

Church Leader, are you feeling burnt out or on the verge of burning out? Here's some solutions to help.

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Leadership Network *Advance*



Getting real with pastor burnout

By: Ron Edmondson, CEO

Almost on a daily, but certainly on a weekly basis, I hear from a pastor or ministry leader facing burnout. This is not a new issue for Leadership Network. We build the idea of health of individuals into all our programs, such as in our [Next Gen Pastors Groups](#). I don't know of many pastors who have gone through one of our group processes who wouldn't say it helped them avoid some of the pitfalls of ministry. Certainly it helped me as a pastor.

It seems, however, that the issues are heavier and the pressures of ministry are greater than ever before in my career. It is why I continue to write about such issues [on my personal blog](#) and why last fall we began adding even more emphasis to the health of the church and church leaders. It's also why we will publish a book on the issue this fall. (Stay tuned)

With this issue at the forefront of our thought process as a ministry, I was delighted to begin recent conversations with Hugh White and [Full Strength Network](#). The mission of Full Strength Network is built around 6 domains of well-being - Spiritual, Emotional, Relational, Physical, Intellectual and Financial. They assist mostly through counseling and coaching relationships. If you need help in any of these areas, please reach out to them. Additionally, [check out this app](#) for Pastors, ministry leaders and their spouses.

Here's an article I asked Hugh to write for us in this edition of LN Advance. As always, please let me know how we might serve you. We care for you and your Kingdom work.

Pastor, Are You Burning Out?

But the Lord said to him (twice), "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

I'm 67 years old and just had my first burn out experience. It never happened during an intense 40+ year business career, most of it as the chief sales and marketing officer of a company with a half-billion dollars in assets. No, it came two years after entering vocational ministry as the CEO of an emerging Christian nonprofit ministry.

Here's a list of the symptoms that I experienced during my burnout adventure:

- I allowed the busyness of the work to crowd out my sacred early morning time with God, including spiritually fueling my heart and mind with His power-giving Word.
- I sacrificed attention to my physical wellbeing diminishing my physical energy reserves and the capacity to renew them.
- My emotional battery ran fully dry and nothing I did would recharge and restore my emotional equilibrium.
- I just wanted to sit in my reading chair in our darkened guest bedroom and let my mind and emotions go numb for hours at a time. It's like my mind and heart kept saying, "Leave me alone!"
- I could not focus or concentrate on much of anything, let alone effectively engage with work duties.
- When I finally made it into my office knowing that people were depending on me to get work done, I'd lean on my desk with head in hands and inexplicably begin weeping—then do in several hours what normally would have taken one.

Thanks to grace-laden empathy and loving care from my wife, and support from my board after confessing my burnout state and admitting that I couldn't go on like this—some recovery realizations (life lessons) began to emerge. I'm happy to say the healing process, though not complete, is underway.

Here are some important lessons that God has been showing me, along with insights drawn from Elijah's story when he became paralyzed with fear upon hearing Jezebel's pledge that "he would be dead by the same time tomorrow".

Lesson 1: Working long days and maxing out every minute of your schedule week after week as a regular routine may seem efficient and the epitome of a high-performance leader, but it's not. It's folly. If your body's tachometer is constantly running on or over the red line, then you've set the stage for burnout. If you leave no slack in your schedule, and you don't renew body, mind, and soul on a regimented basis, then some Jezebel moment (inevitable for pastors) will come from out of nowhere tipping you off balance enough that you won't be able to stop a tumble into burnout. Renewing your mental, physical, and emotional reserves, and scheduling some slack time for unexpected intrusions is critical for thriving.

Lesson 2: Running away and hiding is never the answer for healing. Self-pity doesn't work either. In a moment of weakness (after facing 450 prophets of Baal), Elijah inexplicably caves to Jezebel's death threat. He flees to Beersheba, dumps his loyal servant (isolated pastors beware), and wanders out into the wilderness in total despair asking God to take his life. God, through an angel, twice prescribes sleep and nutrition.

This therapy was a prerequisite for what was to come next.

Lesson 3: During times like this in your life, God wants to meet with you face to face for a divine counseling engagement. God will never squander an opportunity to teach you when you hit bottom. For Elijah, he traveled forty days and nights to the mountain of God. As all good counselors do, God starts his therapy session with a question, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" I would paraphrase the question, "What the heck are you doing here, Elijah?" Elijah disgorges his negative feelings, projecting blame on others for his condition. God gives Elijah an object lesson. He is not to be found in a windstorm, earthquake, or fire; it was in a gentle whisper that Elijah knew God was near. That whisper turned into a repeated question, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" Elijah disgorges a second time, still projecting blame on others. Insight: it takes a while to unpack emotional garbage, and it's critical to get it all out. For me, my gentle whisper from God was, "Stop trying to do big things (wind, quake, and fire) in your own strength, and learn to trust Me!"

Lesson 4: It's critical to delegate and work from priorities, making a fresh pledge to God that you will indeed learn to trust Him. After all, "without faith (trust), it's impossible to please God" (Hebrews 11:6). It's a strange form of insanity to try and do God's work in your own strength. After his counseling session with God, Elijah was told to trace his steps backward from whence he came and resume his prophetic duties by appointing leaders who would join Elijah in sharing and perpetuating leadership responsibility. As part of my recovery, we repositioned a gifted executive to manage operations, the stuff that was crushing me. My early morning coffee time with Jesus has been restored. Tears of returning joy now come at the end of the day as I once again am able to reflect on God's goodness.

Hugh White is a preachers kid, seminary graduate, teaching elder, and the president of Full Strength Network.

PS: *If you haven't participated in our recent church survey we would love for you to now. [TAKE SURVEY HERE](#). Simply answer the ones that apply to you or for which you have a good answer.*

- Ron Edmondson



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