

## Dealing With Burnout (Part 1 of 2)

by Pastor George

“Burnout.”

What do you think of when you hear that all-too-familiar term?



I can tell you what comes into my mind: the guy who found out the hard way that burning the candle at both ends does not make you brighter!

Why do I say this? Because I was that guy! I learned my lesson through tough personal experience. And I’m absolutely certain that I’m not alone. Many of us in professional ministry are living our lives as though we were an inexhaustible resource. That’s not a good idea.

Several years ago there came a day when I found myself saying to my church board, “I think I may be in trouble. I don’t know what’s wrong with me. I’m experiencing increased anxiety. I find myself easily irritated with my wife and children for no apparent reason. I’m going to see a counselor. Please pray for me.”

I went home from that meeting and shared with my wife what I had said to the board. I told her that I was going to call Dr. Mike. And that’s exactly what I did. I remember it like it was yesterday. At our third counseling session, he was ready to give me his diagnosis. I braced myself, almost afraid to hear what he had to say. Then came the verdict: “George, your life is out of balance. You are suffering from burnout.” What a relief! I wasn’t going crazy after all!

Exactly what is “burnout”? In psychological terms, it refers to long-term exhaustion resulting in diminished interest in work. It’s a state of mind in which continual, unrelieved stress can produce feelings of depression, hopelessness, and helplessness. Typically, these feelings are accompanied by a loss of coping skills at home and the office. This leads to negative attitudes towards work, ministry, family and self. Ministry leaders will often report that they experience decreased mental energy and initiative. There is also a loss of confidence, increased anxiety, angry flare ups, and emotional detachment. The list goes on as one becomes increasingly less effective.

Is there a way to avoid “burnout”? My answer is “yes”! And I’d suggest that the first step is realizing that you’re vulnerable. This phenomenon is especially prevalent

among ministers. According to an article in the New York Times (August 1, 2010), 40% of pastors and 47% of pastoral spouses are suffering from burnout, frantic schedules, and/or unrealistic expectations. And 45% of pastors say that they've experienced depression or burnout to the extent that they needed to take a leave of absence from ministry. If you don't fall into that category now, there's a pretty good chance that you will at some point in the future – unless you make up your mind to do something about it.

What exactly can you do? I'll share some specific strategies that will help you steer clear of "burnout" in Part 2 of this article. In the meantime, I want to encourage you sit back and take a deep breath. If you're experiencing any of the symptoms that drove me to have that memorable talk with my board, you can take courage in the thought that you're not alone. There is something you can do to address the situation. And help is on the way.

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