
LIFT

Ministry Group May Resource

Nine Signs You Are Burning Out

More than most environments, ministry combines what you do (your work) with what you believe (your faith) and your community (your congregation/friends). Without skillful navigation, that can create a roller coaster of emotions that push leaders toward burnout.

Carey Nieuwhof identifies nine signs that may indicate you are burning out:

1. Your motivation has faded.

The passion that fueled you is gone, and your motivation has either vaporized or become self-centered.

2. Your main emotion is 'numbness'.

You no longer feel the highs or the lows. There is an emotional emptiness or detachment that is creating a disconnect.

3. People drain you.

Of course there are draining people on the best of days, but not everybody, every time. Burnout could be on the horizon if social interaction leaves you depleted or mentally and emotionally worn out.

Discuss: How do you guard yourself against social fatigue?



We are all familiar with the old adage, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” Simply put, it’s easier to stop something from happening in the first place than to repair the damage after it has happened.

This is as true in ministerial leadership as it is in medicine. Burnout is a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion caused by prolonged and excessive stress. It typically happens when you feel overwhelmed and unable to meet the constant demands of life and ministry. It’s indicative of when we rely too much on our own strength instead of drawing on God’s infinite supply.

“Burnout is not just a physical phenomenon. It is a spiritual one. It’s when you forget that you are a vessel, not the source.”

-John Ortberg-

Yet, often our approach to dealing with burnout is focused on recovery rather than prevention. Ruth Haley Barton, a leader in the area of spiritual formation, contends that the most important gift a minister can give their church is not their preaching, but a healthy soul.

Discuss: Have you ever experienced burnout? What impact did it have on you, your family, and ministry?

Preventing burnout requires intentionality. Let’s look at seven ways a minister can circumvent burnout personally and professionally.

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4. Little things make you disproportionately angry.

When you start losing your cool over small things, it's a sign something deeper is very wrong.

5. You're becoming cynical.

Many leaders fight this one, but cynicism rarely finds a home in a healthy heart. A cynical person tends to doubt others' motives, expecting that behind kindness or good actions, there's usually some hidden agenda or self-serving reason.

Discuss: Do you normally assume the worst about people? Are you skeptical of peoples' motives?

6. Your productivity is dropping.

You might be working long hours, but you're producing little of value. Or what used to take you 5 minutes just took you 45. That's a warning bell.

7. You're self-medicating.

Your coping mechanism has gone underground or dark. Whether that's overeating, overworking, drinking, impulsive spending, or even drugs, you've chosen a path of self-medication over self-care.

8. You don't laugh anymore.

Nothing seems fun or funny and, at its worst, you begin to resent people who enjoy life.

9. Sleep and time off no longer refuel you.

Sometimes you're not burnt out; you're just tired. A good night's sleep or a week or two off will help most healthy people bounce back with fresh energy. But you could have a month off when you're burnt out and not feel any difference. Not being refueled when you take time off is a major warning sign you're burning out.

Discuss: Does time off refresh you physically, recenter you spiritually, and reset you emotionally?

<https://careynieuwhof.com/9-signs-youre-burning-out-in-leadership/>

1. Prioritize Personal Time With God

Your ministry for God can never replace your relationship with God. Daily time in prayer, Scripture reading, and stillness is vital fuel for the soul.

2. Building Strong Boundaries

Set clear limits for work hours, meetings, counseling sessions, and personal family time. Healthy boundaries protect your longevity, but only if you stick to them.



Discuss: What boundaries have you put in place to protect your longevity in ministry?

3. Embrace Rest Without Guilt

Take your Sabbath seriously. Take vacations. Take breaks. Rest is a command, not a suggestion. It's holy and necessary. Rest is not a reward for finishing your work; it's God's design for you to be whole.

4. Cultivate Safe Friendships

Find a few trusted friends where you can be your true self; no titles, no expectations. Genuine friendships provide strength, accountability, and recovery when you fall. Pastors need real friends, not just fans.

5. Delegate and Empower Others

Train, trust, and empower others to share the load, even if they don't do it perfectly. Delegation isn't weakness, it's wisdom from God through godly counsel.



Discuss: Why is delegating so hard for so many pastors/leaders?

6. Watch For Warning Signs

Guarding your inner life is crucial because it affects all outward ministry. Pay attention to irritability, cynicism, isolation, and emotional exhaustion. Early warning signs are God's way of prompting you to adjust before you crash.

7. Stay Humble and Teachable

Be willing to seek counseling, coaching, or mentorship, if needed. Asking for help is not weakness; it's wisdom.