Aucas' response had been encouraging. The savage group had received the gifts and offered tokens of friendship in return.

After New Year's 1956, the five men determined to land their small missionary aircraft in the jungle and meet the Indians. Before they left on their journey, they joined their wives in prayer asking God's protection and surrendering themselves to His will regardless of what might happen. Then they sang a hymn each man had grown to love.

"We rest on Thee, our Shield and our Defender!

Thine is the battle, Thine shall be the praise;

When passing through the gates of pearly splendor,  
Victors, we rest with Thee, through endless days."

Days later the five men were killed in a surprise ambush. (This event was recently re-enacted in the film, *End of the Spear*.) A week later, the five widows joined their voices to sing the hymn again, this time at a memorial service. As they sang, they had no way of knowing how God would use them to reach the Aucas for Christ, or how their husbands' deaths would inspire thousands to give their lives to missionary service around the world.

Ironically, Edith Gilly Cherry, the young British hymnist who wrote "We Rest on Thee," had faced her own apprehensions and challenges as an invalid. But with paper and pen, she voiced her determination to trust God's plans for her life. Like three of the martyred five, Cherry died before reaching her 30th birthday (at age 25).

**GREG ASIMAKOUPoulos**, Mercer Island, Washington



## PULPIT & PEW

### FLOURISHING FRIENDSHIPS ARE KEY TO CHURCH GROWTH

A recent in-depth study by the Gallup organization suggests that flourishing friendships among attendees — more than any other factor — are key to church growth.

The poll discovered that church friendliness is a determining factor not only in attendance and satisfaction, but also in determining whether to join as a member or volunteer for a lay-ministry position.

The Gallup survey found that church satisfaction is 15 percent higher among those who have a best friend in the congregation. People who have a best friend in the church are 21 percent more likely to be regular weekly attendees. Observed spiritual commitment is 15 percent greater among those who have a best friend in church. And 20 percent of those with a best friend in the congregation are more likely to say that faith is a part of every aspect of their lives.

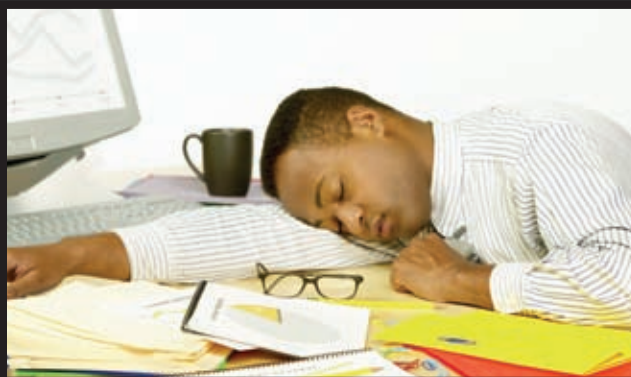
Gallup research specialist Michael Lindsey says deep,



lasting friendships borne out of faith and nurtured in church may be the single most effective strategy in revitalizing stagnant churches.

“No other demographic variable — age, sex, marital status, level of education, race and ethnicity, region of the country or religious tradition — demonstrated as high a level of satisfaction as variables measuring church-based friendships,” Lindsey says.

**JOHN W. KENNEDY**, *Today's Pentecostal Evangel*



## DID YOU KNOW!

### SNOOZE, YOU WIN

According to new studies, nothing tunes up mind and body like a good power nap. But there's an art to catching the right kind of z's.

Napping, in general, benefits heart functioning, hormonal maintenance, and cell repair, says Dr. Sara Mednick, a scientist at the Salk Institute for Biological Studies, who is at the forefront of napping research. “A power nap,” says Mednick, “simply maximizes these benefits by getting the sleeper into and out of rejuvenative sleep as fast as possible.”

Here's how the power nap works. Sleep comes in five stages that recur cyclically throughout a typical night, and a power nap seeks to include just the first two of them. The initial stage features the sinking into sleep as electrical brain activity, eye- and jaw-muscle movement, and respiration slow. The second is a light but restful sleep in which the body gets ready — lowering temperature,

relaxing muscles further — for the entry into the deep and dreamless “slow-wave sleep” that occurs in stages three and four. Stage five, of course, is REM, when the eyes twitch and dreaming becomes intense.

The five stages repeat every 90 to 120 minutes. Stage one can last up to 10 minutes, stage two until the 20th minute. Experts believe that the optimal power nap should roughly coincide with the first 20 minutes in order to give you full access to stage two's restorative benefits. In addition to generally improving alertness and stamina, stage two is marked by certain electrical signals in the nervous system that seem to solidify the connection between neurons involved in muscle memory.

Mednick's most recent research also shows that power naps can lift productivity and mood, lower stress, and improve memory and learning. In fact, Mednick has found through MRIs of nappers that brain activity stays high throughout the day with a nap; without one, it declines as the day wears on.

There is, however, a pitfall in all of this. You have to carefully time the duration of your nap in order to avoid waking in slow-wave sleep. This can produce what's known as sleep inertia, when limbs feel like concrete, the eyes can't focus, the speech is slurred, and the mind is sluggish. You must keep the nap to 20 minutes or slightly less — and, if you need the extra sleep, wait until the 50-minute mark. This will safely keep you on the power side of your nap.

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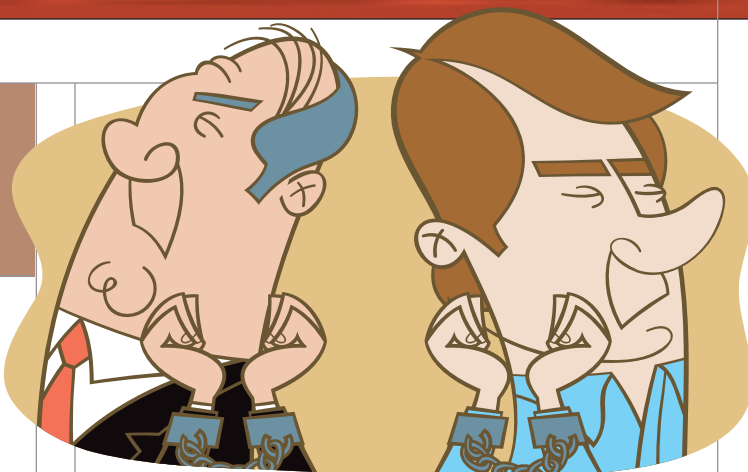
## FIELD TRIP FINDING FREEDOM THROUGH FORGIVENESS

"Forgive and forget." Right? Wrong. Many in the church never find the freedom God intends because they have an unbiblical view of forgiveness. Joseph Campbell, then associate pastor at Lebanon, Missouri's, First Assembly of God, decided to bridge the gap between true and false concepts of forgiveness and reconciliation.

People often find it difficult to forgive because they hold a faulty understanding of what forgiveness means. Campbell identified four inaccurate views: (1) equating forgiveness with reconciliation; (2) believing reconciliation occurs the moment a person decides to forgive; (3) thinking forgiving requires forgetting; and (4) believing forgiveness cannot occur until the offender repents.

True forgiveness, Campbell contends, requires four important features: (1) volition — an intentional act of initiative and determination on the part of the victim; (2) change — perhaps not in external circumstances, but an internal change of heart toward the offender; (3) action — the victim consciously works through the difficulties incurred; and (4) positive emotions toward the offender in place of previous resentment, bitterness, or hatred.

Campbell introduced a model of both forgiveness and reconciliation through teaching, small-group interactions, personal reflection, and application. He started with the incredible portrait of forgiveness shown in Scripture



through God's actions toward people. Divine forgiveness is impartially offered, unconditionally granted, and unilaterally administered. Does this mean that this model of forgiveness is impossible for people to accomplish? Absolutely not! In fact, most participants in Campbell's class made significant progress in their understanding and application of forgiveness.

The applications for this project are important on personal and organizational levels. When churches remain in past hurts and act out of that mentality, they cripple their efforts to be the light of God in their communities. Such high stakes deserve the focused attention of caring leaders. For more information, contact Dr. Joseph Campbell in Lebanon, Missouri. Read his doctor of ministry project at the AGTS library.

**LORI O'DEA**, doctor of ministry coordinator, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary

## SPIRITUAL LESSONS ON VICTORY AND DEFEAT

In spite of the Seattle Seahawks' loss to the Pittsburgh Steelers in Super Bowl XL, Coach Mike Holmgren, a member of Mercer Island Covenant Church, knows the joy of the NFL's ultimate payoff. As offensive coordinator for the San Francisco 49ers in the 1980s, Holmgren grew accustomed to the sweet taste of Super Bowl wins. When Holmgren was head coach of the Green Bay Packers, he took his team to the big dance two consecutive years. Holmgren also knows the heartache of personal struggles and defeat. He has experienced God at the point of personal need and proved his Heavenly Father faithful.

"Like many attendees in First Covenant Church in San Francisco, I was raised in a Swedish-American family. We lived above my grandfather's bakery where Scandinavian breads and pastries kept us well fed. But on Sundays, all



COURTESY OF THE SEATTLE SEAHAWKS

COACH MIKE HOLMGREN

three generations of the Holmgren family were found at church where the bread of life was generously dispensed.

"As a child, my appetite for spiritual things was not substantial. Raised in the shadow of Kezar Stadium where the 49ers played, I was more fixated on my dream of one day wearing a 49ers jersey than Sunday School lessons.

"When I was 11, Billy Graham held a 3-week crusade at Cow Palace in San Francisco. My parents took my sisters and me almost every night. On the final night when Cliff Barrows led the audience in singing

'Just as I Am,' I couldn't stay seated and went forward to accept Christ just as I was, grubby tennis shoes, and all.

"But even as a Christian I remained determined to make a name for myself on the gridiron. After leading my high school teams to the state championship, I was offered a scholarship

to play for the University of Southern California Trojans.

"Unfortunately, injuries kept me sidelined much of my college career. I was surprised when the St. Louis Cardinals drafted me in 1970. But 4 weeks later, I was released. The New York Jets picked me up as a back-up quarterback to 'Broadway Joe' Namath, but before the preseason was over, I was cut. My dream of playing professional football was over before it had ever begun. I was devastated.

"About this time a girl I had met at Mission Springs Bible Camp the summer after I became a Christian re-emerged in my life. Kathy had taken her faith much more seriously than I. She had attended a Christian college, became a nurse, and was serving as a short-term missionary in Zaire. Her inspiring letters helped me realize how much I needed to trust the Lord in the midst of my disillusionment. As a result, I recommitted my life to Christ. Proverbs 3:5,6 became the personal line of scrimmage at which I dug in. 'Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.'

"Kathy and I married in 1971, and I began my coaching career at the high school from which I graduated. As our family of four daughters grew, so did my professional opportunities. I moved into the college coaching ranks. But ambition was not the demon it had once been for me. My wife and kids were a daily reminder of God's blessings in my life and His priorities.

"Then a job opened up in Utah. Some of our friends questioned our judgment in accepting it. But Kathy and I viewed my position as assistant coach at Brigham Young University as a unique opportunity to share our faith with the players, coaches, and students on a predominantly Mormon campus.

"It was during my time at BYU that the San Francisco 49ers invited me to become their offensive coordinator. Although I was not a player, God had fulfilled my boyhood dream of being part of my hometown team.

"Eventually when the media began to speculate that I would be offered the head coaching position of an NFL team, I prayed diligently. When the offers came, it was clear to us that the needs of our daughters took precedence over my career, and I opted to stay with the 49ers. Sportswriters and colleagues scoffed, but God honored our choice. Later, at the right time for our family, I was hired by the Green Bay Packers to carry the mantle of legendary head coach Vince Lombardi.

"In the 6 years I spent in Green Bay, I was fortunate enough to lead the Packers to two consecutive appearances in the Super Bowl. In 1997, we beat New England. A year later we lost to the Broncos. I was blessed to coach a talented team of players who followed my leadership.

"In 1998, I accepted the invitation to become head coach of the Seattle Seahawks. Although some did not understand my decision, it seemed to be the direction the Lord was leading us. During this past season, 7 years of hard work paid off. Not only was I privileged to lead the Seahawks to their first playoff victory in 23 years, we won a bid to play in the Super Bowl by becoming NFC champions.

"Although the outcome against the Pittsburgh Steelers was not what we anticipated, I was extremely proud of our team. I told them they had every reason to hold their heads high.

"Win or lose, I learned a long time ago what really matters. It's not Super Bowl rings, but the crown of eternal life Christ has won for us by His victory on the cross. As the Swedish hymn writer, Lina Sandell, put it: 'Though He giveth or He taketh, God His children ne'er forsaketh, His the loving purpose solely to preserve them pure and holy.'"<sup>1</sup>

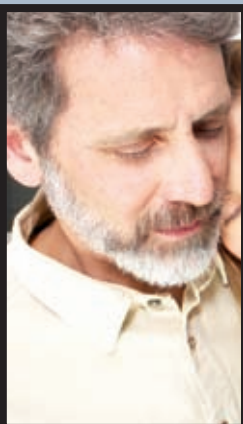
**COACH MIKE HOLMGREN** as told to Greg Asimakoupoulos

#### ENDNOTE

1. *Covenant Hymnal: A Worshipbook*, hymn 87.

## MINISTRY LIFE

### IS BURNOUT IN THE MINISTRY A SIGN OF THEOLOGICAL ANEMIA?



Increasing sources of information show ministry in the church can be hazardous to a pastor's health. Most insurance policies paid to ministers' survivors are the result of cardiovascular related deaths.

Theologian Ray Anderson observed that burnout is the "quiet despair which can seep into one's celebration of the ministry and turn it into a joyless marathon of sheer endurance." Anderson suggests that the verse "Woe to me if I do

not preach the gospel!" (1 Corinthians 9:16) provides insight into the problem. It is one thing to experience God in all His glory as the prime motivation of life; it is another for the work of the ministry to determine pastors' lives and fates. In fact, such a calling to ministry can come close to being fatal.

Jesus' own ministry demonstrates this principle. When Jesus reached the point of exhaustion, He had the freedom to stop and take time alone. Jesus understood that the same God who gave Him freedom to teach and heal also provided Him freedom from the claims people made on Him. This was not merely a technique for relaxation. Jesus' actions were based on a clear understanding of God's call and ministry that was empowered by the God who called us.

**BYRON D. KLAUS**, D.Min., president, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, Missouri



# PROFILES

## AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM AND MIDWEEK SUPPER OFFER COMMUNITY A TANGIBLE GOSPEL

On the heavily traveled central route through Illinois between Missouri and Indiana, Effingham, community of 12,500, is a popular stop as well for Midwest travelers heading to Chicago or down to Kentucky.

Don and Lois Wallace accepted the pastorate at Effingham Assembly of God 18 years ago when the church was still trying to find its niche in the community.

"We started with no building and about 60 people," Pastor Wallace remembers. "We met in a room behind a cabinet business. No one could find us. We weren't allowed to put up a sign."

The congregation has grown to more than 300 since then and enjoys a 31,000-square-foot facility on 16 acres. Brian and Christy White joined the Wallaces as youth pastors in 2002. The youth group has grown from less than 20 to more than 90.

"A few years ago we adopted the church theme of 'Ministry for the Family,'" Pastor Wallace says. "The family unit is God's ideal. He based the concept of the Church and its relationship to Him on the concept of the family. But the family is under attack, children are absolutely the victims."

Effingham Assembly is using two key ministries to connect with families. South Town Kids, a K-5 after-school program, offers activities and homework assistance to enrolled children 5 days a week. Supper's Ready, a midweek-feeding ministry, provides more than 200 people — including 70 to 80 children from low-income families — a hot meal on Wednesday night. While no one is turned away, they do ask for a small donation from those who can afford it.

Christy White has an elementary education degree and wanted to invest that training into ministry. In early 2004, she approached Pastor Wallace with a plan to develop the after-school program.

With four schools represented across the community, there was a definite need for after-school resources. But the school district balked at first over the offer coming from a church.

"We were allowed to hand out about 1,000 fliers," White remembers, "but we couldn't have the church phone number on them or the name of the church. We printed our home phone instead."

South Town Kids started in the fall of 2004 with 13 children. At first, the school district required the church to supply transportation.



"Then we set up South Town Kids as a separate organization that rents its facilities from our church for \$1 a month," Pastor Wallace says. "That untied the hands of our school district and allowed them to bus the children. They really wanted to work with us, but they were scared to death of

creating a conflict."

White oversees the program with a paid assistant. The two women coordinate snack time, recreation time, homework assistance, and supervised Internet access. Several of the children who were struggling in school are earning significantly higher grades.

"Parents can't believe the change they see in their children," Pastor Wallace says.

Supper's Ready currently reaches far more children than the dozen typically enrolled in South Town Kids.

"We have two buses and a van picking kids up for Supper's Ready," Pastor Wallace says. "Dad or Mom might be in prison or struggling with alcohol or drugs. Those are the kids we are going after. We've been doing it for 2 years now, and it's starting to pay great dividends. We're starting to see some of the parents show up at church."

Money from the community has generously supported both outreaches.

"A couple with no children died and left a fund to be directed toward the needs of youth and the elderly in the community," Pastor Wallace explains. "It amounts to about \$1 million to be spread out over 5 years."

The fund's trustees invited Effingham Assembly to apply for a grant. The church received \$10,000 to start South Town Kids and bought five computers, furniture, and advertising. The church has received more than \$70,000 over 3 years, including the purchase of new stainless steel kitchen appliances when the church built an addition with a new kitchen.

"Short-term," Pastor Wallace says of these ministries, "we won't see a lot of results. But long-term we can impact our community if we can reach these children who are locked into a dysfunctional lifestyle and introduce them to the love of Christ."

**SCOTT HARRUP**, associate editor, *Today's Pentecostal Evangel*







## Ask the Superintendent — **HANDLING THE PRESSURES OF MINISTRY**

### DESCRIBE HOW THE STRESSORS OF MINISTRY ARE UNIQUE FROM OTHER PROFESSIONS.

**TRASK:** Ministry is difficult because a pastor is always on call. A person who works a typical job comes home from work and, for the most part, forgets his job-related responsibilities. A pastor cannot do that. He lives with his responsibilities 24/7.

Ministry involves spiritual, emotional, and relational work. As the shepherd, a pastor carries the responsibility of caring for his congregation. A minister may help people who are dealing with stress and relationships; assist people who have problems at their job or in their marriage; and counsel those who have financial pressures, physical ailments, or are caring for a disabled loved one. This wide range of assignments is unique to pastoral ministry and creates unique stressors.

The stressors of ministry are different today than what they were 5, 10, and 20 years ago. American culture has negatively impacted the family. Many people feel it is important to make more money, to have more possessions, and to acquire position and name recognition. Consequently, children and marriages suffer. Approximately 50 percent of children today come from single-parent homes.

The culture's impact on the family places more demands on people. When people's lives become more complex, more demands are placed on ministers.

### HOW CAN A PASTOR MEET THE NEEDS OF HIS CONGREGATION WITHOUT BEING USED BY PEOPLE?

**TRASK:** Ministry requires accessibility. A pastor cannot be effective if he removes himself from people. He is responsible to minister to their hurts, needs, and problems. Some people may try to take advantage of that accessibility. In this case, a pastor must use wisdom and draw the line.

Years ago when churches had parsonages, the pastor usually lived next door to the church. People believed the pastor's home was the church's home and they were entitled to visit any time. These unannounced visits put a strain on the pastor's wife and family. When people stopped by she was expected to drop everything, have coffee, and socialize. Eventually, the pastor had to draw the line.

A minister has to draw a similar line in his family life. When I pastored, Friday night was our family night. Our children were involved in sports, and we guarded that time. There were rare occasions when this time was interrupted. A pastor must set aside a block of time to meet his family's needs, and not allow people to infringe on it.

An old saying is: "I would rather burn up than rust out." I know men who pastored great churches but lost their families. If you visited their congregations, the people

**G**eneral Superintendent Thomas E. Trask is a pastor to pastors. As district superintendent and general superintendent, he has ministered to hundreds of pastors over the years who have experienced stress and discouragement from the day-to-day pressure of ministry. In his quarterly interview with *Enrichment* journal, Trask provides practical advice, words of encouragement, and hope to pastors who might be depressed and disillusioned with ministry.

would say these men were wonderful pastors who were always there for them. But their ministry was at the expense of their own families. God never intended that.

### WHY IS A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD CRITICAL TO HANDLING THE PRESSURES OF MINISTRY?

**TRASK:** Maintaining a healthy relationship with God is probably one of the most critical issues in the life of a minister. A pastor's relationship with God must be a priority. Ministers must spend time with God. A pastor cannot minister out of emptiness.

When I first started in ministry, an older pastor advised me to ask God to help me schedule a time for devotions and to keep that schedule. For 49 years, the first 2 hours of my day — from 5 until 7 a.m. — has been my time with the Lord.

One danger for pastors is thinking they do not need devotions because they are doing the Lord's work. Pastors are not exempt from maintaining their own spiritual well-being. The spiritually draining effect of ministry makes a pastor's time with God that much more important. Spiritual maintenance is the result of prayer, Bible study, and fellowship with the Lord. During prayer and Bible study God renews and sustains our strength. Jesus realized the need to re-energize himself spiritually. He separated himself from the crowds for prayer. Jesus also took His disciples aside so they could pray and rest. Being busy is commendable, but sometimes we need to wait at the Lord's feet and listen.

### MANY MINISTERS LEAVE THE MINISTRY DURING THE FIRST 5 YEARS. HOW CAN THIS TREND BE ALTERED?

**TRASK:** First, we must do a better job of preparing pastors so their expectations match the realities of ministry. Ministry is a sacred calling and needs to be held in high esteem. But some people only see the glitter of ministry and do not see the stresses inherent in it. Consequently, some have chosen ministry as a vocation and have not been called by the Lord.

Second, the church must do a better job taking care of its pastor. A pastor is often torn between meeting his family's needs and the church's needs. He has the responsibility to meet the demanding needs the church presents as a body and as individuals. He wants to be available, prepared, and at his best. But some congregations are negligent in providing for their pastor, even though the church is able to do so. If a pastor's salary is not adequate, he encounters another pressing need. He bears the responsibility of the pastorate and the responsibility of providing for his family. He begins to live under constant pressure. A pastor can only stand that so long.

A pastor needs to consider his spouse and children's needs above those of the church. This pressure also affects them. If a pastor does not know without doubt that God has called him, I can understand why he would look for a different occupation. He must take care of his family. Even ministers who know God's

call and purpose cannot endure these pressures indefinitely.

### PASTORS OFTEN DO NOT SHARE THEIR NEEDS. THEY THINK IF OTHERS KNOW THEY ARE STRUGGLING, THEY WILL THINK THEY ARE WEAK.

**TRASK:** When some people see their pastor struggling, they may indeed think he is weak. There is value, however, in the congregation knowing their pastor is human. Pastors face the same trials, tests, and pressures others face, but maybe in different ways.

In many cases, a pastor's struggles come in much greater measure because of the numbers of people with whom he deals. Ecclesiastes 3:4 says there is "a time to weep and a time to laugh." Christians are to weep with those who weep, and rejoice with those who rejoice. People who love their pastor will empathize with him. It is okay for people to see the humanness of their pastor.

A pastor, however, should not share all his needs from the pulpit. That is not wise. There is "a time to be silent and a time to speak" (verse 7). A minister cannot expect most laypeople to understand the call of God and the pressures it entails.

A pastor does need to find a fellow pastor with whom he can confide, pray, and walk his ministerial journey. Relationships with fellow ministers work because they know about ministry. They can give counsel and friendship in a time of need. Fellow ministers strengthen each other.

### HOW CAN INTERESTS OUTSIDE THE MINISTRY HELP PASTORS RELIEVE STRESS?

**TRASK:** It is important for pastors to have hobbies or activities they can enjoy that are not ministry related. I enjoy detailing cars. For me, cleaning and waxing a car is therapeutic. It takes my mind off of the responsibilities I have, and I can see something accomplished. Some people like golf, fishing, hunting, or camping. Hobbies or activities are good as long as they are done in moderation. ■

#### SUPERINTENDENT'S CHAT



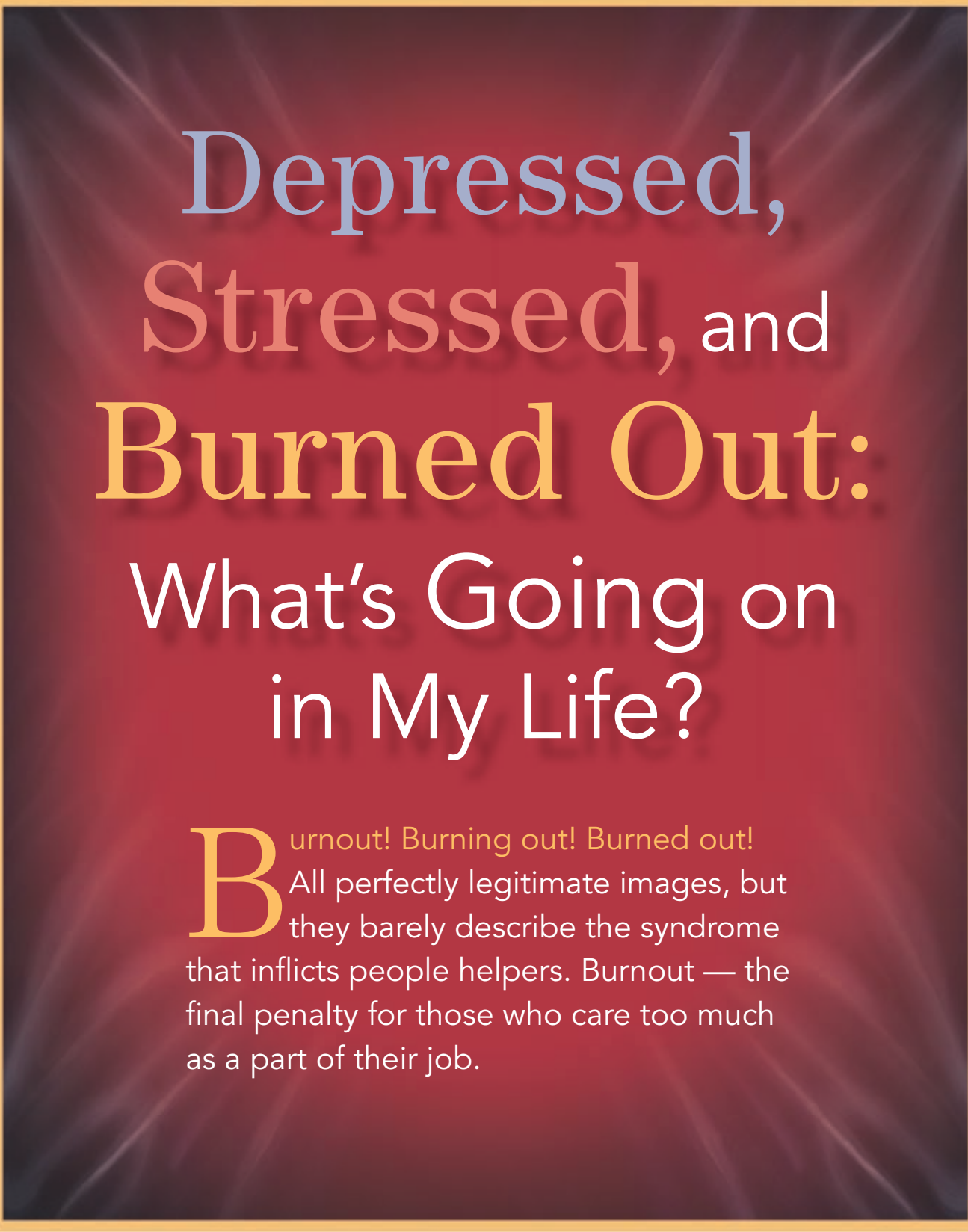
"Hello, Pastor. Let's sit down and talk." Every week, General Superintendent Thomas E. Trask does just that, in a video clip intended for ministers. The informal chats cover the kind of topics you would probably want to ask if you had the opportunity one-on-one.

Trask shares his heart on subjects such as Pastoring a Healthy Church, Prayer, Compassion Ministries, Leadership, and Community Relations. The 5-7 minute messages are archived so you can access them when it is convenient for you. Each message is presented in four formats: video for broadband or dial-up, audio, and text.

Avail yourself of the opportunity to chat with the superintendent every week. The Superintendent's Chat With Pastors can be found at <http://www.ministers.ag.org>.







# Depressed, Stressed, and Burned Out: What's Going on in My Life?

**B**urnout! Burning out! Burned out!  
All perfectly legitimate images, but  
they barely describe the syndrome  
that inflicts people helpers. Burnout — the  
final penalty for those who care too much  
as a part of their job.

Burnout is 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 people. If these people are troubled, then burnout can be particularly rapid and devastating.

The previous definition does not adequately capture the essence of burnout. Theorizing does not help us appreciate how destructive and debilitating caring for others can be. The pastor, who was once vibrant with power and enthusiasm, able to motivate others to service and godly living, and given to caring and concern, becomes reduced to useless ineffective rubble, emotionally exhausted, and deeply fearful. 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, becomes jittery when the telephone rings, panicked by any hint that the doorbell might clang and desperately wanting to be left alone. Or the pastor

who once patiently and kindly plodded his way through the prejudice and projections of ignorant and insensitive parishioners becomes a lonely, isolated, deeply depressed recluse who cannot get out of bed in the morning and who conceals his secret siestas like a closet alcoholic.

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 they:

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

Pastors tend to become overly involved emotionally, 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.

Once burnout sets in, pastors do not believe they are able to give of themselves to others. It is not that they do not want to help; they can't. The gas is gone.

Burnout has also been called *compassion fatigue*. The muscle of a pastor's 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. Short bursts of compassion may be mustered in times

of emergency, but it may suddenly and surprisingly 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. (See sidebar *Test Yourself: The Burnout Checklist*, page 24.)

But is 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 incompetence simply as a symptom of burnout? Will it not take away responsible behavior? Will burnout become a smoke screen for cop-out? Is burnout an excuse to leave the ministry, abandon a marriage, or give up on any activity that demands persistent, unrelenting dedication?

## **Pastors tend to become overly involved emotionally, overextend themselves, and feel overwhelmed by the emotional demands imposed by others.**

Discipleship is never easy. The servant 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 a real hazard, produced in well-meaning and dedicated people who care about others, whose motives are pure, and Holy Spirit-dependence sound. They simply discover that the human frame has its limits. When these limits are exceeded, the price is burnout.

The warning not to allow the idea of burnout to be an excuse for cop-out is well heeded. But on the other hand, prevention is better than cure. A thorough understanding of burnout can help 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 that a few readers will readily acknowledge the reality of the syndrome and the fact they are victims of it. It is much 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

# There is something strangely paradoxical about believing you are a servant of God and acknowledging that you are on the road to burnout.

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? 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 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. 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 effectively care for people without burning out if we heed some fundamental principles.

## UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN STRESS, DEPRESSION, AND BURNOUT

When we hear or read 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 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.

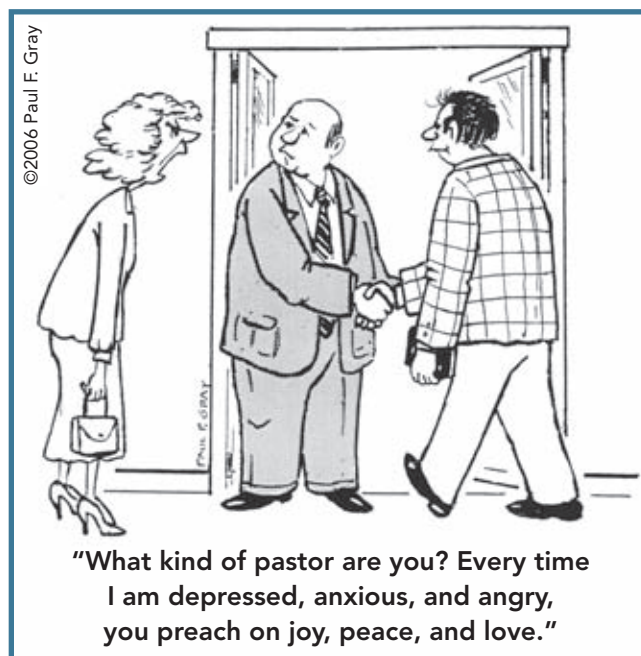
Not only is it common to confuse stress problems with those of burnout, but many also confuse problems of depression with burnout. Pastors who are experiencing a simple (though quite painful) depression could be inappropriately seeing it as burnout. This tends to complicate the problem unnecessarily since the blame is placed on the wrong cause. Many who should be seeking treatment for 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 depression. But if the problem is burnout, the cure may require much more complex and significant life changes. If the problem is depression, particularly of the endogenous type, effective relief may be only weeks away through appropriate medication. (See the sidebar *Different Categories of Depression in the Web version of this article at <http://www.enrichmentjournal.ag.org>.) 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, defines 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 football team play a winning game can be as stress-producing as facing an angry member of your church board after a meeting. Although the one causes good stress (eustress) and the other bad stress



# TEST YOURSELF: THE BURNOUT CHECKLIST

(NOTE: This test 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 amount of CHANGE that has occurred during this period. More emphasis should be placed on change that has occurred during the past 6 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 are not.

| 1<br>Little or No<br>Change | 2<br>Just Noticeable<br>Change | 3<br>Noticeable<br>Change | 4<br>Fair Degree<br>of Change | 5<br>Great Degree<br>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 do not feel concerned about it?
- \_\_\_ 7. Do you spend more time alone, withdrawn from friends, family, and work acquaintances?
- \_\_\_ 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 you are not accomplishing anything worthwhile in your work and that you are ineffective in making any changes?
  - \_\_\_ 18. Do you feel you are not accomplishing anything worthwhile in your personal life or you have lost spontaneity in your activities?
  - \_\_\_ 19. Do you spend much time each day thinking or worrying about your job or people, future or past?
  - \_\_\_ 20. Are you at the end of your tether, the point of breaking down or cracking up?

\_\_\_ **TOTAL SCORE**

## INTERPRETATION:

Please remember, no inventory is absolutely accurate or foolproof. 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 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 no burnout. You may be taking your life or work too casually.                          | 61–75        | You are beginning to experience burnout. Take steps to better control your life.   |
| 31–45 | This is a normal score for anyone who works hard and seriously. Relax periodically.             | 76–90        | You are burning out. You should seek help, reevaluate your present life, and make changes.                                 |
| 46–60 | You are experiencing some mild burnout and could benefit from careful review of your lifestyle. | 90 or higher | You are dangerously burned out and need immediate relief. Your burnout is threatening your physical and mental well-being. |

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## The most devastating form of stress is stress caused by the fight-or-flight response.

(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 stress caused by the fight-or-flight response. This is the body's emergency response system. This system prepares you to deal with any physical or psychological threat. When you become angry, you trigger this response. When you become afraid, you trigger it. Complex changes within the body prepare you to either fight (including many variations of the anger response) or flee.

When the system is constantly subjected to this emergency response and when there is nothing to fight or flee from, the body adapts to this state by producing complex stress hormones from the adrenal glands that cause an increased state of wear and tear in the body.

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

While pastors cannot completely eliminate stress, every effective leader needs to know how to recognize overstress; that is, when his physiology is unable to recover quickly from the over-demand. The symptoms of distress are designed to warn him 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. Many pastors see these symptoms as obstacles to performance or success that need to be overcome rather than as signals to be heeded. Pastors merely want to get rid of these obstacles. They either ignore them or obliterate them with medication. These actions may relieve the symptoms, but they don't stop the excessive wear and tear on the body.

While prolonged distress can lead to burnout, stress is essentially different from burnout in that its symptoms are the consequence of overuse of the body. These symptoms are caused by the overproduction of adrenaline and the repeated triggering of the fight-or-flight response. Stress could just as easily be called hurry sickness. Seldom does the disease of over-stress in and of itself slow the victim down — not until the final blow is struck and the ulcer, stroke, or heart attack has occurred. (See the sidebar *Stress Management* in the Web version of this article at <http://www.enrichmentjournal.ag.org>.)

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 the most complicated of all our emotions, and, yet, one of the most common psychological problems a person can experience. Someone has called it the “common cold” of the emotions.

It's a feeling of gloom or sadness that is usually accompanied by a slowing down of the body, not just in the mind. (See sidebar *Common Symptoms of Depression*.)

We are all designed to experience depression. At some time in their lives, probably one of every five people will experience depression seriously enough to hinder their normal way of life. (See the sidebar *Intensity of Depression* in the Web version of this article at <http://www.enrichmentjournal.ag.org>.)

Depression is nearly always present in burnout. It may only be present in some stress disorders. When it is present in

### COMMON SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION

- persistent sadness, anxiety, or an empty mood.
- feelings of hopelessness and pessimism.
- feelings of guilt, worthlessness, and helplessness. (Depressed people may burst out crying for the slightest reason.)
- loss of interest or pleasure in ordinary activities, including sex.
- sleep disturbances such as insomnia, early morning waking, or oversleeping.
- eating disturbances (either loss of weight or gain in appetite and weight).
- decreased energy, fatigue, and being slowed down.
- thoughts of death or suicide, and even suicide attempts.
- restlessness and irritability.
- difficulty concentrating and remembering, and in making decisions.
- physical symptoms such as headaches, digestive disorders, and chronic pain that do not respond to treatment.

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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. 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.

Depression can be a reaction to what is going on in life — to significant losses one experiences. This is known as reactive depression. (See the sidebar *Types of Depression* in the web version of this article at <http://www.enrichmentjournal.ag.org>.) Most people contend with this type of depression in their daily lives. If we are emotionally healthy, we deal with those losses promptly, and the depression is short-lived. If we are not, the depression lingers and may even get worse or chronic.

For instance, many people experience the “Monday morning blues” as they prepare to meet the demands of the week. For some, the blues are the low periods in their cycle of emotions that normally follow high periods of excitement. Those cycles are quite normal and are determined by our individual physiology, by the weather to some extent, by infections, and by many other circumstances. They are the body’s way of regulating immune function and forcing us to rest. The blues should not alarm us. If we cooperate with them, we’ll improve our overall state of body and mind.

Sometimes stress will bring out an underlying endogenous depression. This 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

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. A body system exhausted by overwork, pushed beyond reasonable

## DIFFERENCES BETWEEN BURNOUT AND STRESS

- Burnout is a defense characterized by disengagement.
- Stress is characterized by over-engagement.
- In burnout, emotions become blunted.
- In stress, emotions become over-reactive.
- In burnout, emotional damage is primary.
- In stress, physical damage is primary.
- The exhaustion of burnout 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 grief engendered by the loss of ideals and hope.
- The depression of stress is produced by the body’s need to protect itself and conserve 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 will not have enough time to finish what you started.



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endurance, and depleted of resources could become burned out. But burnout can also be reached by roads quite different from those of stress and depression. (See sidebar *Differences Between Burnout and Stress*.)

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

- demoralization — the belief you are no longer effective as a pastor.
- depersonalization — treating yourself and others in an impersonal way.

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**A body system exhausted by overwork, pushed beyond reasonable endurance, and depleted of resources could become burned out.**

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# Burnout tends to occur more frequently in those vocations that involve helping people.

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- 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.

## WHO SUFFERS FROM BURNOUT?

Burnout tends to occur more frequently in those vocations that involve helping people. Pastors are particularly vulnerable to burnout because they experience the greatest exposure to the needs of people and, from a human standpoint, often have the least resources 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. The helper usually holds high ideals, along with 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 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 impossible. It is not a reflection on the ineffectiveness of the gospel when a pastor succumbs to burnout. It is merely an acknowledgment that the glory of the gospel is contained in earthen vessels. Don't be surprised if now and again they tend to show the signs of weakness.

## RECOVERING FROM BURNOUT

As in the treatment of all diseases, the cure begins with acknowledging 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.

Burnout is an important protective system — a warning signal telling us that we have lost control of our lives. Do not fear the cure for 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 to align 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. (See the sidebar *Twelve Steps Toward Recovering From Burnout* in the Web version of this article at <http://www.enrichmentjournal.ag.org>.)

The cost of burnout can be high for both the pastor and church. Recovery is not without its price. All those involved in

the life of the pastor — family, parishioner, and friends — will be affected by his burnout. Sadly, many burnout victims go unrecognized and, therefore, unhelped. This often leads to drug or alcohol abuse (often secretive), or to 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 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 they are in a state of burnout.

## Heed a spouse or friend's advice

Sometimes it may be necessary for a spouse or friend to confront the victim with honest feedback. In fact, I have not encountered many pastors or missionaries who have 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. During the first visit the pastor will say, "My spouse is worried about me. I don't think the problem is that serious, but to please her, I'm here." Bravo. Doing it for a spouse is better than not doing it at all.

## Realize burnout is not a sign of failure

Since most burnout situations are more the product of bad circumstances than of bad people, the pastor needs to be reassured his burnout is not necessarily a sign of personal failure. Unfortunately, given the sensitive nature of the guilt mechanisms most people are heir to, pastors are more likely to attribute burnout to defects in them than to the circumstances of their work. This can lead to a sense of personal loss and a deep depression. In such a depression, the pastor is unlikely 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, can open the door for further help.

## Seek professional help

Severe cases of burnout — where the pastor is in a state of emotional turmoil, extreme fatigue, is negative and depressed, and withdrawn — should be treated by a professional. Burnout can be the cause or consequence of so many other problems that self-help in severe cases will only aggravate, not help.

For most, though, burnout will be a less serious problem.



Attention to some basic principles can prevent it from worsening and can 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 the social and institutional aspects as well.

### Learn coping skills

It is important to realize that burnout begins slowly. This is good news and bad news. The good news is that pastors have plenty of time to take preventive steps. The bad news is that it can creep up so slowly many pastors will not recognize it. Burnout 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 rather than burnout.

## Since burnout begins slowly, steps to effective prevention can be taken early in the process.

Since burnout begins slowly, steps to effective prevention can be taken 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 to master the conditions causing the burnout when automatic responses are not readily available. Coping, in itself, does not demand success — just that you put out the effort. What always surprises me is how effective it is 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.
2. Palliation 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 diverting attention from it by getting involved in other activities.

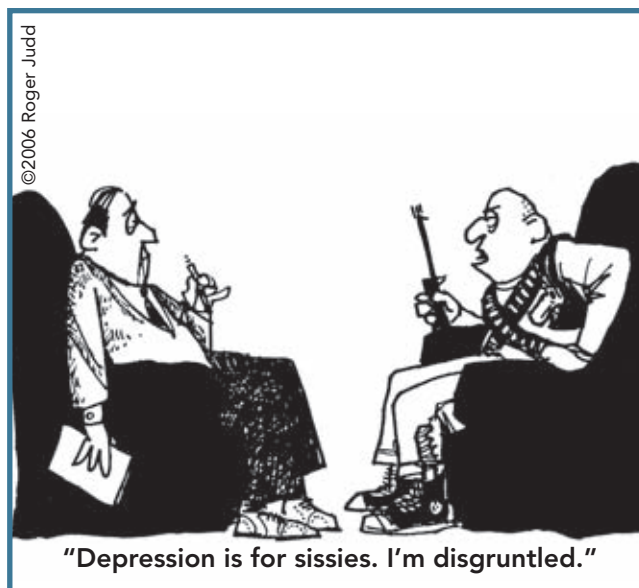
Neither of the above coping strategies is better than the other. Both are necessary for successful prevention or recovery from burnout. All coping is carried out in a spirit of dependence on the source of all our strength. God alone knows the depth of our despair, and He can give us the power to rise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

## PREVENTING BURNOUT

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: assertiveness, role conflicts, and the pitfalls of sympathy.

### Assertiveness

Much stress and burnout found in pastors is caused by a misunderstanding of how to be assertive, and, yet, have a Christlike spirit. Consequently, many pastors have difficulty 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 the abusive situation. As a result, suppressed anger and passive-aggressive behaviors 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. A multitude of expectations are imposed on the average pastor. Many of these can cause conflict and stress that can be 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:

- 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, so at least ensure that you are clear about your own goals.
- Clarify the expectations others have of you and decide which of these are consistent with your calling. Be assertive and ask: "What do you expect of me?" Then, be assertive in accepting or rejecting those and negotiate changes in these expectations to fulfill your calling.
- Focus your roles. Scattered goals 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.
- Educate your congregation in the complex issues of being a minister, the diversity of roles you must play, and the possible debilitating effects they can have. If they know what you experience, they will be much more understanding and less demanding than if they did not know.

## Pitfalls of sympathy

Burnout can result from an inability to keep personal emotions sufficiently detached to avoid over-involvement in the pain of others. How much can a pastor take of the emotional or spiritual pain of others before it starts to burn him out?

The Christian minister or missionary is particularly vulnerable here. He is called to be all things to all people. He is supposed to "bear one another's burdens" and "weep with those who weep" (Galatians 6:2, NASB; Romans 12:15, NASB).<sup>4</sup> 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 pastors to develop an appropriate degree of self-protection so they do 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 for attention, recognition, or appreciation. In some strange way the vicarious pain helps to alleviate these needs and may even boost their self-esteem.

Perhaps the most important reason pastors are affected by the pain of others is they 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.

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 to hurt also. Hurting people are healed by understanding, not by someone else becoming emotionally affected by their hurt.

Pastors need to work out a theology of compassion before becoming involved with a hurting world. On one hand, pastors must be ready to "weep with those who weep" (Romans 12:15, NASB), but on the other hand, "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves" (Romans 15:1). Pastors need to know when they are being motivated by neurotic needs to feel the pain of others and be willing to surrender their neuroticism to the cross of healing so that we can be "blameless and harmless, the sons (and daughters) of God" (Philippians 2:15). We are hardly "harmless" as ministers when we operate out of a neurotic need to sympathetically feel the pain of others. Not only do we destroy ourselves, we rob those who are hurting of the respect due to them in their suffering.

## CONCLUSION

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



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### ENDNOTE

1. Scripture quotations labeled NASB are taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission, (www.Lockman.org).





# Hitting the Wall—

## One Pastor's Journey With Depression and His Road To Recovery

The pastor stopped in the middle of what he was saying, paused, briefly stared at the floor, then looked at me and said, "Actually, I guess the truth about me is this: most days I feel I am hanging by a thread."

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BY DAVID ARGUE

ILLUSTRATION BY: DAVID BATES







His remark surprised me. During the first part of our conversation he had used the language of success: a growing church, the best-ever staff, a long-term pastorate, the finest people, building programs, and great messages.

Then he asked, “How is it going with you?”

It was after I spoke candidly of my journey during these months that he took the risk to become vulnerable. Since then I have frequently prayed for him and have often thought about how hard it is for pastors to find a safe person to talk with, to admit the nature of their inner conversations — the ones that are for real.

Pastors are trying to lead people and be models of strength and purpose. They often feel they must do all they can to earn or keep the respect of the board with whom they serve. To whom do pastors talk? Whom do they disclose to fully? Who

## **Being hard to live with, finding fault easily, blaming, and pickiness became a part of my life.**

watches out for pastors? Who can tell them the hard truth in such a way that it is nonthreatening?

In fall 2003, I found myself on a downward spiral. The church I had been founder/pastor of for 28 years was flourishing (18 percent growth the year before).

Had someone asked me how I was doing, I could have easily referenced:

- the recently completed 40 Days of Purpose campaign.
- how the church had to go to three services on Sunday mornings.
- how the 15 acres we have built on three times seems too small.

I could have given these answers, most people would have been pleased, and I would have appeared to be doing just fine.

But, at the same time, I was beginning to hit the wall. I was on my way to exhaustion, breakdown, and depression. I was feeling increasingly more trapped and alone. Then, after a time, the stress on the inside started to show on the outside.

Now I can see it clearly. Then, I found ways to tell myself I was okay. I would excuse the signs as only temporary. I told

myself, *When I get this in place, it will be so different. I am just tired today.*

## **HITTING THE WALL**

Here are some signs that I was hitting the wall:

### **Sleep disruption**

I began having regular difficulty getting to sleep. I began to wake often during the night and found it difficult to turn my mind off. Problems kept rolling over in my mind, mixed with prayers and fretting.

### **Loss of appetite**

In this journey I lost more than 30 pounds through disinterest in food and changes in tastes and preferences. For some in this state, the attraction to food increases greatly: “There is a frenetic quality about our lives ... and when we do have discretionary time, we indulge in escapist behaviors — such as compulsive eating, ... spending, watching television — because we are too tired to choose activities that are truly life-giving.”<sup>1</sup>

### **Irritability**

Being hard to live with, finding fault easily, blaming, and pickiness became a part of my life. I had a difficult time at home restraining angry words or feelings. At church, I was a model of grace and kindness; but at home, my wife was feeling the brunt of my crumbling person. It was not pretty.

### **Loss of leadership strengths**

My depression manifested itself in postponement of hard decisions. I put things off that contained obvious risk or that involved choosing the *least loss* option.

### **Emotional fragility**

My emotions moved closer to the surface and tears were a frequent result. I consoled myself that the tears were always about God and good things happening to His people, but there were far too many tears, and they came too easily.

### **Mental fragility**

I had a painful discovery — an overworked mind not experiencing enough rest can lead to forgetfulness. I began

having lapses in memory. I was moving into depression.

About this time a friend who is a graphic artist gave me a sketch of a rowboat pulled up on the shore of a lake, waiting to be used. Underneath the boat were these words: "Get in the boat, go across the lake, there will be a storm, you will not die" (Matthew 8:23-27).

How are you doing? Does anyone else know? Do you?

## THE PATHWAY TO RECOVERY

Thanks to a gracious church, I was given time to begin the process of recovery and was accepted along the way. I will never be the same. My focus of ministry has changed. I feel called to work with pastors and churches that need lift and perspective.

Meanwhile, I live each day with these directives in mind.

### I will pace myself

Caveat: I believe in hard work. I believe a pastor's work is eternal and I believe work must be managed to go full cycle with what God wants us to do and be.

I used to go as hard as I could all of the time, acting as if I was forever 29. Pace? That's what I put on tacos.

Sleep? Six to 7 hours daily should do me.

Exercise? That's an option I cannot afford right now.

Appointments? You've got time; I've got time. I will meet you over breakfast, dinner, supper, evenings — any time is a fine time.

Now I sleep longer (8 to 9 hours) and even take naps. (The Southern hemisphere has known something here all along.) I plan my days more carefully, and I am learning to exercise regularly.

Vacations? They must be structured around what rests and refreshes, even if that means not seeing friends scattered

## The simple life tends to be the peaceful life.

across the country or using those days to attend one more conference. (Unless that is what truly refreshes.)

Appointments are to be managed. (Remember, no one at the end of his life ever wishes he had spent more time in the office.)<sup>2</sup>

Study time prepares me to touch the 85 percent of the church that only have contact with me through my preaching. This is where they are fed and grow in God.

So, I must pace myself, manage my schedule, draw boundary lines around my work per week, set aside time for what is

important, say no without guilt, and keep a personal Sabbath day. Just as I gear up in the morning to face the day, I take time to gear down in the evening so my rest can be peaceful and thorough.

### Wherever I can, I will simplify

The simple life tends to be the peaceful life. The uncluttered life gives place to joy. I have begun to give things to people that I hear they would enjoy.

Recently, I overheard a pastor express a need for a commentary set, and that, perhaps, he needed to bite the bullet and order it. I sensed this was a divine setup and pulled that set out of my library and gave it to him. What a delight to see his reaction and know I had been a blessing. He will use those books far more than I did.

A guideline about simplifying has been established: if you have not used something in the last year, it may be time to release it and simplify.

Stuff encumbers ... simplicity frees.

## CONSIDER JESUS

Consider Jesus:

- He walked everywhere: aerobics.
- His ministry was predominantly outdoors. Ours is indoors.
- His diversion was bird watching. "Look at the birds" (Matthew 6:26).
- He was not married.
- He had no electricity. Did He stay up late?
- He was a carpenter for more than 10 years. He was creative, had no power tools, and finished products by hand.
- He foraged for food and lodging: interaction with people.
- He was a Sabbath celebrator.
- He knew "Why I came," the big reason for His ministry/purpose.
- He had no clocks. "You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky" (Matthew 6:2,3).
- He had no cell phones, televisions, computers, newspapers, satellites, or planes.
- He "finished the work."
- We are a direct product of what He did (and didn't) do.



DAVID ARGUE, Colorado Springs, Colorado



## **I will seek to always be spiritually real and open**

There is great joy in being in God's presence, not asking, not laboring, simply being still, and knowing He is God. Pastors have asked what theologically helped me navigate through these months. My answer is a deep sense that God was in control. I sat often and long in a big chair reiterating my faith that God had not left me. He was in control of this part of the

## **There is great joy in being in God's presence, not asking, not laboring, simple being still, and knowing He is God.**

journey, and whatever He wanted I wanted. I am His servant. I have come to an entirely new and real place with God.

When people pray over you, they create an anchoring power. A core group every Friday noon created a prayer shield, a time of soaking in prayer. On one occasion, persons at a house of prayer "read our mail" and provided one more evidence that God is truly in charge. This speaks hope to us. Be open to God and ready to receive in your time with Him.

Be spiritually real with others. When I am with my pastor friends, I seek to edify and encourage, not to compare and boast. Only if I am prodded will I get down to numbers and such.

## **I will listen to my body**

If I had been following this wisdom, perhaps my long journey of depression could have been shortened. The restlessness

and anxiousness, the weight, the negative thoughts — these were sending a signal. I can now see that they were the flashing red lights of the advance warning system God has built into us. Now, I listen much better, drink Powerade,<sup>™</sup> carry energy bars, take naps, and go to bed when I am tired.

## **When the opportunity comes, I will ask friends how they sense I am doing, and I will listen**

For a time, a small core of trusted friends met with me weekly to let me know how they perceived me to be doing. These meetings took place during a time when I was struggling. Their words could be painful, but their input gave substance to the process. In my case, it was a doorway to improving health and a clearer perspective.

## **I will be mindful of my use of "later"**

If I have issues, confrontations with people, or church organizational matters and these are being postponed because of my lack of energy, I will admit it. I will consider what these symptoms might be saying. Am I frowning when the phone rings? Avoiding people?

## **After Christ, my first commitment will be to love my family**

Too often the pastor's family pays heavily because of the work of ministry. It is not enough to claim that our family is our priority; they must feel like they are.

My journey into the valley has underlined in my mind that when the journey is winding down and you walk into the sunset, it will, hopefully, be with your family. It will not be with your board or building committee. Priorities in focus now can leave you prepared for the long walk into eternity later.

## **I will seek to keep the total cycle of life in mind**

At moments during these months, I wondered if I would recover fully. Were my days of earning and planning for retirement adequate? What would happen if the church said, "Three months and it's all over"?

There is such great wisdom in living prepared to go full cycle (and that, men, means you will probably live to age 82).

## **Four times a week I will exercise**

The goal of exercise is enjoyment and physical conditioning. One doctor told me that a person could not walk regularly and be depressed. By walking regularly, he meant 20 minutes of walking at a pace that provides exercise and doing so at least 4 times per week. Walking produces natural responses in your body that effectively eliminate stored toxins and lead as well to the maintenance of our emotional balance.





## "FOR BETTER, FOR WORSE": WHEN YOUR HUSBAND HITS THE WALL

I take thee, David, to be my husband ... for better, for worse ... for richer, for poorer ... in sickness and in health ... to love and to cherish ... till death us do part."

It has been more than 11 years since I spoke those words to David. I was all aglow and focused more on "for better" than "for worse." In the past 2 years, I began reaching within myself to speak those vows in a much deeper way by choosing to love and to cherish during the great pain and loneliness I felt while facing David's struggle with burnout.

As I watched my husband spiral down physically and emotionally, I realized that he was changing, and so was our marriage. My role of parenting partner, playful friend, lover, and ministry teammate was shifting to decision maker, caregiver, protector, and financial manager. Not only did I need to adjust to these changes, but I also had to do so with grace as a pastor's wife in front of our congregation as well. Thank God for wonderful friends and family who walked through these months with us.

Our marriage is one of great joy and laughter, passion for ministry, and deep love for one another and our children. Each of those areas was challenged when David's struggle began. Because the burnout took place over a 2-year period, we experienced many emotional twists and turns. This caused anger in me, and I felt alone and helpless. Where does the pastor's wife go when there is a struggle in the parsonage? In the initial stages, I prayed that the Lord would do all He wanted to do in David's life. Little did I know He wanted to change me as well, and so began my journey of change.

Our marriage and ministry were greatly affected when the clouds of depression rolled in. While trying to plan our youngest daughter's wedding, I was torn between the joy of the upcoming event and the heaviness in our home. I learned that I must continue to embrace life and celebrate joyful occasions, and, at the same time, minister to my husband.

The two most important things I could do for him were to show him that I loved him and pray for him. When he needed to talk, I was there to listen. When he could not see anything good about himself, I reminded him of why I loved him. To help him face the anxious moments I read the Psalms over him, which brought us a sense of peace. I learned to be careful not to be demanding or to pressure him.

I prayed for David in several different ways. Many times, I prayed in the Spirit over him. I prayed trusting God's will

would be done in our lives, and prayer strengthened our faith as well.

I explained to David that if he woke up and felt my hand on his head, I was praying silently for him. There were many nights when he stirred in his sleep and gave a deep sigh of contentment that let me know he was aware of my prayers. That practice continues today in his recovery.

Loving David in practical ways meant respecting his withdrawal and silence. I had to control my frustration and impatience with the changes I saw in him. Sometimes this meant going for a short drive, or calling one of our children and venting my feelings. My calls also reminded them to continually pray for us. I am grateful, too, for my loving parents who called me every day assuring us of their prayers and confidence that God would bring us through.

I had to learn to set my own needs aside during this season of struggle. I needed David's affirmation and encouragement. It took me awhile to accept the fact he was not capable of giving me either. In addition, until I got to a place of acceptance, I could not be a true encouragement to him. I already knew that the Lord is the only One who can take care of me, and I soon discovered that some of my needs did not seem as important in light of David's struggle. I realized that during this season I had to draw from the Lord for my own strength and emotional stability.

I am thankful for the many resources that helped me on this journey. I read many books, and David and I also sought the help of medical professionals and counselors. The Spirit of God was my Comforter and Friend. He spoke to me in the night and enabled me to walk alongside my husband with faith and courage. A verse that I clung to was Micah 7:7,8: "But as for me, I will look to the Lord and be confident in Him. I will wait with hope and expectancy for the God of my Salvation. When I fall, I will arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light to me."<sup>1</sup>

We are both changed. We are both grateful.



**JACKIE ARGUE**, wife of David Argue, Colorado Springs, Colorado. David and Jackie can be contacted through their website <http://www.daveargue.com>.

### ENDNOTE

1. Adapted from *The Amplified Bible*.

The key is to find an exercise that bridges into aerobic value and that you can enjoy. Do that for at least 20 minutes. To stop earlier creates a negative impact on your body. Walk and pray. Walk and meditate. Walk and talk with a friend. But walk.

### **I will regularly allow diversion and the consequent delight it brings to be a part of my life**

For some, their diversion will be a hobby. For others, it will be a game or sporting event. It is important that one's diversion brings joy, helps him enter another world, relax, play, create,

and pique an interest that is big in him. This allows the mind to go on a mini-vacation.

Bow hunting, fishing, digital photography, golf, cycling, painting, auto restoration — all these and more are what friends who are practicing this principle have found helpful.

### **I will be honest with someone about everything**

Hopefully, this *someone* is your spouse. If not, make finding someone a priority. Let this person in on what is going on with you and listen to his input. Your *someone* will come to know you better than anyone else knows you. God wants to use this person to speak to you. Will you listen? Pastors are not trying to lie. Pastors are trying to speak in faith. They are concerned about the impact their honest disclosures may have on the person with whom they share. Pastors wear too many hats. Relationships are complex. So, pastors continue to say, “I am doing well. The church is great ... La ... la ... la.”

With clarity of hindsight, I can see more perceptively now. For a long time I ran as hard as I could, all out of energy every day — long days. In some ways, I treated life like a sprint: 100 yards, all my energy on the line, using it all up in my burst for the tape, and I was done. Now, I see more clearly. Life is a long race — a marathon.

So, I found an experienced marathoner and had a conversation. On his office walls are ribbons and medals from the Philadelphia, Boston, New York, Chicago, Detroit, and Orlando marathons. Now, he does not finish at the top of the pack with name recognition, but he finishes. He gets the prize.

He laughed when I asked him the difference between a sprinter and a marathon runner. He said: “Everything is different. In a marathon, the runner expends his energy

gradually — 26.2 miles is always a long distance. It is always hard to run that far. A big key is to not focus on what the other runners are doing, but to focus on your own energy and reserves. The runner is racing himself.

“Particularly, the runner must guard against spending too much energy too early in the race. He must manage the expenditure of his energy wisely. Runners must eat and drink long before they feel the need to or they will cramp up and the race is over.

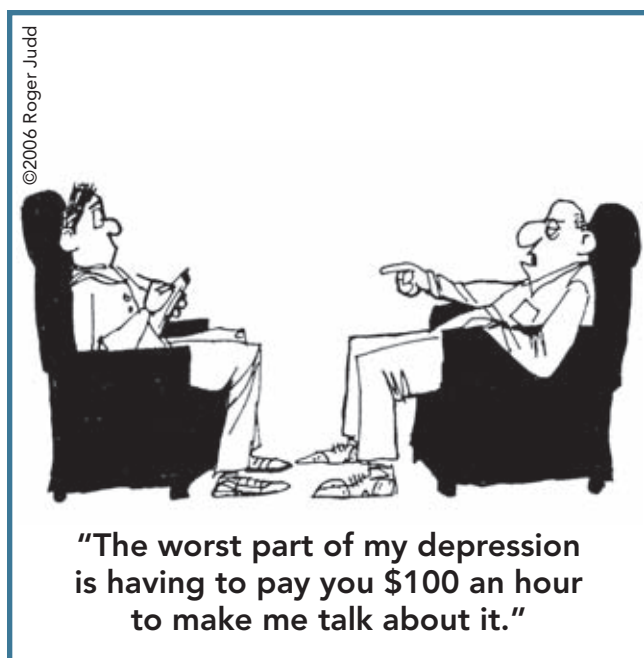
“About managing your energy and finishing strong, all good marathoners break the race into chunks of distance. The first few miles their objective is to see what they are feeling like. Then, they run in 5-mile chunks to measure their time and endurance.

“Finally, at the 20-mile mark, wise runners take another read and pace themselves so they can finish strong and completely spent. Tell them to be wise in how they run. It is always a longer race than one thinks.”

Then I opened the Bible to Hebrews 12:1–3. Verse 1 says, “Run with perseverance.” (Three times in these verses, the descriptive word is “endurance.”) This passage calls us to run the marathon of life.

In the last months as I have gotten real with other pastors about my journey through the valley, I have had others draw close and say in my ear, “I don’t know how I can go on. These are the hardest years of my ministry. I’m hardly surviving. I’m on meds. Something has to change.”

Something needs to change, and something can. Jesus is calling: “Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me — watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly” (Matthew 11:28–30, *The Message*).<sup>3</sup> ■



**David Argue** was founding pastor of Christ’s Place Church in Lincoln, Nebraska, where he served for 3 decades. He currently lives in Colorado Springs, Colorado, and is director of pastoral care for the Rocky Mountain District of the Assemblies of God. He has also served as executive presbyter for the General Council of the Assemblies of God. Now he offers ministry that can strengthen, stabilize, and refresh congregations and those who serve them. For more information visit <http://www.daveargue.com>.

#### **ENDNOTES**

1. Ruth Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence: Experiencing God’s Transforming Presence* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 59.
2. Andy Stanley, *Choosing To Cheat: Who Wins When Family and Work Collide?* (Sisters, Ore.: Multnomah, 2003), 125.
3. *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*. This edition issued by contractual arrangement with NavPress, a division of The Navigators, U.S.A. Originally published by NavPress in English as *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* Copyright © 2002 by Eugene Peterson. All rights reserved.





# COMING OUT OF THE DARK:

## TWO PASTORS' JOURNEY OUT OF DEPRESSION

*Depression and burnout are becoming the occupational hazards of ministry. In a recent Enrichment poll, 17 percent of those who responded said that quite often they were depressed to the extent it affected their ministry performance. Another 24 percent said they experienced this level of depression every 2 or 3 months.*

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WITH WAYDE I. GOODALL AND E. GLENN WAGNER



**R**ichard L. Schoonover, Enrichment associate editor, talked with Wayde I. Goodall, Ph.D., D.Min., and E. Glenn Wagner, Ph.D., D.Min., two pastors who have walked through the darkness of depression.

Goodall pastored for 25 years. He has been a senior pastor in Seattle, and a missionary in Vienna, Austria, where he founded Vienna Christian Center. He was coordinator for the Ministerial Enrichment Office for the Assemblies of God from 1995–2000. He was also senior pastor at First Assembly of God, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, from 2000–05. He is currently director of benevolence for Bethesda Ministry, Colorado Springs, Colorado.

Wagner has been in ministry for 30 years. He was senior pastor of Calvary Church in Charlotte, North Carolina. He has served as vice president for Promise Keepers. His books include *Escape From Church, Inc.*; *The Church You've Always Wanted*; *Your Pastor's Heart*; *Strategies for a Successful Marriage*; *The Heart of a Godly Man*; and *God: An Honest Conversation for the Undecided*. Wagner is also founder and president of FutureLead ([www.futurelead.org](http://www.futurelead.org)), an organization committed to equipping people to live and lead with purpose and passion.

As these pastors share their experience, they also provide a message of hope and healing for those who feel they have hit the wall and don't know where to turn.

## DESCRIBE THE EVENTS LEADING TO YOUR DEPRESSION AND BURNOUT.

**WAGNER:** Several factors contributed to my burnout and depression. One was many years of going full speed. Another factor was the difficulties I encountered while trying to make significant changes

in our church leadership.

Leadership in the church had gone from a healthy to an unhealthy way of functioning, and I was not able to correct it. It seemed the harder I worked to change it the worse it got, and the more discouraged I became. But I kept trying.

The discouragement ebbed and flowed for a while as I tried to handle it through spiritual disciplines and by spending a brief time away. When I did not feel as



bad as yesterday, I believed I was making progress. Another contributing factor was the fact I have never been very good at taking nonworking vacations or days off. The more irons in the fire, the more I enjoy it.

I was convinced during my discouragement that I was just tired and needed a break. I tried to pray and fast. I addressed spiritual warfare issues. I went away on a brief sabbatical. But even while on sabbatical I was still on the phone every day; I never

*Another thing that worsened my depression was the accusations that I was becoming aloof, prideful, or inaccessible.*

—Wagner

really got away. When I returned I felt somewhat rested only to experience the dark cloud quickly returning.

I had days when I felt fine. People would say, “How are you doing?”

I would say, “Well, I’ve gone a long time without a headache.”

I started thinking *I’m making progress*. But progress is somewhat illusionary as the body continues to spiral downward.

I had counseled and observed others with depression. I thought with some rest and a break my discouragement would soon end. I believed the ministry initiatives and the staff changes and additions being made at the church would solve the problem. Finally, I would not have everything on my plate, and I could go away for 6 or 8 weeks and get healthy, rested, and come back refreshed. But even as people came on staff and I cut back my schedule and delegated some of my responsibilities, things worsened, which added to my confusion. I did not understand why, nor did I realize I was moving rapidly from discouragement and fatigue to burnout and clinical depression. I believed that stuff only happens to others.

Another thing that worsened my depression were the accusations that I was becoming aloof, prideful, or inaccessible. I was only trying to cut back, trying to get better.

During the last few years of my pastorate I tried to resign three times. Leadership pleaded with me to stay, promising to deal with the situation. They asked for forgiveness for the political things they had done and asked me to trust them again. I forgave them, I trusted them, and we went back into the same cycle again. After trying three times, I now believe I should have just walked away. They were telling

me it was not God's time to leave. I was trying to make choices to save my health. They were promising to make changes to enhance my life and ministry. None of it came about and I resigned in the middle of a mess in September 2004.

I was placed on medication and still continue on this path to level things out. I have a ways to go with this treatment. I am continuing with counseling and I am walking with some guys who are helping keep me on track. I still have physical limitations concerning how much I can do. There are no easy pat answers, which, unfortunately, is what you often get from the Christian community.

**GOODALL:** I hit my depression and burnout in 1987 after finishing 7 years of 70-plus hours a week in the ministry. I had not taken a vacation in 7 years. My wife and I went right into fund-raising for missions, went on the mission field, and then it hit me. I thought I was experiencing culture shock, but I was not; it was burnout and clinical depression. I was exhausted.

I could not pull out of depression. In spite of that, we planted a church in Europe. We then came home and pastored. I thought this transition would relieve me, but it did not.

I needed to get counseling. I was put on antidepressants for about a year, which greatly assisted me and helped me sleep because during my depression I was unable to sleep.

My depression lasted nearly 2 years, which is typical of clinical depression. I reprioritized my life and started taking days off and vacations. Since then I have been free of depression, although I can sense when burnout is coming.

Another contributing factor was my work ethic. My father worked 16 hours a day. I thought pastors worked long hours. I did not know how to relax or have fun. I still need to work at having fun. So, my long hours of work and my lack of diversion were problems.

There is a vicious downward spiral in our churches of never-ending work. Added to this are the politics and the power plays by lay-people that can box the pastor into a corner. A

pastor can fight it out, but if he is too tired to fight, the only thing he can do is go on a sabbatical, or resign and regroup.

## WHY ARE DEPRESSION AND BURNOUT GROWING ISSUES WITH PASTORS TODAY? HOW WIDESPREAD IS THE PROBLEM?

**WAGNER:** The high calling of ministry drives pastors. A pastor is often involved in too many ministries not because he is a workaholic, but because he genuinely loves what he

does. Calling and desire often fuel the fire. Pastors struggle to keep their lives and ministries in balance, and often the church exacerbates this problem. People want their pastor to be available. Usually they do not grant him permission to be unavailable. If people do give him permission to be unavailable, it is only until their family has a need.

A pastor must learn to say no, be able to deal with the resulting negative ramifications, and not feel guilty. This is a goal I am working on. But as soon as a pastor says no, someone will comment on his lack of dedication, question his servant's heart, and criticize his work ethic. No one likes to be accused of being inaccessible or unapproachable.

So the pastor steps over the line because he feels guilt and manipulation from the church.

Depression and burnout are at epidemic proportions. If this were the case anywhere else in the world, there would be an incredible outcry. The September/October 2000 edition of *Physician* magazine reported that 80 percent of pastors and 84 percent of their spouses are discouraged or dealing with depression. Forty percent of pastors and 47 percent of their spouses say they are suffering from burnout. The norm among men in our country who are experiencing depression at any given time is about 10 percent. The norm among pastors is 40 percent.

These statistics show pastors undergo significant stress. The church cannot escape its culpability, shoot the victim, or



*Unless church conflict is addressed along with the issues of burnout, stress, and depression, and the underlying causes creating these problems, the church will lose more and more of its fine pastors.*

—Goodall

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simply pass it off as the pastor's inability to create and implement proper boundaries and parameters. Pastors do need to learn to say no, but this is only part of the issue. Systemic issues and expectations need to be changed.

When I speak about systemic issues, I am not suggesting church leadership is evil. But leadership is not aware of the systems currently in our churches. Those in leadership lead and react the only way they know how. This is a primary issue hindering the church from being a real movement of God. Current leadership practices unwittingly contribute to depression and burnout. I do not believe it is intentional, even though there are exceptions such as spiritual warfare and antagonistic people who want power and control. Our churches are operating the way they are because this is how they have always done it. So, a reparenting of churches needs to happen to bring change. Through the ministry of FutureLead, my desire is to change the paradigm of how Christian leadership is done in the home, in the marketplace, and in the church.

**GOODALL:** Depression is not new to those in ministry. There are biblical examples of depression along with the examples of dynamic church leaders. For example, Elijah wanted to die. David's mood swings were severe. In 2 Corinthians 1:8–10, Paul talked about his fear of not being able to make it one more day. He did not know if he had the energy. He despaired of his life. Paul was not running from a physical threat; he was spent. Charles Spurgeon and Abraham Lincoln also struggled with depression.

To help me understand the role of stress in a pastor's life, the executive leadership of the Assemblies of God asked me to participate in a 4-year think tank at Duke University called Pulpit and Pew. A book came out of that study entitled *Pastors in Transition*. I learned the primary reason pastors quit the ministry is conflict in the church. Conflict never goes away. Many pastors do not know how or when to deal with conflict. Conflict constantly hits them like a baseball bat on the head. They say: "I've had it. I'm going to do something different." Unless church conflict is addressed along with the issues of burnout, stress, and depression, and the underlying causes creating these problems, the church will lose more and more of its fine pastors.

During the Duke study, we worked with the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. Mayo Clinic's research yielded some phenomenal statistics. One shocking statistic is that the general health of pastors in America is worse than the general health of the population. The general population lives an

immoral lifestyle — smokes, drinks, cusses, swears — yet a minister's health in America is worse. The stress, pressures, and the conflict wear him down. Most pastors I know are incredible people, but ministry is killing them. Addressing these issues will help ministers.

## IN WHAT WAYS DOES DEPRESSION AFFECT A PASTOR'S MARRIAGE?

**GOODALL:** Depression does affect marriages. I have known many ministers whose marriages were greatly affected and some who divorced. A spouse loses the person who is in deep depression.

I am so thankful I have Rosalyn because she has always been with me through every step of our married life. She is an absolute gift, and I listen to her. I listen to her more today than

*It is interesting how many people in the pew have family members on medication or in counseling for depression. But when depression affected me, I was accused of everything from faking depression to having unconfessed sin in my life.—Wagner*

I ever have. She watches me; she knows what is going on.

I was in my depression before I realized what was happening. One night we were enjoying a wonderful meal in the comfort of our home. I started weeping, and my weeping turned into sobbing. I looked at Rosalyn and felt embarrassed. I said, "I don't know what's happening to me."

She replied, "I wondered when it would catch up to you. You have not been home for 37 nights."

I was surprised. I did not even realize that. I was just doing whatever was next. I would think: *Well, I've got to do it. This is next on the to-do list, or this is an emergency.*

So, I listened to my wife, and I started to follow Jesus' example in Scripture. He pulled away from the crowds. Many times He pulled away from the masses and ministry to rest, to pray, to think, to process situations, and to be creative. A pastor needs to pull away, or he will become susceptible to depression, stress, and burnout.

**WAGNER:** I appreciate Wayne's comments on marriage. In our marriage, my depression drew us closer. It changed our family dynamics. My children are grown. Susan and my children began making more decisions. This was positive. But in depression, what is rational becomes irrational, and the irrational becomes rational in one's mind. I remember feeling anxiety because I believed Susan might leave me. I do not



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## Pastors are afraid to talk about their depression.—Goodall

know how many times I asked her if she was going to stay with me. She would look at me with an incredulous look that asked: *What is this?* My fear was completely irrational, but at the same time, I believed she would be better off without me.

A depressed person suffers through many questions, fears, and anxieties. At the same time, people expect a depressed person to make rational choices and decisions. As I look back, I often ask myself: *Why did I do that?*

In spite of my illogical, irrational, and unfounded fears, God blessed, honored, and further strengthened our marriage. But depression and fear may be why many ministry marriages fracture and might also be why so many pastors today are getting caught up in immoral, voyeuristic behaviors.

**GOODALL:** Glenn mentions an important point. In my work with ministers during the last 12 or 13 years, I have seen famous pastors become involved in pornography or affairs. In this sinful way they have found they are still alive. When I talk to these men, they have usually been burned out, stressed out, and overwhelmed. Their burnout and depression turn into wrong decisions, and ultimately sin. Depression is no excuse to sin, but the enemy takes advantage of the situation and brings temptation into their lives, and they do not have the energy to fight.

Some pastors may feel they are losing their significance. Having an affair helps them feel significant again, but this is a phony perk. It is a killer, and it happens more than we would like to think. We have not talked about this problem. We write off the pastor who compromises morally, and he is never quite the same. This is sad. We have not restored these pastors properly. We need to finish the job of restoring them. The problem is they cannot talk with freedom about what got them to that point. They need freedom to talk. Transparency helps everyone. James 5:16 says, “Confess your sins to each other.” There is healing in confessing our sins not only for the one confessing, but also for those who are listening.

### PENTECOSTALS’ BELIEF IN HEALING MAY CREATE A STIGMA ABOUT TAKING MEDICATION FOR DEPRESSION. WHAT DO YOU SAY TO PASTORS WHO NEED TO TAKE MEDICATION OR SEE A COUNSELOR OR PSYCHIATRIST FOR THEIR DEPRESSION?

**GOODALL:** While there is a stigma in the church about medication for depression, we would be amazed at how many pastors and/or their wives are taking antidepressants. These numbers are hard to determine because most pastors do not discuss this because of the stigma associated with depression.

In clinical depression, the body does not produce enough

serotonin. Serotonin keeps one’s moods in balance. When there is not enough serotonin, a person bottoms out.

One out of five Americans will go through a significant depression requiring medication at least once in their lifetime. My major problem was losing my ability to sleep. I was sleeping about 2 hours a night. My lack of sleep and subsequent exhaustion made my depression much more significant. The medication helped me sleep and took the edge off my depression. I took medication for 12 to 18 months and visited a counselor to learn how to reprioritize my life.

I thank God that nonaddictive medication is available. Medication for depression is not like sleeping pills or Valium. Antidepressants are nonaddictive. They are taken until one’s body learns to produce enough serotonin again and a person is able to get proper rest. When a person breaks his arm, he wears a cast until it heals. It is a similar process with serotonin.

When I pastored, I frequently worked with ministers who were in severe depression. I recommended they visit a Christian psychiatrist or psychologist, get on antidepressants, and get balanced out. It is okay to get help. Antidepressants are a great gift. They are like insulin for a person with diabetes. What would we do without insulin?

**WAGNER:** A pastor must deal with his own theological, philosophical, and personal background. A psychologist friend who took me to the psychiatrist explained that people take medications for physiological issues, and taking medications for emotional and mental issues is no different. This is especially true since we know that the emotional and mental is so connected to the chemical makeup of the brain.

Another fear I had became a reality: The Christian community did not understand why I was taking medication. Leadership at my church and at other churches made public statements that a man of God should not need medication. These comments did not help and only further disheartened and discouraged me at a time when I was trying to get well but believing that I might never get well.

In the broader Christian community, those who condemn a pastor for taking medication for depression are usually taking cholesterol, blood pressure, or heart medication. I believe in healing. At the same time, God has provided humanity with the ability to discover, create, and utilize medication. There is more than one pathway honored by God in which He heals people.

*(We interviewed the wives of Wayde and Glenn. The story of their journey during their husband’s depression begins on page 46. This interview picks up on page 52.)*







# COMING OUT OF THE DARK:

## TWO PASTORS' WIVES SHARE IN THEIR HUSBANDS' JOURNEY OUT OF DEPRESSION

*Depression not only affects the pastor, it also affects his family. In this candid interview with Richard L. Schoonover, associate editor, Enrichment journal, Rosalyn Goodall, wife of Wayde I. Goodall, and Susan L. Wagner, wife of E. Glenn Wagner, share their journeys as they and their families walked alongside their husbands during their time of depression. Their message of hope will encourage other wives who find themselves in similar circumstances.*

### HOW DID YOUR HUSBAND'S DEPRESSION AFFECT YOU AND YOUR FAMILY?

**SUSAN:** Glenn's depression caught us by surprise because he has always been strong. When we were in Colorado, he suffered from high fatigue, and was close to burning out. He thought he needed to step out of ministry and take any available job because he was burned out. But this situation was different.

I was seriously concerned about where Glenn was mentally. I am not sure he was processing his thoughts well. I had to answer questions for people and repeat things to close friends. He was unable to cope with anything. He laid around the house for the most part. That was hard on me. My heart hurt deeply to see him that way. I was feeling his and my pain at that point.

I was overwhelmed and saddened that the ongoing 2-year struggle in the church had caused this to happen to my husband. I felt abandoned and we did not experience the help, support, or encouragement I expected and needed.

My discouragement and feelings of abandonment along with the stress caused by Glenn's condition caused me to slip into my own depression. I knew the symptoms because I had been through two previous depressions.

I also experienced grief, anger, denial, and severe panic attacks. I have never been angry with God, but I was extremely angry with people — mainly Christians. Then I would get angry with myself for the way I was handling my feelings and my situation.

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WITH ROSALYN GOODALL AND SUSAN L. WAGNER



E. Glenn and Susan L. Wagner

During the deepest parts of my depression, I had no joy nor could I find enjoyment in any activity. I was no longer interested in anything. To get up in the morning, get dressed, brush my teeth, go to the couch, sit down, and turn on the television was an accomplishment. I would stare at the television without knowing what I was watching. When I ventured out of the house I often experienced panic attacks.

Another symptom of my clinical depression was a change in my sleep patterns. I have experienced insomnia off and on since I was a little girl. For me, my insomnia seemed normal. I finally realized that my trouble sleeping was not normal, but was insomnia. I also learned that one symptom of depression is insomnia, and that one symptom of insomnia is clinical depression. I thought: *No wonder I've gone through depression.*

It was also difficult to see the hurt in my children's eyes. They are both young adults. Glenn's parents also suffered. It has taken at least a year for me to come completely out of this depression. During this time, I experienced every emotion a person can possibly experience, to the extreme.

**ROSALYN:** When we returned from Europe, Wayde was suffering from his second major depression. His depression seemed to stem from situational causes and was burnout-induced. We had been living in Vienna where there were many stressors.

The mindset in Vienna was that the only way to be good enough was to work harder. In other words, God only approves of persons who are the first to arrive and the last to leave. The pastor must work harder than everyone else. He must say yes to anything anyone wants him to do. Under these circumstances, it is easy to become depressed. A pastor may feel guilty. He may think he will never measure up, cannot please God, and no one will ever like him. He may even worry that he will be fired from the church.



Rosalyn and Wayde I. Goodall

I believe there was a great deal of spiritual oppression in Vienna. Depression, suicide, and affairs were common. The many cultural differences took their toll on Wayde. We returned to the United States primarily because Wayde's nerves were shot. He was frustrated and exhausted.

I began to look for answers. I tried to find solutions and assist in my husband's recovery. I pulled back on anything that could be stressful to him.

My sister struggled with depression, and my parents had taken her for counseling. So, I knew counseling is often needed to help people work through depression. I also knew that depression can be a major illness, and some people deal with it their entire lives. Antidepressants and sedatives can be appropriate treatments for depression.

Based on what I knew about depression, I determined to put my husband first even more than usual. Rest is important along with lowered expectations and responsibilities. We tiptoed around him more, cooperated with him more, and took more of his responsibilities. I did everything he usually did around the house, such as mowing the lawn, and taking care of the house and washing the car. I answered the work questions and the people questions. We loved on him.

Wayde would sometimes ask, "Have I disappointed you?" His depression caused him to be insecure, and he constantly needed our love and reassurance.

We tried to be quiet and let him sleep. We did whatever he needed us to do. Wayde also regularly went to see a counselor in another town to ensure confidentiality.

## HOW CAN PASTORS' WIVES COPE WITH DEPRESSION?

**SUSAN:** I sought professional help, and I am on medication. I see a Christian psychiatrist. During one visit, my psychiatrist



handed me a small stone. On it was written, *First*.

He asked, "What does that mean to you?"

I replied, "Well, Jesus is my Rock."

That was not the answer he was looking for, so he asked, "Okay, what else?"

I was thinking, *Okay ... first?* And then it occurred to me: *Whoever throws the first stone*. That ends much of the self-



centeredness that results from depression after you start coming through the different stages.

So, I looked at my psychiatrist and jokingly said, "Oh, you're mean."

That stone got the point across. Stop moping in your

about forgiveness, it concerns the parties directly involved. However, a pastor's wife must be willing to accept the forgiveness and reconciliation that is brought about between her husband and his offender. This brings glory to God.

A godly wife always tries to help her husband. She tries to help him solve any problematic situation he may have. They discuss it together.

Wayde might tell me a conversation he had or he would ask my opinion. He would ask, "Am I reading this right?" or, "What do you think about that?"

I would offer suggestions. But I allow the offense to remain between the two parties involved.

It is important not to let an offense eat into your spirit. Do not become an angry, vengeful person. Do not gloat when those who offend you suffer. It can be hard not to gloat and say, "Thank God."

I feel the people who attack pastors are walking on a slippery slope. When I find out they have headaches so severe they cannot go to work, I want to think: *Well, get right with God*. I am

not sure that is gloating, but I do know it does not honor God to think this way. Yet, at times, I would like to tell certain people to wake up. "So, your daughter just got a divorce from her husband. What did you expect? You are not living for the Lord. You are poisoning your family through your bad advice, through criticizing your pastor, and you are destroying the fabric of your own home and your physical well-being." This is how I am tempted to

feel and respond to these people. But God wants us to honor Him with our thoughts, and to show His love to everyone.

When I was coping with Wayde's depression, I tried to give him support, hope, love, and acceptance. Often he did not want my advice. He just wanted to tell me what is bothering him and receive my love and a hug. He needed me to be noncritical and understanding.

I also tried to offer new ways for Wayde to look at things and to be objective. For example, I gave him a calendar. Everyday I helped him record something he did that he had not done for a while. Maybe one day he got out of bed, brushed his teeth, and went back to bed. As least he brushed his teeth. He had not done that the day before. Or maybe he ate breakfast. If nothing tasted good the day before but today he ate a muffin, we wrote down: Had a muffin. Then, after a month or two we would go back and check the calendar. We would remember that a month ago the big accomplishment for the day was eating a muffin. But today he did some business over the phone. I felt joy in seeing his progress and that gave me something else to write on the calendar: Today he laughed. This was an effective way to measure his progress. I suggest that people coping with depression keep a calendar.

## *My discouragement and feelings of abandonment along with the stress caused by Glenn's condition caused me to slip into my own depression.—Susan*

circumstances. You need to let go. There is truth in the phrase: Circumstances will cause you to become either bitter or better. I knew these things were only hurting me. If I continued to handle them the way I was, they would destroy my walk with the Lord and my relationship with my husband. Glenn moved on quicker than I did even though most of the attacks were against him. But, as far as I was concerned, it was done to me as his wife. When I sought help, little by little the fog lifted.

I had an I-could-not-care-less attitude. Rosalyn mentioned how she tried to take responsibilities away from Wayde, such as washing the car. During my depression, I did not care whether the car was washed. A person in depression often loses the ability to care about things. I do not like feeling that way, and I am not normally like that. But worse, I also did not care about some people. I learned that I needed to focus on something other than the negative thoughts I was holding on to. One thing that took me a little longer to do was to let go and focus on what was ahead.

**ROSALYN:** I try not to take offenses directed at Wayde personally. In a husband and wife relationship, it is easy for the wife to take offense at attacks on her husband. A pastor and his wife are one in the Lord. When the Bible speaks



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## WHAT HOPE CAN YOU OFFER TO PASTORS' WIVES?

**ROSALYN:** It is important to understand God's complete forgiveness. We are His precious children. God wants to bless His children, love them, and accept them. When a person is depressed, it does not mean God is sitting in heaven with a hammer waiting to pound him. God wants us to be faithful. He does not expect people to be sinless. He completely forgives people when they are not perfect and ask Him for forgiveness. But He wants people to be faithful.

If a pastor's wife is going through depression or if she is watching her husband go through depression, know there is a light at the end of the tunnel — and it is not an oncoming train.

You may wonder, *Will I ever enjoy things again?* This may be another item for your calendar: Not only did I eat a muffin today, but I also enjoyed eating it because it tasted good. That signals progress. You will taste again. You will see in color again. You will feel joy, satisfaction, and love again. When a person is depressed, these things may seem far away. You may think: *I'll never measure up. I'll never be loved. I'll never be happy. I'll never sleep well again.* But that is simply not true.

**SUSAN:** I would encourage pastors' wives who are suffering with their own depression to seek help as soon as possible. Do not wait. Many pastors' wives are probably concerned about what would happen if anyone found out they were seeking help for depression.

Most pastors' wives want to keep their depression a secret. They may feel ashamed. They do not want anyone to think there is something wrong with them mentally or that their depression is because they have sin in their life. If sin is the problem, then deal with it. Otherwise, depression needs to be understood as a medically diagnosable illness.

Many people believe they can work through depression on their own. If not, they will go to their pastor. Sometimes these deep issues are beyond the pastor. Depression is not short-term, but long-term; people need a professional.

When a person has a bad cold, he goes to the doctor. Some people become so depressed they become suicidal. A depressed person needs to seek help before he gets to this point. Therapists know what the symptoms of depression are

and what medications will help. My therapist's qualifications and willingness to help were a great plus.

A pastor's wife who is dealing with depression sometimes closes herself off and does not let people know she is depressed. Unfortunately, she often shuts herself off from the very people who can help. But she needs to seek help and support from others.



*When I was coping with Wayde's depression, I tried to give him support, hope, love, and acceptance.—Rosalyn*

It is important to communicate with your husband. I tried to keep my first two bouts with clinical depression from Glenn. I put on an act when we were together. I did not want him to have to deal with a depressed wife because I felt he had enough on his plate dealing with a large, growing church. Even though my intentions were good, what I did was wrong. I should have said something to him earlier. Second to God's love, comfort, and peace is your husband's. He is the person who should help you feel the most secure. Confide in him.

A pastor's wife must overcome the fact there will be Christians who will not understand or accept this. They also need to understand that depression and the attitudes it often inspires in the hearts of Christians are a form of spiritual warfare. This lack of understanding is difficult

for those affected by depression, but the fact is people who have never been through depression and have never experienced the struggles it brings cannot empathize as well as those who have. But a pastor's wife needs to understand that their church might not be the place where she will find the healing, comfort, encouragement, and help she needs. In fact, when Glenn told church leadership of my need during this time, he was told, "Your wife is your problem." We were both devastated by that remark and their attitude toward us.

Confidentiality and trust are also issues for the pastor's wife. She needs to know whom she can trust. That is hard to know because sometimes those you have trusted betray you.

## EXPLAIN HOW PEOPLE HELPED YOU.

**SUSAN:** Depression creates a situation similar to what one finds when dealing with terminal cancer. As soon as others learn someone has been diagnosed, they often start treating that person differently. This causes the ill person to back away from them. People also back away because they do not understand the illness or know how to help. But three individuals helped me.

My daughter has given me great support. She made me get dressed and go exercise. It is important to leave the house.



*If sin is the problem, then deal with it. Otherwise, depression needs to be understood as a medically diagnosable illness.—Susan*

A high school friend who lives here in Charlotte has also given me support. Julie is like a sister to me. We would go to lunch and she would just listen. I can tell her anything and know it stays with her and that she would truly pray for me.

One other person from the congregation was supportive. We are good friends. Her husband was going through chemo, and she suffered with depression because of the overwhelming task of being a caregiver. She finally concluded that the only way she would be able to function and be there for her husband was to seek help. She decided to take medication. We had much in common. We were sisters walking side by side that shared the same struggles, but for different reasons.

She kept a journal of her experiences on 4 by 8 index cards during the time her husband struggled with cancer. She also would read God's Word. At times she would say to me, "I just had to write this down because I knew it was for you." These three people were the people I needed. Each person ministered to me differently.

People suffering from depression usually have limited support. That is another reason why it was important for me to cry out to God. I knew God would never fail me. One's expectations get cut down a notch. I needed to move forward and focus on things that were ahead and not on those things that were behind. Unrealistic expectations can be easily toppled. My expectations were unrealistic. I assumed I would have gotten more support from the church. When my expectations were not met, it hurt. Yet, I had confidence in God. I knew He was going to be faithful. It is important to know God and draw strength from Him. God never allows anything in our lives that we cannot handle with His help. I knew God would bring Glenn and me through it. And He did! And He still is!

## HOW IMPORTANT IS IT TO MAINTAIN A DEVOTIONAL LIFE DURING DEPRESSION?

**SUSAN:** When depression begins and a person is at his lowest, he may not be able to focus or read anything. Activities you normally do without thinking become an effort. Just getting out of bed can be a tremendous struggle. To even think about brushing your teeth is difficult. Your whole thought process shuts down.

In the beginning, we received letters and phone calls from people in the congregation, our city, and even other states and countries whom we did not know. I would read the letters. Glenn would then tell me someone had called to say: "We love

you. We do not know everything that is going on, but we are praying for you."

But after reading these letters and receiving these calls, I said to Glenn, "Right now these words have no meaning to me. I do not sense the fulfillment or true meaning of those words." Basically, they were words without any action.

I was numb. I did not want to hear these messages because they did not minister to me. Most of my encouragement came through praying to God — just talking with Him. I would go out on our screened porch in my pajamas and stare at the trees and watch them move in the wind. In my numbness I would say to God, "I need Your help."

God knew what was in my heart and mind. I would verbalize it to Him. I did not have devotions. If I read the Bible, there was no meaning in it for me. I do not know how else to say it. There was just nothing there. Little by little, I started to pull out of the fog and I began to see and hear the words as I tried to read.

I love the Psalms because I know David got depressed as well. His psalms are uplifting. David recorded how he cried out to God during the difficult periods of his life when he felt so wretched. That is where I was. I would pick out certain psalms and cling to the promises of God. If they are promises, it means they are true.

Little by little, I got back into regular devotions. For a few months I did not open the Bible, but I regularly talked with God. And yes, I cried and sometimes yelled, too.

God knows what we are going through. He was aware of my struggles. Then, when we come out on the other side, we can praise Him and give Him the glory. I knew everything was going to be okay, but I had to go through the process.

**ROSALYN:** When a pastor's wife is going through depression, she can write down Scriptures about God's promises, love, and forgiveness on 3 by 5 cards. Each day she can read these verses and will realize how much God loves her, how much God forgives her and accepts her, and how much God will protect her.

Many times when we are depressed we wonder if we have let people down. We wonder if we've let God down. We wonder if it is because we need to learn humility or to be more honest and hard-working. But when we go to God and ask for forgiveness, He is faithful. According to Psalm 103:12 and 1 John 1:9, we are forgiven. We need to understand that God doesn't expect us to be perfect. This is why reflecting on Scripture is important. ■



(continued from page 44)

## DESCRIBE THE STEPS YOU TOOK TO RECOVER FROM YOUR DEPRESSION? WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO GET OUTSIDE HELP?

**GOODALL:** I was so miserable I had to get help. I could not sleep. I felt as though I was constantly overwhelmed. Depression is like a dark tunnel with no light at the end. I wondered if I would ever get out of it.

Leaving the mission field broke our hearts, but we needed to get back to America to get some help. I did not tell most people, including my minister friends, why we were leaving because I did not feel I could.

When we returned and were pastoring again, I sought help from a Christian psychologist and psychiatrist. My depression was not getting better; it was getting worse. The first thing I said to my counselor was: "My life, my future, and my ministry are in your hands." I had given up.

He said, "Wayde, you need to reprioritize your life. You are wound too tight. I am going to show you how to loosen the spring and get balance." Then he said I needed to sleep and prescribed medication.

I did not know what antidepressants were. I just needed help. I felt like those in the hospital who are hurting and desperately want the doctor to operate.

When I began to sleep regularly again, I regained my ability to think. Then I talked with my doctors and we figured out what I needed to change. I continued pastoring and the church gave me permission to slow down. The church grew in spite of that. Now, when I can see depression or burnout returning, I back off. I tell my secretary to free up my schedule or I take a few days off.

**WAGNER:** One day my wife and I were on a trip. I was driving. We stopped at a traffic light and suddenly I did not know where we were or where we were going. I could not figure out whether we had to turn left, or right, or move forward. Susan navigated me over to the shoulder and said, "Now, are you willing to get help?" She had been

trying to convince me that I was in depression for quite some time, but I simply avoided and brushed her comments aside by saying, "I'm simply tired."

Susan called our friend who is a Christian psychologist. We were supposed to be away for 6 weeks, but we canceled these plans and returned home. Our decision to seek help came at a

time when many events were scheduled in the church, which made for an even more traumatic time.

It is important to choose a Christian psychiatrist. Many general practitioners can prescribe antidepressants, but there is a difference between general practice and psychopharmacology. Find a doctor who specializes in this field. Then seek Christian counseling to help you work through changes needing to be made in your life.

I met with our psychologist friend. He took me to a psychiatrist. My condition was serious enough for my doctors to consider hospitalization. They

decided to give me time on medication first. I went into a cave that seemed as dark as Lazarus' tomb.

My next-door neighbor is Dan Sutherland. His wife Mary wrote the book *Coming Out of the Dark: A Journey Out of Depres-*

*sion* about her battle with depression. Dan took over. He told me I was going to be okay. I thought I would never be able to study, write, or preach again.

Dan came to my house a couple of times a day. He also explained the difference between wanting to die and being suicidal. I wanted to die because I thought my life was over, but I was not planning to take my life. I remember telling the doctor I had seen other people in my condition that did not get all of their mental abilities back. The doctors could not promise me I would. This was my argument with them. I believed life was over. I needed friendship, a confidant, a spiritual director, a medical doctor, and a professional counselor. Leighton Ford also provided needed comfort and direction during this time.

People we thought were friends walked away from us. This was difficult. Some of our ministry friends have not returned. In the middle of our crisis, we received phone calls that my book contract was canceled, and speaking engagements were canceled — not to be rescheduled. It was over. I looked at the situation and said: *That's it.*

During this time my wife went into her own depression. She



*Depression is no excuse to sin, but the enemy takes advantage of the situation and brings temptation into their lives and they do not have the energy to fight.—Goodall*



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withdrew along with me, and eventually we were both getting help. She had adjusted to taking care of me, but now she also needed help.

I have been good at choosing the Timothys and Barnabases in my life. Over the last 8 or 9 years, my biggest mistakes were choosing the Pauls. When things began to deteriorate, I found the people whom I thought I had real relationships with either wanted to use me or control me. I thought these were mutual friendships, but I soon realized these people were only close to me because I was the senior pastor. Our struggle brought the truth to the surface. This caused me additional grief. I asked myself: *How could I have been so blind?* Building relationships is another difficult area of pastoral life. Even in a small church, people can get close to the pastor for the wrong reasons.

## HOW CAN A DENOMINATION HELP CHURCHES AND CHURCH BOARDS UNDERSTAND WHAT IS GOING ON IN PASTORS' LIVES AND TAKE STEPS TO ASSIST THEM?

**WAGNER:** Building new church structures to assist church boards and pastors is a pilgrimage I have been working on and writing about for over 20 years. I have written *Escape From Church, Inc.*, and *The Church You Have Always Wanted*. Creating new structures is like a salmon swimming up the ecclesiastical stream, but I think people are starting to recognize the need for them.

The first step is to replace secular leadership with a sacred leadership model. The church has adopted an overall leadership model that comes from the world. The research shows that the American population as a whole has a very poor view of secular leadership. The vast majority believes it to be untrustworthy and lacking in authenticity. Yet this is the very model and systems we have brought into our churches. Changing this model is key.

When the church changes its leadership model, it can then begin changing its internal structures. The church can move away from the human resources/employee assistance concept to facilitating spiritual direction in pastors' lives. The human resources/employee assistance approach is an after-the-fact scenario. Proper structure should begin on the front end and move more toward spiritual direction.

The concept of the boardroom needs to be replaced with the hospital room. Churches as well as pastoral offices need to be seen as safe places where hurting people can be ministered to in a nonadversarial way. When a patient is admitted to the hospital, doctors do not yell at him because he is having

a heart attack. Doctors do not cause further harm because of the stress they are under. A hospital is a place where people are brought to health, and then changes are suggested for ongoing health.

A leadership shift from a judgmental spirituality to a confessional spirituality is needed. I am one of the more transparent preachers of my generation, but transparency is not well accepted by my generation. The younger generation wants

transparency. To allow for a gentle response to the realities of life, pastors need to have feet of clay and permission to confess. If I am preach-

ing on marriage, I can say: "This is where Susan and I had a struggle."

Pastors also need to get away from the secular concept of accountability, which is about as affirming as an IRS audit. The biblical concept is mutuality. There is accountability along with affirmation and trust, something that was lacking in my situation. There needs to be a change from a solution orientation to a process orientation.

Many people offered me quick fixes, but few were willing to walk through the process with me and encourage me in overcoming depression and burnout. I had many Job's counselors. A pastor can tell who his true friends are by which way they run when life becomes difficult, and by what they say before they run. I received many well-intended suggestions. I tried exercising 4 or 5 days a week. I became obsessive-compulsive with many of these ideas and none of them were helping me out of my depression. No one suggested I was clinically depressed and needed help.

Last, pastors need to replace giving up with starting over. I was struggling with whether I should quit ministry and just take a job somewhere. I had started a new ministry, but I had my doubts whether it was something I should continue or not. At a restaurant, Wayne looked me in the eyes and said, "You are okay. You've done nothing wrong." This lunch meeting was another turning point in my life.

## PASTORS DON'T FEEL SAFE TO SHARE THEIR PROBLEMS WITH THEIR DISTRICT, CHURCH, OR CHURCH BOARD. WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON THIS? HOW CAN THIS BE CHANGED?

**GOODALL:** When Glenn and I met for lunch, I saw the depression and burnout in his eyes. I often see depression in ministers' eyes and faces.

I am open when I speak at a ministers institute, and it is interesting how many of our pastors — at every level from huge churches to tiny churches — come to me and admit they

*The high calling of ministry drives pastors. A pastor is often involved in too many ministries.—Wagner*

are spent. They are going through stress, depression, or burnout, but they cannot talk to anyone about it.

Pastors are afraid to talk about their depression. I have decided not to be afraid to talk about this. I care less about what others may think because I know the Lord created me and understands me. I do not need to live in fear. I am going to trust the Lord. I have been there, and I am going to avoid being there again.

Denominations need to give ministers permission to talk. Another finding in the Pulpit and Pew study is that most preachers in every denomination in America do not trust their district superintendent or their national office. They are afraid that if they are discovered having marital difficulty, depression, or burnout it will affect their future. It is a matter of job security. Ministers want to protect their ability to continue in the ministry and their ability to make a living.

The Assemblies of God has taken strides toward meeting this need, but there is much more to do. The *Enrichment* journal, the ministers 800 help line (1-800-867-4011), and various counseling programs across the country have been established to meet the need, but we have not done enough. Ministers are frightened, so they hide. They put their head in the sand. This is why I talk with several pastors on the phone. We talk and we are bringing healing to one another. We are giving each other permission to talk. But there needs to be a change in how pastors perceive their district superintendents and even their presbyters.

Nationally, we need to offer seminars to pastors and laity on stress, depression, burnout, and marital difficulty. Seminar speakers and church officials need to talk about these subjects and say: "Listen, if you have a problem in this area, I'm going to point you in the right direction, but I'm not going to police your life. I want you to get well. I want you to get in balance. I am your friend."

**WAGNER:** Our churches are not necessarily safe places. It is interesting how many people in the pew have family



members on medication or in counseling for depression. But when depression affected me, I was accused of everything from faking depression to having unfessed sin in my life. People believe a man of God should not be depressed. Many issues need to be addressed, but to blame the pastor for being depressed is wrong. The church should not say a victim is responsible for his own self-care and well-being. Churches and denominations need to take responsibility for the health of their ministers.

When I speak at conferences, people are much more willing to talk to me because I admit my wife has struggled off and on for years with depression. Neither one of us

*The church should not say a victim is responsible for his own self-care and well-being. Churches and denominations need to take responsibility for the health of their ministers.—Wagner*

ever thought it would hit me. This is why she didn't recognize it at first. I've always been the strong one.

Where can pastors find a safe place to share their problems? I have a letter from a pastor's wife. She is afraid if her presbyter finds out she is being treated for depression, it will hinder her husband's advancement. I have an e-mail from a pastor whose doctor told him he needed to take 6 to 8 weeks off and get away from the ministry. He went to his board. They said they would give him 4 weeks. When he returned, the board gave him a 2-week termination notice explaining his condition disqualified him for ministry. They were unwilling to help him get well.

So, there are two ways of looking at these issues: what a denomination is saying, and the historic issues and anecdotes of individual situations that keep pastors from coming forward. Susan and I have chosen to be straightforward. We speak about my depression honestly and prayerfully, and hope it will free others to do the same.

## DISCUSS THE IMPORTANCE OF SABBATICALS FOR PASTORS.

**WAGNER:** The perception of sabbaticals is changing. Even in the secular world people are starting to discuss and plan sabbaticals for leadership. I have two thoughts on sabbaticals.

First, the average board member does not understand the difference between what they do and what the pastor does.

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Lay leadership needs to understand there is a big difference between a pastor's job description and a business owner's job description. There is a difference between how a church of a certain size and budget operates and how a business of the same size and budget operates.

A pastor has the weight of caring for people and is responsible for their spiritual welfare. His calling mandates he take this responsibility seriously. There is a great emotional drain and pull on those in ministry, more than on the average business owner.

Those who own businesses work hard and their responsibility can be draining. The difference is in being responsible for 300 eternal souls as opposed to making and selling a product and operating a business.

Second, the whole concept of a church board turns the pastor into an employee rather than a leader. The more a pastor tries to talk about personal needs and concerns the more moral authority and leadership ability the church board can take away from him. A board can render a pastor powerless in the midst of his ministry.

More information would help the board understand a pastor's needs. There is a disconnect in pastor-board understanding making it difficult for a pastor to discuss his need for a sabbatical or a salary increase. Most pastors do not want to be perceived as whining or unwilling to sacrifice for the Kingdom. Unless someone becomes the pastor's advocate and promotes and teaches about sabbaticals and salaries, the church sets their ministry staff up for failure. I have never been comfortable asking for a salary increase. Churches give one to each missionary, but not the pastor. Can a pastor say to his board: "I need a sabbatical. You will need to cover everything. I cannot take phone calls or answer e-mails on this sabbatical."

A pastor who tries to teach the church how to care for the pastor, especially since he is the perceived beneficiary of this care, puts himself in a precarious position. There must be a better way of instructing and leading church leadership in this aspect of loving the Kingdom. Pastor appreciation month is good, but one month a year is not enough, and receiving a certificate to a restaurant is not sufficient. A congregation needs to provide ongoing care for their pastor.

Tools, resources, symposiums, and training need to be provided through denominations and districts to teach lay leadership a different model of leading and following. They need to know what their responsibilities are so ministry is not the sole responsibility of the pastor.

A pastor can go to a conference and think: *This is great, but when I return to the church how am I going to explain this to them?* These resources need to be provided for lay leadership. Then the church can start implementing them.

*When I began to sleep regularly again, I regained my ability to think.—Goodall*

**GOODALL:** In most Pentecostal denominations, the word *sabbatical* is not used. We do not know what it is, cannot define it, and do not know how to take one. My wife and I recently decided we had been hitting it hard for more than 25 years, and we were not willing to damage our next 15 or 20 years of full-time ministry. So, we resigned and used this time to regroup during a 3- to

4-month sabbatical. I outlined a couple of books, got some rest, and built up some energy. But churches do not give their pastors permission to do this.

Churches and pastors need to learn how to take a sabbatical. The Methodists, Presbyterians, Catholics, Lutherans, and many evangelical groups have had sabbaticals in place for their ministers; sabbaticals are assumed. Every 5 or 10 years, whatever structure they have set up, the board anticipates and plans for their pastor's sabbatical. They rejoice in it.

I have a friend who just took a 6-month sabbatical and studied at Oxford. He came back electrified. He was rested and was able to look at some different ideas. This is healthy. Pastors who take sabbaticals are not lazy. Most ministers are hard working and need a break, and boards need to make provision for it.

How do you get a board in a Pentecostal church to do this? How can deacons guard the pastor's health? We need to develop a tool to talk to our boards.

Most board members, like pastors, are wonderful people who love God and want God's best for the church and pastor. But, again, there is not enough instruction. I have not seen any manuals, teaching tapes, or other forms of information our churches can buy.

## WHAT ADVICE AND HOPE WOULD YOU OFFER PASTORS WHO ARE SUFFERING FROM DEPRESSION AND BURNOUT?

**GOODALL:** I would encourage pastors to get help. The first thing a pastor must do is go to a Christian counselor or physician and tell him what is going on. This Christian counselor needs to understand depression and talk to him about where he is in his life.

Pastors need to talk about their condition quickly and define where they are. There are different levels of clinical depression. Are they experiencing level 1 or level 5 depression? A pastor's spouse should go and be a part of the therapy.

Then they need to reprioritize their life. Glenn talked about his compulsive to excessive exercise, but most of the time the opposite is true. Pastors are not exercising. They do not have balance in their life. According to the Mayo Clinic, obesity is the No. 1 problem with ministers in most denominations. Pastors are often at committee meetings where dinners with desserts and all the trimmings are

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## While there is a stigma in the church about medication for depression, we would be amazed at how many pastors or their wives are taking antidepressants.—Goodall

served. Pastors are not living a balanced life, are not taking care of their bodies, and are not getting enough rest. These items contribute to a balanced picture and are preventative maintenance.

### TEN TELLTALE SIGNS OF DEPRESSION

1. Do you feel like crying more often now than you normally have in the past? Do you feel sad or blue much of the time? When you see yourself in the mirror, do you look sad? Do others comment that you no longer seem happy?

2. Do you frequently have a sense of hopelessness or helplessness? Do you think nothing matters or nothing will do any good? Does the phrase, *What's the use?* come to mind frequently?

3. Do you have less motivation and interest in activities, hobbies, work, or relationships you have previously enjoyed?

4. Has your sleep pattern changed? Are you unable to sleep at night, or are you struggling with restlessness that leaves you tired in the morning? Do you have trouble getting out of bed? Do you want to sleep all day?

5. Have you thought recently that life is not worth living? Do you wish God would just take you home?

6. Do you dread the beginning of a new day, the anticipation of your responsibilities, decisions, and meetings with coworkers or others?

7. Are you anxious and stressed? Are you worried and concerned about the past or about what the future may hold?

8. Have your eating patterns changed? Have you lost your appetite? Does your favorite food no longer interest you? Are you eating much more than you previously did, perhaps even an excessive intake of junk foods?

9. Do you have less energy than usual? Are there other physical symptoms that differ from the past, such as frequency of headaches, upset stomach, constipation, or rapid heartbeat?

10. Do you feel you are not functioning as well at work as you have in the past, and that others are beginning to notice?



**STEVE ARTERBURN**, Laguna Beach, California. Used by permission, Steve Arterburn, New Life Ministries 2006 800-NEW-LIFE.

**WAGNER:** One preventative measure is to review the signs of depression. I have collected notes from speaking with pastors about depression. In the article I did for *REV* magazine, I included a sidebar by Steve Arterburn that lists 10 signs of depression. (See sidebar *Ten Telltale Signs of Depression*.)

As I went through the list, I remembered seeing these red flags in my own life. Pastors are so focused on other people they often do not see the symptoms in themselves. This is not caused by pride as some would suggest, but by ministerial focus. I had ministered to other pastors from outside our church about depression, but I had not evaluated these areas in my own life. Pastors need to check themselves periodically and ask: Am I slipping in this direction? Am I starting to have some of these symptoms? If they are, they need to seek help from trusted people such as a Christian psychologist or psychiatrist. Some counselors offer intensives where pastors and their spouses can go for a retreat and get help for a week or two. These kinds of helps need to be built into budgets and into denominational frameworks so pastors can take advantage of them.

Pastors need to schedule time for activities unrelated to their work and business. Pastors are encouraged to continue their education. They also need to continue soul care, beyond vacation. Vacation is family time. What will we build in for ongoing soul care during routine, day-to-day ministry? Do we schedule a mental health day each month so pastors can get away?

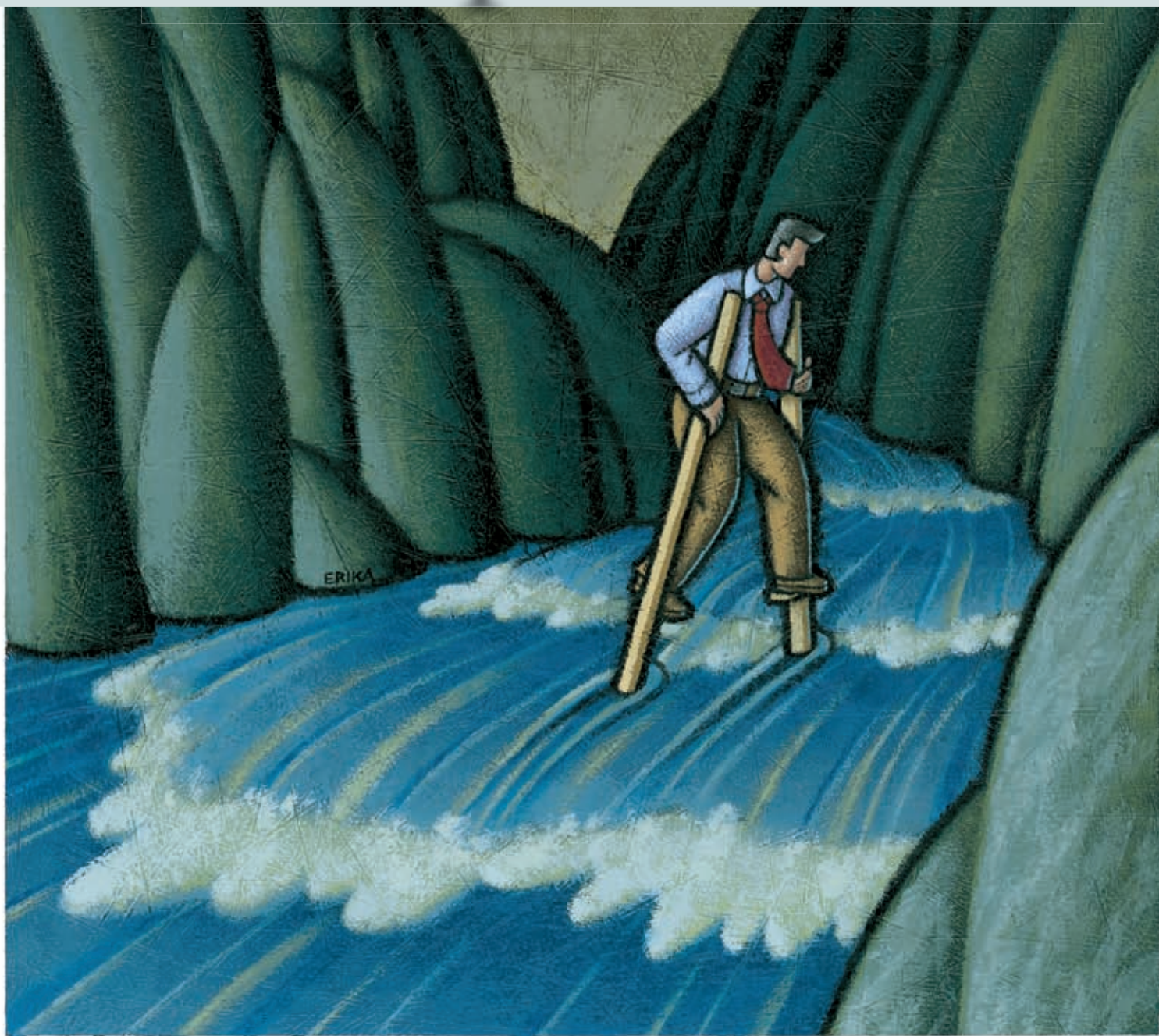
First, I would say to pastors who are headed into or are experiencing depression that depression is not the end of the road. I thought it was. Facts and feelings do not always agree. Second, there is help. Third, there is ministry ahead for pastors if they and God desire further ministry. Intervention at this critical point and in a safe place is essential.

**GOODALL:** We are two examples saying there is light at the end of the tunnel. We have been there and we are still dealing with these issues. Fifteen years ago when I was in the middle of depression, I did not care if I lived another day. I was not suicidal, but I asked: *Who needs life?* But there is a way to reprioritize your life. The harvest is plentiful, and the workers are few. The Lord wants us to carry a light burden. There will always be ministry, and we can be in ministry. Our goal is to understand the lightness of His burden. It is not God's will for ministry to overwhelm or kill us. ■






# Crossing a Deep River —



# Biblical *and* Practical Advice for Dealing With Depression

speak from personal experience. In the early 1990s, I went through a steep 2-year valley of depression. I could share the details, but I will opt for the example of the apostle Paul who described his thorn in the flesh without ever revealing the underlying cause.

I only mention that season in my life to give pastors the perspective that this article is not theoretical advice thrown down from a mountaintop to sufferers below. I know whereof I speak. When the tough time was over I could say with the hero of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* that my life journey involved crossing a deep river, but "my feet have touched the bottom, and it is sound."

Pentecostals do not often talk about depression. Maybe it is because the experience is so removed from the exhilaration of Spirit baptism or the second fruit of the Spirit — joy. Leaders, pastors, or ministerial spouses particularly, have a rough time admitting to anyone that things are not chipper. We are trained to keep a stiff upper lip and model for others a life without shadows or heartache.

Long before I experienced depression at its depths I had preached and taught on the subject. So, let me invite you first to look at a biblical perspective on depression from one who, at that point of time, had not experienced much of it.

## CAUSES OF DEPRESSION

The Bible gives plenty of insight into why believers get depressed. Six reasons stand out.

### Physical

Pastors can go at such a maddening pace that depression rises because they are run down. Look at Elijah's story in 1 Kings 18 and 19.

Elijah won the battle with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, then ran across the Armageddon Valley to Jezreel (1 Kings 18:46). From there, he raced more than 100 miles to Beersheba at the southern tip of Israel (1 Kings 19:3), because he was afraid of Jezebel. After a day's journey into the desert, he sat under a broom tree depressed, praying that he might die.

"I have had enough, Lord," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors."

In other words, he prayed, "Just go ahead and kill me, Lord; I am done" (1 Kings 19:4).



What was his problem? Too much running. What was the solution? Sleep and food (1 Kings 19:5–8). Strengthened by rest, bread, and water, he then trekked 40 days and nights to Mount Horeb (1 Kings 19:8). Elijah was depressed again, this time not under a tree, but in a cave. He was swamped with self-pity and declared, “I am the only one left” (1 Kings 19:10).

He had Moses’ syndrome — the idea that the entire burden of caring for God’s business fell on his shoulders (Numbers 11:10–17). God’s solution for Moses and Elijah was to remind them that everything was not dependent on them alone. Their feelings of isolation and depression arose because they were exhausted.

Illness may be another physical cause of depression. Read the soulful lament of the sick man in Psalm 88. With his life drawing close to the grave he mourned his isolation from people and

reaction to medication, or poor eating habits.

Pastors often make the mistake of searching first for emotional or spiritual causes of depression. I suggest searching first for physical reasons. If the depression stems from physical reasons, then get some rest. Take a break. Exercise regularly. Start eating right. Get a thorough medical checkup.

### Sense of loss

People can become depressed when they lose someone or something.

My college years were among the happiest in my life. When they ended, I drove my 1954, green and white Pontiac to the Los Angeles area to attend seminary. I moved into a small apartment with purple walls. I knew no one. A dear elderly couple brought me a CorningWare® dish of lamb casserole. I

do not like lamb. Never having cooked for myself, I put the dish on the kitchen counter because I had no refrigerator. Every day I would pass the dish thinking, *I need to take a bite so I can tell them how good their casse-*

*role was.* Two weeks went by. When I finally opened the lid, I nearly fainted from the smell and the sight of maggots.

That summer I was so depressed — and it was not just the lamb casserole. I had lost all my friends, and I was alone.

My loss was inconsequential compared to the mother and father who lose a child, the husband whose wife is killed in a car wreck, the longtime employee who is let go a few years before retirement, the individual looking at a stack of bills and an empty checkbook, the married person dealing with the infidelity and abandonment by a spouse, and an empty nest when the last child is gone. The list goes on and on — each is related to losing what is dear to you.

For pastors and ministers the loss may come with the death of a dream or ideal. It may result from church problems, a betrayal by a trusted board member or parishioner, or a deteriorating situation.

If you want a biblical example of loss, read Lamentations. Jeremiah sobbed over the loss of homeland. The book has five chapters — the first two and the last two chapters each have 22 verses. The Hebrew alphabet has 22 letters, and each verse in these chapters begins with a successive letter of the alphabet. The third and middle chapter has 66 verses, and the pattern is replicated. Three times in that third chapter Jeremiah runs through the Hebrew alphabet. It is his way of mourning loss — from A to Z — over and over again.

### Depressive environment

Look at Job. He not only lost his 10 children and wealth in 1 day, but he also lost his health. He developed painful sores

## Pastors often make the mistake of searching first for emotional or spiritual causes of depression. I suggest searching first for physical reasons.

believed God had rejected him. His prayer closes on a down note: “The darkness is my closest friend” (verse 18).

Closely related to sickness is the aging progress. If you are older and would like to be further depressed, read Ecclesiastes 12:1–8 in a modern translation. Hear the plaintiff cry of depression from a man whose foot was almost in the grave, “Meaningless! Meaningless! Everything is meaningless!”

In addition to lack of proper rest, sickness, or aging, other physical causes for depression can be chemically related, a





that he scraped with broken pottery as he sat in ashes. His wife harped on him to curse God and die, and his three best friends, along with a smart-mouthed youngster, vexed him with words. No wonder he said, “Why did I not perish at birth, and die as I came from the womb?” (Job 3:11).

A depressive environment can be both physical and emotional, as we see with Job. That is why I clean off my desk when I leave work. Clutter tends to make me depressed. When I am physically organized, I do better.

A depressive environment can stem from the company one keeps. Job’s wife certainly did not help him. He could not walk away from her and remain faithful to God. So, he endured, and God helped him. Ultimately, everything turned out right; even his wife got better and went on to have another set of 10 children (and after 20 children, Job’s wife could have been the one suffering with depression of the postpartum kind).

As a young minister I found myself getting negative about many things. The Spirit spoke to my heart one day and said, “You are hanging around with friends who are negative. You either need to change friends, or change them.” I did a little of both and got relief.

### Poor self-concept

A healthy self-concept comes from our sense of *identity* (we are comfortable with who we are), *worth* (in a humble way, we know our value to God and others), and *competence* (we are able to succeed in the roles given to us).

A poor self-concept can lead to depression. Look at Naomi. In the opening chapter of Ruth she had given up on life and God. Her identity had been stripped through the loss of her husband and sons. The fact she had no descendants left her feeling worthless. And, she felt helpless to do anything about her situation.

When she returned to Bethlehem she asked her friends and family to start calling her Mara (bitter) instead of Naomi (pleasant, lovely, delightful, see Ruth 1:20). She had lost her sense of identity, worth, and competence.

Maybe you feel like being called *Brother (or Sister) Bitter*. Life has thrown you a wicked curve ball, and you no longer have confidence in yourself or feel you are worth anything. That perspective can certainly breed depression.

### Spiritual failure

Psalm 32 records the depths of David’s depression after his sin with Bathsheba. “When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer” (verses 3,4).

Thank God for that kind of depression. Why? That form of depression leads to repentance. An individual who sins and then walks away without sorrow endangers his soul eternally.

The best thing a pastor can do when he has sinned is to follow David’s example. In this case, depression is a sign that the Holy Spirit is using His Brillo® Pad to clean the soul.

### Spiritual warfare

At one point in my ministry I went through a brief time of feeling down. I examined the causes for depression listed above and none of them applied. Then it dawned on me — the church was in a major growth spurt. The enemy was trying to pick me off through discouragement and depression.

In doing the Father’s will, Jesus knew about depression produced by spiritual warfare. In Gethsemane, “He began to be deeply distressed and troubled” (Mark 14:33). The English Majority Text Translation states, “He began to be greatly amazed and deeply depressed.”<sup>1</sup> The Phillips Translation: He “began to be horror-stricken and desperately depressed.”<sup>2</sup>

Jesus then told Peter, James, and John, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death” (Mark 14:34). The Greek text has one word for “overwhelmed with sorrow” — *perilupos*. This word can be used to describe a tight-fitting girdle — encompassed (or literally, girded about or surrounded) with sorrow. Depression is often not a sin at all or a lack of faith and trust — it may be a deep sadness.

Before facing the outer agony of Calvary Jesus faced the inner agony of Gethsemane. The spiritual warfare was so great Luke tells us He was in “anguish” and “his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground” (Luke 22:44).

There are six major causes of depression: physical, a sense of loss, depressive environment, poor self-concept, spiritual failure, and spiritual warfare. Take a moment and ask yourself if you have experienced or are presently going through depression arising from any of these sources. It helps to identify the source before getting to the solution.

## JESUS’ MODEL FOR HANDLING DEPRESSION

We have just considered the lowest moment in Jesus’ earthly experience — Gethsemane. His way of dealing with overwhelming sorrow provides a six-step pathway out of depression.

Jesus’ way of dealing with depression provides a powerful model that pastors can use in their personal lives when they experience a season of great sorrow.

### Jesus did not isolate himself

Jesus let others into the inner circle of His apprehension, trouble, and grief. Too many believers have imprisoned themselves by treating their depression as a deep, dark secret that cannot be talked about with others. Jesus openly revealed His sadness to His closest and most trusted friends. Do you?

## Jesus did not put on a mask

Jesus avoided the trap of saying to himself, *I am the Son of God, and therefore, I cannot let anyone know the trial I am going through*. He did not pretend to be happy when He was not. He verbalized what He was experiencing. Do you have anyone to talk to when you are feeling low?

## Jesus prayed

Jesus did not try to handle His problems without the Father's presence, comfort, and help. In the privacy of Gethsemane's garden, He poured out His heart to His Father. He exemplified for us the power of accepting the things either we cannot or should not change when He said, "Thy will be done" (Matthew 26:42). Are you praying for God to help you accept what has been thrust on you?

## Jesus did not dissipate His strength with bitterness or blame

Even the failure of His closest friends to stay awake and pray with Him did not deter Jesus from a right spirit and continued prayer. Are you keeping a sweet spirit in a difficult season?

## Jesus rose to action

Events of life can momentarily paralyze or even cause people to flee in the wrong direction. Jesus could have abandoned the way to the cross by quickly leaving Gethsemane, ascending the Mount of Olives, and disappearing like David in a south-eastern direction into the Judean wilderness. Instead, from His place of sorrow He rose to face what confronted Him.

What would you be doing today if you were not depressed? The challenge is to go ahead and do it anyway. May the Lord

give you strength to face your difficulties and not run from them. Remember, the same wind that uproots a tree can lift a bird because the opposing force becomes a lifting force if faced in the right direction.

## MY PERSONAL TESTIMONY

I realize that my journey through depression may not parallel yours. None of us experience life in exactly the same way. I wrote some observations about depression after I emerged from it. I share them with you in the hope that a thought or two might be of resource and encouragement.

- The descent into depression may at first seem to overwhelm you. It can hit with such force that you question whether you can survive. Both Jonah and the Psalmist put it this way: "All your waves and breakers have swept over me" (Jonah 2:3; Psalm 42:7).
- God instantly starts to work. In the first weeks of my depression I spoke at a family camp. No one knew what I was passing through, but an older lady came to me privately and said, "Take courage, George, take courage. God's way. God's time." I hung on to those words like a drowning man to a lifeline. Whether you have only a thin word from God to hold on to — or nothing at all — fall back on your faith. God is at work even when you cannot see it.
- Do not be surprised if things get worse. After surviving a few thunderous waves, my instinct was to think I had survived the worst. Not true. More was coming. Had I known in advance that things would get worse, I could not have taken it. I developed a new perspective on "God will not give you more than you can bear" (1 Corinthians 10:13). I wished that God did not have so much confidence in my carrying ability. A friend later told me, "God will pull you through if you can stand the pull."
- Depression will either drive you to God or away from Him. There were times I hung in the balance just like Asaph (Psalm 73:21,22). I spent 1 hour every day for nearly 2 years journaling through the Psalms. I found that the Word drew me closer to God, helped me gain steadiness, and gave me the wisdom to let heaven deal with issues I might not be able to resolve. Spend time in the Word — take it in massive doses. I made a three-page typewritten list of my favorite promises in the Bible. I tucked this list into my Bible so I could read it over and over. I called it "God's Exceeding and Great Promises to Me."
- Get in control of some easy area. For me, that meant exercise and proper diet. I listened to great gospel music on my Sony Walkman® while on long, daily walks. I decided to eat healthier and cut down on my weight. I could control these things. When I could not sleep at night, rather than condemn myself to a night of tossing and turning, I took sleeping pills. My doctor offered to



prescribe antidepressants. I only declined because I felt I was making progress without them.

- Take time daily for something you enjoy. I love to walk or read. I did plenty of both. I did not read heavy material. I am almost embarrassed to confess that I have a weakness for legal novels. They provided hours of escape for me. My consolation is that the great missionary Lillian Trasher loved Zane Grey novels — as did J. Philip Hogan, former executive director of Assemblies of God World Missions.
- Pray whenever you can. I prayed using the Lord's Prayer as a pattern, or by employing ACTS (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication). I prayed through the concepts of surrender, self-emptying, abandonment to God, relinquishment, and resurrection (per Richard Foster).
- Talk. Talk. Talk. Depression seeks to isolate you within yourself. Break down those walls by talking with the Lord, with a close, personal friend, with yourself (through journaling), and with a professional counselor.

Pride often keeps pastors from seeking help. I had to learn to surrender my pride and admit I needed the resources of an experienced Christian psychologist. His weekly insight helped me stay on the course of recovery.

- Develop a checklist. Every day I asked myself five questions: Have I talked with the Lord? Has the Lord talked to me? Am I in the Lord's will? Have I lived Mark 8:34–38? Have I helped anyone?

I do not know what your checklist might be, but mine helped anchor me and give me purpose. The last question was especially important because it made me realize that other people were in pain and that I could do something about their need.

- Sow the seeds for a good future harvest. It was during this season of depression that my two published volumes on the Psalms were birthed; that the inspiration came for doing a Roots of Pentecost Tour in Los Angeles with Mel Robeck that has now resulted in thousands of people visiting the Bonnie Brae house where the Azusa Street revival began and other sites connected with the Azusa Revival; and that the outlandish idea occurred of asking Tommy Barnett to take a small church in Los Angeles and build a great work for God — a task he accepted — now called the Dream Center.

God wants to work in your down times. Let Him birth something in you. Psalm 84:5–7 suggests when we pass through the valley of weeping (Baca) we make it a well.

Near the end of my time of depression, I picked up *Guideposts* and found reference to the following verse taken from a plaque hanging on the wall in the ranch guesthouse kitchen of St. Benedict's Monastery in Snowman, Colorado.

I was regretting the past,  
and fearing the future.  
Suddenly God was speaking:

“MY NAME IS ‘I AM.’ ”

I waited, God continued:

“When you live in the past,  
with its mistakes and regrets,  
it is hard. I am not there.  
MY NAME IS NOT ‘I WAS.’ ”

“When you live in the future,  
with its problems and fears,  
it is hard. I am not there.  
MY NAME IS NOT ‘I WILL BE.’ ”

“When you live in this moment,  
it is not hard. I am here.  
MY NAME IS ‘I AM.’ ”

Depression has the tendency to toss people back and forth between the waves of their losses in or regrets over the past, and their fears or anxieties for what the future holds. However, since He is with you in the present moment — be present in this moment with Him. You cannot live in either the past or the future. All you have is now — live in it.

The most helpful moment in my depression came one day while I was admiring a wood carving on my desk. I thought to myself about how I had always wished to have artistic talent, but I still drew stick figures for humans the same way I did when I was in grade school.

As a child, I so badly wanted to draw that I bought dot-to-dot coloring books. As I sat at my desk, I remembered that even before I had connected the dots, I had a general idea of the picture that was going to emerge. Suddenly, I felt the Holy Spirit say to me, *George, the problem in your life right now is that you no longer see the dots. The desert sands have blown into your life and covered the dots. All you can see right now are the dots of this morning and this evening. Go ahead and connect them, and trust Me that I know where all the other dots are.*

The “I AM” God was present with me through the days when I only had the morning and evening dots. I encourage you to keep connecting the dots. The Lord knows where He is leading you, and the full picture will emerge some day. Continue daily trusting His providential care for you (Proverbs 3:5,6). ■



**George O. Wood, D.Th.P.**, is the general secretary for The General Council of the Assemblies of God, Springfield, Missouri.

#### ENDNOTES

1. Scripture taken from the English Majority Text Translation of the Holy Bible (EMTV). Copyright © 2002 by Paul W. Esposito. Used by permission of the copyright holder. Courtesy of Stauros Ministries.
2. J.B. Phillips, *The New Testament in Modern English*, 1962 edition, published by HarperCollins, is used with the kind permission of Mrs. Vera Phillips and the J.B. Phillips estate.





# From Coping to Conquering:

A Christian Psychiatrist's View of the  
Relationship Between Physical Health  
and Depression, Stress, and Burnout

RICHARD H. STEIP, M.D.



**W**hat follows is an ongoing true story about a patient I am currently treating. His name and other facts have been slightly changed to assure confidentiality.

## CASE REPORT

John, a 57-year-old married pastor with two children, is well respected and well known in our extended Christian community. People view him as an intelligent and successful church leader with a good marriage. A Christian counselor, who had been treating John for 2 months, referred him to me. The counselor wanted my psychiatric medical opinion on whether or not John needed medication. John was having diffuse burning sensations of his skin, severe anxiety, and a depressed mood. He also felt compelled to stay constantly busy, and whenever he felt underproductive he became even more anxious.

John told me he was on blood pressure and cholesterol-lowering medicine, did not smoke or drink alcohol, engaged in regular physical exercise, and had some osteoarthritis in his knee, probably from competitive sports earlier in his life. Except for a brief, mild reactive depression and grief after unfairly losing a pastorate 20 years earlier, and some transient periods of anxiety or tension during Christmas, he had never felt either this bad or this bad for so long. The anxiety he felt last Christmas had continued through May.

John also had reoccurring dreams of playing in a football game, being a star, then realizing the stadium was empty of spectators. He was experiencing greatly diminished joy and pleasure and would occasionally have bouts of crying. Prayer, healthy living, and exercise had not helped ease his 7 months of suffering.

A few months before seeking counseling, John had several nearly simultaneous stresses. His granddaughter had delicate surgery followed by a second corrective surgery. For a month he and his wife anguished over whether her breast lump biopsy was benign or malignant. One of his two adult daughters was diagnosed with an usually chronic severe psychiatric illness. Finally, he had been involved in two unsettling altercations with next-door neighbors, and he felt he had behaved and spoken in an angry manner unbecoming a pastor. This resulted in subsequent guilt.

John realized that part of his problem was internally driven. On top of his stresses, he had an exaggerated need for performance, productivity, and staying busy.

It was relevant that both of John's parents were alcoholics. His father would get violent and his mother depressed. His father often traveled on business and, as he left, he would tell John, "You're the man of the house while I'm away."

John told me, "I was just 8 or 9 years old, and I grew up trying to make it happen and be 'Mr. Responsible'."

John agreed with my diagnosis that his persistent tension and anxiety, more so than depression, were the main issues at this point in his life. He agreed to try a mild tranquilizer and continued counseling.

After a couple doses of medication, John remarked that he was doing great and felt back to normal. He has continued to gain a better understanding of his past life experiences and self-expectations. He also has begun to address the simultaneous stresses that were overwhelming him in spite of his strong faith and grounding in the Word. Furthermore, he realizes that his exaggerated need for control was being overcome by feelings of vulnerability and failure that were creating more and more anxiety. For 2 months he has continued to improve with the use of minimal medication and

**Healthy people tend  
to cope with, manage better,  
or conquer more easily  
the inevitable tribulations  
that accompany life.**

by taking responsibility for his behaviors and thoughts. During this time, he has successfully ministered to others and served as husband, father, and grandfather.

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PHYSICAL HEALTH AND DEPRESSION

In general, there is an inverse relationship between health, depression, and stress and burnout. Healthy people tend to cope with, manage better, or conquer more easily the inevitable tribulations that accompany life. Unhealthy people do not, regardless of whether their ill health is a cause or effect of their problems.

Health is best defined as "soundness of body or mind" or "the general condition of the body and mind." Health is synonymous with "vigor, vitality, strength, fitness, and stamina."<sup>1</sup> As implied in this definition, it is not wise to differentiate between physical and mental health, even though it is customary in our culture to do so. Physical and mental health are overlapping concepts and realities.

## With the proper use of medication along with counseling, John experienced a quick and favorable outcome for his depression.

Depression may vary from major to minor, as do the various degrees in severity of burnout. Depression and burnout are best viewed as spectrum disorders. The symptoms of major depression can include: suicidal ideas, plans, or attempts; loss of ability to experience pleasure; lack of joy; sleep and appetite disturbances; and hopeless and helpless feelings. The symptoms of minor depression (dysthymia) include: sadness, discouragement, decreased pleasure and joy, and lesser disturbances in sleep and appetite. Both major and minor depression are commonly accompanied by physical complaints that may not have any medically diagnosable or observable basis.

Stress is defined as “a specific response by the body to a stimulus, such as fear or pain, that disturbs ... the normal physiological equilibrium of an organism,” or “physical, mental, or emotional strain or tension.”<sup>2</sup> Being overstressed implies suffering from a dynamic interaction of forces, either internal or external, in excess of one’s comfortable capacity to handle it. When stress continues to exceed one’s capacity to cope, manage, or conquer the stressor, burnout occurs.

Burnout is a failing or wearing out of one’s resources. Burnout is manifested by such symptoms as fatigue, apathy, irritability, temper outbursts, self-criticism, cynicism, and negativity. It also manifests itself when one feels continually besieged, overwhelmed, and helpless.

Symptoms of both clinical depression and burnout are headaches, digestive problems, weight gain or loss, and insomnia or oversleeping. Burnout often has an insidious onset and is often noticed first by one’s associates or family. Unrelieved burnout will lead to even more stress in one’s life such as job loss, drop in job performance, increased absenteeism, and illness.

In my case example, John was suffering primarily from overwhelming anxiety with associated minor depression, medically unexplained physical symptoms, and a decreased ability to enjoy life. His willingness to obtain counseling and psychiatric evaluation and to try medication is preventing burnout, major depression, physical illness, and loss of his ministry to his community and family.

The words we often use to describe our interactions with stress are telling. When we say we are burned out, are succumbing to stress, or we have become stressed out, we imply we have given way to or become ill or dysfunctional because of stress.

If we are coping or dealing with stress, we are struggling with some degree of success and are persevering.

It is better to handle or manage stress, which means we are succeeding at accomplishing something or at least taking charge of the stressful situation. It is better yet to conquer stress. To conquer stress means we become a winner and are actively overcoming and mastering a situation. Best of all is the amazing, wonderful comfort that in and through Jesus Christ we are “more than conquerors” in our tribulations. God is with us, come whatever (Romans 8:37). All will be renewed and restored when we dwell with God eternally in a new heaven and earth with new, resurrected bodies (Revelation 21:1–7).

Tribulation, trouble, stress, adversity, or distress are inevitable results of living in this fallen world. If it were not so, Jesus would not have told us in John 16:33. But through Christ we can overcome and conquer.

Job, David, and Jesus expressed their stress in ways pastors can certainly understand and to which they can easily relate.

### Job

- “For sighing comes to me instead of food; my groans pour out like water” (Job 3:24).
- “A despairing man should have the devotion of his friends, even though he forsakes the fear of the Almighty” (Job 6:14).
- “Nights of misery have been assigned to me. When I lie down I think, ‘How long before I get up?’ The night drags on, and I toss till dawn” (Job 7:3,4).
- “My days ... come to an end without hope” (Job 7:6).
- “I despise my own life” (Job 9:21).
- “My face is red with weeping” (Job 16:16).
- “My spirit is broken, my days are cut short, the grave awaits me” (Job 17:1).

### David

- “I am faint; ... my bones are in agony. My soul is in anguish” (Psalm 6:2,3).
- “How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart?” (Psalm 13:2).
- “I am poured out like water, and all of my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted away within me. My strength is dried up” (Psalm 22:14,15).

## Jesus

Jesus, suffering the worst stress possible, bearing death on the Cross for the sin of the world, said: “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death” (Matthew 26:38).

Job, like many people who are overwhelmed with loss, depression, illness, and stress, expressed his feelings with sighing, appetite loss, groaning, despair, hopelessness, wishing for death, crying, and brokenness. David expressed weakness, pain, anguish, despair, and exhaustion. Jesus, fully God and fully man, expressed overwhelming sorrow.

## MEDICAL ISSUES THAT NEED TO BE ADDRESSED AS A POSSIBLE CAUSE OF DEPRESSION

There are many medical conditions that must be considered and treated, if necessary, to make sure they are not causing or exacerbating stress, depression, or burnout. The importance of regular medical checkups and a physical examination by a physician is important. Many pastors probably take better care of their automobiles than their bodies and minds.

The following is a brief list of some medical conditions that can easily be overlooked as a cause of depression:

- Diabetes (hyperglycemia) and low blood sugar (hypoglycemia) can cause poor concentration, mental dullness and confusion, jitteriness, irritability, excessive thirst or hunger, weight gain or loss, and excessive urination.
- Hyper- or hypothyroidism can cause sweating, heat or cold intolerance, hair and skin changes, anxiety or depression, heart palpitations, and weight gain or loss.
- Adrenal gland overactivity (Cushing’s disease) or underactivity (Addison’s disease) can cause weight gain, skin problems, high blood pressure, and severe mood problems.
- Disorders of the parathyroid glands (small glands behind the thyroid gland in the front of the neck) cause either high or low blood calcium levels that can affect muscle function and neurological irritability or lethargy.

These physical symptoms can cause depression if left untreated. These diseases often make the sufferer feel like a hypochondriac or cause others to accuse the sufferer of being one. People may feel they are causing or bringing these symptoms on themselves. Also, if a physician or the sufferer attributes all of the sufferer’s woes to medical conditions and its symptoms alone, underlying or resulting depression may be masked, overlooked, or ignored.

Other medical conditions commonly considered to be either psychosomatic or somatopsychic (mind affecting body or body affecting mind) include:

- Skin disorders such as acne flare-ups, eczema, psoriasis, hives, compulsive hair pulling (trichotillomania), patchy

hair loss (alopecia), and skinpicking.

- Stress worsens asthma, gastric reflux disorder, irritable bowel syndrome, urinary urgency or constipation, and colitis.
- Menstrual and premenstrual disorders, libido and sexual arousal disorders, and erectile dysfunction.
- Tension and migraine headaches.
- Heart arrhythmias (irregular heart beats, palpitations) can result from stress.

These physical problems must be differentiated from serious underlying organ problems such as tumors or potentially fatal heart irregularities. Alcohol, illegal drugs, and abuse of prescription medications or caffeine can also mimic, cause, or worsen signs of stress, burnout, and some medical illnesses.

Many physicians today commonly see those suffering from what is diagnosed as chronic fatigue syndrome and/or fibromyalgia. Many psychiatrists believe this may be a modern term for what used to be called hysteria, neurasthenia, or hypochondriasis. Afari and Buchwald state: “Chronic fatigue syndrome is unlikely to be caused or maintained by a single agent. Findings to date suggest that physiological and psychological factors work together to predispose an individual to the illness, and to precipitate and perpetuate the illness. The assessment and treatment of chronic fatigue syndrome should be multidimensional and tailored to the needs of the individual patient.”<sup>3</sup>

The mechanisms by which unremitting and unrelieved stress affects our bodies are extremely complex. Acute and chronic stress mobilizes a fight-or-flight reaction in the sympathetic nervous system, raising blood pressure, heart rate, and breathing rate, while slowing down our digestive, reproductive, and immune systems. The clotting factors or chemicals in the blood increase, which are useful if a person is wounded in battle or by a predator, are harmful if they are unremitting. They are also capable of causing hardening of the arteries, clots in veins, and heart attacks and strokes. Physicians can order laboratory tests to check for stress and health-risk indicators such as blood lipids (cholesterol, HDL, LDL, and triglycerides), and some nervous system chemicals such as catecholamines (including epinephrine and norepinephrine), and blood or urinary cortisol elevations that indicate increased risk for heart attacks and strokes.

Midriff weight gain may be a high health-risk feature that is linked with heart disease, and may even be the body’s way to provide feedback to the brain and adrenal gland to decrease stress hormones.

## COPING WITH STRESS

There are many ways of coping with, managing, and conquering stress, depression, and burnout, and for maintaining health and aging well. Each person has different combinations of

## The average person needs at least 6 to 7 hours of sleep a night for adequate physical and mental energy restoration.

whats and hows to accomplish this. Everyone may not need counseling or medication to do well, but some will. The following recommendations and principles have been proven over the years.

- Get enough sleep. The average person needs at least 6 to 7 hours a night for adequate physical and mental energy restoration.
- Find an enjoyable exercise you can do regularly and persist in it.
- Keep your weight within healthy limits by eating reasonably balanced meals, avoiding high-sugar foods and foods high in saturated fats.
- Aggressively plan regular periods of rest including breaks during the workday as well as extended periods of rest, breaks in your routine, and at least two weeklong vacations per year.

Rest will not happen if pastors do not set aside time in advance by stubbornly insisting on it for themselves. I have recently, in addition to regular exercise, planned daily breaks for rest and change in routine. I fill these periods with thinking, prayer, reading, socializing, answering calls and e-mails, or enjoying exercise, fresh air, and sunshine. The rest is paying off. I am calmer and have had healthier blood pressure readings with less blood pressure medication than I was using a year ago.

Well-planned rest periods prevent things from piling up and lengthening our to-do lists. This also reduces stress. We enter the best rest of all — God’s rest — by abiding in Jesus (John 15:4; Philippians 4:4–7) and sharing our load and yoke with Him (Matthew 11:28–30).

- Nurture a social life and fellowship with other believers and nonbelievers regularly. God said: “It is not good for the man to be alone” (Genesis 2:18). This statement not only applies to one’s need for a spouse, but for regular fellowship with others as well. We must “spur one another on,” “not give up meeting together,” and “encourage one another” (Hebrews 10:24,25).

Family-oriented and socially adept people tend to age better and be healthier. Isolation and loneliness sickens and kills. Pastors need to focus on the people who should be the closest to them, those who really matter, and not neglect their parents, spouses, and children in their relentless pursuit of projects, things, power, money, or control.

- Develop a positive attitude and have a sense of humor. Immerse yourself in Bible studies about hope and overcoming through Christ. If a pastor was raised by negative parents, he may need counseling to restructure his thinking and cognitive assumptions.
- Get a sense of control by getting help and information, delegating, avoiding positions with too much responsibility, and avoiding vulnerability relative to adequate power and control over situations at hand. Responsibility without control creates excess stress and illness.
- Lighten your load by eliminating the excess and unnecessary, whether it is inappropriate responsibility, unneeded material things or things that cause financial stress, bad relationships, or unhealthy habits and appetites that are sinful and hinder your relationship with Christ. Overcommitment of your time, even to good causes like ministry, can spread you too thin and cause burnout. Even jettisoning unhealthy concepts (like John, in my case example, having to be “Mr. Responsible”) will lighten your load.

### SEEK HELP

Pastors often pursue wise and healthy biblical living, yet they continue to suffer. John had a healthy relationship with Christ. Yet, even with Christian, Bible-based counseling, he still suffered terribly for over 7 months. Rather than being like Job’s friends who searched endlessly for some unrepented or





yet undiscovered sin to explain why John was not improving, and make him worse in the process, his counselor wisely referred him for further professional evaluation. In John's case, it was a psychiatrist. With proper medication along with counseling, John experienced a quick and favorable outcome for his anxiety.

When we understand church leaders may not be skilled enough to help, it is time to seek additional help through licensed professional counselors such as social workers, marriage and family counselors, psychologists, and psychiatrists. Proverbs 11:14 says, "Where there is no counsel, the people fall; But in the multitude of counselors there is safety" (NKJV).<sup>4</sup>

Some Christians recoil at the suggestion that they might need to visit a mental health professional. Perhaps these Christians still relate mental health professionals to early 1900's Freudian atheism. An empathic, properly trained therapist, however, can be used by God to help and heal. Of course, whenever possible, it is preferable to have a Christian counselor who uses the Word of God in counseling. In many areas of the United States it may be difficult to find Christian psychiatrists or psychologists. God can still use a nonbelieving counselor. Good therapists are trained listeners for what comes out of our hearts. In this sense, all counselors are heart surgeons. A good therapist knows the power of the tongue to heal, bless, curse, or hurt.

A pastor must use wisdom in picking a good therapist. "The wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere" (James 3:17). When searching for a therapist, look for those traits.

Medication may be needed when symptoms are severe enough to:

- interfere with a person's daily performance at work or at home.
- affect a person's sleep, appetite, digestion, and energy.
- cause physical illnesses that complicate a person's problems.
- cause physical symptoms that keep a person distracted.
- cause a person to consistently visit doctors or the emergency room.
- render a person a potential danger to others through suicidal behaviors or irritability leading to violence.

Psychiatrists are the best-trained professionals to administer psychotropic medications. People also need a psychiatrist who takes time to listen to the patient and to the patient's family and friends. The psychiatrist also needs to communicate with referring counselors and other physicians.

When seeking a psychiatrist, find one who is skilled in psychopharmacology and is continually learning about the newest and safest medications. While family physicians, internists, and gynecologists are capable of prescribing

medication, they rarely have the time, training, or experience to prescribe psychiatric medications as skillfully as psychiatrists.

Psychiatrists have many medications from which to choose to help their patients' recoveries or stabilization. Medications work by altering or stabilizing different nervous system chemicals, nerve cells, or tracts. So far, the most is known about serotonin, norepinephrine, dopamine, and gamma-aminobutyric acid. But psychiatrists are only scratching the surface of an extremely complex interwoven system of brain chemicals. Antidepressants and most tranquilizers work on one or more of these.

Lithium and several anticonvulsants use different ways to calm nerve cells. Lithium helps cyclic mood disorders. Anticonvulsants can also help chronic pain, headaches, and appetite regulation. By altering how the brain's chemicals are transmitted from nerve to nerve, by calming irritable or excited nerve cells, or by allowing these substances to accumulate more in the space between nerve cells, these medications alter mood, excitability, irritability, and escalating or impulsive emotions and behaviors. They can also have alerting and concentration-enhancing effects, enhance sleep, and normalize the hunger drive. By improving the physical body in these ways, people who are suffering from chemical/neurological imbalances are better able to return to normal or better functioning and feeling. It is truly both art and science to choose the right medication(s) for any individual, maximizing therapeutic benefits while minimizing side effects or adverse interactions with other drugs the patient might also be taking.

## CONCLUSION

I have presented some key concepts in how physical health, stress, depression and burnout interact, some practical things pastors can do to maximize health and successful living, as well as some steps they can take to get help in recovering from the ill-effects of stress, burnout, and depression. I trust that, although what I have written represents only my opinion and not that of all of organized psychiatry or medicine, I have provided reasoned advice that comes from decades of training and education and experience in the private practice of psychiatry seasoned with the Word of God. ■



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### ENDNOTES

1. *Random House Webster's Unabridged Dictionary*, second ed., (N.Y.: Random House, 1998).

2. Ibid.

3. Afari and Buchwald, "Chronic Fatigue Syndrome: A Review," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 160 (2003): 221-236.

4. Scripture quotations marked "NKJV" are taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

A decorative green vine with several flowers and a heart. The vine starts at the top left, loops around, and ends at the bottom right. It features a small white flower with a yellow center, a small red heart, a large pink flower with a yellow center, and another large pink flower with a yellow center. The vine is set against a white background.

# The Pastor's Wife: Beating the Ministry Blahs

BY GABRIELE RIENAS

**S**helly shifted uncomfortably in her front-row seat. Aware that people could be watching her in the semicircular auditorium, she kept her face blank with a hint of a serene smile on her lips. Her gaze straight ahead, her thoughts turned to the preceding week. Her husband had been quiet and lethargic for several days, speaking in monosyllables and retreating to his study for hours on end. Any attempt to draw him out was met with impatience and irritability.





ILLUSTRATION BY: SONNY CARDER



## **Before becoming too discouraged about loneliness in ministry, pastors' wives need to remind themselves that lonely times are just that — times or seasons.**

As Shelly continued to let her mind wander, she relived the phone call she had received from a church member midweek containing a litany of criticism and complaints that left her exhausted and discouraged. She felt a tinge of guilt because of the snippy comment she had made in a vain attempt to put the complainer in her place. She remembered briefly considering calling a friend and then discarding the thought due to a lack of viable options. Then, there was last night's 9 o'clock phone call informing her the keyboard player had forgotten to give notice he would be out of town for the weekend. Thirty minutes and several phone calls later she had a reluctant replacement. She made a mental note to warmly thank the replacement musician after the service.

Drawn back to the present by a cough in the congregation, Shelly tried again to focus on what her husband was sharing. As he gestured to emphasize his third point in the sermon, she noticed his shirt was not tucked in at the back. She made a mental note to mention it to him after the service.

Like Shelly, many ministry wives struggle with the challenges of their husbands' occupation. Whether she has a personal call to ministry or not, the minister's wife by virtue of her wedding vows is called to support her husband and

his concerns. Ministry, like few other professions, draws a spouse and family members into its day-to-day challenges. Much more than a job, ministry becomes a way of life, a social structure, a value system, and an occupation combined.

Congregations function much like a family. While this can bring fulfillment and joy, it also has its downsides. Like families, congregations can experience conflict and relational tensions. Criticism, disloyalty, and division can often emerge unexpectedly. People behave immaturely and selfishly, and sometimes impose their own unresolved issues from the past on the pastor's family. For this reason more than one pastor's wife has expressed strong feelings of dislike for her role.

Some ministry wives respond by withdrawing as much as possible, while others experience depression and lethargy.

Still others may become anxious, feeling as though the other shoe will drop even when things are going well. Unless the pastor's wife prepares herself wisely and takes deliberate steps to overcome discouragement,

church drama will take its toll in time, and her potential contribution will be rendered ineffective.

### **THE CHALLENGE OF MEANINGFUL CONNECTION**

Ask pastors' wives about their challenges and loneliness frequently emerges near the top of the list. Feelings of isolation seem to be common whether they pursue friendships in the congregation or not. Leadership positions are inherently lonely. Leading people is not the same as being one of the crowd. Even if the pastor's wife does not take a leadership role, her husband's position can cause her to experience a certain degree of isolation. Even in the most warmhearted relationships in the congregation there are certain things she cannot (and should not) share. Her confidentiality and respect for her husband stand in the way of complete disclosure. If she becomes burdened by a difficulty with a particular church member, it would be unethical for her to share her frustration with a third party.

A ministry wife can face challenging hurdles such as unfair criticism and gossip from a person in the congregation, especially if she makes the mature choice not to reciprocate.



One of the ladies who attended Bible study was spreading accusations that Lindsay was cold and unfriendly toward her by playing favorites with her scrapbooking friends. Lindsay was shocked and horrified because she had tried to start conversations with this woman several times, only to be met with disinterest and preoccupation. She did love scrapbooking, but tried hard not to play favorites with the women. She felt a strong urge to correct these false statements. She considered sending a letter sharing her perspective to everyone involved. Even though her heart was sinking, her better sense reminded her that stooping to this level was a poor solution and would

probably only escalate the situation. She comforted herself with the Word: “‘No weapon forged against you will prevail, and you will refute every tongue that accuses you. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and this is their vindication from me,’ declares the Lord” (Isaiah 54:17).

Before becoming too discouraged about loneliness in ministry, pastors’ wives need to remind themselves that lonely times are just that — times or seasons. They are not the sum total of life’s experiences. Ministry also brings with it many opportunities for social interaction and fulfillment. Not everyone will turn against us or wound us. Most congregations

## SURVIVE AND FLOURISH

### KEEP SIGHT OF THE BIG PICTURE

Your life is in God’s hands, and He will finish what He has started in you. No one can stand in the way of His plan for your life. The current situation will pass. Though it may feel like winter, you will again experience spring.

### MAINTAIN YOUR PERSONAL SPIRITUAL FERVOR

You have unlimited access to our loving Heavenly Father. Even if you appear to be strong in public, in the presence of your Father you can let your hair down. You can become childlike and needy, and find comfort and hope in a safe place. Make use of this limitless resource frequently.

### PRACTICE FORGIVENESS

Pain comes in unexpected ways and from unexpected sources. Watch out for resentment and bitterness. Instead, release and forgive. Let God have the last word — let it go.

### KNOW YOURSELF

God knew where you would be today before you were conceived. He has equipped you for the exact task He has for you — nothing more or less. Explore the gifts He has given you, and come to terms with those He has not.

### BE REALISTIC

People are people. Friends can be disloyal, conflict develops,

and mistakes are made. Every job carries seasons of challenge and discouragement. Ministry also brings moments of joy and great fulfillment. Any occupation in life carries potential for joy or pain.

### MAKE YOUR MARRIAGE A PRIORITY

Your marriage should outlast the current church situation. Your marriage vows are for life while congregations can come and go. When dealing with church drama, ask: How will I see this situation 5, 10, 20 years from now? The obvious answer is it will be a blip on the screen of your life. However, the memories and bond you have built with your spouse will last forever.

### KEEP LAUGHING

Keep your sense of humor. Laugh often, laugh hard.

### WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

Ministerial Enrichment helpline 1-800-867-4011

EMERGE Ministries at: <http://www.emerge.org>

For a list of Christian counselors, call the Ministerial Enrichment Office at 1-417-862-2781, ext. 3014.



GABRIELE RIENAS, Beaverton, Oregon



**Most congregations include wonderful, supportive people who love us dearly and wish only the best for us.**

include wonderful, supportive people who love us dearly and wish only the best for us. Fulfilling relationships require risk. After being wounded, we are often tempted to avoid being vulnerable again.

A ministry wife who continues to reach out will be rewarded with healing relationships. The irony is, risk is required to find healing, yet risk leaves one open to more pain. That is why the Holy Spirit has offered to walk with us and help us (Isaiah 43:2).

Relationships outside the congregation are a must. Establishing them can be challenging because of lack of time and lack of contact with people outside the congregational circle. Still, the challenge should not be a deterrent to us.

If pastors' wives are open, God can bring confidantes into their lives in many ways. Another pastor's wife in the community can be a great resource. In one ministry experience I had lunch with several local ministry wives until I found one

with whom I felt kinship. It took several attempts, but the reward was invaluable. We met for lunch monthly for 5 years and continue to meet to this day.

Many communities offer cross-denominational Bible studies. The women in leadership are often mature, compassionate, and possible candidates for friendship. Pastors' wives may make a connection with a neighbor, a colleague at work, or a trusted family member. Sometimes former relationships, such as a loyal person from a previous ministry experience, can be a source of encouragement.

A pastor's wife needs to exercise wisdom in choosing in whom to confide. She must remain aware that safety is not assured because a person is friendly or welcomes her self-disclosure. Unfortunately, there are those who enjoy the perceived social status that goes along with befriending the pastor's wife. We might experience painful repercussions if we make unwise choices. Test the waters and look for signs that a woman is genuine and has unselfish motives regarding her friendship. A trustworthy person will be mature in her faith, compassionate, and honest. On the other hand, red flags should deter us. Does this person gossip about others? Does she have a prolonged history of relational struggles in which she was the victim? Does she have a bitter

attitude toward church? Does she have a history of church-related trauma and difficulty? Does this person agree with everything you say rather than gently confronting you about your own contribution to issues that arise? These are signs that we need to look elsewhere for the supportive friendship we desperately need. Even though it may be a challenge to find time and energy to cultivate outside relationships, the rewards far outweigh the effort.

## **THE CHALLENGE TO BE YOURSELF**

What does it mean to be a good pastor's wife? The answers to this question could be as varied as the people answering it. A ministry wife deals with expectations from the congregation, her husband, and herself.

Expectations are a given in any relationship. No relationship is completely free of them. Therefore, not all expectations are wrong or inappropriate.



# *A Bill of Rights for a Pastor's Spouse*<sup>1</sup>

**D**o you think being a pastor is a benefit or a hazard to your family life?

This question was posed in a survey of ministry couples by *Leadership Journal* a few years ago. Of those surveyed, 40 percent said hazard and 60 percent said benefit. While everyone can rejoice with the 60 percent, these responses mean that 40 in 100 ministry couples believe they face some kind of risk.

The key to living in joy as part of your spouse's ministry is to establish your own Bill of Rights:

- Try being yourself. Resist letting your spouse, children, or church family push you to become someone you don't want to be.
- Use your best gifts most often. Do the things you do the best and delegate what you don't do well — and don't feel guilty about it.
- Make your priorities obvious. Let the congregation know what's important to you. Don't let the church squeeze you into its mold, and don't overreact so people think you are too good to be a servant. A delicate balance is needed.
- Don't attempt to control the church. Work alongside people in your church. Be a happy affirming helper rather than the one who has all the answers and influences all the decisions.
- Listen more and talk less. You help others the most when you just listen. Do not condemn or put people in their place. Listen and allow others to come to their own conclusions about issues of consequence.
- Show visible love to your spouse. In your conversations let people know that your spouse is both special and human. Keep showing the church that you love one another and care for each other.
- Talk about advantages to your children. Never tell your children they have to do something because they are the pastor's children. Give better reasons for your family standard — there are many. Don't expect perfection, but help them know that while they have demands, they also have privileges. Help them see how they have a positive part in your family's shared ministry.
- Find a prayer partner as a soul mate. Seek to be part of, or even establish, a clergy-spouse group to hold each other accountable. Be honest with one another.
- Take a worship break. Go somewhere every few months where you can worship as a family. Find someone, other than your spouse, who can be your pastor.
- Don't spiritualize everything. Enjoy life — its ups and downs — without becoming so religious in your outlook that you're no fun to be around. Learn to laugh at yourself and your situation. Have a life outside of church activities.
- Schedule vacation days and date nights. See to it that your spouse puts important family dates on the calendar.
- Encourage your spouse to find an accountability partner. Every pastor needs a covenant partner, where pastoral stuff can be talked about and burdens understood and shared.
- Don't bug your spouse. Everyone knows the heavy demands on pastors — they don't need to be reminded all the time. However, never let your spouse off the hook where you and the kids are concerned. Your home and your marriage energize and stabilize his ministry.
- Stay attentive to your spouse's needs. Don't back away. There will be times when your spouse, under the weight of the struggle, will become sullen, aloof, and depressed. This is when he needs you the most. Try doubling or tripling your affection and support.
- Commit to self-care. Take care of yourself — spiritually, emotionally, and physically. Continue to mature spiritually.



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## **ENDNOTE**

1. From *Married to a Pastor's Wife* by H.B. London, Jr. and Neil B. Wiseman. Copyright © 1995 by Victor Books, an imprint of Chariot Victor Publishing, a division of Cook Communications, Colorado Springs, Colorado. To place orders call toll free: 1-800-437-4337. Used by permission.



In any relationship, expectations must be negotiated. The problem comes when expectations are not realistic. It is not realistic to expect a minister's wife to be perfect all the time — to always be friendly, compelling, and engaging, and to have perfect children. Too often this kind of pressure compounds her self-imposed, unrealistic standards. Trying to live up to such expectations is like aiming for a moving, hidden target with a bow and arrow — frustrating and futile. She will either strive unsuccessfully, or give up trying in frustration.

### Self-expectations

The first expectations a pastor's wife must deal with are her own expectations. A pastor's wife can only strive to be herself and to use her gifts to enhance God's kingdom. God does not expect any more. God always equips us for the task He wants us to do. It is common, however, for a pastor's wife to struggle with identifying her strengths.

In the name of humility she often avoids self-evaluation. So her gifts remain underdeveloped, and her potential is unrecognized.

The first thing to do is a thorough and honest self-examination. Answer questions such as: *What do I love to do? When given a list of activities to accomplish, what do I gravitate toward first? What do I love to do any time for a long period of time? List your ministry-related experiences and ask: What activity was the most fulfilling?* Most likely, some activities will be more inherently comfortable and rewarding than others. In these areas others may admire you and, yet, you do not feel as if you are doing anything difficult or particularly special. You succeed in these areas because God has given you gifts and character traits to fulfill His purpose in your life.

There are various tools to help people discover their strengths. Some churches or counseling centers offer personality profiles such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® or the DISC® Profile. The Clifton StrengthsFinder™ a resource for readers of the book, *Now Discover Your Strengths* by Marcus Buckingham and Donald O. Clifton, is a user-friendly tool accessible on the Web. These kinds of assessments often confirm what one already knows but may have been reluctant to admit. In the end, what one learns from using these tools can be empowering and motivating. When a pastor's wife finds the freedom to be herself, she can be firm, but kind, regarding the unrealistic expectations set by the congregation.

The pastor plays a big role in supporting his wife in whatever role she chooses to take in the Body. If the pastor publicly supports his wife in using her gifts, his support will go a long way in encouraging congregational support as well. He can do this in many ways. He can refer to her contributions in ministry in a positive way from the pulpit. He can express his

admiration of her strengths. When she is functioning in her gifts, he can be present in a positive, supportive way. He can refer to her in positive ways in social settings. For example, if she is known to evangelize neighbors by helping them in distress, the pastor can refer to a specific event in an admiring way: "Sherri spent most of the day yesterday at the hospital with our neighbor, and they talked about faith and healing. She is so good at breaking through those barriers."

### Her husband's expectations

A pastor's expectations for his wife also need to be negotiated. This is an area of potential conflict in a marriage relationship. What if a pastor expects his wife to entertain frequently, but she cringes at the thought of cooking a meal?

Christine's husband thought she should take over children's church when the leader moved away. Christine did have a

## To overcome her discouragement, the working minister's wife must adjust her expectations.

degree in early childhood education, but she also had two toddlers and an ailing parent she was helping care for. Her resistance seemed to fall on deaf ears. Her husband believed she was the logical person to step into the void. It is best to approach this kind of conflict as one would approach any other conflict in a marriage.

A ministry wife must also deal with her own tendency to take too much responsibility for unmet needs in the church. She must make peace with her limitations. Christine should firmly, but calmly, state why she does not feel she can fulfill this role at this time. She may negotiate a lesser role she can take. She should explain why she feels overwhelmed and communicate concern about her husband's dilemma as well. She might suggest other options her husband could consider to fill the void.

If husband/wife expectations cause recurring conflict, it reflects a larger marriage issue where conflict is not being successfully negotiated. Something needs to be done about the larger issue. Marital difficulty is a destructive element in ministry. When a ministry marriage breaks up, the ripple effect is astounding.

### THE CHALLENGE OF BALANCING WORK AND CHURCH

Nearly 60 percent of ministers' wives are in the work force. In other words, more than half of pastors' wives balance job, family, and church. Some pastors' wives have the blessing of their husbands to work outside the home. These women

have made a personal choice to pursue a career they feel passion for and are more likely to report positive feelings and a sense of well-being. Others must work because of financial concerns. Women in this group are more likely to struggle with the demands on their time and the frustration of unmet expectations. They may grow discouraged by their sheer lack of ability to address the many needs around them. They may also feel disconnected from other women who do not work and have more time to socialize.

To overcome her discouragement, the working minister's wife must adjust her expectations. She must keep in mind time is fixed and finite. People have limitations. A pastor's wife can

level refers to the extra internal pressure and anxiety the job brings. Family functioning refers to the overall health and well-being of the family and its members. A working pastor's wife can monitor the family impact of her job by asking herself: *Do I feel connected and available to the individual members of my family? Do I know what is going on in the lives of my children? How much stress does this job add to my overall sense of well-being? How is my family doing? How are the individual members of my family functioning?* Sometimes bringing the family into dialogue about these matters can enhance one's perspective. Family meetings help bind a family together and bring a shared sense of responsibility.

In any case, those who juggle various hats must be diligent about personal stewardship. Stewardship extends beyond financial responsibilities. It includes taking care of ourselves physically and emotionally. In other words, wives should take care of their bodies and their minds. When running a race,

it is not wise to expend all of one's energy near the beginning and drop out before the finish line. Healthy self-care and rest are important requirements of stamina and resilience.

## The pastor plays a big role in supporting his wife in whatever role she chooses to take in the Body.

only do what she can do. Taking on the world requires more than she is capable of. She must turn her attention to things she is equipped to handle. The rest she needs to give to the loving Savior who can be trusted with the concerns of the world. Essentially, it is necessary to give up control and let some things be undone, and trust God to fill the void in His time. For those who like to control things, this is a challenge (Job 37:14–22).

One's family and marriage should always come first. Family should come before the church, personal satisfaction, and finances. Placing them first means monitoring three specific areas of family life in relation to the job: availability, stress level, and family functioning. Availability means being emotionally and physically accessible to the family. Stress

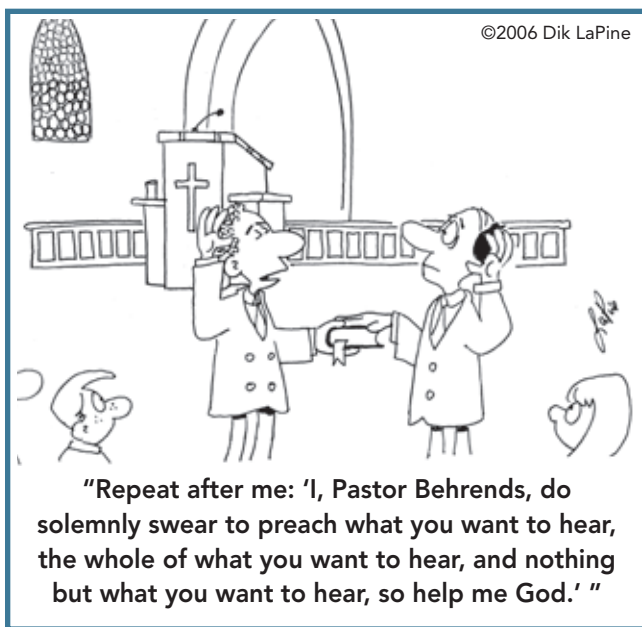
### THE CHALLENGE OF RESILIENCE

Allison was becoming increasingly disillusioned about the ministry. A series of church-related problems had taken their toll. She dreaded Sundays because she felt unsafe and vulnerable at church. She dreaded church social events. She felt as though she was pretending while underneath wanting to run screaming from the room. The congregation became the enemy that threatened her well-being, her mood, and her stability. She felt more and more comfortable in her own home, concentrating on the needs of her family and avoiding the neediness of the people in the congregation. She fantasized about leaving the church and about changing occupations. Knowing this was unlikely to happen, she felt stuck and frustrated.

Allison's experience is common. She is an example of a burned-out minister's wife. The stress and challenge of church life can take its toll and lead to discouragement. Stress and depression become inevitable partners.

Most pastors' wives start out trying to do their best to promote the Kingdom. Inevitably, reality hits somewhere along the way: conflict develops, leaders become disillusioned and leave, financial issues bring constraints, pastors struggle emotionally, people lob criticisms, and the pastor's wife experiences rejection. Stress takes its toll, and sometimes depression is a result.

Depression is a recognizable ailment. It includes symptoms such as sadness, lethargy, lack of motivation, forgetfulness, sleep issues, and isolation. It can be treated. More and more resources are becoming available to help Christian leaders



## Q&A FOR THE PASTOR'S WIFE

**B**eing a pastor's wife can be rewarding, yet sometimes challenging. In *Enrichment* journal's desire to minister to the first lady of the parsonage, we are providing this Q&A for the pastor's wife each quarter.

**A BOARD MEMBER'S WIFE IS PARTICULARLY CRITICAL AND NEGATIVE. I DREAD SEEING HER. WHAT SHOULD I DO WHEN SHE MAKES LOUD, NEGATIVE STATEMENTS ABOUT THE CHURCH IN MY PRESENCE?**

Dealing with difficult people such as this person requires much wisdom and patience. Resist the urge to act impulsively, and take time to think and pray about the situation. If you respond emotionally in the moment, tensions can escalate quickly, drawing other people into taking sides. This can become ugly. Ask yourself, *What might be the reason for her verbal bashing?* The answer can determine your approach.

Her husband is on the board. He, therefore, works closely with your husband. Whatever approach you take could potentially affect your husband. Discuss your options with your husband so the two of you are united.

If it seems she is immature and behaves this way to gain attention, she probably lacks credibility with most of those listening anyway. When she is critical or negative, change the subject and divert attention to something else. Work on giving her positive attention apart from the public incidents, and enlist her cooperation in serving the church in an area where she is gifted. If she responds in a positive way, take time to ask her about her concerns and make suggestions about better ways to handle them.

If she did not express negativity in the past, perhaps personal issues or a hurt she has experienced in the church are contributing to her new behavior. If this is the case, talk to her privately, approaching her from a perspective of concern. "You have seemed upset lately. I'm concerned about you. Is everything all right? Is there anything I can do to help you?"

A person who is reasonable will respond well to a gentle approach and may feel relieved to be heard and cared for. Again, suggest ways she can share her concerns in a more constructive way.

*Negative people may or may not be willing to receive input about their behavior.*

If she seems to be a bitter and negative person, she will act in similar ways in most situations. Sometimes negative people influence others to negativity. If she has credibility, her behavior becomes more of a problem. If others are being drawn in to her negativity and the health of the church is at stake, a more direct approach should be taken. Determine whether you want to speak to her alone or with your husband present. If you decide your husband should be present, make sure her husband is present as well. This is important, to ensure her spouse is clear about what takes place at the meeting.

In your discussion, be clear about the behavior that is problematic. "I appreciate your concern for this church, but when you express your concerns in public it is difficult to properly address them. It also causes discomfort for those who do

not know the whole story of what you are referring to. Would you agree to speak privately with me (or my husband, or a designated person) when something comes up?"

Keep your voice calm and matter-of-fact. Phrase your request in a question that requires a yes or no answer. Negative people may or may not be willing to receive input about their behavior. If she is not, she may get angry or withdraw. At this point, her husband's role becomes important. The issue is now between the pastor and his board member.

Be vigilant about your own security regarding God's will for your life. If you are secure in God's ability to direct your life and the knowledge of your husband's call to the church, you can rest on the truth that God is in charge of what happens there. No person can hinder that.

In the end, you will be challenged to grow to greater heights of maturity and rest in God's providence and care for you. While handling this situation may be painful, you can only benefit.



**GABRIELE RIENAS**, Beaverton, Oregon

**Editor's note:** In future issues of *Enrichment*, we will feature a column for the pastor's wife by Gabriele. If you have questions you would like Gabriele to answer, send them to: [enrichmentjournal@ag.org](mailto:enrichmentjournal@ag.org), or mail them to: "Q & A for the Pastor's Wife" *Enrichment* journal 1445 N. Boonville, Springfield, Mo 65802-1894.

deal with emotional and challenging situations. Reaching out for help becomes the first step in the healing process. In many cases professional Christian counseling is available. When it is unavailable, a caring confidant or mentor can be an invaluable resource.

In the middle of prolonged pain, people desire relief. Withdrawal becomes a survival tactic, or so it seems. This is, however, the exact opposite of what people need. Healing

takes place in the context of relationships. Even though there may be no desire to communicate with others, communication is as important as insulin is to a person with diabetes. Ask others to reach out to you. Being the one in need of ministry can be humbling, but it can also be a growing experience in our own journey.

One frequently neglected area in a busy woman's life is self-care. I often ask leadership wives, "What activity do

you regularly engage in and look forward to?" Too often the response is a blank stare or an uncomfortable laugh. There is even the unspoken idea the concept of self-care might be unspiritual or selfish. Most people agree God cares a great deal about physical health and financial health, even good time management. So, why would pastors' wives rule out taking care of themselves emotionally?

More than anything else a ministry wife needs resilience. Defined as "the ability to recover quickly from setbacks,"<sup>1</sup> this trait allows one to bounce back into shape after being stretched. While a pastor's wife may feel permanently

## A supportive wife communicates she is behind her husband and trusts God in his life.

damaged from unexpected events that come her way, the choice to rebound lies with herself and her desire to try again. Scripturally, she has promise after promise that God is for her and offers her the resources she needs to recover from her trials when He is allowed to do the work. God wants to reveal His power through difficult circumstances (2 Corinthians 4:16). He provides opportunities for those in ministry to grasp just how dependent they are on Him and His grace in their lives (Deuteronomy 8:3).

### THE CHALLENGE OF BEING A SUPPORTIVE WIFE

Brenda studied her husband Steve as he slept. Her heart was deeply burdened for him, and she prayed silently. Life and ministry had been difficult during the past year. Increasing conflict with certain board members, financial issues, and the death of his father had taken their toll. While he seemed the same as ever at church, at home he was withdrawn, lethargic, and morose. He made frequent negative comments about ministry and about his ability to pastor. He was spending more time at home, but most of his time was spent watching television or sleeping on the couch. He did not return calls from friends. Her attempts to draw him out were met with irritation and defensiveness. Brenda sighed.

What does a minister's wife do when her husband encounters emotional struggles? Women naturally are nurturing. They want to help and comfort those close to them who are in distress. Also, in ministry, life and occupation are closely intertwined. The pastor's wife knows that if her husband continues to struggle, it could affect their future.

Pastors and their wives can work on one solution before discouragement and depression even arises — cultivating a safe atmosphere in the home where honesty and self-disclosure are welcomed. This comes from being a mate who listens

well and uses advice and correction sparingly. If a leader's disclosures to his spouse are met with overreaction, criticism, and despair, he will soon learn to limit vulnerability with his wife. In an atmosphere of mutual sharing and honesty, a wife can express her concerns about her husband's depression and mood. She will have earned the right to make suggestions or gently steer her husband toward possible solutions.

Depression is a family matter. It should be discussed as a family, and the solutions should be approached as a family. A pastor's depression should be discussed with church leadership as well. In most cases depression is a temporary state of mind and can be treated from both a spiritual and psychological perspective. If necessary, obtain outside help. Family responsibilities may need to be rearranged temporarily. The depressed person will need much prayer and spiritual support through his difficult time.

Being a supportive wife is not the same as being a codependent wife. A codependent wife takes on the responsibility of making sure her husband looks good and behaves properly. This task is too big for any woman. It will lead to frustration for her and resentment for him, while at the same time enabling him to be less than his best.

A supportive wife communicates she is behind her husband and trusts God in his life. She offers unconditional love and positive regard. She offers to help him in reasonable ways, taking into account her own limitations. She recognizes she is unable to resolve all of his shortcomings and gives up trying to control them. She puts her energy into dealing with her own issues where it is better served.

Turning her attention back to the sermon, Shelly felt a surge of compassion and admiration for her husband. Week after week, he put everything he had into bringing God's truth to the people in their congregation. Rarely taking a day off, he passionately fulfilled his calling and felt the burden of the needs of the people of the community. He tries hard to be a good husband and father as well. She resolved to be more supportive and positive. She reminded herself God was more concerned about her well-being and her future than she was. Taking a deep breath and whispering a prayer for strength, she settled back for the rest of the sermon. ■



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#### ENDNOTE

1. Anne Soukhanov, *Encarta Webster's Dictionary of the English Language*, 2d ed. (New York: Bloomsbury USA, 2004).





# When Shepherds **FLEE:** Confronting the Stress Wolves in the Smaller Church

**T**he call to ministry is a call to a strange mixture of joy and sorrow. When pastors enter the ministry, they anticipate the joy of making a difference in the lives of people. What most pastors did not anticipate or prepare for, however, is the depth of pain pastors experience daily. Paul wrote, "This body of ours had no rest, but we were harassed at every turn — conflicts on the outside, fears within" (2 Corinthians 7:5). Because of this pain, many pastors are leaving the pastorate disillusioned and disappointed. They feel rejected not only by people, but also by God. The crisis is not only seen in pastors leaving the ministry, but also in pastors leaving their churches in search of greener pastures. When confronted with the daily stress, it is easy to think if we had a different church, we would have a more productive ministry.

In John 10:12, Christ contrasts the faithful, True Shepherd from the hireling who abandons the sheep and runs away when he sees the wolf coming. Wolves are not only those who violently oppose a pastor's ministry, but they also include the threat of pain and the difficulties pastors face in ministry.

For the smaller church to be healthy and effective, it needs stability in leadership, that is, leaders who do not flee because of the wolves in ministry. Stable leadership occurs when pastors recognize what causes stress in the smaller church and how to effectively prevent it from destroying their ministry. The key to stress is not its elimination, but managing it effectively.

## **HEARING THE CRY OF THE WOLVES**

Stress is a reality in any ministry. Troubles and difficulties are a part of ministry. While there are prevalent issues in any size church (opposition, criticism, and conflict), there are unique

issues in the smaller church or issues that are exacerbated by the dynamics of the smaller church.

## **The expectations wolf**

When a pastor arrives at a smaller church, the congregation has many differing expectations of his role as pastor. These expectations range from preaching on Sunday to mowing the lawn and fixing the plumbing on Friday. People expect pastors to be an extra hand during harvest, attend every meeting, oversee every program, and take care of church facilities.

Equally unrealistic are the expectations pastors place on themselves. They expect the church to grow. They expect to be involved in everyone's life. They expect to develop new, effective programs to reach the community. The result is an open-ended and never-ending job description. As one pastor shared, "It is not uncommon for a pastor in a rural setting to need to get up early to have an unhurried time with the Lord,

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BY GLENN DAMAN





study for Sunday morning or a Bible study, then attend some church or community meeting, stop by and help an elderly neighbor with some chores or run him to the store, counsel a family who has had a long-term problem, drop in for the youth ministry meeting, get an unexpected call to visit a church member, and after a quick bite to eat, head to another church activity.”

When pastors do not fulfill these expectations, they feel guilty because they believe they are not doing enough. Pastors become frustrated because no matter how much they have accomplished, there remains a mountain of activities and tasks to perform. Guilt becomes their constant companion. So, they become like one pastor who, in his first pastorate, worked 70 to 80 hours a week that resulted in a stroke at age 33.

### **The finance wolf**

Sometimes pastors feel like Tevye in *Fiddler on the Roof*. They sing, “If I were a rich man” and wonder if in God’s infinite plan, it would have been possible to have been blessed with more wealth. While most pastors never expect to become rich when they enter the ministry, they never anticipated living on the fringe of financial poverty. While most smaller churches are

generous in their giving, the limited number of people makes it difficult for a smaller church to pay anything more than a basic subsistence salary. The



constant financial struggle a pastor faces can easily lead to resentment against the church for its

failure to pay more, especially if the church has had to cut his salary or has failed to give him a raise for several years.

Without a savings, pastors fear retirement. They wonder how they will buy their children new clothes for school or pay for their college education. Over time, pastors develop a sense of guilt for bringing their family into a ministry where they need to make so many sacrifices. It is no wonder one study on the shortage of pastors concluded the No.1 reason smaller churches face a shortage is because of the lack of financial remuneration.

### **The defeated dreams wolf**

When a pastor arrives at a church to begin a new ministry, he has dreams of a growing and dynamic church. Even though

the church may have had problems in the past, the pastor is confident his faith in God, depth of training, and personal hard work can turn things around so the church can become an exciting place for service and fellowship. It does not take long, however, before the reality of ministry undermines his dreams. Instead of a pastor’s dreams being realized, they become a mockery of his passion for ministry. His frustration increases as he reads the plethora of books broadcasting the latest fad guaranteeing ministry success. Instead of attaining his dreams, the pastor becomes discouraged, disheartened, questions his call, and becomes embittered toward the people he perceives are hindering the fulfillment of his dreams. This is compounded when a church family moves from the community, leaving a big hole in church leadership or when, after working many hours to prepare a sermon, only a handful of people attend. These can sap the spiritual vitality of one’s ministry.

### **The relational wolf**

The strength and vitality of the smaller church is the depth of relationship it enjoys. The hallmark of the smaller church, however, can become a source of stress for the pastor. Everyone in the church expects the pastor to be his friend. Consequently, pastors become relationally stretched as they try to meet the relational expectations of everyone in the church. As pastors strive to be a friend to everyone, they become a close friend to no one, even neglecting their own family.

## **Stable leadership occurs when pastors recognize what causes stress in the smaller church and how to effectively prevent it from destroying their ministry.**

A second problem with this relational focus in the smaller church is pastors feel significant tension should they need to choose between upholding biblical truth and maintaining close relationships. One pastor expressed this unusual stress when he stated, “Within the small-church context it is easier to fall into the murky areas leading to the depression of being well-liked. Sometimes it is easier to put aside personal principles to maintain a sense of being liked by the people in the church. But over time the guilt and agony of not being true to strong biblical principles will drag a pastor down into despair. The constant battling against or giving into these issues and relationships can literally drain away one’s heart and compassion for ministry.”

### **The isolation wolf**

In contrast to the relational tension, there also exists a mindset the pastor should never have any close relationships with



# LEARNING TO DOMINATE DISAPPOINTMENT

I struggle with disappointment. Even today after nearly 25 years of ministry, at times I am still shackled by the pain and hurt disappointment brings.

Disappointment can be described as the failure to achieve expectations or that which was hoped for. In a conversation among ministers, I overheard one pastor claim that he knew the key to overcoming disappointment. My attention was suddenly drawn to him. He began sharing his insight with a small group of young ministers who had gathered around him.

"The key to overcoming disappointment," he said, "was in refusing to expect anything out of anyone." He and the group of eager, soon-to-be pastors laughed. Unfortunately, many weary, worn, and battle-scarred ministerial soldiers embraced his casual remark about disappointment.

A disappointing Sunday afternoon begins when attendance goals are not met, anticipated spiritual results are not achieved, and there is an empty response to the altar call following what you believe is a God-given message.

Disappointment increases as: an outreach fails in spite of your prayer, planning, and preparation; a deacon disagrees with the obvious solution to an issue; a trusted worship leader suddenly receives new direction for the worship service and fails to share it with you; a dedicated and committed family informs you as you are walking to the platform on Sunday morning that their spiritual needs are not being met by your ministry, and they have decided to attend the new church across town.

Another, and even more disappointing, hurt happens when the rumors about your children partying and misbehaving are true. These kinds of disappointments often leave scars.

The nature of a pastor's calling, ministry, and life includes high expectations for him and his family. Unfortunately, those expectations sometimes fail to materialize.

God-called kings experienced disappointment and heartache in their family. King David grieved over the death of his rebellious son Absalom (2 Samuel 18:33–19:4). God-appointed and God-anointed apostles endured the disappointment caused by an associate minister's disloyalty. The apostle Paul wrote to Timothy: "Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me" (2 Timothy 4:10). Even Jesus felt disappointment and lamented because the people of Jerusalem refused to embrace His ministry (Matthew 23:37).

Disappointment is a negative part of a pastor's calling. It is often painful and unwanted. But pastors must not allow their faith and future ministry to be influenced by past disappointments. Ministers must guard themselves against becoming cynical. They must remain faithful to their flock, churches, and ministries in spite of past

results and disappointments.

Though pastors struggle with disappointment, they must learn to dominate disappointment when it comes their way. Pastors may benefit from the following suggestions.

Keep your eyes fixed on the source of your help, not the vessel of your help. The Lord is a pastor's source for ministry, but He uses man as the vessel to deliver His blessings and benefits to people. The Lord never disappoints, but His vessels can at times cause disappointment. My grandmother said: "Trust in the Lord, and thank God for men." If pastors place their trust in men, they set the men and themselves up for disappointment.

Your communion in the Word of God and fellowship with the Holy Spirit must remain constant. Loyalty can be unconsciously misplaced. Most people pastors fellowship with will automatically gain their loyalty. It is easy to substitute

## It is easy to substitute fellowship with the saints for fellowship with the Savior.

fellowship with the saints for fellowship with the Savior. When a pastor makes this substitution, his dependence turns to his congregation instead of God. When a pastor spends time with God, his confidence, guard, and expectations are founded in His ability, not in his own.

Your God-given vision is nonnegotiable. Pastors are often tempted to validate their vision by the results of individual events, church attendance, offering totals, and even comments received on their Sunday morning message. A pastor's God-given vision for his pastorate, family, and ministry is not adequately measured by an event, offering, or attendance figure. Those measurements may indicate the progress and development of a vision, but they do not determine a vision's validity. Pastors determine through prayer and Bible study along with the counsel of spiritual advisors what God's vision for their ministry is. Then they must refuse to allow individual disappointments with programs, attendance, or others' actions to deter them from moving forward in accomplishing God's plans and purposes for their life and ministry.

Ministry disappointments will come. Even so, it is better to live with expectations and suffer some disappointments than to walk through life expecting nothing and receiving what was expected.



**ROBERT TURNER**, superintendent, Tennessee District of the Assemblies of God, Madison, Tennessee

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# As pastors strive to be a friend to everyone they become a close friend to no one, even neglecting their own family.

people in the church. This leads to pastors being isolated and lonely in ministry. For those serving in smaller churches, this is further exacerbated by the separation pastors have from their fellow pastors. These pastors do not have other staff members with whom to share their struggles. They may be serving in isolated communities where they are geographically distant from other pastors in their denomination or even other pastors in their community. The result: pastors do not have the support mechanism, or support may be too distant to provide them necessary encouragement in times of uncertainty and stress.

## The slow-pace wolf

For some pastors, especially those who have come from large churches where things are continually happening, the slow pace of the smaller church can seem old fashioned, outdated, and generally inflexible. Small-church pastors attend conferences and hear how individuals in large suburban churches have achieved several goals during the past year, and they wonder if they will see anything different in their church in a lifetime, much less a year. One pastor shared what he had learned: “It took me a long time to learn that people in a small community will observe you for years before they will trust you with anything, their problems, or another’s.”

The smaller church operates at a different pace. People move in seasons rather than hours. Life cycles play a far more important role than goals. People think in cyclical time rather than linear time. This can lead to frustration for a pastor who desires to move the church ahead.

## KILLING WOLVES AND DEFEATING COYOTES: DEALING WITH STRESS IN THE SMALLER CHURCH

The key to dealing with stress is not eliminating stress but managing it. God reminded Jeremiah when he was being overwhelmed with the stress of his ministry that he was not called to a life of ease but to faithful ministry. God challenged Jeremiah, “If you have raced with men on foot and they have worn you out, how can you compete with horses? If you stumble in safe country, how will you manage in the thickets by the Jordan” (Jeremiah 12:5)? This is not an unrealistic appeal to buck up and quit complaining, but a challenge to recognize the realities of ministry and keep focused on God.

Pastors cannot deal with the pressures of ministry by blindly denying them. To do so is to take the first step toward burnout. Rather, they must make sure to take the necessary steps to manage pressures so they can maintain their spiritual and

emotional health. Pastors must accept responsibility for their own well-being — no one else will.

## Build a strong support team

Because of the isolation pastors experience in the smaller church, it is important to intentionally and prayerfully build an emotional and spiritual support team. These individuals are more than just friends; they are people with whom to share struggles and frustration. They are to challenge the pastor’s perspective when it becomes distorted and hold him accountable when he is starting to develop unhealthy attitudes and ministry habits. As one pastor shared, this often needs to be someone outside the church: “We believe strongly it is valuable and vital to invest some time in building relationships with good godly people — local pastors, a pastor and family in the same denomination — other people who are not connected with our church, ... we need to have a base of emotional support outside the church so our world is not encompassed by the church.” This person, however, does not always need to be someone near. It can be someone a pastor can call or send an e-mail to monthly or even weekly (especially during times of difficulty), and who can provide encouragement and support by offering a listening ear.

## Maintain a healthy marriage

The single most important person supporting the pastor’s ministry is his spouse. Consequently, it is important to maintain a healthy marriage. Along with having dates, it is important to develop healthy interaction. During their time together it is important for a pastor and his spouse to keep negative talk to a minimum. It is easy to spend too much time talking about the problems in the church. While there is a time and a place to talk about the problems in the church, pastoral couples should not dwell on them.

## Be accountable

Stress and discouragement make pastors vulnerable to temptation. When a pastor is emotionally drained, he is more susceptible to attacks of Satan that can destroy his ministry. Consequently, pastors need to be accountable in three areas. First, pastors need to be accountable for their spiritual growth. They need people who challenge them regarding their devotional and prayer life. Second, pastors need to be accountable for their marriage, and care for the emotional needs of their family. Third, pastors need to be accountable for taking time off from

work so they do not overwork themselves and inevitably burn out.

## **Recognize your limits**

Sometimes pastors get a Messiah complex. They think they need to save the world and solve everyone's problems. Furthermore, because the work of ministry is never done and because pastors feel the enormity of the responsibility of ministry, they can easily become so involved in ministry they no longer take care of their family or themselves. Pastors can become overextended emotionally, spiritually, and physically. However, someone pointed out, "Relax and do not take life so seriously. There will still be work to be done long after I am gone. The world can run fine without me."

Pastors must recognize they are finite in their abilities. Christ set a pattern for pastors by taking time to get away for personal rejuvenation when the demands of the people were the most intense (Matthew 14:13–24; Mark 6:31). While there are times when pastors need to forgo their comfort for the sake of ministry, they must also recognize there are times to draw back from ministry to be spiritually and emotionally rejuvenated.

## **Remain patient**

Pastors must remain patient with the pace of the smaller church. Like a flower growing in a garden — which day after day seems not to change, but through time experiences a remarkable transformation — so also is the church. It may not seem anything is changing, but as pastors continue to proclaim the Scriptures, transformation happens. Paul reminded Timothy to "preach the word ... with great patience and careful instruction" (2 Timothy 4:2). Pastors must remind themselves God is at work, even when they cannot see His work.

## **ACCEPTING WOLVES AND CHANGING SHEPHERDS**

The reality of ministry is pastors cannot change many issues that cause anxiety and stress. Because pastors work with people still marred by the effects of sin and because pastors themselves are still marred by these effects, they will continue to serve in churches facing difficult challenges and problems. There will always be conflicts and disagreements. In the smaller church, there will always be financial shortfalls and limited resources. These wolves will not change. This, however, does not minimize their reality or the effect they have on a pastor's life. Often these wolves can be the greatest causes of stress in ministry. What is most discouraging are not the problems pastors can address and solve, but the difficulties they have no control over and no hope of resolving. Pastors must learn to differentiate between what they can change (and, thus, are responsible for) and what they cannot change

(what God is responsible for). Concerning the issues pastors cannot change and are outside of their control, pastors need to instead examine themselves and change their own attitudes.

## **Have a right perspective of God**

Pastors must remember God is in control, and the church is ultimately His, not ours. He takes final responsibility for the growth and well-being of the church. A pastor's task is not to solve every problem but to remain faithful in the ministry to which God has called him. One pastor said, "The Scriptures clearly teach effective ministry will produce fruit, but the foundation of this truth is faithfulness, not method. Productiveness does not create faithfulness, but biblical faithfulness will be productive in bringing people to Christ and seeing Christians grow spiritually strong." Consequently, pastors must trust God to accomplish His purpose. This takes enormous weight off a pastor's shoulders, for he can look to God for the results.

## **Do not compare your ministry to the ministry of others**

God has uniquely and specifically equipped each pastor to the task to which He has called him. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 12 that Christians have different functions in the body of Christ. While God has called and equipped some to serve in large churches, He has also called and equipped others for smaller congregations. Pastors can rest in the fact God has promised He will supply what is needed to effectively accomplish His purpose in one's life and ministry.

## **Keep a focus on God's call**

In times of discouragement, such as those experienced by Elijah (1 Kings 19), pastors can easily lose sight of their calling. The problems pastors encounter can easily overwhelm their awareness of God's calling on their life. Instead of seeing what God is doing, they only see the problems they face. The result is pastors begin to question God's blessing on their ministry and God's call on their lives.

Ministry is never easy, and it is costly. To live in the sphere of God's ministry is to experience pain. A pastor is not sustained in the midst of his pain by some fabricated emotional and spiritual buck up that denies the problems he faces. He is sustained by the continued awareness of God's character and His call on his life. When a pastor is sustained by Christ (Matthew 28), encouraged by the Word (Psalm 119), and empowered by the Holy Spirit (John 16:12–15), he can stand firm even when feeling the most ferocious wolves. ■



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ILLUSTRATION BY SONNY CARDER





# Coping with the Kingdom *of* Stress

**A**s a junior in Bible college, our son Rob proudly said, "Dad, when I get into the ministry, I want to have high blood pressure."

I asked, "Why?"

His response surprised me, "Because many of the successful ministers I know have high blood pressure."

What is it about ministry that creates stress? I am not suggesting that ministry cannot be fun, rewarding, and fulfilling, but too often the monster of stress beats pastors down and the joy and significance of ministry evaporate.

BY H. ROBERT RHODEN





## The first rule in a storm is to outlast it.

the storm, remember you are not alone. If you cannot locate someone to

After visiting all 315 churches in the Potomac District, I can identify six agents of stress. What can a pastor do when he faces these stressors?

### CONGREGATIONAL EXPECTATIONS

Jesus knew about unrealistic expectations. A mother wanted her sons to have the two most prominent positions in the Kingdom. His followers thought He would use force to set up an earthly Kingdom. He was expected to restore the Kingdom immediately.

On arrival at a church, a pastor must understand the written or unwritten mission, and the core values and vision of that church. The Family Church (1–50)<sup>1</sup> expects the pastor to be more like a chaplain to their families. If the membership grows, they fear outsiders will damage the church. Matriarchs and patriarchs may equate growing numbers with reduced spirituality or other smoke screens when the real issue is loss of control. Family members will say, “We are losing our church,” or “These new people are not proven.” The stress factor for the pastor rises quickly as he sees a confusing mission, core values, and vision. In this situation, pastors must be nice to everyone and keep adding members until the church has enough members to create a “tipping point.”

The first rule in a storm is to outlast it. While riding out

confide in, find another pastor who has been where you are and ask him to share his story. If you cannot find someone, ask your presbyter or district superintendent to connect you with someone. Next, clarify the issues. You may have inherited a situation that is bigger than you are, but it is not too big for God. In prayer, call the names of people who need to be changed. Finally, do not try to walk on water. Like Peter, you will sink. Stay in the boat and keep loving people. Do the natural, and let God do the supernatural.

In the Pastor-Size Church (50–150),<sup>2</sup> the pastor is the central leader and replaces the patriarchs and matriarchs in the church. People enter the church through relationships with the pastor, the pastor’s ministry, and the pastor’s influence. When a church reaches 150 in attendance, the pastor can no longer know everyone, and begins to become overwhelmed with ministry duties and demands. The pastor must change his leadership style from doer to facilitator. Recruiting and training must become a priority. Leadership development through seminars, selected reading, and seeking out mentors will help him deal with this emerging stress.

In the Program-Size Church (150–350),<sup>3</sup> the pastor is still central, but his role shifts. The pastor clarifies the mission, core values, and vision of the church and helps people arrive at consensus. The stress level is contained in the fact people

expect more professional staff leadership than the budget can support. This may be the most difficult size church to pastor. Before making significant changes in the structure and organization of the church, ask for help from someone who has successfully navigated through this stage of growth.

As you develop a pastoral team, select leaders who will be pastors of people not directors of programs. Continuing education will improve your leadership skills and a sabbatical will help you deal with the stress of this size church. (See sidebar *Sabbatical for Potomac District Ministers*.)

The Corporate-Size Church (350 and above)<sup>4</sup> has a lead pastor and a pastoral leadership team. The stress factor is usually related to creative and excellence fatigue. Each week, month, and year there is pressure to do something bigger and better. How do we overcome that pressure? Ministry relationships, mentors, and mini-sabbaticals are necessary for the entire pastoral team. One pastor I know visits a professional Christian psychologist once a month to get advice on various parishioner counseling needs. Additionally, he talks with the counselor about his own needs and seeks spiritual and professional advice. This has been an invaluable tool for him in managing stress and maintaining emotional health. They pray together each month.

Attention to personal spiritual formation is important at every church size, but at this level it is essential. The more people one serves the greater the temptation to rely on boilerplate spirituality. (See sidebar *Vocational Ministry or Spiritual Ministry?* page 94.)

## PERSONNEL SELECTIONS

Pastors often ask about the criteria for selecting volunteers as well as paid staff. The agony of trying to work with people who resist training and who represent power bases in the church is the bane of any pastor.

When you inherit staff, begin with a review of their job description. If there is no written job description, prepare one. A clear understanding of what is expected provides a good basis for evaluation.

Apply Bill Hybels' model of character, competency, and chemistry in selecting new staff and evaluating current staff. Integrity is an essential element of character. Does the person do what he promised to do? Is he trustworthy? Competency is determined based on ability. Can he lead his area to a new level of growth? Chemistry is about fitting in. This is subjective, but important. A person may have good character and be competent, but not fit your leadership style. If you inherited him and it is not a good fit, then work on an exit strategy.

In Luke 6:12–19, Jesus gives the model for selecting people to be ministry-team members. He prayed all night, selected His team, and then they did ministry. The results were

phenomenal: "Those troubled by evil spirits were cured" (Luke 6:18). Many pastors begin ministry, decide some people are needed to help, and then resort to prayer when things are not going well. This is the opposite of the model Jesus gave: He prayed, selected, and then ministered.

## UBIQUITOUS TEMPTATIONS

Without question, the most difficult task given a district superintendent is dealing with ministers who yield to

### SABBATICAL FOR POTOMAC DISTRICT MINISTERS

There is value in taking a sabbatical. Approximately 30 ministers, including myself, have taken a sabbatical since the Potomac District adopted the following guidelines in 1993.

Recognizing that ministers who have been in ministry consistently for 7 to 10 years need a break, the presbytery adopted the following plan at its meeting June 15, 1993.

#### BASIC PLAN

1. When a minister has been in successive ministry for 7 to 10 years, preferably in one place, though this is not required, he is eligible for a 1-month sabbatical.
2. The recommendation for a sabbatical will be at the initiation of the district superintendent and must be approved by the board of presbyters or the executive committee.

#### ACTIVITY

1. The minister, in consultation with the district superintendent, will choose to engage in personal and ministerial development experiences for 1 week.
2. The minister and his family will vacation for 2 weeks.
3. The minister may do whatever he chooses for 1 week.
4. Absolutely no preaching or ministry assignments will be allowed during the sabbatical.
5. The district superintendent will arrange with the pastor and church board for a minister to fill the pulpit during the sabbatical.

#### FUNDING

1. The district superintendent and the church board will work out a payment arrangement for the supply minister.
2. The district superintendent and the church board will arrange to give the minister a \$1,500 gift or more for his sabbatical.
3. The church will continue to pay the pastor at his regular salary and perks during this time.



**H. ROBERT RHODEN, D.Min.**, Gainesville, Virginia.

## You may have inherited a situation that is bigger than you are, but it is not too big for God.

temptations that take them out of the ministry for a season. Unfortunately, some violations require dismissal without opportunity for restoration to ministry. Great stress emanates from loss of position and income. The collateral damage to family, congregation, and friends exponentially increases the pain.

Stress created by choices is especially difficult. Most often, these choices are made in a dry spiritual season. However, at times, these decisions are made after a spiritually high experience. One pastor finished a week of fasting and prayer and made poor choices the next month. He later said that the stress of ministry was the genesis of his temptation. What an oxymoron.

This ubiquitous battle must be fought at every season of life. The path to victory is clearly marked, but often becomes opaque from daily stressors. In Luke 4:1–13, Jesus outlined the path for dealing

with the stress of temptation. These temptations are symbolic of the cravings of the flesh, the allurements of power and money, and testing God (asking Him for a sign greater than He is willing to give). Jesus met these temptations successfully by relying on the presence and power of the Holy Spirit and by appealing to and applying the Word of God. Ministers who experience moral or ethical failures often acknowledge that they neglected regular prayer and Bible study.

### LIMITED RESOURCES

In a recent survey conducted by *Enrichment* journal, 47 percent of pastors said they struggled with limited financial resources. A letter I received from some concerned members

## GIVE IT A REST FOR MINISTRY RESILIENCE

My friend had fatigue in his voice. He was leading a strong congregation, coordinating effective ministries, and pursuing new and exciting projects. But his high-energy approach to ministry was beginning to short-circuit.

“Mel, I don’t know whether I’m just tired or it’s time for a change in my ministry.”

I knew his church was growing and projecting many effective outreaches. I also knew he and his wife had gone through months of physical, mental, and emotional demands with repeated major surgeries. In addition, the close-knit and busy household was shifting to an empty nest with the last of his three children launching into adulthood.

He needed rest, but he had to have a nudge to give himself permission. “Why don’t you take some time off — a sabbatical, leave of absence, or extended vacation?” I asked. “You can’t make healthy decisions if you are exhausted. Go get rested. Then you can honestly evaluate what God wants and know when and what you’re hearing from Him.”

He said, “I don’t know how.”

I urged him to tell his board, staff, and church family what he had just told me and to make arrangements to get away and rest. A short time later when I called the church office I was pleased to hear, and his assistant seemed pleased to announce, that pastor had taken a few weeks off.

Now he is back and going strong. He said he found the same challenges, problems, and situations when he returned home,

but he was different. He found new energy to tackle whatever he had to do.

Sharing thoughts from his heart, Pastor Charlie Bazan of Graham Faith Center Assembly of God now recognizes that many factors can contribute to wearing out. He cites major changes in church ministry staff and structure, extended family issues, finances, and not taking time for yourself and your spouse.

He needed rest, but he had to have a nudge to give himself permission. “Why don’t you take some time off — a sabbatical, leave of absence, or extended vacation?” I asked. “You can’t make healthy decisions if you are exhausted.

Like many ministers, he counted district councils, General Councils, ministers retreats, and family reunions as time away from the church, but they were not.

“If you think like me ... you do get spiritually refreshed, but it’s not totally resting.” He recognized himself in Alicia Chole’s description of producers. These people:

- go to the office on their days off and feel guilty or bored whenever they take a vacation.
- value the visible and the measurable.
- prize efficiency and production.
- get stressed by inactivity.
- emphasize results — fruit.



of a particular congregation provides one snapshot of this struggle:

"We are writing this letter because we are concerned about our pastor. Our pastor has led the church nearly 4 years and is doing a tremendous job. The Body is in unity and loves him and his family. We have been members for some time, but are concerned because we know our pastor struggles financially. We have asked the board to prayerfully consider blessing our pastor financially, but this has not happened. We asked the board if the pastor received a raise this year, which he deserves, but he was not given one. The church has doubled in size since he came, and our finances have more than doubled.

"We do not know what to do. It is sad to know that our pastor cannot take a vacation, buy his children school clothes or parts to fix their vehicle when the church has thousands of dollars available. For the pastor to move at this time would be devastating for their daughter who has 2 more years of high school to complete.

- start the day with a to-do list and add to or check off items to measure how effective they have been.

"I don't know how to rest," he confessed. "My mind won't slow down."

For more than 15 years, he had kept a steady schedule with no extended time to relax. He came uncomfortably close to collapse until he opened his heart to church leaders after a Sunday morning service. He found them supportive. "I came to a point when I said, 'I need 3 weeks off'."

The board said, "Good idea."

He admitted to a common feeling among ministers. "Sometimes when we are worn out, we think our congregation will judge us as being weak." In reality, the people want their pastor to be refreshed and clear-thinking.

Bazan worried about what the church family would think, but they responded totally opposite to his fears. Different members said, "Pastor, I'm glad you're taking a break. We're happy for you."

He was surprised when he returned from the unplanned rest, stood before the congregation, and let them know what he was feeling. They understood. "Many people came up to me and said, 'Pastor, we feel the same way about our lives. We need to rest our minds.'"

His impromptu vacation did make new demands on the church calendar. He had to reschedule and/or arrange speakers for 3 weeks. It is better to write meaningful rest times for the pastor into the annual church schedule. When he got back, he told the church board they must insist that all staff members take time to rest. "We are going to write it in our schedules, not just mine, but every associate."

"I do not believe it is right for the church board to control this decision when the board does not represent the feelings of the congregation. We ask for your help."

Some people in the congregation believe the compensatory feeling provided by being in the ministry should be considered part of a pastor's remuneration. Another common subliminal attitude is the need to help the minister incarnate sacrifice. Both compensatory feeling and sacrifice are legitimate observations about the ministry. Nevertheless, these should not be used to create stress for a minister's family by withholding adequate salary and benefits.

The Potomac District offers to meet with boards and pastors to openly discuss the salary, housing allowance, and benefit package for the pastor. One suggestion that resonates with boards is to compare their pastor's salary and benefits with other public servants in the community such as high school, middle school, or elementary school principals.

There is no easy answer to this agent of stress, but Jesus did tell us not to worry (Matthew 6:25-34). The combination

How did he rest during his 3 weeks away from the church? Ironically, he had to work at it. The first week he had to force himself to be a nonproducer. "It took 1 week to not feel guilty."

The second week he and his wife both forced themselves to rest. "It was great. We did nothing — no plans, just rest. I was fortunate to be blessed with a trip to San Diego. We went to the beach, stared at the ocean, and rested. It was wonderful."

They talked about church, about personal and ministry goals, and about life. He realized, I have a great church filled with great people and a great leadership team.

Bazan began to recognize his problem. "I had spread myself so thin that my body, mind, and spirit were tired."

When that happens, he said, "It's easy to entertain thoughts about yourself and your ministry that just aren't true. ... Getting away, and I mean really getting away, helps you confront you ... things I need to change in me. There are choices I need to make better."

One of those choices is balance. This includes spreading the weight of your ministry load and steadying your service with meaningful times of rest. Burnout and stress hardly fit the vocabulary of producers, but Scripture is clear. Transformation and fully experiencing God's will come with fresh new minds (Romans 12:2) — renewed by the Holy Spirit and, sometimes, removed from the old routine.

"It's still hard being wired like I am, but I believe these 3 weeks of rest have opened my eyes."



**MEL SURFACE**, director of Christian education and men's ministries, North Texas District of the Assemblies of God, Hurst, Texas

of learning good personal budgeting skills, providing training for the church board, and seeing God as our faithful provider will carry pastors through stressful seasons.

As this article is being prepared, the pastor referenced in

## **Stress created by choices** **is especially difficult. Most often,** **these choices are made** **in a dry spiritual season.**

the letter is still leading the church and the problem of his financial situation is being addressed.

### **UNRESOLVED CONFLICT**

In the same survey mentioned earlier, 31 percent of pastors struggle with unresolved conflict in the church. Conflict is endemic to the church. Pastors cannot avoid it, but they can

manage it and find help in resolving it. Most pastoral stress emanates from some form of conflict.

Most church conflict centers on methods and goals that have become values. Several years ago, a church split in the Potomac District because the youth group was selling ham sandwiches in the church basement to raise money for Speed the Light. There were other surrounding problems, but this event brought the church's conflict to a head. Raising \$1,000 for Speed the Light by selling ham sandwiches mitigated against the value that the church is a holy place where merchandising should not be allowed. Jesus clearing the temple in John 2:13-17 was the scriptural basis for those who embraced this value. We may not agree with how the church applied this text to create such a value, but the disagreement was a Waterloo for the pastor.

If conflict is a major source of stress, then learning how to manage and resolve it is critical for every pastor.

## **VOCATIONAL MINISTRY OR SPIRITUAL MINISTRY?**

**D**uring the previous year and a half, the church I was pastoring had doubled in size. The vision God had given me was beginning to unfold, and everything ministry-related in my life seemed to be prospering. But it bothered me that people kept saying to me, "Pastor, you often look sad." I did not want to admit my sadness because things seemed to be going so well. Behind the scenes, however, I found myself getting angry every time the phone rang and growing distressingly impatient with the constant onslaught of people's problems. I also felt spiritually dissatisfied, which did not seem possible given the fruitfulness I was experiencing.

Ironically, I was praying at least a couple of hours a day. But something was not right. It was at this crucial juncture in my ministry development that I realized the dangers of vocational ministry are similar to those couples face who divorce after 25 or 30

years of marriage, once their children have left home. Left with an empty nest, partners begin to realize they are living with a stranger. For years, everything in their marriage revolved around the children. This bred partnership, but not relationship.

Everything in my walk with God revolved around my spiritual children — my congregation. The intimacy of knowing and walking with Jesus, for who He is, had started to elude me. My personal sadness was, in reality, a spiritual loneliness. Joy had evaporated in spite of obvious success. Yet, the Lord kept bringing me back to Isaiah 40:30,31: "Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in

the Lord will renew their strength." Maybe there was a cure for the toxicity of public ministry that was poisoning me spiritually.

The prescription was simple. I began to spend every Saturday night alone with God in my room. I was single and in my late 20s at the time. The Lord seemed to characterize those Saturday evenings as a date with Him. Praying for ministry concerns or even the Sunday message felt off-limits. Instead, I would strum my guitar and sing worship songs to the Lord. Or I would lie on my face on the carpet and groan, wrestling over what was missing in my life. At other times, I would sit cross-legged on my bed with my eyes wide open, telling Jesus the reasons why I loved Him.

**The Lord seemed to characterize those Saturday evenings as a date with Him. Praying for ministry concerns or even the Sunday message felt off-limits. Instead, I would strum my guitar and sing worship songs to the Lord.**

Nothing happened immediately, but over a 6-month period my joy began to return. I started to experience God's presence in extraordinary ways as I went about my pastoral duties. It became clear to me that I was relearning to preach and serve out of a spiritual life that had nothing to do with preaching or serving. The enduring lessons of a secret life with God were being burned into my life, lessons that would shape the authenticity and lasting fruitfulness I needed so badly.

Spiritual ministry without spiritual intimacy can quickly degrade into ministry idolatry. At the beginning of this season of Saturday night appointments with God, I felt warned by the

Norman Shawchuck has an outstanding model for understanding conflict and insightful suggestions for managing and resolving it. The conflict cycle is represented using a clock face. The 1 o'clock position is tension development; 3 o'clock is role dilemma; 5 o'clock is injustice gathering; 7 o'clock is confrontation; and 10 o'clock is adjustment. Unless the conflict cycle is broken through intervention and written agreements (Acts 15:1–35), it will be repeated. I suggest a more in-depth review of Shawchuck's material to help with the stress of conflict. (See the spring and summer 2005 issues of *Enrichment* journal for a comprehensive discussion of managing church conflict.)

Tex Groff said that pastors face issues and problems in the ministry. Issues often cannot be solved. Music styles and having enough volunteer nursery workers are frequent issues in the church. But solving the problem of creating a good infrastructure of leadership in the church that focuses on character and productivity is a worthy goal; or making

sure the various generations find some part of the music that ministers to them is wisdom in action.

## SORTING PRIORITIES

Two levels of priorities must be sorted out if pastors are to cope with stress in the ministry. When Joan and I planted West End Assembly of God in Richmond, Virginia, we had three small children; limited resources; a small, but growing congregation; and a large vision. The challenge of growing a congregation and leading a building program resulted in two short hospital experiences for me. After receiving negative results from every test, the doctor came to my room one day, sat on the edge of the bed, and said, "It's stress. You need to make changes in your lifestyle if you hope to live a long, healthy life."

That experience along with a dream got my attention. I dreamed one night that I was leaving the church building and saw a young disheveled teenager smoking pot on the front

Lord that ministry invitations involving Saturday evenings would shortly be coming my way, but to accept any of them would be as sin in His sight. I had never looked at ministry opportunities that way before. Yet, if I was to renounce what had become the idolatry of ministry activism and start a process of renewal in my life, I had to decide that I wanted Jesus more than I wanted another opportunity to preach.

It would take years for the implications of those choices to be woven into the fabric of my ministry life and philosophy, but at least a process had begun. I would come to see the integration of being and doing not so much as a balancing act between two opposites, but as a fusion of two indispensables. The essence of who I am brings depth and authority to what I do, just as what I do brings outward structure and expression to who I am. It has turned out to be a much less stressful way to live and serve.

In preaching, I came to realize the need to emphasize who God is to us as much as what we need to be for God. I desired to push people less and to feed them more. Increasingly, I preached expositionally, not just topically, allowing the Word to eclipse my own tendencies toward more singular agendas. I also began trusting the work of the Spirit in people's lives more than I trusted my own ability to motivate, organize, or manipulate response. Grace started to look less like a theological loophole that people used to avoid their spiritual responsibilities and more like a gift. The freedom of grace began to temper my performance-focused preaching as I let grace touch my own life.

This journey, nourished by those Saturday nights alone with

God, also began to affect the way people responded to me personally. Previously, my friends said I needed to become more of a real person. Now, they said that I was easier to relate to and follow. I found Kingdom life to be honest and relational to its core, and God was shaping a capacity for that kind of spirituality within me. To capture an old cliché, I favored people over programs. In a religious culture that tends to be more event-centered than relationship-centered and more program-driven than discipleship-driven, I wanted to go the other way.

Ordinary aspects of life that I sometimes felt impatient with — casual fellowship, nonministry conversation, recreational socializing, and even domestic priorities — took on increasing value. Chuck Miller of Barnabas Ministries once pointed out to me that pastors need to be people of God before they can

do the work of God. Church is not an event we attend. It is who we are, together. As my own drive to accomplish things gave place to a more relational leadership, the stage was set for a culture shift that would personalize ministry and better connect people to each other. Amazingly, when relationships undergird task, people engage mission in a healthier way.

I am still learning. Yet, the genius of Christ to reduce us, even as leaders to loving God and loving people continues to clarify the way for me.

## Spiritual ministry without spiritual intimacy can quickly degrade into ministry idolatry.



**JIM BRADFORD, PH.D.**, senior pastor, Central Assembly of God, Springfield, Missouri

# The following priorities have worked for our family and our ministry: God first, spouse next, children next, and then ministry.

lawn of the church. Approaching him, I asked him to leave the church property. He stared at me and said, “Don’t you recognize me. I’m your son, Rob.” I awakened from the dream crying and thanking God it was only a dream.

Over the next couple of months, I made some strategic changes in my schedule. Our kids’ activities were placed on my calendar as appointments. It was important to communicate to them by my actions that being a father to them was a priority in my life.

The following priorities have worked for our family and our ministry: God first, spouse next, children next, and then ministry. I am pleased to say that our three children and their spouses serve the Lord. We fumbled and stumbled as parents, but God was faithful as we tried to deal with the stress of ministry by incarnating these priorities.

A second challenge is to clarify ministry priorities. A pastor called one day to ask for help in forming a policy manual for his church. He had been at the church 15 years and was looking for a way to lead 35 people to a new level. I asked if the church had a mission statement. After a prolonged silence, he replied, “No.” He quickly focused on the stress of the ministry and his temptation to resign. His next comment was telling, “I don’t know what to do next.” He was obviously looking for some trigger to create a fulfilling, successful ministry. Developing a policy manual was not the answer.

Ministry priorities center around four Whats.



- What we do — our mission and purpose. Jesus was clear about His mission: “For the Son of man came to seek and to save what was lost” (Luke 19:10). Have you written a personal mission statement?
- What we believe — our core values. A representative statement about the core values of Jesus is contained in Luke 2:52: “Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man.” Identifying core values will help pastors deal with the crucibles of stress. Have you identified your core values and shared them with others?
- What we see — vision. “Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matthew 9:35,36). Seeing the harvest helps keep our vision renewed.
- What we achieve — goals. The Gospel of Matthew emphasizes what Jesus finished (Matthew 7:28; 11:1; 13:53). Achieving goals builds confidence in those we serve.

Some people in ministry feel stuck in their calling. They are not sure they are serving in their gifts, but are reluctant to make a change. How does a pastor make a change at age 30, 40, 50, or even 60? The stress of feeling stuck can be overwhelming. Sorting out these priorities is the first step. If everything does not line up, then it is time to make a change. This is the only answer for this stressor.

## FINALLY

In the ministry, pastors will have stress. Unmanaged stress can lead to burnout. Some day, pastors may have more time to think about fewer things,<sup>5</sup> but until then coping with stress will remain on the front burner. ■



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## ENDNOTES

1. The naming of these church sizes and some of the observations are borrowed from Arlin Rothauge, *Sizing Up a Congregation for New Member Ministry* (New York: Episcopal Church Center, 1983).
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. A statement made by Tom Brokaw when he retired.









# *Recovering* *from* Ministry Meltdown

*What to do when the physical,  
psychological, and spiritual  
resources needed to fuel your  
ministry are gone.*

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BY LARRY E. HAZELBAKER

**B**ut we will not boast *beyond our measure*, but within the *measure of the sphere* which God apportioned to us as a *measure*, to reach even as far as you. *For we are not overextending ourselves*, as if we did not reach to you, for we were the first to come even as far as you in the gospel of Christ; not boasting *beyond our measure*, that is, in other men's labors, but with the hope that as your faith grows, *we shall be, within our sphere, enlarged even more by you*" (2 Corinthians 10:13–15, NASB, italics added).<sup>1</sup>

"Amen," I said as I opened my eyes and refocused on the room around me. My office is not fancy. Experience has taught me that those coming to pour out their hearts do not care whether or not my walls display the latest oils by Thomas Kinkadee, or even have paint on them at all. I took a few deep breaths, pulled a pen from my shirt pocket, and welcomed my afternoon appointment.

He entered the room and sank deeply into the chair in front of me. He choked back tears as he whimpered in shame, "Larry, what has happened to me?" I stared, quietly, hoping my silence would invite him to elaborate.

His demeanor was that of an exhausted man, and his body language told his story almost redundantly as he proceeded to verbalize what I could already see.

"I have no strength," he said with a defeated tone. "But more than that, even scarier than that, I have no compassion for people anymore. I have no desire to help or listen to them, or to intercede or interfere for them. I want to leave the ministry.

"I was sure God called me, but now I think I must have misunderstood. I think I am ready to pursue other avenues in life. You know, reinvent myself. And yet, saying the words makes me feel selfish and guilty."



"Reverend, you'll experience new heights of freedom in your preaching with our bulletproof Plexiglass™ model!"

I listened intently to what, unfortunately, is a much too common story. He began to weep as though mourning the loss of his drive and inspiration while continuing to sputter the details and anecdotes that led him to his conclusion, and, ultimately, to me.

As I witnessed this near meltdown of a man with 35 years invested in the ministry, I jotted down one single word on my legal pad: *Burnout*.

## If a pastor's friends will not allow him to make mistakes, he needs new friends who will.

Common among many, burnout leaves people feeling *spent*. Teachers, students, blue-collar workers, parents, kids, athletes, entertainers, and ministers can all experience burnout.

### DEFINITION

Burnout is a gradual process of desensitization that inevitably wears down an individual until he has no motivation. Burnout happens so slowly that the person affected does not realize it is occurring. It is a state of mental and/or physical exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress.<sup>2</sup>

Generally there is one cause of burnout. I scribbled a second word in my notes: *Demands*.

Demands and responsibilities are a necessary and important part of life. They drive, motivate, and make people accountable for productivity. An undemanding life would be dull and unfulfilling. It is important that pastors carefully identify which demands are healthy and which are detrimental to the health of their relationships, careers, lifestyles, and ministerial callings. Demands that act as realistic benchmarks or motivational incentives introduce a certain amount of exhilaration and, in fact, prevent burnout. The key to having a balanced life is to keep its demands within our reach.<sup>3</sup>

My pastor-friend was on the brink of accepting failure. I witnessed evidence of a total depletion of the energy and coping mechanisms reserved for perseverance. The physical, psychological, and spiritual resources needed to fuel his ministry were gone.

### EXTERNALLY IMPOSED UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

Pressure is a reality, especially in ministry where many people equate unrealistic feats to enormous acts of faith. Ministers feel pressured to produce. Spearheading building programs, multiplying conversions, growing congregations, increasing offerings, or developing internal and external church ministries can all become draining and unattainable objectives.

In ministry, there are many opportunities to pressure and



be pressured. On one occasion, I met with a pastor who was being pressured by his church to meet unimaginable goals. This pastor was being pressured to build an annex onto the church. I saw in his eyes a false look of determination as he tried to disguise great fear and uncertainty. "We can do it," I heard him say as he tried to convince himself. He was so desperate to *perform* he dismissed the possibility that he could not only fail, but also, perhaps, financially destroy the church. I tried to be his voice of reason and counter the pushes and shoves he was receiving from others. I cautioned him to be sure the goal was within his reach. Pastors should trust God for the unreachable, but they should also fervently pray for a revelation of God's participation in their chosen ambitions. Jesus must be nearby when a pastor decides to step out of the boat. Be sure of His presence in your choice.

In 2003, I conducted a survey and learned that 37 percent of the ministers who participated reported feeling the discomfort of external pressure placed on them by their congregations and church boards. When asked to describe what "external pressure" meant, more than 52 percent stated that *successful ministry* was measured by how many people attended church, financial fluctuation, and how many individuals were baptized.

Pastors believe God is their boss, but God is not the one signing their paychecks or keeping the financial records. To avoid undue pressure, ministers should thoroughly investigate the opportunities before them. Many ministers accept pastorates without doing vital research. They accept positions for many reasons and often fail to consider the church's expectations before agreeing to the responsibilities of them. Subsequently, they risk taking a high-pressure job and fail to consider the potential hardships it will cause them and their families.

It is critical that a pastor consider the expectations before accepting a responsibility. If a situation poses unrealistic expectations, it is wise to decline it if the opportunity appears to be a promotion. Often, "the next step up" is made by people wearing blindfolds, who do not realize that the next step will take them to the bottom of a canyon. What appears to be a promotion is sometimes a death trap in disguise.

## SELF-IMPOSED UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

External pressure is often self-imposed. While a pastor's stress may result from his circumstances, he must also take ownership of what he allows others to do to him. Ministers, who are by nature compassionate and people pleasers, may struggle intensely with the pressures they face. They seem to forget that they are allowed to say no and to work within the parameters of their ability. They need to consult with their families and examine their personal status before they

obligate themselves to more than they can handle.

Many ministers set impossible goals for themselves. They impose unrealistic expectations on themselves in the church, their homes, and their relationships. They feel they must be all things to all people to make church work.

Pastors must protect themselves from potential disasters caused by unrealistic demands and expectations. They must depend on the Holy Spirit to help them know God's will and understand that His way is not always the hardest way. God's way will not always be easy, but there is not always a mountain to be moved, either.

God wants His servants to be fresh in mind and spirit. He wants pastors to maintain the same drive and motivation they had when they first felt His call on their lives, so they can continue to be an example and a catalyst of change for those in need. To ensure that kind of newness each day, pastors must identify what is God's *next steps* plan for their future and be certain it matches what is expected of them in church, family, friendships, and work.

The line between external pressure and self-imposed demands is sometimes blurry. Pastors must work to avoid unnecessary stress, whether from internal or external sources. In many cases, avoiding stress is as easy as being introspective and self-questioning. Pastors must accept their

## Pastors believe God is their boss, but God is not the one signing their paychecks or keeping the financial records.

boundaries and introduce margin into their lives to effectively meet the goals laid before them by God. Then, they can finish strong, rather than fizzle out.

## RECOGNIZING SYMPTOMS

Burnout is often accompanied by denial, which is the estrangement from one's own feelings. Stress, hostility, neglected needs, guilt, and low self-esteem also appear to be characteristics. People suffering from these symptoms are more at risk when they are nurturing others or anticipating the needs of others. Pastors, therefore, tend to be perfect candidates for burnout. They often see themselves as somewhat *alone*. They may feel powerless to change anything they are doing because of this aloneness. Ministers who suffer burnout tend to be perfectionists and seem to struggle with their own power, autonomy, and identity.

## RECOVERING FROM BURNOUT Overcoming negative emotions

Negative emotions stem from a person's perceptions of what is expected from him. Disappointment, discouragement,

despair, despondency, embarrassment, and even depression can follow a meltdown. Pastors are people. They will make some bad choices and decisions. In ministry, bad choices and decisions are sometimes interpreted as not being led by the Holy Spirit or a lack of wisdom. Both are perceived as ministry killers.

A minister is not immune to bad choices. For a pastor to beat himself up or allow others to is evidence of trying to please men. Pastors will occasionally become overburdened. Whenever ministers try to do well, there is also the potential for failure. Learn from negative experiences. Many individuals pay money to learn what others have already learned from making a decision that turned out wrong — not necessarily bad — just wrong.

To see things objectively, a pastor may need to seek help from an unbiased person — someone who does not know him and has no investment in his cause. A good Christian counselor can help if the pastor will admit he needs help. Counseling provides a safe environment, especially if the counselor is a professional. Counselors are bound by ethical guidelines that discourage any disclosure of a counselee's situation. Thus, a pastor has nothing to hide — no pretending, facade, masks, or lies. The gift of being honest and true, with nothing to prove to anyone, is a beautiful gift a pastor can give himself. A counselor can help a minister find where he left the reality path. This is the road to emotional, physical, and spiritual healing.

### Confronting past mistakes

Mistakes provide the steps and tools for learning. God does

not allow His servants to go through or endure painful situations without providing them the ability to overcome and be victorious. God will reveal why He allowed the situation. The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord (Psalm 37:23, KJV). Pastors can take comfort in knowing they are where God wants them to be based on their decisions, right or wrong. Mistakes are some of the rungs on the ladder that

## Pastors should trust God for the unreachable, but they should also fervently pray for a revelation of God's participation in their chosen ambitions.

pastors climb. Tests are part of a pastor's testimony. The value of ministry is directly related to the effort given to it. Sometimes, the effort is pleasant and exhilarating; at other times, it includes pain and suffering. Either way, if pastors endure, God will reward them. It is both strange and wonderful to know that the reward is often related to something one must *endure*. What is *endured* is seldom pleasurable.

I have found comfort in reading Genesis 1:26–31 about God's excitement when He made man: "God saw every thing that He had made, and, behold, it was very good." Genesis 6:5,6 says, "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth. The Lord was grieved that He had made man on the earth." When I have failed as a parent, God reminds me that He had kids too — Adam and Eve. He not only walked and talked with them but He also created them. They made a bad choice. But God, in the end, will make all things good.

### Renewing your call

One feeling that seems to accompany failure is inferiority. Feelings of inferiority are not necessarily bad if they prompt one to improve. The danger for pastors is when they allow feelings of inferiority to become an inferiority complex. An inferiority complex drives one to internalize his feelings. It weakens a person and creates the perception that he is not measuring up.

Pastors should not measure themselves by someone else's definition of success. God does not place pastors in a situation where they have no opportunity for victory. God prepares His servants for every work that He has called them to do. Pastors need to remember that God's mercy and grace will accompany them as long as they operate within their sphere of gifts and talents.

When a pastor allows others to drive him out of his sphere, they are usually the first to criticize him when he fails. Then they want the pastor to wear a big "S" (for *shame*) or "F" (for *failure*) monogrammed on his suit so he can be constantly reminded of his failures. Outside the pastor's sphere of ability



lies the potential for failure. If a pastor's friends will not allow him to make mistakes, he needs new friends who will.

### Maintaining a devotional life

The song, "No One Ever Cared for Me Like Jesus," is an incredible reality. A pastor can pour his heart out to his friends, family, and even counselors, but no one will ever accept him for who and what he really is except Jesus. When a pastor gets alone with Jesus and invites the Holy Spirit into the room, he has opportunity to be refreshed and renewed.

Speaking in tongues has always contributed to my renewal. An extremely helpful benefit to speaking in tongues is personal edification. Paul wrote, "He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself" (1 Corinthians 14:4). Speaking in tongues not only connects one with God spiritually, but it also has physical and emotional benefits as well. Speaking in tongues is an expressive form of worship that is also therapeutic. It brings one into the presence of God, and, in the process, the Holy Spirit refreshes and renews the speaker's mind, soul, and body. It is

good to have time alone with God and to speak in tongues.

Reading the Word of God also provides great personal benefits. "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). If reading the Bible provides one with a much better and healthier perspective on life, why would anyone choose not to read it?

### Renewing your inner spiritual/biblical life through continuing education

One negative self-perception that encourages low self-esteem and fuels depression is that of being unlearned or ignorant. This perception is reinforced when one fails at something or begins to show signs of burnout. Learning reinforces self-worth because knowledge aids in making better decisions and wiser choices.

Wisdom seems to accompany knowledge. Pastors must study. To rely on the verse, "For the Holy Ghost shall teach

## STAGES OF BURNOUT

The Wholistic Stress Control Institute at Morehouse College has determined that *burnout* occurs in stages.

*The first stage is the intense compulsion to prove something to someone.* Pastors live in a society that demands excellence and growth. They cannot get away from that demand. God's Word has this instruction for pastors: "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men" (Colossians 3:23). Pastors need to engage life with great energy and a sense of adventure. The way one engages life has everything to do with the purpose behind his strivings. "Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain" (Psalm 127:1). Those who violate this directive will enter an unhealthy environment where pleasing men takes precedence.

*The second stage is the willingness to deprive self, avoid conflict and personal needs, and sacrifice one's values.* Pastors who strive to please by accepting unrealistic demands will sacrifice themselves and their values. This is true whether the goals are self- or externally imposed.

*The third stage is denial, disengagement, and observable behavioral changes.* A person on the road to burnout usually has disregard for the reality of his situation and lives in a world of denial. Denial is the belief something exists even when evidence indicates it may not. It is an unconscious defense mechanism.

If a person is not well, he should admit it and ask for prayer for healing. To deny being sick is to deny reality. Truth prevails. When a person is sick, he should call for the elders of the church to pray for his healing (James 5:14,15). Pastors should let others know when they are not well and then let them know when they are healed. It is not good to lie to

others and to ourselves or to create a stressful environment. I have counseled many ministers over the past decade that have suffered from tremendous stress because they denied that they were suffering. Most were afraid to admit it for fear that their peers might judge their faith or lack of faith.

*The fourth stage is depersonalization, emptiness, and depression.* Once a pastor reaches the stage of denial, he must embrace reality. When the truth comes, and it will, the person in denial suffers greatly in its demise. His ministry will come into question. This tremendous shock of encountering reality now becomes difficult to deal with. The pastor's faith seems to have failed him, and the product is often depersonalization. I have had ministers say to me, "Larry, I have spent my whole life teaching and preaching this and now, when I need it, I cannot get it." They experience emptiness, despair, despondency, discouragement, and finally depression. Many ministers have left the ministry because when they needed to draw on the words they preached to others, they could not speak those words to themselves.

*The fifth stage is total burnout and exhaustion.* After depression sets in, burnout soon follows. The wise person will seek counsel in sorting out unrealistic expectations and discovering what path took him to this place. Physical, psychological, and mental well-being begins to deteriorate. The outcome may be catastrophic.

LARRY E. HAZELBAKER, Lakeland, Florida

#### ENDNOTE

1. Wholistic Stress Control Institute, Inc. <http://www.mindspring.com/~wholistic/burnout.html>

you in the same hour what ye ought to say" (Luke 12:12, KJV), for daily ministry is an unrealistic expectation. I have learned through my personal experience and the experiences of others that the Holy Spirit can give a word of wisdom, knowledge, or discernment when He wants to address a particular issue at a particular time. But God also expects a pastor to "do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). Those who choose to be lazy and do not apply themselves to learning tend to "study to show *themselves*." This will only add to the misery of burnout.

## Burnout is a gradual process of desensitization that inevitably wears down individuals until they have no motivation.

Engaging in education stimulates the brain and produces a cognitively functioning human being who can dialogue on many subjects. Problems can arise, though, when education is used to overcompensate for inferiority complexes. The result is usually a superiority complex. This person learns for the sole purpose of bringing recognition to himself.

Many opportunities exist for learning new things. The American Association of Christian Counselors offers tremendous resources for Christian counselors and ministers. Assemblies of God institutions have distance education and accelerated programs that can provide resources to help. Educational experiences can greatly help a minister feel more

at ease while dealing with burnout. Interestingly, one of the ministries of the church is that of a teacher (2 Timothy 1:11). A teacher is needed to instruct those willing to learn.

### Managing time and organization to reduce stress

It is essential that a pastor learn to manage his life. Managing one's life takes discipline and structure. Words like *boundaries*, *parameters*, and *margins* are good. Pastors must have boundaries. One boundary is realizing that a pastor cannot operate 24/7. A pastor cannot allow himself to believe the false perception that God will overlook the careless management of His resources. One of those resources is a pastor's health.

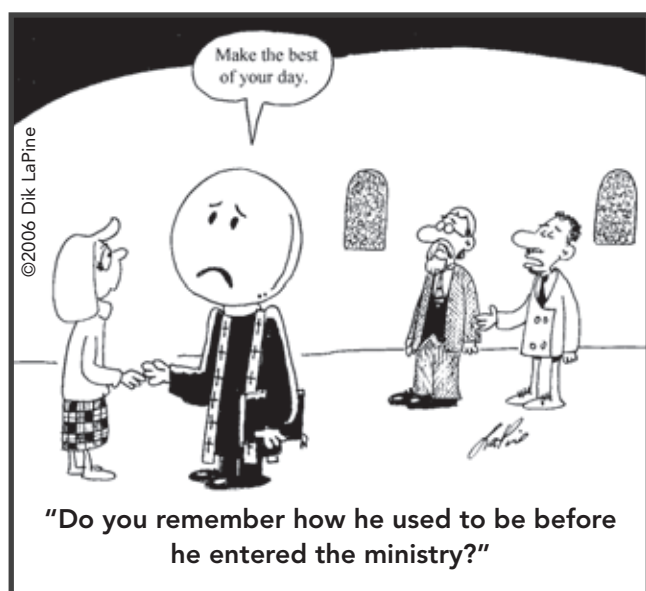
Planning can be learned. Many ministers have said to me, "I am not a detail person; I hire people to do that for me." A pastor can hire a "detail" person, but ultimately, the responsibility is his. To whatever extent a pastor defers details is usually the extent that something goes dreadfully wrong. "It's the little foxes that spoil the vine" (Song of Solomon 2:15). The devil truly is in the details.

There is a management method called management by objective. The method requires setting a goal and establishing objectives to accomplish the goal. It is an easy method that assures goal completion. Implementing good time management and organizational skills lowers stress levels. Creating a blueprint with flowcharts, timelines, and structure shows how a goal can be achieved. If a pastor does not know how to create these charts, he needs to learn how.

### Maintaining physical health

Taking care of one's body can be a difficult task, especially when a person enjoys certain kinds of food. A disposition toward food and a disinterest in exercise can make a pastor vulnerable to sickness and disease. A pastor must give proper attention to his physical health. A friend of mine who is a doctor told me years ago that I needed to take better care of myself. I can honestly say I have been trying. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which we have of God, and ye are not your own. For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body ... which are God's" (1 Corinthians 6:19,20, KJV).

Pastors benefit from regular exercise. Keep a Sabbath; it is important to have a day of rest. Some pastors do not allow themselves the rest they need until a serious health problem forces them to rest. Do not buy into the philosophy that God protects pastors from illnesses because they are doing His work. Ministers need to live by the laws of the universe that God put into place. Exercise and rest are important. Sometimes we forget "we have this treasure in jars of clay" (2 Corinthians 4:7).





# Burnout is often accompanied by denial, which is the estrangement from one's own feelings.

## Building healthy accountability relationships

Scripture warns Christians to be careful with whom they associate. How many times have pastors used the Scripture, "Evil communications corrupt good manners" (1 Corinthians 15:33, KJV), to help their congregation and family? The same words apply to ministers. A similar saying is: Tell me who you hang with and I will tell you what kind of person you are.

People seem to move or gravitate toward others with whom they share common interests. By engaging in some introspection, a pastor can find the areas where he allows "perceived" friends to reinforce unrealistic expectations on him.

A pastor can benefit from an accountability group. The group should include some people who do not know him personally because they will tend to be more objective in their perceptions. There is often more freedom and safety among strangers than friends when it comes to accountability. An accountability group or partner who does not know a minister will usually be honest and tell him what he needs to hear rather than what he wants to hear.

Paul asked the Galatians, "Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?" (Galatians 4:16). Sadly, when a

person asks his friends to tell him the truth, and they do, the friendship usually begins to wane. Therefore, it is better to ask others, counselors or consultants, what their perceptions are. Both parties will eventually discover the truth.

If a pastor has unhealthy relationships with individuals who are always encouraging him to set unrealistic goals, he needs to find new friends. Similarly, if he surrounds himself with people who are sick, he may become sick as well. Again, find a new group of friends.

God did not intend pastors to live a life of misery in ministry. In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul explains why he does ministry. Verse 22 says: "I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some." Pastors cannot do some things because God did not gift them to do those things. Remember, however, that a pastor can do all things the Father (not others) requires him to do through Christ Jesus who gives him strength (Philippians 4:13).

Pastors can live in God's grace and mercy even when they do not measure up to unrealistic self- or externally-imposed expectations. They can say with Paul: "Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize" (1 Corinthians (9:25-27). The one who runs aimlessly and beats the air will most likely suffer burnout.

May God bless your life with the resources needed to accomplish His expectations as you embark on the journey to do His will. ■

## ALLEVIATING BURNOUT

Burnout can be alleviated. The following guidelines are from The Wholistic Stress Control Institute:

1. *Live a better lifestyle as it relates to choices.* This includes diet, exercise, and relaxation methods, reducing harmful habits, and addictions.

2. *Develop and maintaining a social support system.* Everyone needs someone with whom to fellowship. I recommend finding friends outside of the ministry. There are many Christian organizations in which to get involved.

3. *Become absorbed in meaningful tasks.* Find something outside your church and become a part of it. Volunteer to spend a little time working at your local Salvation Army store helping people find the things they need. Get outside your own ministry environment and "do ministry."

4. *Learn to cope with stress.* Coping means protecting oneself. If you are a normal person, you will not need to look for things to stress you; they will find you. Find ways of recognizing stress before it becomes a means for potential burnout. Learn your limitations and *do not* venture outside of them. Develop a referral list for anything you cannot do well or that you do not have the time to do well.

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### ENDNOTES

1. Scripture quotations taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. ([www.Lockman.org](http://www.Lockman.org))
2. D.A. Girdino, G.S. Everly, and D.E. Dusek, *Controlling Stress and Tension* (Needham Heights, Mass.: Allyn and Bacon, 1996).
3. S. Hutman, J. Jaffe, R. Segal, G. Kemp, and L. Dumke, *Burnout: Signs, Symptoms and Prevention* [http://www.helpguide.org/mental/burnout\\_signs\\_symptoms.htm](http://www.helpguide.org/mental/burnout_signs_symptoms.htm) (2005).



*From the*  
**TRANSCENDENT**  
*to the Trivial:*

Stress-Coping Strategies for  
Today's Hispanic Pastor



**Hispanics** in the United States number 38 million. Mexican-Americans are the largest contingent among such minorities, followed by Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and Central and South Americans. The 2004 Assemblies of God annual report indicates there are more than 2,000 Hispanic churches and 3,000 Hispanic ministers in the United States. Whether they are acculturated and assimilated fifth-generation American residents, or recent arrivals in need of adapting to the dominant culture, Hispanics have made major contributions to the Assemblies of God in the United States.

members before courts, school systems, immigration, welfare, and social service agencies. These pastors also assist members in meeting the challenges posed by their need to acculturate and assimilate into the demands exerted by a dominant culture.

Besides spiritual guidance, preaching, teaching, and administering,

Hispanic ministers face unique stressors in ministry and may benefit from considering the descriptive as well as prescriptive aspects related to stress in Hispanic ministry and the possible strategies and coping styles to utilize in their struggles to adapt.

Hispanic pastors represent a heterogeneous and multicultural population that is diversified in terms of acculturation, education and socioeconomic levels, degree of bilingualism, and experience in ministry. They deal with populations subject to an ecosystemic context marked by socioeconomic, political, and discriminatory stressors that impinge on the personal and family life of church members. In general demographic terms, poverty, lower education levels, higher rates of incarceration, inadequate housing, poor health, and discrimination disproportionately affect Hispanics.

Pastors called to minister to such populations necessarily work under conditions that exacerbate the possibility of developing stress syndromes, depression, anxiety, and burnout. It has been documented that those who attend to the needs of traumatized and stressed people may in turn experience a secondary post-traumatic syndrome themselves. The pressures placed on ministers can be described as stressors of interpersonal, situational, and intrapsychic nature.

## INTERPERSONAL AND SITUATIONAL STRESS

The expectations placed on Hispanic pastors range from the traditional disciplines of preaching, teaching, discipling, and guiding to more concrete needs for socioeconomic, educational, and legal services. The roles of most Hispanic pastors go beyond normal ministerial tasks. They often engage in personal guidance and advocacy for church

Hispanic pastors engage in social services in their communities such as pastoral counseling, family counseling, and parental guidance. Other social services include food services, clothing assistance, referrals to other agencies, emergency financial assistance, aids to immigrants, ESL classes, aids to prisoners and their families, help for AIDS victims and their relatives, tutoring programs, and substance abuse and rehabilitation counseling. They are not only perceived and appealed to as ministers of the gospel, but have also become advocates, social workers, mediators with systems at large, reformers, and providers of concrete services.

Hispanic church members experience various degrees of veiled and overt discrimination since they are a composite, heterogeneous population that includes all socioeconomic, educational, and acculturated levels. The pastor is often the bridge between the needy, the poor, and the unsophisticated, and the demands of societal nature that appear alienating to a minority culture that needs to adapt, survive, and to actualize God's will in their lives. Yet, Hispanic pastors are seldom prepared for these tasks. Their lack of the necessary training and strategies to accomplish such endeavors may lead to perceptions of inadequacy, lack of self-efficacy, and a sense of failure.

## INTRAPSYCHIC STRESS

Intrapsychic factors refer to the inner struggles experienced by Hispanic pastors. The struggles include self-image, self-esteem, and self-efficacy as these relate to a pastor's well-being (character growth, spiritual standing, degree of empowering in the Spirit). Intrapsychic factors also include doing ministry in optimal fashion that is assessed in terms of church growth, evangelism, discipleship, missions, and social services in the community.

Intrapsychic conflicts include the pressure to demonstrate holiness or impeccability in perfectionistic fashion. These pressures can cause pastors to border on legalistic injunctions against sinful nature. At times spiritual mindedness may displace the need for relaxation, leisure, fun, or simple rest. These activities could be perceived as fleshly, worldly displays of carnal desires, lack of power to regroup, or even spiritual slothfulness. Sanctification, defined as total separation from this world, may exert pressure on pastors to be less than participatory in any social endeavor perceived to be *mundano* (of the world).

Often such radical exclusivity may lead to an insulated, isolated, and solipsistic existence prone to stress, depression, and burnout. The pressure to be the anointed one, to always glow in the Spirit, to always be healthy, strong, and confident deprives many pastors from being real, or from confessing their weaknesses to anyone, or to ask for help when depressed, exhausted, or under great anxiety and tension.

In mental health research it has been documented that Hispanics often translate their depressive syndromes into psychosomatic symptoms. Such syndromes among pastors may result from unresolved intrapsychic tension since pastors are expected to be on top of things, wear the right hat for each occasion, and live victoriously.

### Spiritual expectations

Interpersonal stress may be elicited by the pressure to measure up to Anglo pastors or other Hispanic pastors who seemingly have more displays of spiritual power, more

members, larger mission programs, or better facilities. Pastors of start-up storefront churches try to find a place among ministers already established in large churches with “proper” architectural design. Such stressors may lead to overcompensatory mechanisms, exaggerated claims of giftedness, and extravagant allusions of being special or more in tune with God than the traditional (considered deadly) establishments would dare to claim.

Church services are often measured by logistics, frequency, intensity, duration, and expected consequences. These, in turn, are equated with the level of spirituality, success, or ministerial effectiveness. Thus, pastors are expected to be constantly engaged in church activities and to push for more services that are longer and louder than normal, and produce

## Taking time to please God and God alone, before facing people's needs, is the highest priority in ministry.

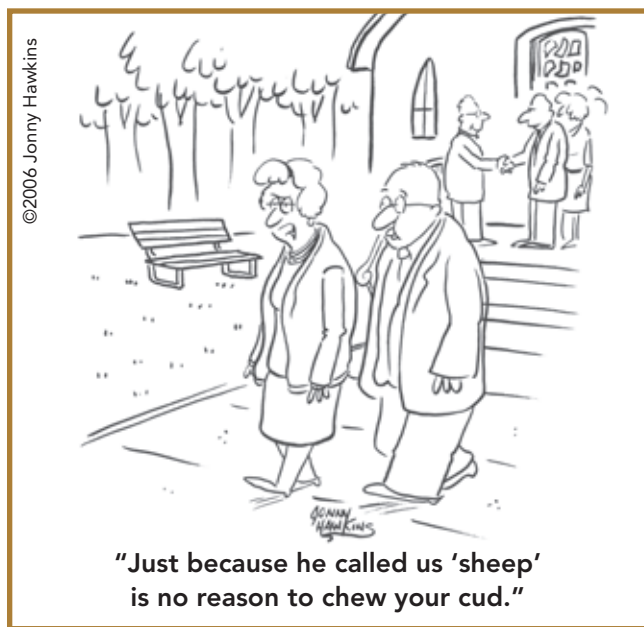
better results — more conversions, more baptisms, more healings, more infillings with Spirit — compared to churches in the dominant culture. The number of activities during weekly services in most Hispanic churches testify to the fact busyness is equated with spiritual devotion, holy dedication, and surrender to God.

Contrary to delegating power and responsibility to other leaders in the congregation, many Hispanic pastors are expected to attend all meetings including prayer meetings, men's fellowship, women's groups, Royal Rangers, Missions, and Bible studies. Except in larger churches, pastors are expected to wear many hats — from pulpit hoods to bus driving caps.

### Ministry expectations

Hispanic pastors are often more personal than professional in their dealings with church members. Instead of regular office hours, appointment times, or delegated services (seen as detached and isolating Americanized ways of doing things), pastors are expected to have open-door policies, be accessible to every member, be available to every need, and live under the close scrutiny of the congregation. Accepting such a predicament is just one aspect of being called by God to serve people.

The constant drive for significance, relevance, success, and effectiveness in ministry creates a vulnerability to stress. Running on empty and lacking proper boundaries, buffer zones, and margins in one's personal life allows for codependency and entanglements in the problems of members. As a result, pastors may lose perspective and become part of the problem.





The above descriptions represent conditions of stress that may cause physical tiredness, emotional fatigue, anhedonia, and even burnout.

### **Cultural expectations**

Cultural expectations in general, and even more in pastoral domains in particular, may encourage faulty coping styles that foster defenses such as denial, depression, or burnout. Pastors may engage in flight responses to avoid recognizing and managing stress. The typical pastor rejects help in this area as a confession of vulnerability, weakness, and a lack of faith in God.

Pastors are expected to always be joyful, victorious, and glowing in the Spirit. These expectations may cause pastors to hide negative feelings and deny confused, illogical, or negative thinking. Often, such attempts lead to despair, blaming others, or feeling rejected by God.

The experienced anxiety (a general state of tension) and depletion (a state of lethargy, with loss of faith, hope, and courage) may lead to loss of self-efficacy, self-esteem, and sense of direction. These feelings may diminish personal resourcefulness and coping styles. A learned helplessness may result from such faulty endeavors.

## **STRESS MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES**

Ranging from the transcendent to the trivial aspects of stress management, the following strategies may be worthy of consideration:

### **Serving the Lord of the house before serving the house of the Lord**

Spending quality time with God, dialoging in the Spirit, meditating in His Word, and pleasing Him first is the basic premise for spiritual and mental health and wholeness. Taking time to please God and God alone, before facing people's needs, is the highest priority in ministry. Human needs will always exist. When the pastor is ready to delve into the people's problematic situations, they will be there for him to tackle.

Serving people (the house of the Lord) can cause stress, but worshiping God (the Lord of the house) demands an unstressful, fresh and fragrant service. Resting in His presence acts as the best stress-management paradigm.

### **Dedicating time to family**

Pastors are keepers of vineyards. It is important they not leave their own field unattended. Dates with one's spouse, playing with one's children, and going places to enjoy diversion and fun are as important as helping people in need. Plan such endeavors; do not leave them to chance.

### **The importance of friendships**

Hispanic pastors receive cultural messages to be personal, gregarious, socially minded, given to fellowship in the community, and to develop deep friendships. The saying is: "It takes people to make us sick, and it takes people to heal us."

The value of family, friends, and good company is undeniable in stress management. Positive encounters with friends and fellowship that allow for vicarious, observational learning from positive role models can help pastors develop good coping strategies against stress.

### **Setting realistic goals in ministry**

Pastors often strive for noble ideals. While such ideals may be praised, they may also be unrealistic and impossible to achieve. Burnout is more present among those with zeal and a burning desire for God's work. The cost of overextending personal capacities could ultimately be devastating. A

## **Pastors are often expected to say yes, no matter what the demands.**

proper perspective must guide goal setting. Goals need to be planned in a faith-oriented fashion, yet be humble enough to be adequate, reachable, and functional.

### **Delegation of responsibilities**

Instead of directing the orchestra while simultaneously playing all the instruments, Hispanic pastors may benefit from delegating authority to disciples and leaders. Pastors should consider delegating more often, more adequately, and properly without feeling anxious or having the need to always exert spiritual control over everyone.

### **Doing the same things in different fashion**

Renewing the mind keeps a pastor's motivation fresh and novel. A renewed mind can make doing customary things seem as if they are being done for the first or second time. Renewing the mind allows for reframing tedious, customary, and even dreadful events into more palatable opportunities while exuding proactive behaviors of a unilateral, unconditional, empowering, graceful, and merciful nature.

### **Rest and relaxation training**

Hispanic pastors may profit from relaxation training, engaging in meditational prayer, and pondering the Word under the influence of the Spirit. To compensate for Pentecostal zest, loudness, and effervescence, disciplines of a quiet nature and contemplative resting in God could be developed in stress-management style. The importance of scheduling rest periods as necessities rather than luxuries is advocated. After all, Jesus went away with His disciples "in a boat to a solitary

# The expectations placed on Hispanic pastors

## range from the traditional disciplines of preaching, teaching, discipling, and guiding to more concrete needs for socioeconomic, educational, and legal services.

place” when “so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat” (Mark 6:31,32).

### **Stress-inoculation training**

To overcome depression, stress, and burnout, Hispanic pastors need to engage in stress-inoculation training — learning to relax and develop comebacks ahead of time in a safe environment. This strategy calls for relaxation techniques coupled with anticipatory perceptions and cognitive-affective encounters to prepare one’s mind for possible stress in the future. The goal is to develop mental “antibodies” to prepare the mind to fight real stress or suffering if and when it happens.

Pastors need to develop cognitive, affective, and behavioral antidotes against possible suffering in a proactive way before it hits them. Preparing one’s mind for anticipated suffering may help develop coping skills which augment predictability and control over circumstances rather than becoming trapped or defined by them.

### **Assertiveness training**

The need to develop emotional freedom or assertiveness (without becoming cold, detached, or obnoxiously aloof) is essential. The cultural propensity toward acquiescence poses a problem for Hispanic pastors. Pastors are often expected to say yes, no matter what the demands. The difficulties pastors face in denying requests, accepting unacceptable requests, or setting limits on people’s claims if they represent unfair, exaggerated, or otherwise trapping burdens need to be addressed by “speaking the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15).

### **Establishing proper boundaries with others**

Overworked and overburdened pastors need to place limits on requests, demands, and unrealistic expectations coming from needy people, and say no to perceived nonsensical demands without experiencing guilt or shame.

### **Recognizing personal limits**

Recognizing finitude, entropy, and decay, as well as the propensity toward fallenness could serve as a humble antidote to idealistic, perfectionistic, triumphalistic, or unrealistic self-perceptive traits. Pastors reach out to the abstract, the esoteric, and the possible feats of spiritual nature. Yet, they are reminded of decay, entropy, and death exemplified in the need for refueling energy and depending on God’s grace for every move they make and every breath they take.

### **Self-talk**

Pastors can benefit from learning to address the multivoiced aspects of the inner self with an empowered executive function under the Spirit’s presence and power. This enables them to address their negative and intropunitive injunctions with graceful comebacks, as the Psalmist did: “Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God” (Psalm 42:11).

### **Nutrition**

At reductionistic levels, a person is what he eats. Maintaining a healthy body requires a healthy diet and rest. Biochemical imbalances result when one disregards his need for relaxation, rest, and a properly balanced diet.

### **Proper sleep habits**

The brain needs rest to function properly. Sleep deprivation may lead to dysfunctional thinking, reasoning, perception, judgment, and memory. All these cognitive functions may be distorted by depression, anxiety, and burnout.

### **Physical exercise**

Habitual physical exercise is a good way to keep the mind and body healthy. As part of stress management and good mental health, pastors need to tone their muscles and release their natural biochemical uppers — endorphins and other biochemical stress managers.

## **CONCLUSION**

Hispanic pastors need to take care of themselves in a proactive fashion. This will include some practical measures in their routines to avoid capitulation to stress and burnout, and to ward off depression and anxiety. The above suggestions are not necessarily sequential, but represent a holistic approach. A pastor’s attention to ministry tasks under the auspices of the Holy Spirit does not exclude good cognitive, affective, and behavioral connotations. After all, God took our sins away, not our brains. We can still use them. ■



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# Pastors: Called into Crisis

**Whether we are ready or not, crisis counseling finds us as pastors, and it takes all we can muster to face it.**

BY JAMES D. BERKLEY

**T**his article introduces the series *The Greatest Challenges of Pastoral Care*. The next several issues of *Enrichment* will provide up-to-the-minute counseling tips on those crises judged most difficult. Each article will focus on a particular crisis.

Many people nourish an unrealistic notion about the life of a pastor. Standing beside the “Ha! You only work one day a week” jokes is the bizarre notion that pastors lead a sheltered, cloistered life, apart from the glaring realities of existence that most people endure. People surmise pastors spend their days in quiet reflection, in a resplendent pastoral doceticism. These people believe pastors only appear to be in this world and could not possibly be jostled by the bumps and bruises other people endure. They think pastors drink tea in serene parlors and benignly luxuriate among lofty thoughts most of the week.

I remember meeting a church member’s son at a social occasion. He was a

deputy district attorney, and, at the time, I was volunteering as the local police chaplain. We hit it off immediately and were having a jolly time telling police and courtroom tales. Then his mother circled back around and caught wind of our conversation. Aghast, she gently reprimanded her attorney son for talking with me about such escapades. “He doesn’t want to think about such awful things,” she chided, “he’s a *minister*.” In other words, “What would he know or care about the harsh world the rest of us live in?”

“A whole lot!” I could have told her. “Ever since becoming a pastor, I’ve been pulled into some of the darkest, most bleak, most wrenching incidents in people’s lives. Far from being *sheltered* from the harsh realities of life, I get them thrown at me in dizzying array.” What I should have said to that mother is, “Pastors are called into crisis.” It is part of the package when God calls us to be shepherds who bind up the wounds of the sheep.

One of my favorite secular writers is Ivan Doig, who weaves colorful stories based on his childhood in a sheep-ranching family in Montana. In his memoir, *This House of Sky*, he tells of tending sheep one summer: “There was not one upright particle on all these miles of range for a sheep to rub against, and an attack of ticks was beginning to make the ewes itch beneath their heavy fleeces. . . . The sheep were rolling themselves on the ground to scratch — a roll which easily carried them too far onto their deep-wooled backs to be able to get up again, and within minutes in the summer heat, their struggling would bloat them to death. We had the prospect of endless ballooned corpses around us.”<sup>1</sup>

A crisis. For the next 14 days he kept weary patrol among the sheep and frantically tipped each ewe back onto her feet whenever one would roll over. That is a shepherd’s job. Crises naturally find them, and they improvise a plan to intervene for the good of the sheep. And so do pastors.



Any pastor could recall sad tales such as these:

- A sweet, former homecoming queen heads off to college. A dreadful transformation happens, and she casts herself to her death off a freeway overpass. A few minutes later her mother drives under this same overpass on her way to visit her daughter.
- A vigorous, young dad comes down with a brain tumor, then another, and another. Through operation after operation, procedure after procedure, he hangs on. Then, his young daughter contracts leukemia.
- A seemingly normal marriage gets blasted apart as a string of infidelities comes to light. The husband's pattern has been continuous and frequent, and the wife's humiliation and sense of betrayal nearly smother her.

Not only can pastors tell such stories, they also become players in these events along with people's expectations that pastors can do something to help bring some kind of balm, healing, and words of hope. While others read or gossip about such happenings and perhaps once or so in a lifetime experience such trauma, pastors step into such situations many times a year, perhaps hundreds of times during a lifetime of ministry.

Most pastors are not highly trained counselors. I majored in psychology in college and had a couple of seminary counseling classes. But working with rats in Skinner boxes and reading a book or two hardly prepared me for crisis counseling. I expect that most pastors feel as inadequate as I have about the task. We work on the fly; we learn on the run. God somehow uses us, and we chalk up the experience as on-the-job training.

## **Like most of ministry, crisis intervention should not be about us — our need to rescue people, our need to prove our worth, or our need to be successful.**

While it does not take an advanced degree in "crisistry" for the Spirit to work through us, it does not hurt to give the subject some forethought. Just as most people have a fire extinguisher in their kitchen because they want to be prepared for a fire, it is advisable for pastors to do some prior thinking about crises before the phone jangles and they run out the door with Bible in hand to help tip some sheep back on its feet.

In 1989, I had opportunity to consult with some excellent crisis counselors — both parish pastors and professional Christian counselors. *Christianity Today*, Inc., had done research on which pastoral-care crises pastors considered the most difficult. I was tasked with distilling the experts' wisdom on the nine greatest challenges of pastoral care: marital conflict and divorce, sexual misconduct, domestic violence and abuse, homosexuality, major illnesses and injuries, death of a child, death of a spouse, suicide, and alcohol and drug problems.

The Leadership Library book *Called Into Crisis*<sup>2</sup> resulted, providing insight into crisis counseling in general and how to handle various topics in particular. The volume can be downloaded electronically through <http://www.ChristianityTodayLibrary.com>.<sup>3</sup> Following are some of the lessons I learned and communicated in that process, plus an update for the particular circumstances pastors find themselves in today.

### **CRISIS MODE**

At the heart of a crisis is a sense of losing control. When one feels in control, even

difficult or highly troublesome matters can be handled routinely. But when we sense we are no longer in control, we enter a crisis. For example, driving on a rain-slicked road with limited visibility is more difficult, yet one motorist on. When the traffic signal turns red, however, and applying the brakes makes no difference because the car is hydroplaning, the driver is in a crisis. During a crisis, normal coping mechanisms may not work when one's life is careening out of control. Often people crash, either literally or figuratively. That is when pastors are needed.

When a pastor enters a crisis situation, he needs to make some quick assessments. Asking four questions will help a pastor decide how to unscramble what has been scrambled:

#### **Is this crisis the result of real or imagined factors?**

Those who perceive themselves to be in crisis are in crisis, but it is helpful for pastors to know what is behind the crisis. One woman repeatedly called the police because space aliens were trying to steal her thoughts by shooting special beams through her windows. One would guess that this woman's crisis was imagined — although it proved to be easily fixed when a cagey police sergeant advised her to cover her windows with aluminum foil to reflect the rays. But when I was called to comfort a family whose son had been electrocuted in a freak farm accident, there was nothing imagined about that circumstance. It is most helpful to know the facts of a situation.

#### **What history does the person bring into this crisis?**

People come into an experience with different levels of stress or coping ability. The woman who has just lost her job, buried her father, and had her husband walk out is likely to respond to getting arrested differently from a woman who is on top of the world. Life experiences and personality traits

enable some to cope better than others. Some people would benefit from a desk plaque that reads: "I can handle anything but adversity."

Our Christian faith and spiritual maturity often have a major impact on our ability to cope. It helps if a pastor can look beyond the immediate mess to see what resources or liabilities the person brings into his situation.

### **What support does the person have?**

One day the police called me to a condo. They were waiting with an elderly man for the coroner's office to remove the body of his wife who had died suddenly. This new widower had no church, no pastor. He did not know his neighbors. He had lost touch with his family, having alienated them through the years. He had no children. He had no friends. He and his wife had narrowed their circle to just the two of them, and now she was gone. He finally suggested that I call his stockbroker. That number was all he had. It was tragic — that man was in a crisis. Obviously, the greater a person's close network of support, the better his prospects are of managing a crisis.

### **What symptoms are present?**

Certainly heavy bleeding or a stopped heart signals a crisis, but other more subtle physiological symptoms may indicate one as well: headaches, vomiting, hyperventilation, and panic are examples. Mood is also an indicator. Mood indicators include feeling overwhelmed, hopeless, downcast, beaten down, desperate, or frantic. At their worst, the symptoms are the crisis: alcoholism, depression, and acting out are examples. While acute symptoms need care, symptoms often point toward the underlying problem.

Two fundamental questions remain. The first is: *Whose problem is this?* Pastors are wise to remember that God

and the participant are the ones who own the problem. Pastors can help, but it is not good to make the problem ours. One California pastor said, "If people try to hand the problem to me, I just hand it back and say, 'It's yours. How can I help you with it?'"

The second question is: *Why am I doing this?* Like most of ministry, crisis intervention should not be about us — our need to rescue people, our need to prove our worth, or our need to be successful. Jumping into a crisis is not easy. It is messy and risky. Much is unknown. A crisis takes time and can be inconvenient.

Pastors do not do crisis counseling for their own benefit. Pastors do crisis counseling to minister and to serve others. God calls pastors into crisis, to care for the sheep He loves. And the sheep sometimes need a hand.

## **TODAY'S REALITIES**

Since I wrote *Called Into Crisis*, nearly 2 decades have further etched the cultural landscape. While God and God's Word delivered to us by the Holy Spirit remain unmoved, society has shifted, social mores have been rewritten, and societal attitudes have drifted far from Christian moorings. This means the image and role of pastor as crisis counselor is on shakier ground than these roles were as recently as the 1980s.

For instance, I noticed while reviewing a crisis I intervened in 30 years ago that I related with a distraught young woman in ways that would not be prudent today: driving her places with no one else in the car, meeting with her alone, bringing her into our home to stay briefly with my wife and me.

My conduct was innocent; nothing improper happened. But a good sexual-misconduct policy categorically disallows such practices to avoid actual harm or the opportunity for suspicion or false accusations that *could* easily come from such naïve caring. Today, being platonic, godly minded, and well-intentioned does not fly. Sadly, pastors must be more cautious and protective.

Here are some other societal influences today that affect crisis intervention:

### **Post-Christendom**

A short time ago cultural values and Christian values were much the same. This is no longer the case. Christianity is not mainstream anymore. Many people do not understand Christianity. Christians — and especially pastors — are often gravely

**When a pastor enters a crisis situation, he needs to make some quick assessments. Asking four questions will help a pastor decide how to unscramble what has been scrambled.**

misunderstood, if not distrusted. At one time pastors could expect a measure of respect, honor, and trust, but they can no longer go into a crisis assuming such advantages.

Post-Christendom also means that a person's basic values may be at odds with Christianity. Take the valuing of life, for example. Not everyone thinks suicide should be prevented. One hears stories of crowds chanting, "Jump! Jump!" to a potential suicide victim who is perched high on a ledge. Pastors cannot assume that people share Christian values.

## Postmodernism and deconstructionism

These terms deal with how people think, which is much different from what it used to be. Rational, logical answers no longer carry the same weight. Truth and meaning are up for grabs — rather ephemeral and hardly worth worrying about,

## Ever since becoming a pastor, I've been pulled into some of the darkest, most bleak, most wrenching incidents in people's lives.

some say. Responses that once would have been effective in answering a parent's fundamental questions about the problem of evil in the death of a child now fall on mystified ears. Reading a Bible passage about God's unfailing love may well provoke a "So what?" shrug. To many, "your truth" can be wildly different than "my truth." There is also a great indifference about truth. Pastors cannot assume that people will automatically resonate with the kinds of help that have been traditionally provided.

## Individualism and entitlement

People have become extremely individualistic, desiring designer religion to match their personal whims. They expect to select their experience with God in the same manner they order the latte they prefer. As people are constantly barraged by advertising slogans, they also feel entitled to nonstop pleasure and fulfillment that is sure to frustrate and disappoint them in real life in a fallen world. As a result they set themselves up for enormous falls. When many hit the inevitable crisis, they are not wired to benefit from classic pastoral care. Pastors who plunge into their crisis may first need to figure out how to plug into their wiring system, which is alien to our way of thinking. We can assume that some people will react against the faith element implicit in our help.

## Moral relativism

Today, people consider pastors immoral for having an affair with a parishioner *not* because it violates God's sexual standards — which are hardly given a second thought — but because of unequal power in the relationship. Because of the lack of shared moral values, crises will have different dimensions and be much more complicated today. People may not agree that sexual infidelity is wrong per se, making it harder to pick up the pieces afterwards. People may consider God the villain if a spouse dies of alcoholism. In this case, a pastor must deal with the widow's anger against the One most capable of healing the hurt.

A "spouse" whose death causes a crisis may be a same-sex or live-in partner. Pastors cannot assume people will be on the same page with them regarding moral behavior anymore.

While the culture has changed, God has not. Neither have God's commands and promises. Those who may wonder if God even exists, those who debate His will for their life, those who get creative in molding false gods to fit their own

purposes — have crises, and may ultimately experience a crisis of faith, which is the greatest crisis of all. These people — confused and turned upside down, angry and lost, fallen and mistaken — remain the objects of God's love. They also remain the subjects of our care in times of crises, a care made more difficult by their challenges, but a care that is necessary. For those who are called into crisis, true Christian compassion will find a way. ■



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**IN THE NEXT ISSUE:** Pastoral Issues Surrounding Suicide by Richard D. Dobbins

### ENDNOTES

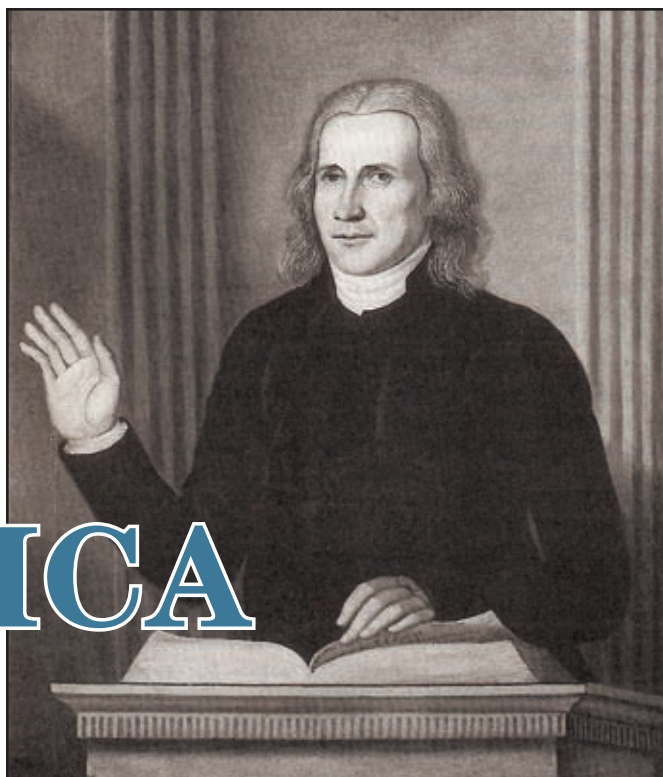
1. Ivan Doig, *This House of Sky: Landscapes of a Western Mind* (Eugene, Ore.: Harvest, 1978), 206.
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**"Do you promise to love, cherish, and protect her in sickness and in health and until Medicare can take over?"**

# Francis Asbury: SPARTAN APOSTLE of Early AMERICA



BY WILLIAM P. FARLEY

In October 1771, 5 years before the American Revolution, Francis Asbury (1745–1816), a 26-year-old Methodist missionary, disembarked from a British sailing vessel in Philadelphia. He was poor, uneducated, and unknown, but he was destined to become one of the most influential Christians in American history.

When Asbury arrived, there were only a handful of Methodists in North America.<sup>1</sup> Most Christians were Presbyterians, Congregationalists, or Anglican. But by 1850, 79 years later, 34 percent of Christians in North America were Methodist.<sup>2</sup>

“When Asbury came to America in 1771,” observed Mark Noll, “four Methodist ministers were caring for about 300 laypeople. When he died in 1816, there were 2,000 ministers and more than 200,000 Methodists in the States, and several thousand more in Canada.”<sup>3</sup>

During Asbury’s short life, Methodism grew from a small organization to America’s largest Protestant denomination. Because of this growth, notes Nancy Pearcy, some historians call the 19th century “the Methodist Age.”<sup>4</sup> Asbury’s Herculean labors, staggering self-sacrifice, and tenacious self-denial energized this tremendous expansion. Who was Francis Asbury, and how did he get such amazing results?

## BIOGRAPHY

Asbury was born in England in 1745. His parents, converted under the ministry of John Wesley about the time of their son’s birth, were fervent Christians. Under his parents’ faithful teaching and example, Asbury matured.

His father was poor and illiterate, so Asbury received little formal education. He was converted at age 13. By age 18, he was called by Wesley to preach. He began rising at 4 a.m. to pray and read Scripture. He continued this practice the rest of his life.

In 1771, he and four other men answered a call from Wesley to become missionaries to North America. His father, believing he would never see his son again, wept at his sailing. His intuition proved correct.

When Asbury arrived at Philadelphia, the few Methodists living in America were in big coastal cities such as New York and Baltimore. The colonial population was beginning to migrate west into the sparsely settled coastal plain between the Atlantic seaboard and the Alleghenies. The future was westward. Those living outside the big cities were dispersed across large areas and had little contact with other Christians. Asbury saw an opportunity and, like most entrepreneurs, capitalized aggressively.



Using Wesley's methods, Asbury formed preaching circuits in rural areas. He recruited and ordained young men to preach to congregations that formed near each circuit. They preached wherever hearers would gather: in barns, fields, living rooms, or later, at camp meetings. Congregations often numbered only 10 to 25 people.

After America had won her independence, Asbury mobilized his people. Prior to the Baltimore conference of 1784, Methodism was a lay movement attached to the Episcopal Church. At Baltimore, delegates formed a separate denomination, which they named the Methodist Episcopal Church. Asbury and Dr. Thomas Coke were the church's first appointed superintendents. However, Asbury's organizational talent, inspiring vision, and dedication quickly won the allegiance of his peers.

Asbury was now the de facto bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and he was determined to lead by example. Like Jesus, he became the servant of all. He denied himself worldly comforts, such as marriage and a home. He never earned more than \$80 in a year. He traveled by horseback an average of 5,000 miles per year, and often 50 miles a day. He crossed the Alleghenies 62 times. He never owned more than he could carry in his saddlebags. He preached daily, answered voluminous correspondence, and ordained hundreds of associate ministers.<sup>5</sup>

Asbury traveled most of the year, only resting a few weeks each winter in Charleston, South Carolina. He averaged 20 miles (about 5 hours) per day in the saddle. He wore out six horses, several dying under him. He traveled in muggy southern heat and New England's snow and ice. Nothing deterred him. Much of what is known about early America and Asbury comes from his journal. A typical winter entry reads: "The water froze as it ran from the horses nostrils. ... I have suffered a little by lodging in open houses this cold weather; but this is a very small thing when compared to what the dear Redeemer suffered for the salvation of precious souls."<sup>6</sup>

In Asbury's day, there were few hotels in the backwoods of America. When nightfall came, Asbury and his traveling companion would seek shelter by knocking on the closest door. They were seldom refused, but the accommodations were not

## **Asbury and his men were the Marines of the Christian life, the Spartans of Christian brotherhood, and ascetics given arduously to the great task of evangelism.**

great. Often they slept in drafty cabins, a piece of buckskin separating them from the cold, dirt floor. Flea- and lice-infested animals often bedded a few feet away. Dry bread and hemlock tea were served for breakfast.

In spite of his many illnesses, Asbury maintained this routine for more than 30 years until 1816, when, at age 71, he died. *Christian History Magazine* notes, "It is estimated that in Asbury's lifetime he preached well over 16,000 sermons, ordained more than 4,000 preachers, traveled on horseback or (when he was too old for that) in carriages 270,000 miles."<sup>7</sup>

He persevered despite the arthritis, tuberculosis, and liver failure that came with old age. Asbury's life epitomized Jesus' words: "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head" (Matthew 8:20).

When Asbury died, he was still attempting to travel his 5,000-mile annual circuit. What motivated him to work this relentlessly? Passion for the lost. When faced with a choice of studying or itinerating, Asbury said: "If you can do but one, let your studies alone. I would throw by all the libraries in the world rather than be guilty of

the loss of one soul."<sup>8</sup> In this pursuit, he and those he ordained traversed every rural trail and rutted path looking for any settler who had not heard the gospel. In about 1800, a frustrated Presbyterian preacher in Kentucky wrote: "For several days I traveled from settlement to settlement, on my errand of good, but into every hovel I entered, I learned that the Methodist missionary had been there before me."<sup>9</sup>

Asbury's example brought forth the same heroic exertions from his disciples. He never asked them to do anything he did not do first. When the average Congregational pastor made \$400 per year, Asbury paid his itinerant pastors \$60 and expected them to live a life of self-denial. The stamina and self-denial of Asbury's troops is legendary. Most were poor, uneducated, and single. The hardships of their itinerant lifestyle took their toll.

In 1855, Abel Stevens studied 672 circuit riders. Fifty-seven percent lasted less than 12 years on the job. Half died by age 30, 200 in the first 5 years. Most died by age 40.<sup>10</sup> Asbury and his men were the Marines of the Christian life, the Spartans of Christian brotherhood, and ascetics given arduously to the great task of evangelism. God used them greatly.

"What is remarkable about Asbury's career," writes Historian, Nathan Hatch, "is his success in stamping personal convictions indelibly upon an emerging movement."<sup>11</sup> For a generation after his death, Asbury's example continued to motivate this kind of dedication and sacrifice.

Asbury's impact on American Christianity was nothing less than phenomenal. As the population spilled west over the Alleghenies into Kentucky, Indiana, and beyond, the Methodist circuit riders rode the crest of this wave, extracting spoils for Christ and His kingdom.

Their success did not come at the expense of the message. Asbury and those he ordained preached vigorously

on the Judgment Seat of Christ, the terrors of God's law, the horrors of hell, the awfulness of sin, and the majestic mercy of a redeeming Savior. This message, rather than causing an impediment to church growth, was enormously successful.

## ASBURY'S STRENGTHS

Asbury's power of perseverance and his single-minded devotion to Christ's cause were exemplary. Nothing but significant health problems deterred him from his arduous schedule. He continued in spite of violent and persistent headaches, constant hemorrhoids (a significant problem for a man on horseback), bouts of depression, dissensions in leadership, and criticism.

His humility is legendary. He was quick to forgive, quick to overlook an insult, and the first to admit faults in conflict.

His self-denial and willingness to suffer to reach the lost made him stand out among his peers. Passionate love for those without Christ drove him. Like Paul he could boast, "Death is at work in us, but life is at work in you" (2 Corinthians 4:12). And, like Paul, the amazing resurrection life that followed Asbury's ministry was in direct proportion to his death.

He was zealous for personal holiness. Like most Methodists, he believed in the possibility of sinless perfection through instant sanctification by a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>12</sup> So, he strove relentlessly for personal holiness in thought, word, and deed. His biographer notes, "The quest for holiness is the primary thesis of his journal, which is quite possibly the most exhaustive account of introspective spiritual formation that we have from any American before the Civil War."<sup>13</sup> Men who traveled with him and knew him well remarked how utterly dead to the world and its allurements he had become.

## Asbury's example brought forth the same heroic exertions from his disciples. He never asked them to do anything he did not do first.

Asbury's greatest strength was his example. He motivated a small army of dedicated followers to heed Christ's words: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23).

## ASBURY'S WEAKNESSES

Like all great men, he was imperfect. Many complained of his autocratic, sometimes overbearing, personality. The power of the Methodist Episcopal church resided with Asbury, and sometimes he was too quick to criticize, make decisions, or bring judgment. "Asbury offended most of the leaders with whom he worked, sooner or later," notes his biographer. He spent much time trying to resolve conflict.

He suffered from acute restlessness. "Resting," observes Salter, "was something for which his temperament had no toleration."<sup>14</sup> At times he needed to rest, but he could not. His inner compulsions drove him. Like many of us, his strength was also his weakness.

Last, Asbury's ministry suffered from his lack of interest in theology. Although he read prolifically, taught himself Greek, Hebrew, and Latin, he had little interest in the formal study of God. He was too busy being busy. "A systematic doctrine of God does not exist in Asbury's writing; he was interested only in the operation of God within the soul,"<sup>15</sup> observes his biographer. For Asbury, "theology was not about who God was; it was about what God did."<sup>16</sup>

Ultimately, Asbury's failure to grapple with the doctrine of God probably contributed to his restless moralism. It also contributed to an anti-intellectualism that has hindered American Evangelicalism ever since.<sup>17</sup>

## LESSONS FROM ASBURY FOR TODAY'S PASTOR

The first lesson pastors can learn from Asbury is the power, importance, and impact of personal example. Asbury reproduced himself in his followers. His cadre was "bound together by strict rule and discipline under one leader, a sort of religious military order," notes Hatch.<sup>18</sup> Behind this success was the personal magnetism of Asbury's self-denying example. Asbury took to heart Paul's injunction to his followers, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1).



Asbury knew that for a Christian leader, holiness is the chief thing. He was convinced that his actions must not contradict his message.

The second lesson pastors can learn from Asbury is that there is a place for celibacy. For Asbury, marriage would have been a disaster. God called him to remain single, and he responded. Is it possible that some 21st-century ministries might be conducive to the celibate life?

The third lesson pastors can learn from Asbury is that God uses earthen vessels. He delights to magnify His power through human weakness. Many might criticize Asbury's autocratic leadership, but God used him greatly, and through him gave the church a glorious legacy. God uses different and diverse personalities to accomplish his work. But ultimately, love is the test of any leader. Asbury was a man matured in the love of God.

Historian Paul Johnson has observed, "Great events in history are determined by all kinds of factors, but the most important single one is always the quality of the people in charge."<sup>19</sup> Methodism prospered, grew, and dominated early American Church history because of one factor, the quality of Francis Asbury's leadership. May God raise up men like him today.

History is His Story! ■



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#### ENDNOTES

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15. *Ibid.*, 332.
16. *Ibid.*, 333.
17. Percy, chap. 9–11.
18. Hatch, 82.
19. Salter, 359; quoted from Paul Johnson, *A History of the American People* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1999), 128.

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# Prodigal in the Parsonage

BY JUDI BRADDY



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Is there anything more devastating for a minister who is setting out to win the world than to find that he is losing his own children? What a paradox. Here he is, the spiritual quarterback, running the ball to the end zone while his kids are tearing down the goal posts and burning them in protest before the crowd. While fledglings in the faith may make a wrong play here or there, the pastor is expected to strategize and call the spiritual shots.

At the first sign of trouble, questions become silent specters that haunt our thoughts and prayers. How can this possibly be happening? We've tried to do everything right. Where did we go wrong? Even more frightening is hearing these same questions echoed from the pews.

This is a familiar scenario for my husband, Jim, and me. As ministers and the parents of an adult prodigal son, we understand firsthand the dilemma a

pastor faces when he is caught between the church and his family, and the issues that must be resolved if he is to balance both without losing either.

For us, this devastating drama began nearly 20 years ago. The first sign of trouble appeared soon after we accepted the call to pastor a new church — one with great potential, but limited resources. This meant our children would need to be taken out of Christian school and placed back into public schools. For our two elementary-age boys it was not a drastic change. But our oldest son, who had just turned 13 and entered 8th grade, was thrust into adolescent crisis. At first we hoped that this trauma was temporary. After all, our boys had weathered many previous ministry moves. Our son had adjusted before. He would adjust again.

He did not.

For reasons we may never fully understand, his unhappiness escalated into a rebellion of unparalleled proportions. During the months ahead we trudged into frightening and unfamiliar territory as our son's anger and frustration turned inward. Soon our entire family was involved in his struggles. With no warning signs posted, we entered a dark tunnel of hurt and pain that would soon send us careening down a long road strewn with the wreckage of his poor choices along with the resulting consequences. It was an unexpected journey and one we could never have been prepared for. Our journey, we discovered, parallels that of many other ministry families.

Sadly, many Christians today are experiencing the pain of having a child or close relative walk away from faith. Can there be any doubt that the enemy is targeting both children and parents? Yet in this spiritual conflict, it is vitally important to God's kingdom that we do not succumb to discouragement



and defeat, that we remain faithful to our calling and our families.

Thankfully, through the years we have come to see God's greater purpose in the pain. It has become our mission to share these practical perspectives on how the challenges of having a prodigal child can affect ministry issues. But more so, to share the ways our lives, families, and ministries can be enriched if we stay the course and apply the lessons.

Yet, learning God's greater purpose was not without some dark times of personal doubt and despair.

## FIGHTING THE FEELINGS OF FAILURE

Without question, the initial reaction common to pastors whose children reject the faith is that of utter personal failure. Many see resignation as the only honorable way out. There is just one small problem.

Where does a pastor go to resign? He can hand the church board a piece of official stationery indicating his intentions but, even though they invited him to this place of ministry, they did not issue his divine commission. That came from God whose "gifts and call are irrevocable" (Romans 11:29). A pastor may leave the church but he cannot just walk away from a lifetime calling.

Resigning may remove a pastor from the immediate pressures and embarrassment of his situation, but it does not eliminate the problem. It may even start a new cycle

## Is there anything more devastating for a minister who is setting out to win the world than to find that he is losing his own children?

of guilt, frustration, and failure. The last thing parents need when their children are facing an identity crisis is one of their own. The assurance that we remain in God's will provides shelter when everything else comes crashing down around us.

So, what should a pastor do when it becomes apparent that problems in the parsonage are not going away? There are too many variables for a one-size-fits-all answer. I can suggest that through the years we have seen many ministers give up too soon and lose their church, future ministry, family, and in extreme cases, their relationship with the Lord. That should never happen.

Remember, there is no more perfect pastor/parent than God. Yet, even with everything going for them, it did not take long for His firstborns to tumble into trouble. Like many preachers' kids, their turning from God boiled down to an identity problem that resulted in rebellion and some severe consequences. And, they also had some unsolicited support from a deceitful snake.

Remember, too, we are not the only shepherds struggling to save the home pasture. We must lay aside comparisons and critical thinking if we are to help ourselves and encourage each other.

God has called pastors for a purpose. Never doubt it for a moment. We must believe that, no matter how the present circumstances appear. More is happening in heaven than we can possibly know. Even so, we will continue to struggle with earthly emotions.

## RIDING THE ROLLER COASTER OF EMOTIONS

Ministers are called on to do difficult things, such as comforting those going through a life-threatening illness or death of a loved one. Through this

process, most pastors have become familiar with the five stages of grief: denial, anger, guilt, depression, and acceptance.

Dealing with a prodigal child can run that same gamut of emotions. Just like sickness or death, parents are grieving due to a frightening change, a devastating separation, and a real loss.

The problem is, ministers are good at hiding their emotions and managing around them. After all, someone has to keep the parish plates spinning. Fearing accusations of spiritual weakness or lack of faith, pastors may do the worst thing: minimize their feelings or suppress them entirely.

To grieve and acknowledge emotions is not a weakness. Nor, in the case of ministers, is it unspiritual. A normal range of emotion is part of the natural process in managing any difficult circumstance. Early in ministry I learned to allow myself to grieve over the frequent pastoral transitions. Otherwise, I could never have fully embraced the next.

Out-of-control emotions can render pastors ineffective and can even become counterproductive to God's work in our lives and our children's lives. So, how do we continue to function without being overwhelmed, embittered, or paralyzed by them?

Any student of Scripture knows the answer: It is in translation. We must find a way to translate spiritually what is happening on the most personal and poignant level of our lives to our congregation and others. If we can, we will relate more personally to people than we could behind a pulpit.

But one might say, "I am having a hard time translating this for myself. We must have blown it. Otherwise, we would not be going through this."

How do you know that?

Many years ago, I wrote two sermon quotes in my Bible that I refer to often: "God shows His confidence in us by the circumstances He sends our way" and "Circumstances do not reveal who we

will become as much as they reveal who we already are.” Maybe you do not like the circumstances or the person that has been revealed through them. On the other hand, you may be surprised how well you have weathered the storm. Either way, we learn much about ourselves in the process. And even more about how God sees us. After many years of believing Him, is it not amazing and humbling to realize that He also believes in us?

The big question is: Can we accept the fact God has purposely chosen us for this challenge? Perhaps we resist, thinking acceptance means we have resigned ourselves to our children’s situation. Not at all. From His own Word, we know it is not God’s desire that any, including our precious prodigals, should perish (2 Peter 3:9). He never stops seeking, so we must never stop praying and believing for their safe return. Rather we come to see the situation not as a celestial crisis, but as divine design.

God knows what has happened in our children’s lives and why. Our challenge is to continue believing that God is not only present, but also active in our lives. This confidence frees us to move ahead, committed not only to fulfilling our duty to ministry, but also devoting our lives to God’s heavenly purpose on earth.

To be honest, I prayed for years for divine insight. I analyzed our situation until my brain hurt. I wore a rut (and often found myself in one) backpedaling to where the problem started, only to pump wearily back carrying the same unanswered questions. Have we endured years of pain because we made our son leave a school he liked? Would he have made better choices for his future had we stayed? Or, were there things already in play that we could never have predicted or anticipated?

My conclusion, given the various contributing factors, is there is no single,

earthly answer. Dealing with personalities, perceptions, and personal choices is much more complicated than that. We may come to understand some of what has transpired; other factors only eternity will reveal.

Still, the process has to count for something. For us, there is no question that God has been using the circumstances to do much work in our lives. One invaluable lesson we learned is that imperfection should not be seen as failure. Rather, we should accept that to be human is to be imperfect and, with that recognition, admit our great need for God. This realization has kept us humble in our own sight so we could be real before others.

In spite of the personal pain, Jim and I stayed the course in ministry, and it has rewarded us on many levels. It has not been easy. But as we have fought with the enemy for our children and sought God for wisdom, our prayer muscles have been strengthened and we have had to keep our sword sharpened. Not bad qualities for a minister. Our situation has opened doors of ministry, allowing us to touch hearts and lives in ways and places we never imagined.

Here are a few observations from our journey that may encourage you in your own.

## ANSWERING TO THE COMMUNITY

Having to answer to the community, church, and peers for the negative actions of our wayward children can be hurtful and humiliating. It can also provide incredible opportunities to reach and encourage those we might not have otherwise met. This means, at some point, we must stop worrying about what others think, but instead, seeking what Christ requires in each situation.

## MINIMIZING COLLATERAL DAMAGE

Inevitably, ministers’ kids get caught in the crossfire of church problems and hurtful circumstances. But we can disarm the enemy by taking time to consider our reactions carefully and prayerfully. If the damage is already done, then we can ask God for the words and wisdom to explain the harsh realities of ministry life.

Even then, much depends on the child’s own susceptibility. And the devil knows all about that.

## PUTTING THE BLAME WHERE IT BELONGS

As the war against rebellion rages, it is imperative to remember that the enemy is not our child, our church, or even those who hurt us, deliberately or not. Our enemy is Satan, the evil accuser, who wants to discourage us from pursuing God and accomplishing His will. We must determine daily to focus our energy on his defeat, armed with weapons divinely designed to demolish his strongholds (Ephesians 6:12–18).

## KEEPING HEART AND HOME TOGETHER

Home is the stage where real-life dramas play out, but a prodigal’s performance can jeopardize the whole playhouse. Marriages become strained as parents disagree on appropriate discipline. Siblings are torn in their loyalties. Dissimilar ways of handling stress can create a communication chasm. Occasionally, the burden is compounded by unsolicited advice and extenuating circumstances.

As tough as the home turf can become, it pays to keep your children there as long as possible while they are young. Use every minute to make a positive influence, build traditions, and create memories — things that your children will miss enough as they journey down the prodigal path to be drawn back home

again. Home, even one with some painful memories, is still the place you hang your heart.

## SEEKING WISE COUNSEL

There were times when Jim and I wanted to run away from home. But no matter how frayed our nerves became, we were committed to keeping our marriage and family intact. For us, this meant seeking professional Christian counsel — an area where some ministers struggle for a variety of reasons. Yet, what can be more honest and set a better example than acknowledging our own problems? Otherwise, we only deceive others and ourselves, disastrously delaying the help our families need.

## CONCLUSION

The longer our children wander, the more complicated things become, and the more parents must ask God for special wisdom to know when and how much to intervene. Parents must push through their own personal pain and feelings of rejection. This is no small task. Undoubtedly, some will battle with hurt and anger over what has transpired. Only when we seek God for divine emotional redirection, do we begin to see the promising possibilities of how He will use the pain for our growth and His glory.

Perhaps it will help to consider these encouraging research statistics:

- Faith rejection is more about searching for truth than it is about rejecting it.
- Eighty-six percent of prodigals eventually return to faith.
- Ninety-three percent of current pastors and Christian leaders who went through a fairly or extremely serious faith rejection came back stronger than ever.

It should be no surprise that prodigals make some of the best pastors. Who better to preach firsthand the perils of the pigpen?

Undoubtedly, it is when we are, as my dad used to say, “between a rock and a hard place,” that living is most difficult. Having to determine how we will live with the consequences of our children’s choices and trying to remain encouraged when circumstances are weighing us down, is difficult.

Yet, we know with God’s help all things are possible. It boils down to this, trust Him and keep putting one foot in front of the other. Then, do not be surprised if down the road you find yourself between a rock and a God place.

Our children will always be the most important people in the world to us. We cannot take our earthly possessions to heaven, but we can influence our children to serve God and, thereby, take them to heaven. So, believing that God is already orchestrating the outcome, let’s start supervising the celebration.

## IN THE NEXT ISSUE

As the war against rebellion rages, it is imperative to remember that the enemy

is not our child, our church, or even those who hurt us, whether deliberately or not. Our enemy is Satan, the evil accuser, who wants to discourage us from pursuing God and accomplishing His will. Believing that the battle belongs to the Lord, we must determine daily to focus our energy on the devil’s defeat by arming ourselves with the weapons divinely designed to demolish his strongholds.

In the next issue of *Enrichment* my article, “Battle Plan,” will focus on the familiar fighting formula in Ephesians 6:12–18 from a “vicar’s-eye” view. Until then, I will let you borrow one of my favorite life verses: “Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day” (2 Timothy 1:12). ■



**Judi Braddy** is a writer, motivational speaker, and credentialed Assemblies of God minister. This article was adapted from her book, *Prodigal in the Parsonage: Encouragement for Ministry Leaders Whose Child Rejects Faith*. For more information about her writing and speaking, visit her website at <http://www.judibraddy.com> or contact her by e-mail at [judibraddy@aol.com](mailto:judibraddy@aol.com).

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# Sufficient as Ministers

BY STEPHEN PHILLIP GREEN

*“Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers for the new covenant”  
(2 Corinthians 3:5,6).<sup>1</sup>*

**I**n a world filled with expectations of success and achievement, questions of adequacy or ability challenge our ministry. Paul struggled with similar questions: *Am I adequate to minister to these people?* or *How can I accomplish this work?* Paul’s response reveals his personal battles with self-confidence, and his public battles concerning his apostleship.

Paul taught that the key to a happy, healthy, and hope-filled ministry is in understanding that our sufficiency is in Christ, not in ourselves. First, God has made pastors partakers of His grace and mercy. Second, we are ministers of hope and healing to a sin-weary world. Paul showed that God calls, equips, and declares pastors competent to proclaim His gospel to the ends of the earth.

As hungry men are drawn by the smell

of barbecued ribs, a minister who is on fire for God draws spiritually hungry people. Paul’s earlier descriptive words that Christians are “the aroma of life leading to life” (2 Corinthians 2:16) refer to the temple where the stench of animals, blood, waste, and death was masked by the aroma of meat roasting on the altar. The evocative smell of the sacrifice built faith in the people’s hearts. People were reminded that their sins were forgiven, and families could be restored to a right relationship with God.

“And who is sufficient for these things?” (2 Corinthians 2:16). Some may have felt a bull sacrificed on the altar was not adequate to atone for their sins, much less the sins of Israel. But a bull was what God commanded the Children of Israel to offer; and more important, was what He accepted.

God calls people to ministry in spite of their frailty. Challenges to the Christian’s call to minister will come from within and without, but those walking with God’s grace and Paul’s encouragement can truly be “sufficient as ministers.”

The Greek adjective *hikanos* is translated “sufficient” (“to have arrived or to come in season”). Sufficiency describes the readiness, ability, competence, and worthiness of Paul’s ministry team in spite of what they saw in themselves. Paul’s own struggles with his qualifications (Philippians 3:5; 1 Corinthians 15:9) were overcome by his declaration that God has “made us sufficient as ministers” of the gospel (2 Corinthians 3:5,6). Our competence is not found in our personal talents or



attributes, but only in the grace of God. God has called and commissioned us for a ministry far beyond our own meager capabilities.

Three building blocks are necessary for pastors to reach this level of self-assurance. First, they must have a steadfast confidence in God's personal call. Second, they must maintain an undying commitment to the cause of Jesus Christ.

## **Challenges to the Christian's call to minister will come from within and without, but those walking with God's grace and Paul's encouragement can truly be "sufficient as ministers."**

Third, they must nurture and develop a compassion for the people that surround them. Each of these convictions draws from far deeper wells than pastors will ever find in themselves, so they must be sustained and refreshed from a greater source: God.

### **CONFIDENCE IN OUR CALLING**

The call of God is a commission to serve His kingdom. God does not call people because of their talents or skills. He sends pastors to minister in ways that are beyond their abilities so He might do the work through them.

Elisha was plowing a field when Elijah threw his mantle on him. He heard the call to follow the prophet. He did follow, and God prepared him for future ministry. After Elijah's home going, Elisha immediately tested God's calling by striking the water with Elijah's mantle and saying, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" (2 Kings 2:14). The waters parted, and Elisha received his answer. God was with Elisha at the river, even though Elijah was no longer with him. Elisha's confidence grew as he moved out from Elijah's shadow and ministered beyond his own abilities and understanding.

Many ministers struggle with feelings of inadequacy. They wrestle with common earthly problems and may feel like saints in sinners' bodies, even as they counsel, preach, or teach God's Word. The truth, however, is that a minister's confidence cannot be in himself, but must be in God who has "made us sufficient as ministers" to our neighbors and world. Imperfect though pastors are, God's stamp of approval remains on those He has called, and they can minister confidently to His people.

### **COMMITMENT TO OUR CAUSE**

The minister's cause is rooted in Jesus dying for humanity's sins, thereby reconciling God and man. God's love for sinful man is our greatest message, and reconciliation with Him is the world's greatest hope. Paul declared "we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:20). Those who have been freed of their earthly burden of sin take up the heavenly burden of God. Following the example of Jesus, they bring men to repentance and reconciliation with God.

The cause ministers proclaim demands a costly commitment. Accepting or rejecting the gospel brings eternal ramifications for the hearers. But the proclaimer is also obligated to fulfill the call with faithfulness and obedience. The call of God must overshadow other interests and become priority in a minister's walk with God. Although a pastor's toil is earthly, his cause is heavenly. His words become his

plow, his pen becomes a scythe, and his gain is reaping in the harvest fields of humanity.

If a minister's commitment to God's imperial call wavers, his message to unbelievers will also be unsteady and unconvincing. Pastors must defiantly challenge the world's ideals, boldly proclaim the gospel, and zealously bring into the Kingdom those seeking to be reconciled with God. A pastor's commitment is dependent on personal interaction with the Word of God, including daily fellowship with God in prayer. Commitment brings vision to one's call, value to his message, and victory to the struggling souls who look to God's minister for help and hope.

### **COMPASSION FOR OUR CROWD**

Jesus loved the crowds. His time walking the earth was largely spent teaching, touching, and talking with people. Jesus demonstrated compassion for people by empathizing with them. He taught, disciplined, and corrected their misguided ideas. He wept with them. Most of all, Jesus loved them.

Jesus was not a high priest who must stand apart from "the feelings of our infirmities," but He "was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). His humanity provided the complete atoning sacrifice for mankind's salvation. The sacrifice of bulls and goats only covered man's sins, but Jesus paid the full penalty for all of mankind's sin by taking our sins upon himself, "that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness" (1 Peter 2:24, KJV).

The minister's sufficiency to reach people for God is seen in this example. Incarnate humanity is called to reach past its own weak flesh to minister spiritually to people bound by their sinful flesh. This privilege of flesh ministering to spirit is accomplished by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit works through our imperfections to demonstrate God's

grace and power to the spiritually hungry within our sphere of influence. God uses our frail and finite humanity to consummate His great and infinite plan of reconciling those who will come to Him.

The crowd presents many opportunities to minister. By entering into the crowd, pastors can minister to the people who surround them. By engaging the crowd, pastors teach, learn, and leave some of themselves (and Jesus) with them. Well-meaning disciples often tried to protect Jesus from the crowd, but His greatest miracles occurred when the desperate cry of a blind man or the searching arm of a diseased woman touched Him. Jesus loved people, and they loved Him.

Paul had his struggles with his perception of himself (2 Corinthians 12:7–12). Perhaps being taller, having good vision, or speaking eloquently would have given

him more confidence. Evidently, God did not think these were prerequisites for Paul's ministry. Instead, He purposely used Paul's infirmities to emphasize His grace and power in the apostle's life, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is

## Commitment brings vision to one's call, value to his message, and victory to the struggling souls who look to God's minister for help and hope.

made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9). Paul's response: "Therefore, most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, *that the power of Christ may rest upon me*" (2 Corinthians 12:9, italics added).

Do pastors, like Paul, ever doubt their ability to fulfill God's call on their life? Do pastors ever fret over how others perceive their ministry? Paul's achievements in ministry were possible by the trust he maintained in God's plan and purpose for his life. God has given pastors everything they need to accomplish His calling. He has made them *hikanos* — sufficient as ministers to the people of God. ■



**Stephen Phillip Green** is a licensed minister, and lives in Springfield, Missouri.

### ENDNOTE

1. Unless indicated, Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Version (NKJV). Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.



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# Broken in All the Right Places:

## Finding **HOPE** When **LIFE** Falls Apart



ISTOCK PHOTO

BY GAYLORD A. LEMKE

I cut my eyeteeth on Mother Goose nursery rhymes. I recall a tattered, dog-eared volume that made its home on my nightstand. One of my favorite illustrations depicted Humpty Dumpty teetering precariously on a brick wall. In the next frame he tumbles from the wall to his legendary, shattering experience. I have always felt badly for poor, unfortunate Humpty. I remember trying to glue broken eggshells back together again. In my naive understanding I thought success would spell hope for Humpty Dumpty's rebirth. Despite my best efforts, the operation was a miserable failure.

Recently, when a series of devastating events left my world in ruins, I identified with Humpty Dumpty. In my struggle to understand why this was happening to me, I faced a daily battle with the tormenting voices of hopelessness and shame. I felt a sense of abandonment by God. This season of intense brokenness stripped away my false security and brought me face-to-face with the shallow nature of my faith. The journey has taken me from the valley of the shadow of death to a renewed awareness of God's constant presence and unique ability to put the pieces of my fractured existence back together again.

Have you been broken lately? If not, sooner or later life will test the stuff from which you are made. Someone said tough times make a person either bitter or better. So, how can a person emerge from the furnace of adversity as a choice instrument refined by the flames instead of dross to be discarded? To answer this question, consider two profiles of brokenness.

### **BROKEN IN ALL THE WRONG PLACES**

Maybe, like me, you went through a clumsy stage as a child. One day I tripped over my feet, fell headlong into a display case, and shattered a prized vase that had been given to my mother when she left home. After collecting the fragments, I used hobby cement to restore the treasure. I thought I had done a great job. But later that week, when my mother was dusting, she held up the vase and screamed, "Where did all these cracks come from?"

Have you ever known people whose lives resemble my mother's vase? At first glance they seem to have their life all together; on closer inspection, however, the jagged edges of makeshift repairs loom large. Sometimes these *walking wounded* are identified by their pleas for pity. Touch where they hurt and a flood of relentless emotion pours forth. Others are unresponsive stoics who fortify themselves against the threat of future wounds. Like Simon and Garfunkel's 1960s anthem, they declare, "I am a rock. I am an island. A rock feels no pain, and an island never cries."

I relate to a third group. In general, this group appears to be well-adjusted. However, press their hot buttons — their areas of unresolved hurt — and they erupt in a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde tirade that leaves the innocent party bewildered and wondering what they did wrong. Apparently, when people try to repair the damage inflicted by the school of hard knocks, they eventually look much like my mother's vase — stuck back together, but the cracks are painfully evident.



## BROKEN IN ALL THE RIGHT PLACES

Mother had another vase. It was finished with a glaze that produced superficial, hairline fissures. Over time, these narrow cracks became ornate patterns. I was fascinated by this vase and marveled at its capacity to hold water in spite of obvious flaws.

Occasionally, we meet individuals who, like this piece of pottery, bear the marks of suffering, yet grace and wisdom emanate from their lives like sweet perfume. Instead of sympathy, they evoke admiration. A transparent sincerity replaces hardness and beckons others to embrace the path they have trod. What is their secret? Perhaps they have learned from a loaf of bread.

As a young man I attended a youth camp. The speaker's theme was dealing with life's hurts. He explained that the world exerts a downward spiritual pull on people. A continual exposure to evil produces a sclerosis of the soul that dulls sensitivity to God and compassion for others. To illustrate his point he emptied a pitcher of water over a loaf of French bread. Nearly all the water ran off the bread and collected into a pan underneath. He explained that just as the bread's crust sheds water, a callous heart impedes the Holy Spirit's penetration into our lives. Taking the loaf in his hands, the speaker broke through the crust by plunging his fingers deep into the loaf, exposing its doughy heart to our view. Again, he poured the water over the bread. The thirsty mound absorbed it like a sponge. When God allows pain in our lives, His purpose is to break apart the encrusted veneer of our hardened existence so His power can penetrate to our inmost being.

Our speaker was not finished. Holding the now saturated loaf, he began squeezing it until a milky mixture of water and bread poured forth. When a person allows God to break him in the right places, something unexpected happens: his response to stress and

strain is transformed, and a unique blend of the natural immersed in the supernatural bubbles up from deep inside. Jesus said, "If you are thirsty, come to me! If you believe in me, come and drink! For the Scriptures declare that rivers of living water will flow out from within" (John 7:37,38).<sup>1</sup> Only those whose hearts have been broken open by ageless, loving hands can provide living water to quench the thirst of a parched humanity. The Holy Spirit is the life-giving water, but we are the vessels.

## MOVING FROM PROBLEM TO PROMISE

God made a promise through the prophet Jeremiah to a group of expatriates whose future was in doubt: "I will come and do for you all the good things I have promised and I will bring you home again. For I know the plans I have for you. They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope" (Jeremiah 29:10,11). Adversity tests our faith in God's sovereignty and our trust in His goodness. Do we believe God is in control and, — in ways often beyond our grasp — does He cause everything to work together for our good? (Romans 8:28). Will God, at just the right moment, give His children all the good things he has promised?

When we collide with the unfairness of life, questions such as, *Why me? Why now?* or even, *Why did God ... ?* testify to our desperate need for answers. In our effort to make sense of life we must seek for appropriate explanations. A lifelong mentor encouraged me to shift my focus from problem to promise by asking, "What now, God? What can I learn from this situation? What will You reveal about Your plan for my future? What's next for me, Lord?"

Moses lived with failure for 40 years before his burning-bush assignment. Little is known of this period in his life, but it was likely a season filled with gnawing questions. In Psalm 90, his passionate prayer displays a hard-earned confidence in God's ability to redeem past setbacks for future blessing: "Give us gladness in proportion to our former misery! Replace the evil years with good. Let us see your miracles again; let our children see your glory at work. And may the Lord our God show us his approval and make our efforts successful" (verses 15–17). When we surrender our trampled dreams to God, He tenderly gathers them up in His everlasting arms where they are recreated and woven back into our lives. Then He draws us close and whispers, "Don't worry; it's all in My plan."

## A NEW BEGINNING

A less familiar version of Humpty Dumpty concludes, "Threescore men, and threescore more, cannot put Humpty Dumpty where he was before." Humpty's great fall changed everything. No amount of effort could erase the sad outcome. The sudden recognition that life will never be the same injects a dose of bitter reality into our brokenness. A chapter has closed, and we are left with gnawing doubts and fears about our future. There is a sense of profound loss that must be resolved before we can move forward.

In my situation, initial shock was replaced by disbelief, anger, and even bitterness. I tried to play "Let's Make a Deal" with God, hoping I could somehow bargain my way out of my difficulties and back into familiar territory. Only when I accepted my circumstances was I ready to consider the possibility that, although it would be different, life might also be better.

Sometimes, disappointments over past failures and lost opportunities complicate recovery. As persecutor of the Early Church, the apostle Paul had good reason to regret his past. Yet, his words reveal an individual who was anything but defeated: "I am still not all I should be, but I am focusing all my energies on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I strain to reach the end of the race and receive the prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us up to heaven" (Philippians 3:13,14). Without minimizing his shortcomings



Paul chose to concentrate on future triumph. At the end of his life he was able to declare, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful. And now the prize awaits me — the crown of righteousness that the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that great day of his return” (2 Timothy 4:7,8). When blindsided by adversity it is easy to lose perspective. People forget, “My help comes from the Lord, who made the heavens and the earth! He will not let you stumble and fall; the one who watches over you will not sleep” (Psalm 121:2,3). God is not caught unaware by our circumstances. This same Lord “heals the brokenhearted,

## Only those whose hearts have been broken open by ageless, loving hands can provide living water to quench the thirst of a parched humanity.

binding up their wounds” (Psalm 147:3). God has already fashioned a response to life’s injustices. His definitive reply to brokenness will come in the form of a new heaven and earth, free from corruption (see Revelation 21:1). Meanwhile, Christians can experience a foretaste of that ultimate restoration. However, those who cling to the past are unable to take hold of the future God has prepared. People are healed when they refuse to nurse or curse what has happened before, looking instead for the open window of opportunity following the closed door. In the midst of life’s heartaches, God has not forgotten us. He may be preparing a new beginning where He is central in our life.

### WE’RE NOT HOME YET

Life is hard. Suffering eventually impacts our lives. People may emerge from brokenness with renewed purpose and hope for the future. The pain, however, may last a lifetime. Beaten, shipwrecked, and misunderstood, Paul knew something about life’s hardships. His conclusion was: “Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will give us later” (Romans 8:18). I like how Eugene Peterson expresses this verse in THE MESSAGE: “That’s why I don’t think there’s any comparison between the present hard times and the coming good times.”<sup>2</sup> Paul encourages Christians to cultivate an eternal perspective — a steadfast confidence that, regardless of present circumstances, the best is yet to come. Our survival sometimes hangs on a single phrase: This, too, will pass. Life will not always be this difficult; there is a golden, never-ending day ahead filled only with joy.

A veteran missionary and his wife returned home after many years of service. Their failing health and meager financial resources left little hope for a fulfilling retirement. It happened that they booked passage on the same ocean liner that carried President Theodore Roosevelt. When the missionaries arrived in New York City, fanfare and enthusiastic crowds greeted the president. The haggard missionary couple slipped from the ship’s berth into the shadows.

Later that night the missionary bitterly complained to his wife, “We have faithfully served the Lord all these years and have nothing to show for our sacrifice. The president was welcomed by thousands of cheering people to the strains of ‘Hail to the Chief.’ We have poured out our lives for others, and yet there was no one to meet us when we arrived home. God isn’t being fair.”

With a knowing look, the missionary’s wife admonished her husband, “Go into the bedroom and pray through your feelings.”

Later, the old man returned with a tender expression on his face.

“Well, did you talk to God about your problem?” his wife asked.

“Yes, I did,” he replied. “I pleaded my case before Him, explaining how wrong it was that the president enjoyed every benefit and privilege while we had nothing.”

“What did God say to you?” she questioned.

“He agreed with me. He acknowledged that we have little of this world’s treasure in return for all our labor and dedication. Then He reminded me of one thing.”

“What’s that?” his wife questioned.

“He asked me if I had forgotten that we’re not home yet.”<sup>3</sup>

In Humpty Dumpty’s mythical realm, all the king’s resources could not change his terrible fate. However, Mother Goose got it wrong. An all-powerful King is moved with compassion by our helpless condition. He can do what seems impossible to those who are hurting. He can bring life from death, hope from despair, and wholeness from brokenness. When people commit the wretched pieces of their lives into His care, they discover His matchless ability to put their lives back together again. Like my mother’s pottery, Christians become precious works of art, *broken in all the right places.* ■



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#### ENDNOTES

1. Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, Illinois 60189. All rights reserved.

2. THE MESSAGE: The Bible in Contemporary Language. This edition issued by contractual arrangement with NavPress, a division of The Navigators, U.S.A. Originally published by NavPress in English as The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language Copyright © 2002 by Eugene Peterson. All rights reserved.

3. This missionary story is common online and is told with various changes. The author is unknown and, to our knowledge, this event cannot be verified. A similar story has been published in Ray Stedman, *Talking to My Father: What Jesus Teaches About Prayer* (Sisters, Ore.: Multnomah, 1984) and James S. Hewett, *Illustrations Unlimited* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1988), 172.

Preaching on giving and stewardship can be challenging. My introduction to this reality took me by surprise nearly 20 years ago. I was a new pastor attending our annual men's retreat. A group of us were talking after supper when the subject of giving came up. An influential (wealthy) deacon announced boldly, "Here's my theory. The church is like a black hole. No matter how much you give, they always want more." After this experience, imagine how thrilled I was to preach on giving. Revival seemed far away.

For years I allowed this brother to stifle my growth as a stewardship leader. I preached on stewardship because it was my responsibility "to proclaim ... the whole will of God" (Acts 20:27), but I never enjoyed it. My church often seemed stuck in first or second gear. Thankfully, God's goodness is endless. He had better plans. God began to show me that stewardship was far more than a duty; it is a pathway to blessing, even supernatural power. Now, we are anticipating revival.

Something special and supernatural happens when pastors take the high road and teach the positive, grace-filled, practical message of lordship in giving, spending, and money management. People are crying for help. They want to see God at work in their lives and in the ministries of their church. Imagine congregational giving jumping from 20 to 40 percent, people getting free from crushing credit card debt, ministries launched with fresh vision, missions expanded into new areas, and people coming to Christ and being filled with the Spirit as never before. These things are happening today across the country. Stewardship is playing a vital role in this new revival.

After studying or working with about 2,000 churches during the last 10 years, I have noticed four key stewardship principles that pastors can and must emphasize. Challenges may arise, but



BY KREGG R. HOOD

the Lord will reward courage and open new doors of transformation. Both Scripture and experience call pastors to put this four-step plan into practice.

### TAKE THE LEAD IN PRIVATE

This first step is simple, but challenging. If pastors are not personally following God's principles for giving, tithing, saving, and spending, they indict themselves. Could this be the primary reason why pastors hold back in this area of ministry? They may hear a few critical "black hole" comments, but deep inside, most pastors struggle because they have not seen God work in this area of their lives. We can be grateful for grace. When faced with private fears and faults regarding stewardship, pastors must go to God and confess, repent, and buckle down to live out the truths they want to present.

Start your own walk of faith. Trust God with your finances, your church's finances, and give sacrificially. As the spiritual leader, first commit to your own personal growth in this area.

### TAKE THE LEAD IN PUBLIC

In the church, stewardship begins with preaching and teaching the promises in the Word of God. I have discovered that many Christians do not give because they are afraid they will not be able to pay their bills. Do not allow the devil to deceive. He works overtime to con people into believing that God will not meet their needs, that He has no positive plans for them, or that, when it comes to money and finances, they are on their own.

From the pulpit engage your listeners with grace-filled words that encourage them to believe the truth, oppose the lies, and enter into a form of spiritual warfare. Reread passages such as Deuteronomy 8:18; Psalm 23:6; Proverbs 3:9,10;13:11; Matthew 6:33; 2 Corinthians 9:10,11; and Philippians 4:19. These passages improve our understanding of our Lord's goodness. These powerful truths extinguish the flaming arrows of the evil one and proclaim, "Glory to God."

Preach at least one series each year on how God helps people manage money and the other resources He has entrusted to them. More than 2,200 Bible verses provide inspired instruction on giving, saving, spending, and making money. Pastors

do not need to be financial experts to take a public leadership role in the financial arena. Be transparent and lead by example (1 Chronicles 29:1–5,14). Share with your congregation your struggles and personal testimony of when God answered prayer in your own finances and giving. If you are beginning your stewardship journey, walk with them in this adventure. Listeners will sense a contagious blend of humility and faith as you preach the truth in love from firsthand experience. As others experience financial victory, they can personally share their testimony with the congregation. As pastors faithfully preach God's Word and share how God has answered, the Holy Spirit will speak to hearts and others will catch the vision.

## TAKE THE LEAD IN THE PRACTICAL

Give people the best tools for growth in all areas of their finances. Start small-group training courses on personal financial management, provide budget counseling for those in debt, and launch seminars to help people with long-range asset development and planning — all from a Christian perspective. Keep practical application in the forefront. After all, there are only four things a person can do with money — make it, spend it, save it, or give it — and the Bible has much to say about each one. Ask financially savvy people in your congregation to help by teaching Bible-based, Christ-honoring, financially effective training sessions.

Many excellent resources are available to jump-start the process. Schedule classes, small groups, seminars, and one-on-one coaching. Let the topic determine which setting is best for learning. Include follow-up and accountability processes as well.

Programs need to be offered on a regular basis. Make it easy for people to sign up for the topics that will benefit them most. To boost involvement, periodically have special speakers to help with preaching or leading seminars and classes. Focus on eliminating the negative financial problems people in our culture are struggling with. Add training and planning sessions to help people develop wealth using God's ways, wisdom, and purposes.

People need a personalized, practical road map to help them get out of debt, spend wisely, learn contentment, save for the future, invest effectively, plan for retirement,

and minister with their money — even after they go on to meet the Lord. If we entrust these tasks to the world's economic system, our people and ministries will suffer. Worldly organizations have only one motive: profit. The church's purpose is different: service. So, take advantage of Christian approaches that provide needed resources to create and expand the local church ministry structure and encourage, equip, and empower practical results through stewardship. For resources on implementing cutting-edge stewardship education in your church, visit <http://www.agfsg.org/enrichment>.

## TAKE THE LEAD IN PRAYER

Satan wants to keep believers from doing two things: praying and giving. When a church is growing in both, the Kingdom expands. Pastors need to clearly communicate their willingness to pray for financial matters — and provide opportunity. Philippians 4:6,7 says, “Do not be anxious about anything.” Finances are a cause of anxiety, so encourage people to take both their needs *and* goals to God. Pray about the use of God's money in your personal life and in the congregation's ministry. Prayer keeps the theme of lordship on the front burner. We need the Lord's wisdom, deliverance, favor, and mercy. As always, “pray continually” and ask the Lord to block the negative and bring the positive (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

These four steps will help people experience the power of stewardship and lead them on an exciting journey. Get started now, because the need is increasing and revival tarries. When we step out in faith publicly, privately, practically, and prayerfully, we become better partners with the Lord to “proclaim freedom for the prisoners” (Luke 4:18). Revival is on the horizon. Let's begin. ■



**Kregg R. Hood, Ed.D.,** senior vice president, AG Financial, Springfield, Missouri.

## STEWARDSHIP REVIVAL RESOURCES



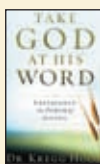
*Crown Biblical Financial Study* is a complete stewardship education program for in-depth small-group leader training. For more information, call 866-621-1786.

*Escape the Debt Trap* will help congregants see God as their financial leader. The series combines preaching with a take-home study resource. For more information, call 800-962-7499.



*From Debt to Life* is a small-group or Sunday School curriculum for developing a 10-step financial freedom plan. For more information, call 800-962-7499.

*Take God at His Word* is a preaching series with a positive focus on the power of giving. For more information, call 800-962-7499.



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# Encountering Bioethics in Everyday Ministry



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BY CHRISTINA M.H. POWELL

**O**n a typical day ministers encounter several important issues and controversies within the field of bioethics. A pastor might stroll through a supermarket and see boxes of cereal touting the use of nongenetically modified organisms. As he goes through the checkout counter, the front covers of news magazines flash headlines about end-of-life issues. Later in the day, when he visits a parishioner in the hospital, he may find this person overwhelmed by treatment choices and the opportunity to join a clinical study. In an afternoon counseling appointment, he might encounter a couple in the church struggling with infertility and weighing their options. Finally, he might close the day watching a news story on television that outlines the challenges involved in financing health care.

## WHAT IS BIOETHICS?

Bioethics is the study of the ethical and moral implications of advances in medicine and the biological sciences.

Bioethics covers areas such as how physicians relate to patients, guidelines for human experimentation, and the nature of life itself. The field of bioethics has grown with the needs created by new medical technologies and our increased understanding of life processes.

## BIOETHICS AND THE MINISTER

The central mandate of the minister is the proclamation of the gospel. Ministers, especially pastors, accomplish this mandate by fulfilling a number of roles, including preacher, counselor, moral leader, and role model. A working knowledge of the

**A minister's job is to remind scientists, doctors, public health officials, and laymen that all people answer to God. This realization is the basis for bioethics.**

bioethical issues of our day can enhance the minister's abilities to fulfill his many roles, ultimately aiding him in proclaiming the gospel.

## THE MINISTER AS PREACHER

The pastor in the pulpit on Sunday morning and the chaplain serving on the ethics board at a hospital are both preachers. A preacher's job is to communicate biblical truth in such a way that the hearer is able to apply it to his earthly life and to also prepare for eternity. As a preacher, the minister needs to speak to the moral issues of our day, including bioethical issues, bringing the light that comes from God's revealed truth.



The roots of modern bioethics can be traced back to the Hippocratic Oath developed in ancient Greece. Ancient physicians took this oath, promising to “first, do no harm” to their patients. A modern version of this oath is recited by graduating medical students to this day. The research ethics branch of bioethics developed in the last century because of atrocities such as the experiments Nazi doctors conducted on death camp prisoners and scandals in the United States involving human experimentation. The story of one such scandal reveals the potential role a preacher can play in setting ethical standards in the medical community.

## **On a typical day ministers encounter several important issues and controversies within the field of bioethics.**

In the early 1960s, at the Willowbrook State School in New York, mentally retarded children were deliberately infected with the hepatitis virus, initially by being fed stool from other infected children. These experiments were done to determine the nature of hepatitis infection and to test the effectiveness of a particular treatment (gamma globulin) in preventing or ameliorating the disease. The researchers involved in this study justified their approach by pointing out that most of the children became infected anyway while at Willowbrook and being infected under carefully controlled research conditions assured them of better care.

The research on the children was conducted with their parents’ consent. In many cases, however, parents found they were unable to get their children admitted to the overcrowded Willowbrook without first agreeing to have them participate in the studies.

In 1966, Henry K. Beecher, M.D., a prominent anesthesiologist at Harvard Medical School and Massachusetts General Hospital, published a landmark article entitled “Ethics and Clinical Research” in *The New England Journal of Medicine*. In this paper, he revealed problems with 22 studies involving human experimentation, including the Willowbrook study. He concluded the article with these words: “An experiment is ethical or not at its inception; it does not become ethical post hoc — ends do not justify means. There is no ethical distinction between ends and means.”

Beecher was known to have a deep Christian faith, reading a chapter of the Bible each day. Some of his colleagues viewed this as a driving force for his interest in research ethics. Beecher’s article led to the creation of the Institutional Review Board system and informed consent standards that govern federally funded human experimentation to this day.

As a pastor, you may not serve directly on an ethics board, yet your ministry may encourage a doctor like Beecher who may be in a position to effect necessary reforms. Isaiah 55:10,11 reminds us that proclaiming the Word of God is never in vain. “As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”

A pastor equipped with a knowledge of bioethical issues, both illustrations and information, will be more effective in the pulpit or other platform that God has given him to communicate His truth.

## **THE MINISTER AS COUNSELOR**

The minister not only serves as a preacher to the whole congregation, but also as a counselor to individuals who seek guidance and wisdom in difficult and confusing situations. Christian family members who are agonizing over end-of-life decisions for a loved one will probably seek their pastor’s input. A pastor is a representative of God’s message. He is uniquely positioned to bring peace into a situation filled with uncertainty. A pastor who has ministered in an area for a number of years and knows the individuals well may be capable of providing insight into the values and desires of the parishioner with failing health.

It is essential that a pastor or chaplain knows what he believes concerning the value and nature of human life and is able to clearly articulate why he believes it. The information in future articles in this column will enhance a pastor’s ability to respond to the needs of people facing various medical crises such as end-of-life decisions, organ transplantation, cord blood banking, genetic testing, assisted reproduction, clinic trials, and genetic screening. Pastors will have opportunity to reflect on the theological underpinnings of these issues and develop an appropriate response before encountering the issues in a crisis.

The ability of a pastor or chaplain to respond appropriately in a crisis can have profound spiritual consequences for individuals and entire families. End-of-life decisions, in particular, can provoke lingering guilt and conflict between family members. Spiritual counsel from a knowledgeable, well-prepared minister can bring healing to hearts and relationships. “A man finds joy in giving an apt reply — and how good is a timely word!” (Proverbs 15:23). Seeking to learn more about bioethics is far from an academic exercise; such preparation

can quickly have practical application for pastors working on the frontlines of ministry.

## THE MINISTER AS MORAL LEADER

A pastor's influence extends beyond the doors of his church. In addition to being a preacher on Sunday and a counselor throughout the week, the pastor serves as a moral leader in his community. Pastors often have opportunities to minister to those outside their congregations through radio broadcasts or television. I know of one pastor who spoke to the moral issues of our day by writing a column for the local newspaper.

Christians are to be the salt of the earth and the light of this world. We are to be like a city on a hill that cannot be hidden (Matthew 5:13,14). Proclaiming the gospel must always remain foremost. Yet, addressing what the Bible has to say about moral issues can be a means of proclaiming the gospel. The minister's approach must uphold the value of life and avoid an adversarial attitude toward those whose beliefs differ from his.

Our belief in the sanctity of human life flows from the gospel. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). We believe in eternal life beyond this earthly life. We value each person because God values life enough to provide a plan of redemption for each person.

Since God does not show favoritism, we must also respect all people and treat everyone with fairness (Acts 10:34). Such behavior would prevent a scandal such as the Tuskegee Syphilis Study, where 399 poor, African-American men from Macon County, Alabama, were denied medical treatment and were deceived by officials of the United States Public Health Service for 40 years. The study began in 1932 and ended in 1972 when a reporter for

the *Washington Evening Star* newspaper uncovered the truth that health officials deliberately withheld treatment from the men so the natural course of the disease could be studied. By the time the story broke, dozens of men had died, and many wives and children had been infected. Imagine the extent of human suffering that could have been prevented given the exercise of appropriate moral leadership in this historical situation.

My hope is that pastors will learn more about the bioethical issues created by current technological advances, and will become like the "men of Issachar, who understood the times and knew what Israel should do" (1 Chronicles 12:32). As we are diligent to learn, God will provide a way for us to use our knowledge to provide moral leadership in the communities in which we serve.

## THE MINISTER AS ROLE MODEL

Not only does a pastor serve as a preacher, counselor, and moral leader, but he also serves as a role model. The best sermon is the one we preach with our lives as well as our words. This column will provide information that pastors can use for themselves and their family, as well as their church. My desire is that pastors will gain a better understanding of health-care issues such as preparation for medical emergencies, living wills, medical powers of attorney, financing health care, and the use of alternative medicine.

## Time spent clarifying medical issues as they relate to your own household is an investment that will pay dividends for your ministry as well as your personal life.

The choices a pastor makes for himself and his family often influence the choices that individuals in his congregation make. Time spent clarifying medical issues as they relate to your own household is an investment that will pay dividends for your ministry as well as your personal life.

Pastors also serve as role models in their attitude toward science and medicine. In their quest to point out the limitations of science and the dangers of research practiced without moral input, pastors must be careful to remember that new medical discoveries are blessings that can alleviate human suffering. In Genesis 1:26, God gave man dominion over all the creatures of the earth, paving the way for appropriate scientific research. Knowledge can be used for either good or evil. The key to using knowledge for good is to realize that man is not the ultimate authority. A minister's job is to remind scientists, doctors, public health officials, and laymen that all people answer to God. This realization is the basis for bioethics.

By modeling integrity, honesty, acceptance of human limitations, and trust in a faithful God, a pastor is laying the foundation on which ethics is built. His good example may influence the actions of a teenager who grows up to become a leading medical researcher. His faithfulness in modeling Christian character will also provide his parishioners with the tools they need to navigate this exciting, but technologically complicated world in which we live. ■



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# Experiment With Life Coaching: The “Wheel of Life” and Personal Discipleship

BY DEBORAH M. GILL

**I**n spite of increasing demands, stresses, and uncertainties, many of today’s spiritual leaders not only desire to survive, but also desire to make a difference — to reach their highest and best — and to leave a lasting legacy. Yet, even these noble aspirations add to the challenges and pressures of ministry.

A pastor in this stretching place is not alone. His experience is symptomatic of

the day in which we live. Contemporary life is more complex than ever, and social structures that supported past generations (such as intergenerational contact and community ties) have broken down.

## LIFE COACHING

In this context a new profession has arisen — life coaching. “Faced with the unsettling impact of galloping change, rapid technological advances, and tidal waves of information glut, business leaders began to see that no single person could keep abreast of everything.”<sup>1</sup> From its first appearance as executive coaching in the corporate world, the concept of coaching has spread to most aspects of life.



Today there are coaches for everything from fitness to finances, from parenting to public speaking, from time management to transitions, to life itself. Coaching has even entered the church by touching the pastoral realm, preaching, and leadership. Its use is growing among church planters and revitalization pastors; in the new Strategic Coaching program for pastors; in many ministry leadership applications; and in discipleship coaching for believers.

What is life coaching? Instead of comparing it to athletic coaching (which adopted the term in the 1880s), let us go back to the 1500s when the word *coach*

## **This wheel gives Spirit-filled Christians a method to assess their present life and to chart a course toward a life that pleases God even more.**

meant a “horse-drawn vehicle that would get people from where they were to where they wanted to be.”<sup>2</sup> Life coaching helps people chart and pursue their course to a more desirable future. Distinct from counseling or therapy, consulting, or even mentoring, life coaching is a mutually designed relationship benefiting the person being coached by framing issues in revealing ways, helping him find his strengths and building on them, prodding him to action, and celebrating his successes.<sup>3</sup>

### **SECULAR VERSUS CHRISTIAN**

Life coaching has become increasingly popular in the business and professional world. Today, more than 150,000 people call themselves coaches, and more than 5,000 are certified members of the International Coaching Federation.<sup>4</sup> Life coaching is fast becoming a great resource to the church. There are several training tracks and professional networks just for Christian life coaches.

It is important to distinguish between the philosophical underpinnings of secular coaching and Christian coaching. Secular coaching is humanistic, placing the client’s wishes and goals at the center. Secular coaching sees clients as self-sufficient and capable of producing the transformation they want. Christian coaching, by contrast, places Christ and His will at the center. It recognizes the sovereignty of God and the availability of the Holy Spirit to assist the believer in the transformation God desires. Christian coaching is founded on a biblical worldview, biblical values, and biblical spirituality. While it encourages self-discovery, it also considers God’s design for the person being coached and the Spirit’s empowerment to fulfill His design.

### **INTERESTED?**

Are you a candidate for life coaching? Do you want to beat burnout? Perhaps you are interested in improving your life. Do you want to gain focus, balance, productivity, and fulfillment? Do you feel a holy discontent with the way you are living? Life coaching is for people who want to make changes in their lives — changes for the better — and for people who are willing to do what it takes to change.

Pastors who would like to experiment with life coaching can apply its methods to their lives without engaging the services of a professional Christian coach. Try self-coaching or, better yet, join a friend and peer-coach one another. Best of all, include Jesus in the coaching experience, taking the transformational issues of life to Him. Through recentering, pastors can change their goal from harnessing His power for

success to letting God harness them for His glory. Instead of inflating their confidence with more of themselves, they can entreat Him to infuse their lives with more of His Spirit.

### **WHEEL OF LIFE**

A commonly used tool in life coaching is called the Wheel of Life. It is a self-assessment tool and guide to growth that is helpful in many applications. It can be used to evaluate life balance, personal fulfillment, or professional expertise. The person being coached can then determine which areas of his life to change or adjust to pursue greater life effectiveness. I have modified this tool into what I call the Wheels of Whole-life Discipleship. This wheel gives Spirit-filled Christians a method to assess their present life and to chart a course toward a life that pleases God even more.

Between the spokes of the wheels are various aspects of one’s life as a disciple: formation, worship, ministry or service, power, evangelism, stewardship, multiplication, and relationships and community. Each section of the Christ-centered Wheel points to the center where a cross represents the place Christ desires to have in every aspect of our lives.

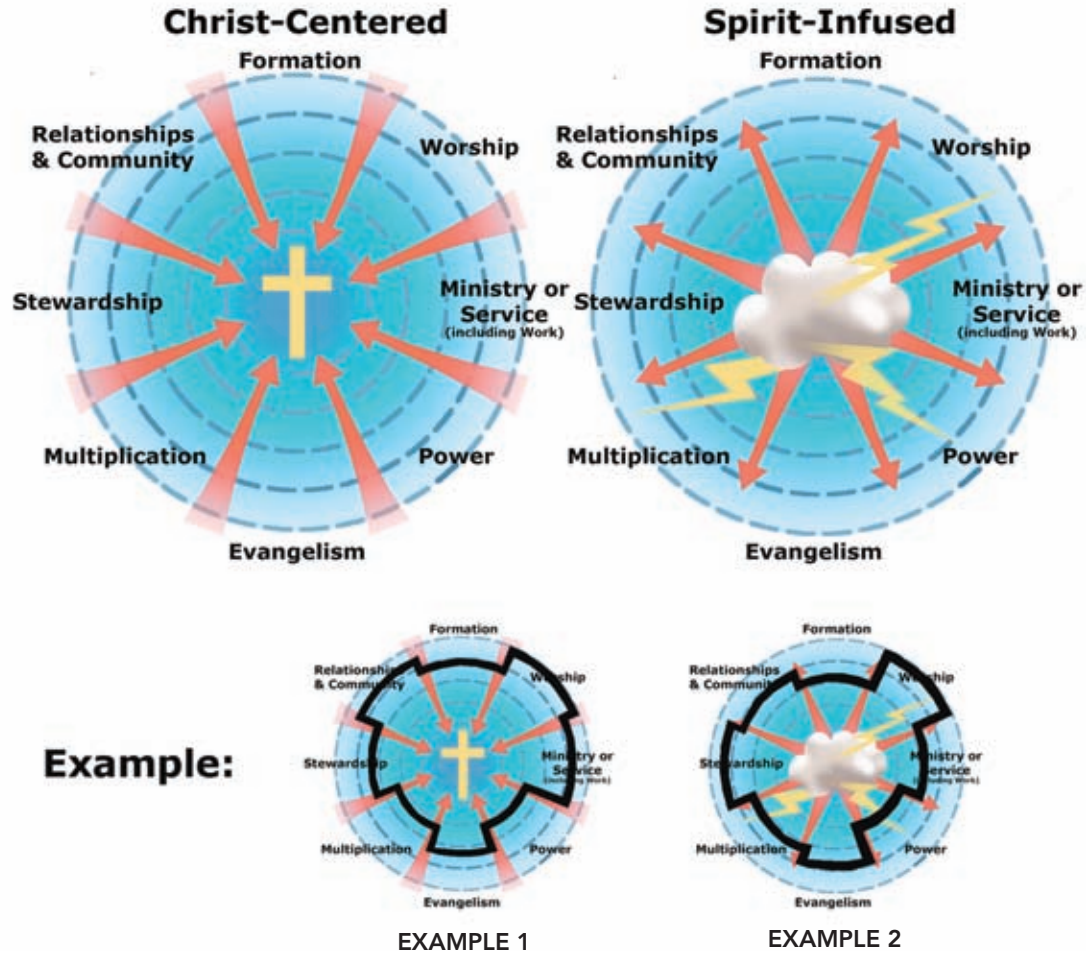
### **AN EXPERIMENT**

Quiet your heart and welcome the Holy Spirit. Ask Him to spotlight truth,

## **CHRISTIAN LIFE COACHING**

Whereas mentoring pours the best into a person, coaching pulls the best out of a person. A Christian coach is skilled in the use of powerful, prayerful, open-ended questions that help the person being coached discover for himself God’s best for his life.

# Wheels of Whole-Life Discipleship



revealing God's perfect will and exposing your present personal reality. Then ask yourself, section by section, How satisfied am I with the place I am giving Jesus in that area of my life? Am I totally submitted to Christ's absolute lordship in this aspect of my life? How closely do my ambitions, hopes, and dreams for this part of my life align with His?

In the *Christ-centered Wheel*, the outside of the wheel represents 10 and the hub represents 1. Draw a curve parallel to the edge of the wheel in each section ranking yourself on a scale from 1 to 10 that represents your satisfaction level with Christ-centeredness in your life. (See *example 1*.) If you are satisfied with your ministry or service, draw the curve to fill nine-tenths of that section. If you are frustrated with the way you are stewarding your health or finances,

draw the curve to fill three-tenths of that section. (See sidebar *Wheel of Whole-Life Discipleship Terms* for working definitions.)

The cloud radiating from the center of the *Spirit-infused Wheel* represents the Holy Spirit. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit — a Comforter and Companion just like Jesus — to coach us through our transformation. It is God's plan that the Spirit's influence infuses every aspect of our lives with God's presence and power.

Connect again with God, humble your heart, and hear the Holy Spirit urging you toward God's best. Then ask yourself, section by section, How satisfied am I with the role the Spirit plays in this area of my life? How often and to what degree am I directed and empowered by the Spirit in this aspect of my life? How aware of His presence and how in sync with His purposes am I in this part of my life? How evident are supernatural power, transrational revelation, and the fruit of God's Spirit (the character of Christ) in this area of my life? Using the same 1 to 10 scale, draw a curve parallel to the outside edge of the wheel to rank each section of the second wheel to represent your satisfaction level with the Spirit's infusion of that part of your life. (See *example 2*.)

## AN ASSIGNMENT

Study your self-assessments. What do you see? Where are you most satisfied? Least satisfied? If your lines represented the wheels of your life as a disciple, how bumpy would your ride be? Does your assessment match what you are experiencing?

Ask God for a picture of what your life could be — His vision of a life completely

## WHEEL OF WHOLE-LIFE DISCIPLESHIP TERMS

- Formation:** becoming transformed by Christ's truth.
- Worship:** delighting God in what you do.
- Ministry or Service:** investing yourself in God's purposes.
- Power:** allowing the Spirit a supernatural place in your life.
- Evangelism:** sharing the great news about Jesus.
- Multiplication:** investing in others to leave a legacy for Christ.
- Stewardship:** exercising responsible accountability for God's gifts.
- Relationships and Community:** treating people as Christ would and living "new life" as a family of brothers and sisters who love Him.

DEBORAH M. GILL, Springfield, Missouri

## Christian coaching, by contrast, places Christ and His will at the center.

Christ-centered and absolutely infused with the Spirit. As you ponder and pray over this possibility, let God ignite in you the passion to pursue the Christ-centered and Spirit-infused life.

Decide where you would like to go in God. Where would you like to begin? What initial change would have the greatest effect? What would your goal in that area be? What subsequent improvement would best fuel the next? How could you change a 7 to a 3? How could you raise a score one notch?

Ask Jesus, as your personal life coach, to help you meet these goals. Consider using the wheels of whole-life discipleship together with a ministry peer, spouse, or ministry team. Self-discovery accompanied by spiritual sensitivity, outside perspective, and relational

accountability make a powerful peer coaching combination.

Pursuing a Christ-centered and Spirit-infused life — in every aspect — will not only equip pastors to deal with pressures and problems, but these intentional disciplines will also empower them to fulfill God's unique plans for their lives. ■



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### ENDNOTES

1. Gary R. Collins, *Christian Coaching: Helping Others Turn Potential Into Reality* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2001), 15.
2. Ibid.
3. Laurie Beth Jones, *Jesus, Life Coach: Learn From the Best* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2004), x-xi.
4. Ibid, ix.



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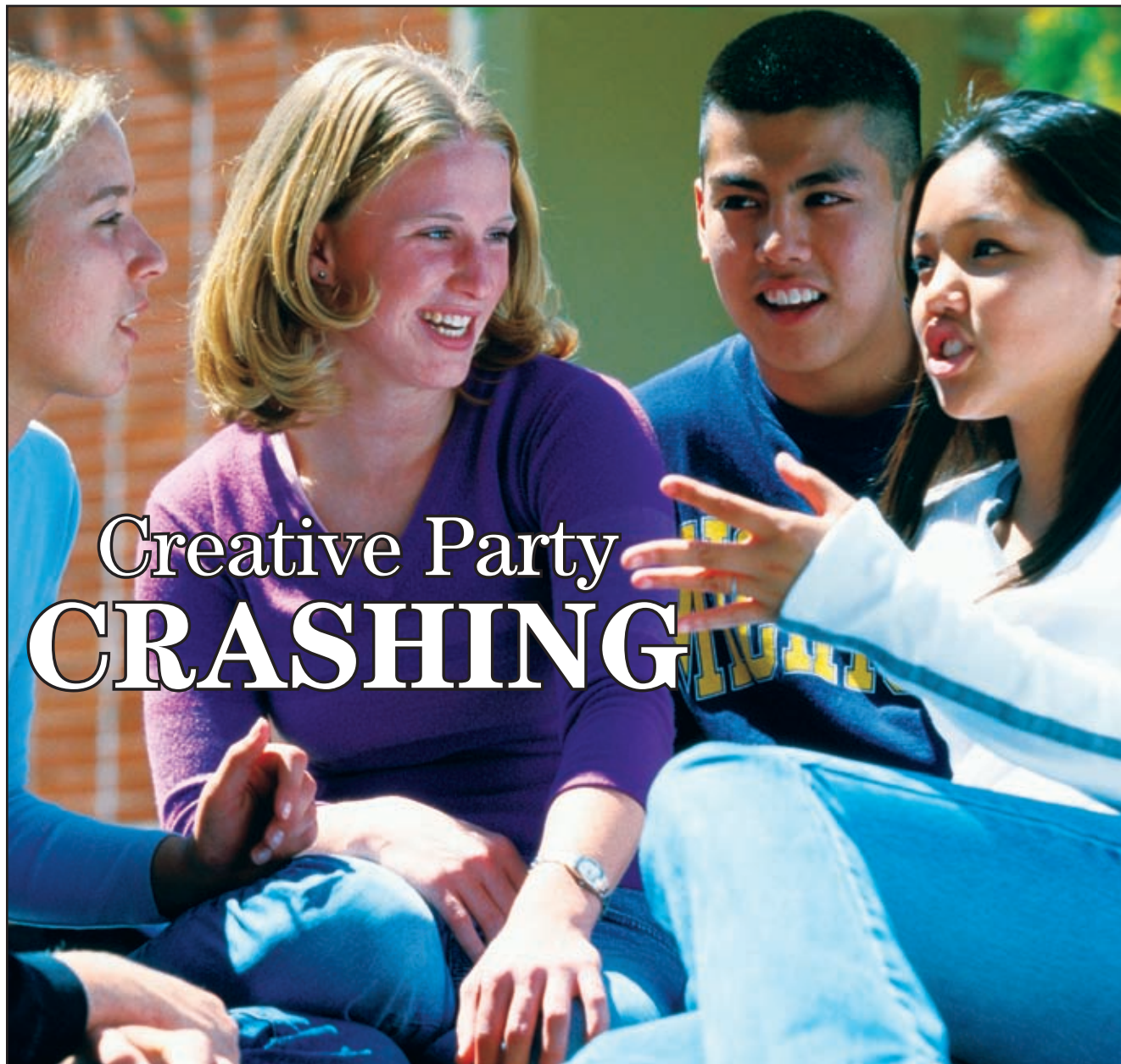


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## Creative Party CRASHING

PHOTODISC

“Mind if we crash your party?”

Have you ever encouraged your Christian students to use an evangelistic conversation opener such as that?

In campus ministry during and after college, I have attended spring break beach outreaches at popular student vacation spots. The scene is repeated around North America every March and April. Students from across the nation swarm to sunny climates — Panama City Beach, South Padre Island, Palm Springs, or Mazatlán, Mexico — to let

off steam and seek their fill of surf, sun, sand, suds, and sex.

Often students anticipate finding genuine happiness, true love, or at least an exciting time. Some become disillusioned as their week in paradise unfolds. Perhaps their dream date never materializes, their pale complexion becomes a painful lobster red, or their liquid overindulgence brings huge hangovers. These students can be ripe for the message of hope.

At Daytona Beach, Florida, (Daytona Beach city leaders now discourage spring break revelry, prompting campus migrations to other spots.) hundreds of Christian students and campus ministers came to present Christ. In the mornings students gathered at a church to sing, worship God, hear Bible teaching, and pray. Afternoons brought individual interaction with interested beachgoers. Musical concerts with contemporary groups also showed Christians could have fun and helped spark conversations about God.



## PARTY TIME

At night, spring breakers gathered in bars and motel rooms for drinking, dancing, and romancing. Christians decided to go where their peers were, hang out with them, and as God opened doors, share Christ. They aimed not to preach, but to befriend and see where God might lead.

One evening I was ministering with Suzy, a Duke University student. We prayed and then walked the streets looking for God's opening. Outside one motel I asked a student, "Do you know where any parties are happening?"

"Sure," he replied, "there is a party in room 407."

The social atmosphere during spring break can be both sexually charged and relaxed. Many people are eager to meet others. It is not uncommon and often perfectly acceptable for strangers to drift in and out of motel room parties.

## Jesus and Paul engaged people where they naturally gathered — at a well, in the marketplace, in the synagogue.

We wandered up to 407 and found a room packed with students talking, listening to music, and having a good time. A student stood at the open door holding his beer can. "Hi," I ventured, "mind if we crash your party?"

"It is not my party," he replied, "come on in."

This opener would be totally inappropriate in many social situations. But the casual spring break mood made it no problem. Suzy entered the room to meet people while I stayed to visit with our host at the door.

As we discussed his campus, his spring break experience, and other subjects, he seemed friendly. I mentioned Suzy and I were in town with a group of students who were showing people a short outline about the spiritual side of life. I asked if I could show it to him, and he agreed. We stood at the door discussing the outline in a small pamphlet as party guests wandered in and out of the room.

After we finished the pamphlet he decided to invite Christ to be his Savior, so we discretely prayed a simple prayer. When I mentioned I would love to send him some material to help him grow in faith, he was interested. I held his beer can while he wrote down his address. Angels were rejoicing. Someone had joined God's family.

I entered the motel room and saw Suzy engaged in conversation, so I introduced myself to a large guy with a beard sitting alone on one of the beds. We spoke for a while, and then I asked if I could get his opinion on the outline I had shown the doorkeeper. In a short time, he, too, was praying to trust Christ as his Savior.

## GOD'S PARTY MORPHING

By this time, it was late. I felt it was time to leave because we had a full schedule the next day. But Suzy was engaged in a lively conversation about God with several people who were seated on the floor around her.

"Rusty, come here and help me answer these questions," she implored as I tried to tell her we needed to go.

For the next half hour or more we fielded questions. The entire gathering had turned its focus on Suzy and me, and our discussion about Jesus. The spring break motel party had morphed into an impromptu Christian outreach meeting.

Eventually, one of the men mentioned that everyone needed to go to bed. But, he added that they had enjoyed the discussion and asked if we could return the next day to resume it.

We returned to talk more about Jesus, His wonderful love, and the great friend He could be. God had His eye on those students. They were precious in His sight. Even while they sought to quench their inner thirst with things that left them dry, He brought them two friends who could point them to living water. He also increased Suzy's and my faith when we saw how powerful He was, and how open the partygoers were.

## PRINCIPLES GOD USES

What lessons for secular university outreach might this story hold?

### Go where the students are

Jesus and Paul engaged people where they naturally gathered — at a well, in the marketplace, in the synagogue. A nonbeliever's comfort level might be high on his own turf, while yours might be low. Fear of failure or of temptation can play tricks with your mind. Ask God for wisdom, peace, and favor while looking for appropriate opportunities to mix with people whom He loves. Greek houses, dorms, social gatherings, and vacation spots can be good venues. Sometimes prime outreach spots can be found off campus.

### Adapt to student culture where you can

Suzy and I did not enter the motel room to criticize the partygoers' lifestyles. We sought to be warm, congenial, and to make new friends. We looked for common interests, and ways to identify and connect with them. God used our human efforts to open doors for the gospel.

### Pray

"Devote yourselves to prayer," Paul



## Ask God for wisdom, peace, and favor while looking for appropriate opportunities to mix with people whom He loves.

wrote, “keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving; praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ ... ; that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak” (Colossians 4:2–4, NASB).<sup>1</sup> The entire outreach and our participation in it were bathed in prayer. God’s Holy Spirit gave us wisdom, courage, open doors, and clarity of communication.

### Be sincere and friendly

“Live wisely among those who are not Christians, and make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be gracious and effective so that you will have the right answer for everyone” (Colossians 4:5,6, NLT).<sup>2</sup> Some Christian students may not know how to relate effectively to peers whose values, convictions, and politics differ significantly from their own. Observing a leader’s grace, sincerity, and kindness shown among nonbelievers can help build student disciples’ skills and confidence.

### Open conversations simply

“Mind if we crash your party?” is simple. So is “Please give me a drink,” an opener used by a skilled evangelist (John 4:7, NLT). Other examples abound: “What are the latest developments in the disaster relief effort?” “What do you think about the war?” “How do you feel about (insert celebrity’s name here) latest relationship?” These questions, if handled sensitively and used with appropriate transitions, can lead to conversations about spiritual need. However, “Come here often?” is a bit trite, and

may prompt concern about one’s motives.

I am shy, but I have learned to ask questions to engage others in conversation. Bob Prall, a campus minister and my undergraduate mentor, was an excellent example. His casual friendliness and warm, engaging style endeared strangers to him and taught me much as I watched him. A leader’s example can have a similar effect on student disciples.

### Be willing to answer questions and return for more

When Paul spoke on Mars Hill about Jesus and the Resurrection, reaction was mixed: “Some of them sneered, but others said, ‘We want to hear you again on this subject.’ ... A few men became followers of Paul and believed” (Acts 17:32,34). Campus outreach is similar. As campus ministers and their disciples are patient to answer skeptics’ and seeker’s questions, skeptics may become seekers and seekers may become believers. ■



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#### ENDNOTES

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## CHRISTIAN SERVICE TEXT: Romans 12:3–8

### INTRODUCTION

As Paul encouraged complete dedication to Christ, he addressed the attitude of the Christian in service. Paul commanded Christians to use their abilities to serve one another with graciousness.

Possessing a spiritual gift does not authorize or empower its use; it must be founded on certain qualities. Three qualities authorize the use of spiritual gifts.

### MESSAGE

#### 1. Humility.

- a. “Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather

think of yourself with sober judgment” (Romans 12:3).

- b. Do not be conceited. Gifts are not signs of superiority.
- c. What are the charismata?

#### 2. Cooperation.

- a. “In Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others” (Romans 12:5).
- b. This analogy has several important things to teach us:
  - (1) You must accept yourself.
  - (2) You must recognize the importance of every role.

- (3) You must employ your gift on behalf of others.

#### 3. Virtue.

- a. “Different gifts, according to the grace ... in proportion to his faith” (Romans 12:6).
- b. Spiritual gifts must be utilized in proportion to the spiritual character of the individual.

### CONCLUSION

You can make a difference in the church if you have the right attitudes when you apply your abilities.

—Jay Herndon  
Burlingame, California

## THE POWER OF CHANGE TEXT: Matthew 4:19

### INTRODUCTION

God uses those who surrender to Him. He uses the most unusual people to do His work. He takes nobodies and makes them into somebodies. He selects people not according to what they are, but what they can be when yielded to Him. There is no limit to what God can do through a person who is fully surrendered to God. Look at God's changing power in these four men.

### MESSAGE

#### 1. Moses — from weakness to wonder.

- a. Careless (Exodus 2:11,12). Moses became angry and killed an Egyptian who was mistreating a fellow Hebrew. He fled into the wilderness to hide.
- b. Call (Exodus 3:1–14). God called from a burning bush. God promised to be with him (Exodus 3:1:12).
- c. Complaint (Exodus 4:10–12). Moses was not a good speaker, but God promised to be with him and help him speak.
- d. Choice (Hebrews 11:24–29).
  - (1) Suffering (Hebrews 11:24–26). Moses suffered with God's people.
  - (2) Spiritual (Hebrews 11:27). Moses saw the invisible God. Faith is important and necessary today

(Hebrews 11:6).

- (3) Supernatural (Hebrews 11:28,29). The Red Sea opened; The Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1–17).

#### 2. Jonah — from escapee to evangelist.

- a. Call (Jonah 1:1,2). Jonah was called to be an evangelist to Nineveh.
- b. Callousness (Jonah 1:3). He disobeyed the call of God.
- c. Confusion (Jonah 1:4). God sent a storm. He prepared a fish to swallow Jonah and keep him from death.
- d. Crying (Jonah 1:17; 2:1–10). Jonah was in the fish for 3 days. Jonah called to the Lord. The fish vomited Jonah onto dry ground. God preserved Jonah's life.
- e. City (Jonah 3:1). Nineveh was a large city. It required 3 days to walk around it (Jonah 3:3, Living Bible). He preached and 120,000 people repented. (See Jonah 4:11, Living Bible).

#### 3. Peter — from reed to rock.

- a. Rejection (Matthew 26:69–74). Peter denied Christ three times. Before, he was bold and brave. At that moment, he was a weakling.
- b. Repentance (Matthew 26:75). Peter wept bitterly. He repented and changed his way of living.

- c. Redemption (Mark 16:7). The angel said, “Go tell the disciples, and Peter.” Christ forgave Peter.
- d. Results (Acts 2:14–47). Peter, who had denied the Lord, received the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:14). On the Day of Pentecost, he preached and 3,000 were converted.

#### 4. Paul — from persecutor to preacher.

- a. Situation (Acts 9:1,2). Paul approved of persecuting Christians.
- b. Supernatural (Acts 9:3,4). Paul fell to the ground. God spoke to him.
- c. Surrender (Acts 9:5,6, NKJV). Note: “What do you want me to do?”
- d. Service (Acts 9:8–20). Paul was made blind. God used Ananias to pray for his healing. Immediately, he preached the gospel.

### CONCLUSION

God took 40 years to train Moses to do His work. He used a storm and a whale to persuade Jonah to obey. Though he denied Christ, Peter was forgiven, and was used by God. God used a light from heaven and blindness to get Paul's attention. God can use the life of any person if they surrender to Him.

—Croft M. Pentz  
Union, New Jersey



# JESUS CHRIST, THE ALPHA AND OMEGA

TEXT: Revelation 1:8–8; 21:1–8; 22:7,10–17

## INTRODUCTION

1. The divine title *Alpha and Omega* has its roots in the Old Testament and its fulfillment in Christ. This title is our assurance of God's lasting presence with us, of God's sure promises, and of His sovereign power to bring His good plans to fruition in our lives.
2. The title *Alpha and Omega* occurs only three times in the Bible (Revelation 1:8; 21:6; 22:13). What does this expression mean?
3. This use of the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet refers to the "beginning and the end," or the "first and the last" (Revelation 1:8; 21:6; 22:13).
4. John had in mind the Old Testament background for this idea (Isaiah 44:6).

## MESSAGE

### 1. Revelation 1:4–8.

- a. John expounds the Alpha and the Omega in terms of the early Old Testament understanding of the divine name revealed to Moses (Exodus 3:13,14).
- b. John's adaptation, "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, 'who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty' " (Revelation 1:8).
- c. He is not just the source and fount of everything, the *alpha* who runs creation as its autonomous, unknown, and chaotic course.
  - (1) He is not the *Alpha* and the *Unknown Quantity x, y, or z*.
  - (2) He is not the *Alpha* and a *chaotic particle* in a materialistic universe.
  - (3) He is the *Alpha* and an already fixed *Omega*.
- d. Jesus speaks of both His eternality, but also of His eternal sovereignty.

### 2. Revelation 21:1–8.

- a. In Revelation 21:5,6, "It is done" is the divine cry over new creation on the lips of the Alpha and the Omega.
  - (1) This indicates two things:
    - (a) *Alpha*: He is the initiator of creation.
    - (b) *Omega*: He is its end as well; He guides the whole process to His desired conclusion.
  - (2) This reminds us of the Lord's final cry on the cross; only now He is sitting on a throne.
- b. He is not only the first point in time; but He is also the first point in the new creation.
  - (1) He is certainly the pre-existent first point in creation: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1).
  - (2) But He is also the pre-eminent end point of all creation:
    - (a) He is "making everything new" (verse 5), and is the source of the "water of life" (verse 6).
    - (b) His Words are "trustworthy and true" (verse 5): His purpose is not "well maybe, ... on the other hand, ... perhaps, ... or only time will tell" — His Word is sure.

- c. Whatever lies between the *Alpha* and the mysterious *Omega*, we can know that it is part of His larger plan.

### 3. Revelation 22:7,10–17.

- a. Jesus speaks as Judge of the whole world, claiming the title the Lord God Almighty used of himself (Revelation 1:8; 21:6).
  - (1) He is not only the author, but also the perfecter of our faith

(Hebrews 12:2).

- (2) He is not only the One who starts a good work, but One who also completes it (Philippians 1:6).
- b. Creation will not wander without purpose or completion.
  - (1) There is an Omega point, and His name is Jesus, the Christ, the everlasting God Almighty.
  - (2) He will hold up the finished product against His eternal purpose, judging everything according to that unchanging purpose (verses 12–15).
- c. But now is not the time for judgment; it is the time for invitation:
  - (1) Those issuing the invitation: "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come.' And let him who hears say, 'Come.' " (verse 17).
  - (2) Those who receive the invitation: "Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes" (verse 17).
  - (3) The gift promised to those who respond to the call: "Let him take the free gift of the water of life" (verse 17).

## CONCLUSION

There is One amid all changes  
 Who standeth ever fast;  
 One who covers all the future,  
 The present and the past;  
 Jesus is the Rock of Ages,  
 The first and the last.  
 Jesus is the first;  
 Jesus is the last;  
 Trust to Him thy future,  
 Give Him all thy past;  
 Jesus is the Rock of Ages,  
 The first and the last.

—Dale A. Brueggemann  
 Cambridge, United Kingdom

# JESUS HEALED ME AND YOU HELPED HIM

TEXT: Acts 3:1–8

## INTRODUCTION

When my son, Jonathan, was 3½ years old, he got a splinter in his finger. He was crying hard as my wife, Debbie, attempted to remove the splinter with a needle. The longer it took the harder he cried. And the harder he cried, the more difficult it was for Debbie to work on his finger. Hearing the crying, I went to the room, put Jonathan on my lap, wrapped my arms around him, and held his finger while Debbie quickly removed the wood sliver. Within a few minutes, Jonathan jumped off my lap and was happily playing. Later that day, he showed me his finger and with a warm, thankful smile, said, “My finger feels better, Dad. God healed my finger, and you helped Him.”

In the fascinating story told in Acts 3, Jesus was the Healer, and His disciples were His helpers. God uses His children to help bring His healing to the hurting. Let’s look at the process as Luke tells the story.

## MESSAGE

### 1. Someone carried the lame man (Acts 3:2).

- a. Someone had probably carried him every day for years. Though we do not know who this person was, we do know he was faithful. The lame man was in a place where the Lord could heal him because someone had carried him there.
- b. We can carry people to the Lord by:
  - (1) praying.
  - (2) giving a Bible or tract to someone.
  - (3) being kind.
  - (4) being consistently honest in our business dealings.

### 2. Peter challenged the lame man (Acts 3:4,6).

- a. Peter challenged him to take his eyes off his problem (his lack of money) and focus on the problem solver (“In the name of Jesus”).
- b. We need to challenge the hurting to take their eyes off their

problem and see the Lord as their Provider, to stop looking at their shortcomings and start seeing Christ’s sufficiency.

- c. The task of the church is to release the life of God, to declare the power of God, and to make available to men, in the name of Jesus, the help that only He can give.

### 3. Jesus cured the lame man (Acts 3:7,8,16).

- a. Peter helped him up. Jesus made him strong.
- b. This man was healed through faith in Jesus’ name.

## CONCLUSION

God uses some of us to carry the hurting to a place of healing. God uses others to challenge the hurting to trust in Christ. God alone cures the hurting. It is as my son said, “Jesus healed me, and you helped Him.”

—John M. Palmer  
Des Moines, Iowa

# THE MEANING OF MARRIAGE

## INTRODUCTION

After seeing how his fellow soldiers lived, a soldier sent me a letter to ask, “What is the meaning of marriage?”

## MESSAGE

### 1. Origin of marriage.

- a. Leave father and mother (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:4–6; Mark 10:6–9).
- b. He who finds a wife (Proverbs 18:22).

### 2. Purpose of marriage.

- a. Companionship (Genesis 2:18).
- b. Accomplishment (Genesis 2:18).
- c. Procreation (Genesis 1:28; Psalm 127:3).
- d. Provision (1 Timothy 5:8).
- e. Affection (Ephesians 5:25;

Ecclesiastes 9:9; Proverbs 5:18,19).

Love is more than erotic feelings.

Married love is commitment, respect, appreciation, equality, vulnerability, acceptance, gentleness, and determination. Be determined to keep your wedding vows: richer or poorer, sickness or health, better or worse, to love and to cherish (not to cast aside).

- f. Instruction (Ephesians 5:22–25).

### 3. Sanctity of marriage.

- a. Honorable (Hebrews 13:4).
- b. Private (Hebrews 13:4).

### 4. Quality of marriage.

- a. Permanence (Matthew 19:6; 1 Corinthians 7:39).
- b. Equality (2 Corinthians 6:14).
- (1) Spiritual inequality.

- (2) Intellectual inequality.
- (3) Academic inequality.
- (4) Cultural inequality.
- (5) Social inequality.
- (6) Mental inequality.

## CONCLUSION

Statistics can prove anything. More than half of marriages end in divorce. More and more people are living together. However, some statistics show that more marriages last than is commonly believed. I would not trade all the growing, rich experiences, memories of learning together, experiences shared, battles fought together, victories won, and lessons learned, for all the cheap thrills Satan has to offer.

—Warren McPherson  
Springfield, Missouri

# THE PENTECOSTAL BAPTISM

TEXT: John 14:16–18; Acts 1:15

## INTRODUCTION

Jesus told His disciples that after He went back to heaven He would send the Comforter, the Holy Spirit. He said they would be “baptized with the Holy Spirit.” Since this promise was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1–4), we call it the Pentecostal baptism.

## MESSAGE

### 1. What is the baptism in the Holy Spirit?

- a. An immersion (Matthew 3:11).  
John baptized the people by immersion. He said he baptized with water, but Jesus would baptize “with the Holy Spirit and with fire.” To be baptized with the Holy Spirit is to be immersed, drenched, and saturated with the Spirit of God.
- b. A filling (Acts 2:4).  
The expression “filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:4) is equivalent to “baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:5). Here the Greek verb is *pletho*, to fill (Matthew 27:48, a sponge filled with vinegar; Luke 5:7, ships filled with fish; and Acts 3:10, people filled with wonder and amazement). The word *pleres* (Luke 4:1, Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit; Matthew 14:20, baskets full of fragments; and Luke 5:12, a man full of leprosy) is from this verb. So is *pleroo*, to be made full, used in Ephesians 5:18: “Be filled with the Spirit.” This Baptism is a filling indeed.
- c. An anointing (1 John 2:27).  
The Holy Spirit came upon Jesus and anointed Him to preach the gospel (Luke 4:18). From this verb for anoint (*chrío*) comes the Greek *chrisma*, meaning endowment, unction. Those who believe

on Jesus receive this *chrisma* (2 Corinthians 1:21; 1 John 2:20,27) when the Holy Spirit comes upon them.

### 2. Who needs it?

- a. John the Baptist did (Matthew 3:14).  
He prophesied Jesus was going to baptize with the Holy Ghost and said he needed this Baptism.
- b. Jewish Christians did (Acts 2:5,38).  
Peter told the Jews to repent, be baptized, and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The 120 who received this Baptism in the Upper Room were all Jews. They had been with Jesus and had learned of Him, but they needed this Baptism. Even Mary the mother of Jesus needed it. So did Paul, the scholar; Apollos, the orator; Luke, the medical doctor; Philip and his daughters; and Timothy, the third-generation believer.
- c. Samaritan converts did (Acts 8:14,15).  
Through the preaching of Philip, many people in Samaria were converted. But that was not enough. Peter and John came and led them into this Pentecostal baptism.
- d. All Christians do (Acts 10:44–47).  
God baptized the Gentiles at Caesarea with the Holy Spirit. Would He have given them the Spirit had they not needed Him?

### 3. Why do we need the baptism in the Holy Spirit?

- a. To teach us (John 14:26).  
Jesus said when the Holy Spirit came He would teach His followers all things and bring His teachings to their remembrance. The Holy Spirit makes the Bible come alive. He stimulates our growth in God.

- b. To empower us (Acts 1:8).

We need this spiritual power to be effective witnesses for Christ.

- c. To obey God’s command (Ephesians 5:18).

If we are not filled with the Spirit, we are disobeying a divine command. The disciples were not disobedient when the Lord commanded them to “wait for the promise of the Father” (Acts 1:4,5).

### 4. How do we receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit?

- a. By asking (Luke 11:13).  
This Pentecostal baptism is compared to the latter rain. The prophet said, “Ask ye of the Lord rain in the time of the latter rain” (Zechariah 10:1). That time is now.
- b. By obeying (Acts 5:32).  
God gives His Spirit to those who obey His Word.
- c. By receiving (Galatians 3:14).  
We can do nothing to merit the Holy Spirit. We are not baptized as a reward for fasting and praying or being good. God sees the potential in our lives through His grace and power, so He falls upon us. We simply receive the promised Spirit through faith.
- d. By yielding (Acts 10:44).  
Cornelius and the Gentiles in his household only had to believe and receive as the Spirit fell upon them. Jesus is the Baptizer. You must put yourself in His hands.

## CONCLUSION

This Pentecostal baptism is available to all believers. There are no exceptions. It is for you. Without this Baptism, you are less than you can be. With it, you may be more than you are.

—D. Leroy Sanders  
Roseville, California

## WHY GREAT MEN FALL: 15 WINNING STRATEGIES TO RISE ABOVE IT ALL

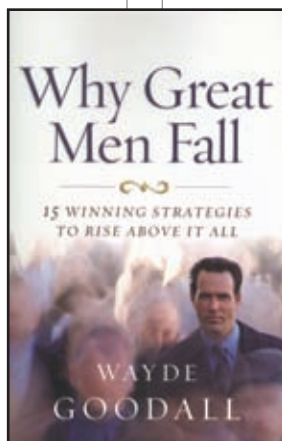
Wayde I. Goodall (New Leaf Press, 160 pp., paperback)

Most pastors know of a fellow pastor who became involved in moral compromise. We are saddened when we hear of the failure of these friends. We wonder: *Why did this person fall? What led to his failure? What could he have done to prevent this?* Wayde I. Goodall, in *Why Great Men Fall*, provides some answers to these questions.

Through his years of pastoring and counseling pastors, Goodall has discovered 14 characteristics that seem to be the "tipping points for these leaders to do wrong." In chapters 2 through 15, he describes each characteristic and the cause that led to failure. These include: entitlement, integrity, anger, compromise, moral issues, accountability, ethics, stress and pressure, and money. Each chapter also provides hope and practical ways to avoid failure. Chapter 16 points the reader to Jesus, the One who can keep us from falling.

This book is a must read for all who want to avoid failure. Taking time to meditate on the principles set forth in this book will strengthen one's resolve to keep from falling. For those who might have already failed, this book offers hope and a plan for recovery.

—Reviewed by Richard L. Schoonover, associate editor, *Enrichment journal*, Springfield, Missouri.



## REVOLUTION

George Barna

(Tyndale House Publishers, 144 pp., hardcover)

Do pastors feel the ground shaking beneath them? George Barna believes he does.

In a book already generating much discussion, Barna argues that everything in American Christianity is about to change.

"No longer," Barna states, "are American Christians content to go to church. They want to be the Church."

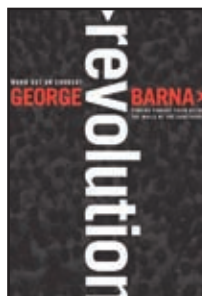
"This is not apostasy," he argues, "this is a phenomenon among committed, born-again Bible-believers."

Barna calls it a *revolution*; many pastors will call it a *rebellion*.

My encouragement is to look beyond Barna's positive attitude toward the possible emerging "revobellion," and instead ask if he is accurate and what God may want pastors to do about it.

As a pastor, I have been wrestling with similar underlying issues for the past 2 years. Recently our congregation began a process to reinvent who

we are in a way that gets everyone into the game. That is our way of adapting. If we do not, Barna argues that the coming paradigm tsunami will sweep Christians away, leaving at least half of all committed believers outside the organized local church.



Barna attempts to offer an astute and unflinching analysis of this phenomenon, but he offers no real solution to pastors.

Reading *Revolution* may leave you angry or depressed, or it may drive you to your knees. One thing it will not do is leave you bored.

I offer one suggestion: Read *The Present Future* by Reggie McNeal along with *Revolution*. McNeal addresses many of the same issues addressed by Barna, but he does so with much more optimism for the institutional church than Barna.

—Reviewed by Paul E. Grabill, senior pastor, State College Assembly of God, State College, Pennsylvania.

## BEYOND THE IMPASSE: TOWARD A PNEUMATOLOGICAL THEOLOGY OF RELIGIONS

Amos Yong

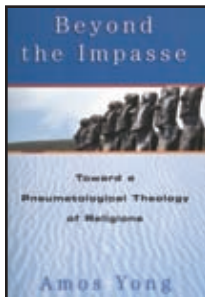
(Baker Academic, 205 pp., paperback)

Yong is a Pentecostal scholar who has maintained a steadfast allegiance to his Pentecostal roots. His objective is to open up fresh lines of theological reflection on the theology of the Holy Spirit as the centerpiece of serious engagement with non-Christian religions in an age of globalism. With the contours of world Christianity rapidly shifting from a primarily Western (European and American) dominance, Yong sees the urgency of Western Christians who are seeking to cultivate genuine biblical contextualization. For the author, genuine contextualization of Christian theology requires an understanding of the non-Western cultures in which the Church is growing. He recognizes no one enters the Christian life in a vacuum devoid of pre-conceptions and inherited values.

If engagement with non-Christian religions is being thrust on us, how then can we best undertake this challenge?



Yong makes a persuasive case for what he calls a "Pneumatological Theology of Religions," in which the student is called on to enter deeply into what Pentecostals understand to be discernment of the spirits. Yong offers suggestions for how such discernment is to be employed. In non-Christian religions there may be some positive features that can be pointers to Christ, but that much may, in fact, be quite contrary to Christian faith. For Yong, spiritual discernment, a ministry of the Holy Spirit, is important to make such distinctions.



This book is laden with references and quotations that disclose the range of knowledge and the breadth of the author's reading. It is not an open door to a sentimental inclusivism, neither is it a simplistic rejection of everything taught in non-Christian cultures. It is a thoughtful invitation to the serious reader to ask hard questions about how we are to engage in confronting world religions in a positive and biblical manner. This volume will stimulate Pentecostals who are interested in world evangelization.

—Reviewed by William W. Menzies, Ph.D., longtime Assemblies of God educator and missions consultant, Springfield, Missouri.

## PRODIGAL IN THE PARSONAGE: ENCOURAGEMENT FOR MINISTRY LEADERS WHOSE CHILD REJECTS FAITH

Judi Braddy  
(Beacon Hill Press, 143 pp., paperback)

Ministry life is tough enough, especially given people's expectations, and the expectations a minister has for himself and for his effectiveness. There are a hundred ways to feel relationship

failure in ministerial leadership. *Prodigal in the Parsonage* will break your heart and also raise a shout of thanksgiving as the author transparently unpacks her family's painful history.

Jim and Judi Braddy gave heart and soul to their calling, yet found little success in leading their three sons into the faith they preached. As they prayed, counseled, and watched, they helplessly saw their love and discipline scorned and walked on, crushing their spirit, and taking them to the edge of resignation from ministry.

The author has placed the family's deep heartaches and hurts inside sensitive stories and insightful revelations that reflect the rebellion, police reports, drug problems, resistance to parental guidance, and strain on their marriage and ministry.

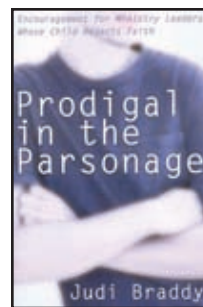
"Over the many years we squinted daily ... for our son's familiar stride on that distant road. Even today, two of our grown sons are at arm's length from the faith we tried to instill

— we've never stopped hanging out the lantern of love. One thing we must never resign is hope."

This is a book of hope. As the author says, "However long it took for the biblical prodigal to come to his senses, the father kept a robe and ring waiting. He never gave up hope."

Braddy says, "Just keep the robe and ring dusted."

—Reviewed by T. Ray Rachels, superintendent, Southern California District of the Assemblies of God, Irvine, California.



## WHEN PEOPLE THROW STONES: A LEADER'S GUIDE TO FIELDING PERSONAL CRITICISM

Blaine Allen

(Kregel Publications, 175 pp., paperback)

"Words strapped to bombs" is how Allen describes the confrontational, verbal approach some people use to get their message across. This includes the unscrupulous and thoughtless words people use with unusual freedom to carve up a responsible pastor.

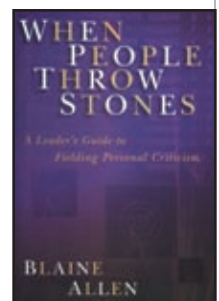
The book reviews situations in which a person can be hurt by others and then shows constructive ways to bring about positive results based on wise responses. For example, when some in the Corinthian church took the apostle Paul apart and labeled him a failure, he responded with wisdom (1 Corinthians 4:1–5). Allen uses Paul's response to outline how to keep standing when the ground underneath seems to move: (1) "Know who you are," (2) "Know the standard of success," (3) "Know who the real critic is" (1 Corinthians 4:4).

Allen writes with unusual freshness and transparency on big subjects, such as: when you have done your best; when you cannot take anymore; when your critic speaks the truth; how to deal with unjust criticism; when to take a stand; some survival techniques; how to temper your fire; what to do when an explosion seems inevitable; and when you do not want to forgive.

It is inevitable that pastors will face personal criticism. Being thoughtfully prepared and emotionally equipped to handle criticism is vital. I highly

recommend a careful and slow study of this excellent book.

—Reviewed by T. Ray Rachels, superintendent, Southern California District of the Assemblies of God, Irvine, California.



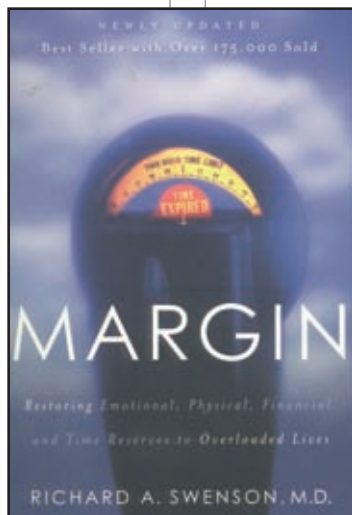
## MARGIN: RESTORING EMOTIONAL, PHYSICAL, FINANCIAL, AND TIME RESERVES TO OVERLOADED LIVES

Richard A Swenson

(Navpress, 275 pp., paperback)

This book is a must read for today's busy leaders. Writing from personal experience and from his observations as a medical doctor, Swenson diagnoses the problem of marginless living as epidemic. Swenson is concerned about the issues individuals are facing because of the continual overextension of their emotional, physical, financial, and time resources. Swenson points out the need to allow some margin or room for the unexpected in each of these four areas and offers a set of commonsense prescriptions designed to restore proper balance in people's lives. Although readers may not wish to add as much margin to their lives as the author, most will probably find themselves motivated to try some of his prescribed solutions.

This easy-to-read, interesting, relevant, and compelling book covers deep, life-changing concepts. Pastors should find it a valuable resource not only for dealing with individuals in their congregations caught up in



marginless living, but also for creating more personal margin in their own lives. There are books people read and give away. This book is valuable for future reference.

—Reviewed by Clarence St. John, superintendent, Minnesota District of the Assemblies of God, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

## UNFAITHFUL: REBUILDING TRUST AFTER INFIDELITY

Gary and Mona Shriver

(Life Journey, 223 pp., paperback)

*Unfaithful* is the true story of how the Shriver's marriage was traumatized by infidelity. Gary and Mona Shriver relate in detail their relationship before, during, and after Gary's affair. They describe the stages of forgiveness and healing, while making suggestions to those facing similar circumstances. The Shriver's are not professional counselors, but they share insights gained from their own marriage counseling.

Though the book has much to offer couples, one section could cause some to struggle. The authors recommend that both spouses acknowledge their part in the breakdown of the



relationship prior to the affair. They state that the unfaithful spouse is 100 percent responsible for the affair, but suggest that both husband and wife contribute to the prior breakdown of the relationship. Though this may be true, it is not always the case. In some marriages a person's choice to have an affair has little to do with his spouse, and has much to do with a breakdown in his personal life. Little is written on the internal issues that contributed to Gary's affair, but their self-disclosure is commendable and beneficial.

Despite the devastating pain of adultery, recovery is possible. This book could be a lifeline for hurting couples. Because of the delicate nature of the recovery process, however, it is recommended that the book supplement, not substitute, counseling with a pastor or counselor.

—Reviewed by Tricia Cunningham, MA, LPC, intensive therapist and director of support resources, Smalley Marriage Institute, Branson, Missouri.

## THE PASSIONATE CHURCH

Mike Breen and Walt Kallestad

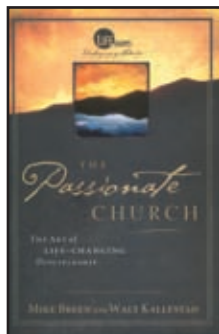
(Cook Communications Ministries, 235 pp., hardback)

Breen and Kallestad capture the complexity of discipleship in an ever-changing culture using clear and simple language. By merging eight everyday "LifeShapes" with the concepts of Christian living, the authors provide a clear explanation of discipleship for readers by enabling them to effectively communicate it to others.

Maps, like programs, are useful as long as the landscape and the roads never change. Since culture is rapidly changing, leaders are left to navigate among changing landscapes with obsolete maps. This book is not about updating maps and programs;

it is about returning to the Compass — Jesus. *The Passionate Church* serves as a handbook for church leaders in navigating with the Compass.

Breen and Kallestad help leaders discern the gifting God has placed in them, and stretch them beyond their comfort zone enabling them to understand and include the contrasting gifts of others. For example, the authors submit that “without pioneers we will never find the next frontier



... we will not reach beyond what we have already achieved. Without the settlers, we would never keep the frontier that was won by the pioneers. The pioneers will have pushed on to new territory, leaving the recently discovered land barren. Settlers must come to build and occupy, to maintain, and increase through steady, deliberate efforts. ... Many churches split, not because of theology, but because they don't understand the interplay between pioneers and settlers.”

*The Passionate Church* will help church leaders discover and define key concepts to develop disciples as lifelong learners.

—Reviewed by Daniel L. Zitterkopf, senior pastor, Cornerstone Fellowship, Bayard, Nebraska.

## FRAGILE HOPE: YOUR CHURCH IN 2020

Thomas Bandy  
(Abingdon Press, 166 pp., paperback)

Thomas Bandy does not mince words or waltz timidly around controversy. While his long-term ministry has taken place in mainline Protestant churches, his keen sense of the challenges

facing the Church spans the scope of Christian faith traditions.

The book centers itself around several key questions and themes.

- Will a church lament the current challenges from our culture by isolating itself in a protective mode or hit the road into mission? Bandy calls this the *Quo Vadis Moment* in search of Quo Vadis Momentum.

- Is church unity a matter of continued harmonious inclusiveness or unity created by focused missional purpose? Bandy suggests church organizations are fragile because they are not missional.

- Do religious institutions exist to preserve a heritage or challenge

people to be radical followers of Jesus? Bandy calls most church members “meandering delitantes” who are curious about religion



and are willing to invest a percentage of their income and several blocks of time a week to be part of a friendly group.

- Ministry as a missional congregation requires the question: “What is it about our experience with Jesus that this community cannot live without?”

- To concerned church leaders, Bandy answers the question, “Is there any hope?” (for my church and denomination) by saying, “Absolutely.”

This volume is not for the faint of heart. It goes straight for the jugular vein, but Bandy speaks clearly and from great experience. He deserves the attention of concerned church leaders.

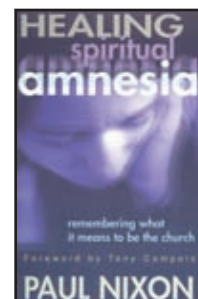
—Reviewed by Byron Klaus, president, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, Missouri.

## HEALING SPIRITUAL AMNESIA: REMEMBERING WHAT IT MEANS TO BE THE CHURCH

Paul Nixon

(Abingdon Press, 144 pp., paperback)

Nixon's book provides hope for churches that need revitalization. As Tony Campolo states in the foreword, “This book lays out exactly what has to be done for the dead bones of a fading congregation to take on new life and rise again.”



By amnesia, Nixon means that churches sometimes forget their timeless mission and values. They replace their original mission with historic forms and yesterday's ministry strategies, but continue to expect the same spiritual result as in the past. Their amnesia takes four forms:

- Forgetting who Jesus is.
- Forgetting the holy habits or spiritual disciplines.
- Forgetting our neighbor.
- Forgetting how to be effective in reaching our world.

Nixon amplifies these areas utilizing arresting illustrations from church life through which he weaves healing solutions for our amnesia.

The solutions, however, do not include a resurrection of the “good ol' days.” Church revitalization is not as simple as rolling back the clock. Fundamental causes of amnesia must be addressed.

This book is easy reading, but will challenge the reader to deal with hard issues. The study questions at the end of each chapter make it an ideal guide for discussion with church leaders.

—Reviewed by Warren Bullock, Ph.D., dean of the School of Ministry, Northwest College, Kirkland, Washington.



## KEY BEARERS MARKS 10 YEARS OF EFFECTIVE PRISON MINISTRY

In 1996, *Today's Pentecostal Evangel* began partnering with Light for the Lost to provide a consistent gospel witness in correctional institutions across the United States. That partnership, Key Bearers, has supplied some 5.5 million copies of the *Evangel* to the incarcerated over the past 10 years. In 2005 alone, more than 1,100 inmates made documented decisions to follow Jesus Christ.

"What a great 10 years this has been," says *Evangel* Managing Editor Ken Horn. "We never cease to be amazed at how God has used this ministry. Five million *Evangel*s means 5 million magazines being circulated in our prisons, each being read up to 100 inmates. The more magazines, the more opportunities to save souls and strengthen new believers."

Donations have provided Key Bearers with more than \$1.2 million since 1996, including a record \$143,000 last year. The outreach uses those funds to supply the English-language *TPE* and the quarterly Spanish *Evangelio Pentecostal Hoy* to at least 620 correctional facilities.



"There are so many prisons needing and wanting the magazine," Horn says, "that we are going all out to pour record numbers of the *Evangel* into our nation's correctional facilities."

"Key Bearers makes it possible to reach the growing Hispanic segment of our prison population with *Evangelio Pentecostal Hoy*," says Efraim Espinoza, director of the Office of

Hispanic Relations for the Assemblies of God and *EPH* coordinator.

"Many of these Hispanic inmates are immigrants who share their magazine and the salvation message with others in their home countries

in Latin America. Thus, many copies of *EPH* not only penetrate behind prison walls, but also across international boundaries with the 'Buenas Nuevas' the Good News."

"Key Bearers is one of the most effective uses of outreach funds," adds Horn. "It has had proven results among some of the most forgotten people for 10 years."

Churches can support Key Bearers by calling Light for the Lost at 1-800-988-0292 or by visiting the *Today's Pentecostal Evangel* Web site and clicking on the KB logo.



## Church conflict. Sometimes it can get pretty baaaaaaad.

Do you butt heads with your board? Is there friction in the flock? Do you approach conflict sheepishly? Discover time-tested, scriptural ways of dealing with conflict in *When Sheep Squabble: Managing Church Conflict*. It's a single-volume, spiral-bound compilation of our popular spring 2005 and summer 2005 issues of *Enrichment*. Order your copy today! (Tip: Order one for each of your staff and board members, too.)

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Communicating our beliefs and practices is important for AG churches. With the *AG Information Series*, AG churches can create a quality information center. The series contains specially designed, easy-to-read brochures that inform and educate visitors and members about our churches and the Assemblies of God.

A great way to start an information rack is with the *Sampler Kit* (GPH item #34TL4224). The sampler is \$6.25, and allows one to review 15 colorful information brochures. The sampler includes each brochure from the *Super 7 Series*, the six AG Perspectives, and our popular *Visitation* pieces. The *Sampler Kit* allows one to choose the brochures that best meet the church's needs. Many of these brochures cover the Assemblies of God's position on doctrinal and contemporary issues and can be used in Sunday school, membership classes, Wednesday night teachings, and small-group discussions.

An easy way to start an information rack is with the affordable *Super 7 Starter Pack* (GPH item #34TL4216). This starter pack contains 25 copies of each brochure in the colorful *Super 7 Series* (175 brochures for \$68.95). These easy-to-read brochures will help your community better know and understand your church. These seven brochures include *Our*

*Church and Fellowship*.

This handout is designed to introduce visitors to AG history, beliefs, organizational structure, and what can be expected in a typical service.

Another brochure, *Our Message*, answers questions that visitors and new believers may have about God's role in their lives

and explains the four primary truths of the Assemblies of God. The other brochures in the *Super 7 Starter Pack* give more in-depth, easy-to-understand explanations of our 16 doctrines, including the baptism in the Holy Spirit. These brochures are great for Sunday school and small-group discussions or for new converts seeking a deeper Christian life. Also included in this collection is a smaller informative piece containing AG statistics with colorful graphs and charts of growth trends, ministries, and more. Many churches use the AG statistics brochure to give new members a feel for the larger Fellowship they are joining.



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For more information, visit the GPH Web store at <http://www.gospelpublishing.com>. To place an order, call Gospel Publishing House at 1-800-641-4310, or order online. The *AG Information Series* is a resource of the Office of Public Relations.

## NEW MEGA SPORTS CAMP THEME MEANS NEW CHANCE FOR CHURCH GROWTH

MEGA Sports Camp is an intentionally evangelistic outreach that uses sports to attract elementary-age children. Since the program is sports based, it is easy for children to invite their friends or for churches to invite the whole neighborhood. Churches using MSC have reported a 50 percent increase in visitors. MSC makes turning visitors into regulars easy because MSC builds in natural opportunities to connect with children and their families.



Suzanne Cole, a children's ministry director in Louisiana, reports, "MEGA Sports Camp was our most successful outreach ever. We had 40 percent more children, and nearly 30 of them accepted Christ. And, for the first time, men volunteered to help. We are definitely doing MSC again."

*Breaking Free*, the new theme, is based on Hebrews 12:1,2 and shares how God helps children overcome things that hold them back in sports and life. The new theme uses the same high-quality, do-it-yourself format to teach children basketball, soccer, or cheerleading skills. MSC also incorporates upbeat music, interactive Bible stories, and attention-grabbing object lessons to teach Jesus' great love in simple terms.

MEGA Sports Camp's schedule is flexible. By using five, 3-hour sessions or 10, 1 1/2-hour sessions, MSC can be used as a VBS alternative, spring break outreach, after-school program, midweek program, weekend sports clinic, or back-to-school kick-off. Youth pastors and teens have also successfully adapted MSC for overseas missions trips.

According to Lee Terry, Rocky Mountain District youth director, "MSC gave



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structure to our youth group's park outreaches to children during the 2005 General Council. The leaders loved it. MSC is a complete program, but you can use as much as or as little as you want. It would be great on the mission field. I would recommend this to anyone who wants to do effective outreach to children."

Discover how easy it is to introduce children to Christ through sports by visiting <http://www.megasportscamp.com> or call 1-800-641-4310 for an information packet that includes a free catalog.

## AG OFFERS FREE ONLINE NEWS SERVICE

The Assemblies of God offers a free online news service called AG News. Three times a week national Assemblies of God news is delivered directly to subscribers' e-mail addresses.

Along with regular news reports, the service features stories on individual and church efforts to evangelize and minister to communities; AG colleges; upcoming events; new resources available; and significant national leadership changes.

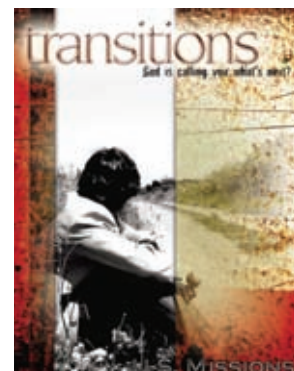
When breaking news happens that affects the Assemblies of God — such as the hurricanes that ravaged the Gulf Coast this past year — AG News provides its readers with first reports

from districts as well as how churches and individuals can take action and assist with the recovery efforts.

To subscribe to AG News, send an e-mail to [news@ag.org](mailto:news@ag.org) and write "subscribe" in the subject line or register online at <http://www.ag.org>.

## NEW U.S. MISSIONS MINISTRY CATALOG

*Transitions — God Is Calling You ... What's Next?* is a ministry catalog designed to give young adults information about how to become a U.S. missionary. This 20-page catalog covers Chaplaincy Ministries, Chi Alpha Campus Ministries, Church Planting, Intercultural Ministries, Teen Challenge, and U.S. MAPS. *Transitions* includes additional features, such as finding God's will for one's life, how to make it on a missionary's budget, and recommended readings related to missionary work. For more information or to order this catalog, visit <http://www.usmissions.ag.org>, or call 1-417-862-2781, ext. 3266.



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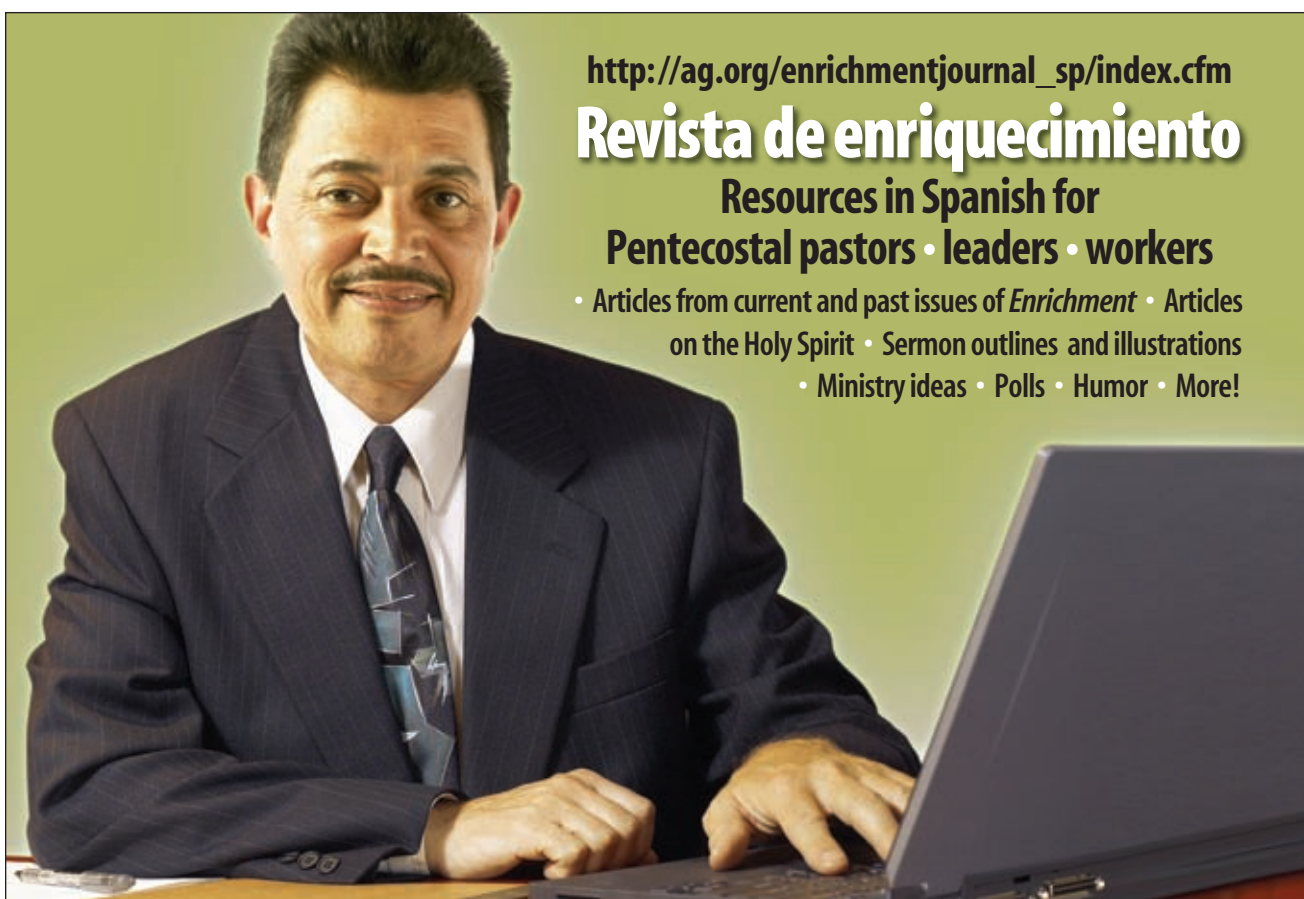
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# Hope in Despair

BY RICHARD L. SCHOONOVER

**G**loom, despair, and agony on me. Deep dark depression, excessive misery.

If it weren't for bad luck I'd have no luck at all.

Gloom, despair, and agony on me."

Those who watched the television show *Hee-Haw* between 1969-71 often laughed at the humorous anecdotes that accompanied these lyrics. But those suffering from depression know that "gloom, despair, agony, and deep dark depression" are nothing to laugh at. They are real. In a recent *Enrichment* Web poll, 17 percent of respondents said they became depressed to the point it affected their ministry performance quite often. Another 24 percent said they were depressed to this point every 2 or 3 months. While some pastors may not be willing to admit it, depression is something they live with every day.

Part of the problem with depression, stress, and burnout comes with the role of pastor. Those in the helping professions — pastors, teachers, doctors — are at greater risk for these conditions because they care about people. Archibald Hart calls burnout "compassion fatigue."

Many things create depression, stress, and burnout in the ministry. Pastors are on call 24/7. Their work is never done. Pastors always have sermons to prepare, people to visit, administrative duties to perform, and family needs that require their attention. Many pastors are idealistic about the ministry and what they believe they can accomplish. Thus, the unreasonable and unrealized expectations that result from people and situations that pastors cannot control cause stress and depression. Pastors often feel a sense of failure because their plans

for success in the church did not develop as they had hoped. For some pastors, criticism and conflict in the church are constant companions.

Steve Roll identifies several unholy spirits in the church that contribute to burnout: the "spirit of rebellion" among people who resist authority; the "spirit of offences" among people who are easily offended and willing to believe the worst about the pastor and others in the church; the "spirit of criticism"; the "spirit of bitterness"; and the "spirit of control."<sup>1</sup> Because dealing with these issues is stressful, many pastors leave their churches and even the ministry.

More than merely listing the cause of depression, stress, and burnout, the staff of *Enrichment* journal wanted to offer help and hope to those who are suffering from these conditions. We have planned this journal as a resource for those who are suffering from depression and burnout.

Pastors must have permission to talk about their depression and burnout. Many pastors hide in their condition for fear they will lose their ministry. But this only deepens the depression and burnout, making recovery that much more difficult. Pastors need to find a trusted friend in whom they can confide. Free confidential counseling for pastors and their families is also available from the Ministerial Enrichment helpline at 1-800-867-4011. Trained counselors at EMERGE are there to help.

Many of those who wrote articles for this issue of *Enrichment* have experienced depression and burnout. As they share their experience, they also provide practical and spiritual answers in overcoming depression and burnout. These writers also provide timeless tips for reducing stress and minimizing depression and burnout.

A pastor's wife is susceptible to depression and burnout because of the unique pressures she faces. A pastor's wife is also affected by her husband's depression. Roy Oswald from the Alban Institute says: "Stress and burnout among clergy wives is as high as for pastors — and that's high." We have included an article and an interview with two pastors' wives to help them deal with their and their husbands' depression.

Many Pentecostals have negative opinions concerning psychiatrists. They associate these medical professionals with Freudian concepts. But some pastors and their wives are in such deep depression they may need to take antidepressants along with biblical counseling. Just as we might see a doctor for a physical ailment, some may need to see a Christian psychiatrist for their emotional needs. (*See From Coping To Conquering: A Christian Psychiatrist's View of the Relationship Between Physical Health and Depression, Stress, and Burnout*, page 64.)

Pastor, be assured that we are concerned about your spiritual, emotional, and mental health. We trust that this issue of the journal will start you on the road to a healthier more fruitful life and ministry.

For more resources on dealing with depression, stress, and burnout, go to <http://www.ag.org> and type any of these words in the search box. ■

**Richard L. Schoonover**, associate editor, *Enrichment* journal, Springfield, Missouri  
ENDNOTE

1. Steve Roll, *Unholy Burnout* (Tulsa, Oklahoma: Hensley Publishing, 1996).