



Preventing Pastor Burnout

Presented by Sean Nemecek, author of *The Weary Leader's Guide to Burnout*

Burnout is . . .

- NOT a lack of resilience but an end to resilience.
- NOT a disease, disfunction, or disability.
- A normal human response to an overwhelmingly stressful work environment.
- A total depletion of self.
- A somatic stress response.
- Accompanied by shame, anxiety, or grief.

How can I know if I'm Burned Out? 4 Diagnostic Questions

1. Are you physically and emotionally fatigued?
2. Do you have a diminished sense of accomplishment?
3. Have you lost your calling or your sense of self?
4. Are you feeling hopeless or stuck?

What causes burnout?

1. Primary Cause: Unhealthy or dysfunctional work environment (or micro-environment).
2. Secondary Cause: Inability on the part of the individual to differentiate from their work.



6 Areas that contribute to burnout

From the *Areas of Worklife Survey* by Michael P. Leiter & Christina Maslach

1. Workload — Not just about hours worked but more likely the spiritual and emotional toll of the work.

Example: The amount of emotional, relational, physical, and cognitive energy expended on one Sunday morning can leave pastors feeling depleted for 24 to 48 hours after.

Questions to ask:

- What does your rhythm of work and rest look like?
- How is your work affecting the rest of your life?
- How do you experience your strengths and calling?
- What is weighing you down and how can we help lighten the load?

How to help your pastor be more resilient:

Ensure that their strengths and calling shape their work and provide regular rhythms for rest and play.

2. Control — Freedom to decide when, where, and how work gets done.

Example: While pastors have more flexibility in their schedule than most people, their work is often determined by the changing needs of others. An unpredictable schedule causes more stress than a regular pattern.

Questions to ask:

- In what ways do you feel restricted in your work?
- Which parts of your schedule are fixed, and which are flexible?
- How can we help you protect your most important work?
- What about your job is draining? What is life-giving?

How to help your pastor be more resilient:

Help your pastor establish healthy boundaries so they can say “no” to things that would take them away from their most important work.



3. Reward — Recognition for our work without additional pressure to perform.

Example: Pastors swim in criticism and hear very little genuine encouragement. They also feel the immense pressure of being “put on a pedestal” that makes it hard to be simply human.

Questions to ask:

- How can we offer enough encouragement to counteract the negativity you encounter?
- What types of positive feedback are most helpful to you?
- When do you experience anxiety, shame, or too much stress?
- What are you most proud of in your work? What gets most overlooked?

How to help your pastor be more resilient:

Teach your congregation how to offer *genuine encouragement* to one another and to your pastor.

4. Community — The spiritual, emotional, and relational health of the workplace

Example: Many churches (and church boards) are conflict avoidant which causes stress to build below the surface until someone erupts. The pastor often becomes the lightning rod for people’s disappointment with God because they don’t know how to manage their own emotions.

Questions to ask:

- What can we do to deepen our trust in one another?
- How can we better understand one another’s deepest values and beliefs?
- What can we do to develop a healthier approach to conflict — one that works through our differences to create unity?
- In what ways is our congregation or our board spiritually, emotionally, or relationally immature?

How to help your pastor be more resilient:

Learn to lament well and teach your congregation how to communally take their anger and disappointment to God.



5. Fairness — People are treated with equity and justice with each person treated according to their needs.

Example: Churches sometimes show favoritism toward those who give more money or have more influence, especially when they conflict with the pastor.

Questions to ask:

- Which of your needs are not being met or are causing stress?
- In what ways do we need to improve at meeting one another's needs?
- How are we showing favoritism or marginalizing people?
- How can we prepare ourselves to stand up for the weak and powerless?

How to help your pastor be more resilient:

As a session, be more concerned about one another's well-being — spiritual, physical, emotional, relational, financial — than about doing business. If you can't care for yourselves and one another, you shouldn't be caring for a whole congregation.

6. Values — How what matters most to us lines up with the organization.

Example: Most pastors who are in burnout have fallen into some form of people-pleasing which causes them to set aside their core values in favor of appeasing the critics.

Questions to ask:

- How are you protecting your values and expressing them through your work?
- Where are you tempted or pressured to compromise your values?
- How do your values line up with the values of the rest of session? With the church?
- Which of your values are out of sync with the values of the Kingdom of God?

How to help your pastor be more resilient:

Work for clarity around values. Each person on session needs to be clear on their own values, the values of the Congregation, and, most importantly, the values of the Kingdom of God. When values are in competition, conflict arises and can divide the group.



Identity

Who is speaking the Gospel to your pastor?

- Who we are in Christ
- Our security in Jesus
- Courage to take ministry risks
- Freedom from the outcomes
- Our belovedness as God's children

Additional Items for Discussion:

- How do you experience the work culture of our church?
- How can we help our pastor hear far more encouragement than criticism?
- What would help us to feel more secure in Christ and with each other?
- Where have we broken trust with one another?
- How did Jesus care for himself by protecting his time, energy, and life with the Father?