

Alan Palmer (Edited by Richard Collins)

Ministerial Burnout Signs and Solutions

(Part Two)



Ministers can be like pilots of hot air balloons.

To avoid crashing, they look for ways to lighten the load. Things get dumped. And this might help, but sadly, it's often the wrong things which are jettisoned. Quiet times, space for the spouse and children, hobbies which help with reducing stress – these often go first. Instead of taking a careful look at the stress, and making changes, ministers start to do without some of the most important things in life. Just to survive.

Except this doesn't help with survival. It can actually worsen the situation. As things deteriorate, ministers seek darker solutions: alcohol, over-eating, smoking and even the secret world of porn addiction. Some resort to immoral relationships in

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a vain 'cry for help.' They subconsciously hope to be discovered, knowing they will be forced to quit pastoral ministry.

Further toxic effects may surface. Leaders may be tempted to avoid areas which are emotionally demanding. Instead of confronting problems, they avoid them, putting Band Aids on issues which need immediate, urgent attention. Sadly, children often suffer as a consequence. Parenting

is a demanding task, and a minister with limited capacity can easily see children as 'a problem to fix,' instead of a gift from God. If depression sets in, the whole family will suffer.

Possible Solutions

If only there were some quick fixes for this. There aren't. But there are some practical steps that leaders can take.

- Don't feel guilty. Reject the idea that depression is shameful. It isn't. It can happen to anyone.
- Don't delay in seeking help. Do NOT suffer in silence.
- Involve your family. Let them be a part of the healing process.
- Confide in a close friend.
- Seek professional help, if necessary. Do not let pride obstruct your path to healing.
- Take medication, if necessary. There is nothing shameful in using modern medicine.
- Tell your elder board (governing authority). Delay on this and it will only make things worse later. Talk sooner rather than later.
- If you take time off, then return only when you are healthy. Early return will simply lead to the same results – that isn't good for you or the church you serve.

Avoiding Burnout

Of course, the best course is to establish patterns which help you avoid a crisis point. The Greeks had a saying, 'The bow that is always kept bent will lose its power.'

Some ministers don't know how to relax. They either feel guilty or they start to lose their identities when they're not working. Yes, that sounds extreme, but it can happen. The healthy minister, by contrast, establishes a balanced life. Time to rest, time with family, sabbaticals, they're part of a balanced 'life-diet.'

It's actually not hard to know if you're healthy. Ask yourself the following question when you're 'kicking back.' Am I thinking of work – sermons to write, people to counsel, decisions to make? Or have I set those things down in order to recharge my batteries? If you bring your work into your rest, you won't be able to find the spiritual space to connect with God. You'll find you're constantly carrying loads you were never designed to carry.

Rest is not an option. It is God's design for human beings. Including leaders, who need rest just like everyone else.

One final thing. Connect, connect, connect. Either confide in a close personal friend or set up a triplet. Invite challenging questions. Don't become isolated. Go deep with these friends and journey together, encouraging each other and sharing your burdens with them. Christ had his three best buddies, Peter, James and John. It's a good model.

Then pray, pray, pray. The Lord Jesus is the head of your church. Not you. You are not responsible for it, Christ is. All you need to do is show up and be faithful. Entrust each day to your God.

He will take care of you, because he loves you. Believe it.



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