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Never Alone: Discovering the Path to Burnout Avoidance

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

NEVER ALONE:
DISCOVERING THE PATH TO BURNOUT AVOIDANCE

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF PORTLAND SEMINARY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

DMin Dissertation

This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

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has been approved by
the Dissertation Committee on February 20, 2018
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Semiotics and Future Studies.

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All scripture references, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version. Biblica, Inc., 2011.

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to all the hard-working men and women who serve in the ministry. Some of you, like me, experienced burnout at some point in your journey. Some may be experiencing symptoms right now. The journey back is long and difficult but well worth the effort. We all know the destination is the large part of our purpose, but it's the journey together that stokes our anticipation for what is to come.

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ABSTRACT

Pastoral burnout, in the past century, has become an issue that captures the attention of researchers and ministry professionals alike. Experts claim that burnout is avoidable when ministers submit to an obedient, faithful pursuit of life with God rather than working at a frenzied pace to impress people and gain the approval of God.¹

Defined as the status of an individual that has become fatigued with his or her vocation or major life activity, burnout is preceded by a long-term avoidance of the signs of weakness and an intense focus on simply working harder.² Some scholars believe the primary problem is the lack of self-care, however, in what form and to what standard would self-care be measured?³ To understand the impacts of self-care in preventing burnout, self-care must be defined and contrasted with different environments deficient of such care.

This study will share findings across denominational and cultural lines and the impact of different approaches to healthy ministry and what appears to prevent the effects of burnout. Additionally, this author, by examining the missing components in spiritual and personal life, compared real-life stories of ministry failures and successes by juxtaposing them with healthy, long-term ministry professionals who avoided burnout and ministry failure.

¹ J. R. Briggs, *Fail: Finding Hope and Grace in the Midst of Ministry Failure* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 62.

² Richard J. Krejcir, "Statistics on Pastors," *Into Thy Word*, 2007, accessed February 12, 2017, <http://www.intothyword.org/apps/articles/default.asp?articleid=36562>.

³ Bruce Epperly, *A Center in the Cyclone: Twenty-First Century Clergy Self-Care* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 4.

This project identified the problem of burnout facing Evangelical ministers today and examined several case studies that confirm the overwhelming statistical evidence of an epidemic that has grown in recent decades, despite the abundance of research, focused studies, and preventative measures put in place. The idea is not to say denominations and churches have not taken the problem of ministry burnout seriously, but that perhaps the focus has been heavy on the treatment of symptoms rather than the causes.

The solution, if discoverable, will address the root of the problem while providing some healing to the symptoms during the long process of holistic personal and spiritual health of the minister. While this author does not claim to hold the secret to perfect ministry health or the solution to higher-than-average attrition rates in caring occupations, the personal experience of burnout and emotional fatigue after a decade in ministry will lend some expertise to the potential solution. Particular attention to avoiding the temptation of quick fixes and the entertainment of suppressive devices that only exacerbate the problem will be a priority.

SECTION 1:
THE PROBLEM

Burnout has become a word we use to describe an individual who has become fatigued with his or her vocation or major life activity. Pastoral burnout continues to be a problem throughout western Evangelicalism and according to author John Sanford, will never be an old subject.⁴ The longer one serves, a battle begins to rage in the mind of committed pastors, convincing them to ignore the signs of weakness and acquiesce to intense workloads. The problem could be the lack of self-care, as many interviews conducted by this author would suggest.

The following statistics encapsulate the responses of pastors from evangelical churches in North America addressing the consequences of vocational ministry:

- Nearly 75 percent of pastors have considered leaving their jobs in the last quarter of the survey year, 2006.⁵
- 35 to 40 percent of pastors do leave the ministry after only five years; 60 to 80 percent of pastors will leave in their first decade, and a small percentage will stay in the ministry for their entire career.⁶

⁴ John A. Sanford, *Ministry Burnout* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1982), 1.

⁵ Richard J. Krejcir, "Statistics on Pastors," *Into Thy Word*, 2007, accessed June 10, 2016, <http://www.intothyword.org/apps/articles/default.asp?articleid=36562>.

⁶ *Ibid.*

- One study found that United Methodist clergy spends 56.2 hours per week in ministry and twelve evenings a month away from home on church duties.⁷
- 80 percent of clergy expressed that their involvement in church leadership has negatively impacted their appetite for functioning in the church.⁸
- 33 percent say that ministry is a hazard to their families.⁹

Considering the implications of the data, the suggestion that fifteen of every twenty ministry leaders are entertaining the idea of leaving vocational ministry is alarming.

A plethora of burnout definitions exist, with most focused on the combination of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion from unmanaged stress. The Mayo Clinic extended the definition to include doubts about one's confidence and the value of one's work.¹⁰ High-achievers are frequently zealous about what they do; they cultivate a disregard for evidence, they're working extraordinarily long hours, undertaking remarkably heavy workloads, and putting immense pressure on themselves to excel—marking themselves prime for burnout.

Writing about pastors and ministry leaders, author Peter Scazzaro commented about those who leave church:

⁷ Larry VandeCreek and Laurel Burton, eds., "Professional Chaplaincy: Its Role and Importance in Healthcare," *The Journal of Pastoral Care*, 55, no. 1 (March 1, 2001): 81–97, accessed December 15, 2016, doi:10.1177/002234090105500109.

⁸ George Barna, *Today's Pastors: A Revealing Look at What Pastors Are Saying about Themselves, Their Peers, and the Pressures They Face* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1993), quoted in Wayne Cordeiro, *Leading on Empty: Refilling Your Tank and Renewing Your Passion* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2009), 43.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ "Job Burnout: How to Spot It and Take Action," Mayo Clinic, August 30, 2015, accessed December 15, 2016, <http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/burnout/art-20046642>.

After many years of frustration and disappointment, realizing that the black-and-white presentations of the life of faith did not fit with their life experience, they quit—at least internally. For the sake of their children, or perhaps for lack of an alternative, they have remained in the church, but passively. They can't quite put their finger on the problem, but they know something is not right. Something is missing. A deep unease in their soul gnaws at them, but they don't know what to do about it.¹¹

Though burnout displays are somewhat recurrently in ministry-related fields, burnout is not restricted to those in Christian service. Individuals with jobs in high-stress environments who feel compulsory urges to please employers and clients share a common experience.

Thomas Skovolt and Michelle Trotter-Mathison, in their book *The Resilient Practitioner: Burnout Prevention and Self-Care Strategies for Counselors, Therapists and Health Professionals*, identified the chief five occupations in which burnout presents itself: counselors, therapists, teachers, health care practitioners, and clergy, apparently representing high-touch professions that suggest a desire to love and heal those who are hurting. Maslach captured this idea when she detailed the response of a social worker named Carol: “When I try to describe my experience to someone else, I use the analogy of a teapot. Just like a teapot, I was on the fire, with water boiling—working hard to handle problems and do good. But after several years, the water had boiled away, and yet I was still on the fire—a burned-out teapot in danger of cracking.”¹²

Archibald Hart, a forerunner in the scholarship of ministry burnout, encapsulated his experience with pastors that have experienced burnout: “A pastor becomes reduced to

¹¹ Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality: It's Impossible to Be Spiritually Mature While Remaining Emotionally Immature* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 11.

¹² Christina Maslach, *Burnout: The Cost of Caring* (Los Altos, CA: Malor Books, 2015), 56.

useless, ineffective rubble, emotionally exhausted, and deeply fearful. A pattern of emotional overload with little reward or appreciation in the context of feelings of helplessness is at the heart of the burnout syndrome.”¹³

As pastors, our capacity to lead can be dramatically affected by the stress of the call, obligations to family and church, and the lack of self-care.

Fred Lehr, in his book *Clergy Burnout: Recovering from the 70-hour Work Week—and Other Self-defeating Practices*, pointed out that over two-thirds of those employed in church leadership have personality types that lean toward co-dependent relationships.¹⁴ The need to fix and please may lead to self-imposed expectations that have little to do with actual ministry realities. Furthermore, burnout percentages may increase when pastors who have attempted to maintain the appearance of the qualities to please and fix diminish under pressure. Donald Hands and Wayne Fehr confirmed Lehr’s observations in their book, *Spiritual Wholeness for Clergy: A New Psychology of Intimacy with God, Self, and Others*, with their assertions that members of a family of origin with codependent relationships, that later enter the ministry, are predisposed to similar relationships in a work environment, and subsequently burnout.¹⁵

¹³ Archibald D. Hart, “Depressed, Stressed, and Burned Out: What’s Going on in My Life?” *Enrichment Journal: Enriching and Equipping Spirit-filled Ministers*, Summer 2006, accessed June 22, 2017, http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/200603/200603_020_burnout.cfm.

¹⁴ J. Fred Lehr, *Clergy Burnout: Recovering from the 70-hour Work Week and Other Self-defeating Practices* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006), 22.

¹⁵ Donald R. Hands and Wayne L. Fehr, *Spiritual Wholeness for Clergy: A New Psychology of Intimacy with God, Self and Others* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 1993), xii.

Can burnout be observed as a reset button? One author believed burnout is a profound and agonizing occurrence for a purpose—to prevent utter disregard of problematic behavior. Hart captured this unmistakably:

Burnout should never be seen as a sign of failure. Sometimes burnout is God’s plan for your life. It is the only way He can get your attention. Burnout is an important protective system—a warning signal telling us that we have lost control of our lives. Do not fear the cure for burnout. If anything, give yourself permission to experience it—recognizing that it is protecting you from a far worse fate.¹⁶

While Hart presented a compelling argument for some occurrences of burnout, can a researcher honestly say God’s plan for a pastor is to allow burnout to acquire his or her attention? This author encountered several cases in which obvious signs of burnout had been ignored or outright missed when an otherwise spiritually healthy minister would have recognized the need for course correction.

Scripture substantiates God’s ability to use human decision making, mistakes included, to bring about good outcomes.¹⁷ Scripture also substantiates God’s desire for his children to make wise decisions prior to falling into a spiritual trap.¹⁸ Section 2 offers further exploration of this topic.

¹⁶ Hart, “Depressed, Stressed, and Burned Out.”

¹⁷ The story of the prodigal son highlights grave mistakes (sin) that would eventually lead to greater knowledge of the love of his father and ultimately a better relationship (Luke 15). David’s sin of adultery with Bathsheba and eventual murder of her husband Uriah also led to the birth of Nathan (Luke 3:31), and Solomon (Matthew 1:6), sons of David through Bathsheba (1 Chronicles 3:5).

¹⁸ Proverbs 2:6, 13:20; James 1:5; Ephesians 5:15–16.

Case Studies in Burnout

Throughout the project, personal interviews were conducted to establish potential patterns, triggers, and uncover innovative ideas that might unveil some of the mystic surrounding burnout in the ministry. Each interview, whether in person or over the phone, was conducted with each participants permission and the understanding of complete confidentiality throughout the process. Appendix A features a survey of questions presented to each participant. The following are a few of these encounters.

Pastor Carl

Carl's hands shook as he held the cup of coffee. We chose the small diner because it was quiet, and Carl wanted to share his burnout story with as little interruption as possible. The story began like so many others during this project of discovery for ministry burnout, with Carl describing what felt like a blindside. "I had no idea it was this bad, and out of nowhere, everything seemed to fall apart."¹⁹ The ministry had seen exponential growth both numerically and spiritually in the previous ten years. The pressure to surpass the previous year's accomplishments seemed reasonable to Carl and the leadership council, leading them to ignore the additional hours the pastor was putting in.

The position began with an expected forty-five-hour work week but had become a sixty-eight-hour grind. The rural ministry setting posed additional challenges in that Carl had limited access to resources that might have alleviated the pressure. When the

¹⁹ Pastor Carl, interview by Rick Millikin, January 4, 2017.

breakdown happened, Pastor Carl was caught off guard, attributing the symptoms to declining health. The doctor explained that his body was ok, but a test revealed high levels of stress, putting his heart and other systems at risk.

Carl began to examine where his life had taken a turn, writing down all that he was doing on a weekly basis. It was obvious, in retrospect, why his family had abandoned him two years ago. Subtle hints from his spouse, the children, and even parishioners he dismissed as petty squabblers most likely were perpetrated by the enemy. Carl made a note of how many hours he spent in sermon preparation, prayer, and study. "Pathetic," he said. "I was spending a fraction of the amount of time doing those things compared to my first few years in ministry."²⁰ Carl tendered his resignation and began to seek help for putting his life back together. Upon reaching the resignation decision, the instinct to call a friend and share the news revealed the most shocking truth of all—Carl had no friends to call.

Pastor Jamie

Pastor Jamie had been an energetic youth pastor for a growing church in the suburbs of a developing community. Young families had been moving into the area, so the growth came easy. Jamie implemented every concept of successful ministry gained from four years in seminary. The young pastor prided himself in the accomplishments of digital/social media implementation since accepting the position, noting how quickly

²⁰ Ibid.

things fell into place. Five years later, he was managing a youth staff of two full-time employees and five part-time helpers. Life was good—or so he thought.

Beginning his sixth year, pastor Jamie started to notice tension between not only he and his staff but the senior pastor as well. Jamie was asked to present current and future ministry models before the church board. He lied during each presentation, including the private meetings with the senior pastor. "They were out to get me and were trying to take credit for the success that I had built with my own hands," Jamie confessed.²¹ "I don't even know why I lied, but it became a pattern for me." Jamie left the ministry in year seven to pursue para-church organizational positions.

When asked about the number of personal friendships maintained during this ordeal, Jamie sat back to think for a minute and concluded that not one close relationship fostered during the final two years.

Pastor Terrance

Pastor Terrance seemed relaxed yet guarded while detailing the first decade of ministry that ended with an emotional breakdown and resignation from pastoral ministry, and relocation to another part of the country for a fresh start with his wife and two children. Though Terrance has resumed the call to pastoral ministry, early indications were that ministry was never again to be part of his life.

Unlike Carl or Jamie, Terrance recognized the symptoms of stress and burnout beginning to take over. "The signs were obvious! Weight gain, fatigue, headaches,

²¹ Pastor Jamie, interview by Rick Millikin, January 5, 2017.

constant exhaustion, and even hints of depression,”²² Terrance said as he stared off into space. Avoiding people, including phone calls but especially personal visits, became a standard routine for this pastor. His paranoia was rooted in the fear that at any given moment leaders would emerge to ask for his resignation because of the growing stack of unfinished projects and promises that lay scattered about the office.

Sabbath had become a thing of the past, exchanged for squeezing in an hour or two of devotion now and then. "I would just fall asleep during these brief times. In the middle of the day, I'd awake to find my chin on chest, unsure how much if any Scripture was read." Then came the drinking—moderately at first, then significant amounts as the body began to adapt to the effects. Sleep came easier on these nights, but spiritual responsibilities became less necessary, replaced by the drive to see tangible evidence of success. When asked which friends were a part of a close-knit group worthy to share the secret love for alcohol, Terrance shared that his drinking done was in isolation. "I always drank alone."²³

Pastor Richard

Perhaps the most frightening story was that of Richard, who became a victim of ministry burnout between his tenth and twelfth years of ministry. The day on which the burnout became painfully obvious, that something was wrong, has been etched into his brain eternally. Pulled to the side of the road on historic Route 66 that ran through the small rural town, Richard sat weeping onto the steering wheel in his clean, yet battered

²² Pastor Terrance, interview by Rick Millikin, June 19, 2017.

²³ Ibid.

Ford Taurus. Unsure if it had been thirty minutes or three hours, Richard signaled to return to the highway, only then to notice the elderly couple that had pulled alongside the car, staring wantonly through the driver's side window. They inquired if everything was alright, but Richard, overcome with emotion, was only able to shake his head no as he sped away quickly.

That day, like so many before it, would end only after eighteen long hours of work, ministry, more work, and a few minutes of family time sprinkled in for good measure. Nine years of bi-vocational ministry had taken a brutal toll that was only just beginning to surface with noticeable side effects. Hindsight would reveal much later that the signs of burnout were everywhere, had anyone been looking for them. Richard recalled the busyness of *doing God's work* preventing anyone from noticing that somewhere along the way it had stopped being about God.

Approval of his superiors had consumed Richard to the point that he was oblivious to the pitfalls that surrounded him. Excuses began to mount, as neglected projects around home became almost a joke. His wife's hints that someone else could take care of the next request were quickly dismissed. Extended family members attempted to point out that it seemed like an unhealthy work environment to require so much of the associate pastors.

Richard found one small area of interest that provided some stress relief, yet it took even more time away from his family. What seemed at the time to be a healthy course of action would eventually become the final straw in a collapsing lifestyle. Sadly, that somber day by the side of the road was not the day Richard chose to make a change. Instead, he buried the selfish desire of a rewarding hobby deep down for the next two

years, before everything blew up in his face. This story is all too well recognizable to this researcher, as it is his own.

These stories put a face on the statistics. As noted earlier, a percentage of ministry leaders are searching for a means of escape, unwilling or unable to withstand the mounting pressures of life. Each participant shared the primary motivation to stay in a miserable situation longer than desired—the worry of financial obligations and supporting their family.

Case Studies in Burnout Avoidance

There were similarities and differences in the encouraging case studies of ministers that practiced their calling without falling victim to burnout. While most interviewees secured a form of self-care, not all were predisposed to a healthy model as a requirement. Several pastors indicated they had witnessed healthy models during the formative years of training while a few followed programs put in place by senior ministers or church boards.

Pastor Damon

Damon is in love with God, the church, and the staff with whom he works. This reality wasn't always the case. The hiring process leading to his first church role as the youth pastor following his graduate program in seminary led Damon to believe hours would not exceed forty-five-hour work weeks. The reality by year three was sixty hours per week and labor across three different departments. Family time began to diminish into short stints of play time and the occasional weekend trip to accessible destinations

within their region. Damon's health issues began to reach critical levels, including weight gain, issues that required medication, and severe sleep deprivation.²⁴

Afraid of losing his job, Damon remained quiet about the displeasures of the pastoral role and chose to work harder to secure longevity within the ministry.

Thankfully, the executive pastor addressed Damon following a staff meeting. "You seem stressed, and there have been complaints from parents that you look distant from the students. Is everything okay?"²⁵ The pastors set down together over the coming weeks to develop a care plan that would bring Damon into a healthy place. The plan would eventually lead to changes in staff policy for sabbatical and renewal. Questions required for new hires inquire about personal practices in self-care before employment. Once a quarter, each leader must invite one of their closest friends to a social gathering among the staff.

Pastor Green

Pastor Green serves a large church with more than one hundred employees, including fifteen pastors. There has been little turnover since the church was founded more than twenty years prior, except to send ministers into new roles as the ministry has grown beyond their walls. Surprisingly, Pastor Green said no formal plan exists to require pastors to implement self-care programs or take sabbaticals, though assistance is provided for both if requested. The current practice, based on mentoring relationships from the top

²⁴ Pastor Damon, interview by Rick Millikin, June 11, 2017.

²⁵ Pastor Damon expressed incredible gratitude for the intervention of his supervisor. The conversation, though painful to begin, opened the door for healing that saved his marriage, career, and possibly the involvement in future youth ministry.

down, seems to work. Senior pastors model healthy and sustainable care plans, which have naturally flowed throughout the organization. Additionally, each employee is given a series of evaluations before employment that assesses aptitude as well as emotional and spiritual compatibility.²⁶

Healthy relationships are a priority outside the office. Part of each monthly evaluation is a question that asks about a personal relationship with someone unrelated and not a co-worker. The friendship, though confidential, is examined for quality and authenticity.

Pastor Thomas

Pastor Thomas is retired and wishes he wasn't. "I'm bored out of my mind in retirement and miss the challenge and excitement of doing ministry four days a week."²⁷ Clarifying the statement, Thomas explained that an average workweek for him had been four ten-hour days. This schedule provided three full days of family time or Sabbath, often consecutively. An early mentor convinced Thomas that working six or seven days per week was harmful to one's spiritual and personal life. The mentor often worked seven days per week, had been married three times, and suffered from heart disease.

When asked what he liked most about three personal days each week, Thomas identified the freedom to move the schedule around to fit that of overworked friends. Not a week went by that Pastor Thomas wasn't sitting with a close friend over coffee and pie. "I never took a sabbatical in thirty years of ministry. Not that I wouldn't have jumped at

²⁶ Pastor Greg, interview by Rick Millikin, May 31, 2017.

²⁷ Pastor Thomas, interview by Rick Millikin, June 10, 2017.

the chance to, but it just wasn't an option, or at least we didn't think so at the time."²⁸

Thomas indicated that he highly recommends pastors take frequent sabbaticals these days. "My friends kept me on the straight and narrow, but it seems not too many pastors have friends like that."

Research Hypothesis

The high-stress environment of the ministry professional appears to leave some vulnerable to isolation. Depersonalization occurs when church leaders devote sizeable amounts of time and drive to avoiding parishioners, friends, and family.²⁹ The relational and spiritual symptoms of burnout seem linked to the separation from God, self, and others.³⁰ A majority of literature on the subject of burnout avoids naming isolation as a primary culprit. This author contends that not only does isolation deserve more attention; perhaps the most important first step toward best practices is solving the relational issue.

The personal interviews revealed a common theme among interviewees— isolation when pressures began to mount. Rather than seek counsel and confide in a close friend, pastors chose to withdraw, work harder, and often self-medicate. Relational indifference would appear as merely a symptom of a bigger problem while in reality could be at the root of the problem.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Steven Daniel and Martha L. Rogers, "Burnout and the Pastorate: A Critical Review with Implications for Pastors," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 9, no. 3 (Fall 1981): 232–249, accessed June 20, 2017, <http://journals.biola.edu/jpt/volumes/9/issues/3/articles/232>.

³⁰ Hands and Fehr, *Spiritual Wholeness for Clergy*, 13.

For instance, Jimmy, having vacated the pastorate following ten years of ministry (five wonderful, five devastating), now works as a bus driver for the local school district. Jimmy left the ministry at age thirty-two. Further discussion revealed that when it became apparent that something was wrong, the church began efforts to provide care opportunities for the family, manifested primarily in time off for vacation, but it came too late. "The system never worked for me. By the time I unwound enough to relax, it was time to go back and step into the same stressful mess I had just left."³¹

Jimmy found himself working harder and longer hours to compensate. When asked about specific action plans for self-care, he had none. His church did not implement a plan or anticipate the need for follow-up and accountability. The question of relationships never came up among the church leadership. Jimmy indicated that the church has been through two more pastors since he left more than fifteen years ago.

While the initial research focused on statistical analysis and viable solutions, continued efforts concentrated on the common thread of broken relationships that began with a disintegrating relationship with God. Researching the content of all recordings and interview notes found an eerily similar pattern of isolation among burnout victims. For the early interviews that lacked proper questioning in this area, follow-up calls were made to clarify. The information confirmed this author's assumption that lack of relationship in the primary areas was experienced by over 90 percent of participants, while 100 percent of participants who avoided burnout shared a common attribute—healthy relationships.

³¹ Pastor Jimmy, interview by Rick Millikin, February 9, 2017.

Goals for This Study

The purpose of this study is to understand better the connection between burnout victims in pastoral ministry and the isolation that is prone to occur in a high-stress, help-focused occupation. First, this project examined the historical evidence of burnout and the studies of probable causes. This author expected that most leaders recognized the dire need for reform in self-care, but was there a willingness to confront the potential disaster in their reality? Second, this research reviewed the most popular practices of prevention, summarizing the modern approaches to preventing burnout and the success/failure rate over the last two decades. Section two concludes with the consideration of the ultimate guide to surviving in ministry—a biblical approach to healthy practices and self-care.

Section 3 details the research methodology that led to a solution. Beyond the topical anesthetic that may ease the pain momentarily, this study examined sustainable practices that offer lasting success in pastoral excellence. Solutions were considered in detail with highlights of pros and cons in longevity.

Sections 4 and 5 present an artifact that should prove useful in preparing potential burnout candidates with encouragement and practical steps for implementing proven self-care techniques. This artifact is a weekly podcast that focuses on identifying burnout symptoms, addressing probable causes, and suggesting procedures that might redirect the victim's energy into productive efforts of recovery. The format of the podcast presents an on-demand delivery method, which removes one recurrent obstacle facing those in the path of burnout—busyness. Most respondents during interviews admitted to having little time to read another e-mail, blog post, book, or website. Listening, however, can be accomplished while preparing for the day or during the drive across town for a meeting.

Section 6 addresses the reality of what was present and what was missing during the project. How might future studies best focus on the issues of pastoral burnout and what potential outcomes might enhance the success rate of burnout avoidance in the future? The pitfalls are multi-faceted, requiring the attention of not only the ministry professional but also the organizations they serve. While earlier sections address some of the successful and failed attempts at prevention and recovery, the concluding section attempts to expose areas that are yet unexplored.

SECTION 2:

ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

Introduction

The results of the case studies on burnout revealed an array of brokenness caused by exhaustion, fiscal mismanagement, immorality, immaturity, isolation, or the irresponsible choices of others. This list, while not exhaustive, is inclusive of several causes of burnout.³² Regardless of the underlying cause, restoration is possible if one is willing to recognize the problem, identify the source(s), and submit to a sustainable plan of healing and recovery.

The concept of burnout began circulating more than thirty years ago, and since the 1980s, astute and focused attention has centered on high-profile Christian leaders who experienced moral failures and departed the ministry in full view of the public.³³ Since then, much research in the area of burnout prevention has given rise to resources to assist ministry leaders with developing healthy careers. This section aims to recognize approaches to restoration and healing in recent decades.

³² Each of these were contributors to the burnout of interviewees of this project.

³³ The following Christian leaders are among the growing list of ministers who experienced ministry failure: Jim Bakker, Ted Haggard, Richard Baker, John Geoghan, Jimmy Swaggart, Larry Lea, and Robert Tilton. Though not specifically leading to burnout of the high-profile leader, attention has been drawn to the ministry profession and the fact that ministers are leaving office for a variety of reasons, burnout among them.

Historical Evidence of Burnout

Biblical

Scripture contains examples of burnout in ministry. For instance, the story of Elijah (1 Kings 18–19) we witness an episode of burnout so profound that the prophet was ready to die rather than continue. This came on the heels of one of the greatest victories over an enemy recorded in the ancient Scriptures.³⁴ Exhausted from giving his best efforts, Elijah was burned out and ready to die. He saw himself as a total failure, so what was the purpose of continuing? He was obviously no better at doing the Lord's work than those who went before him.³⁵ This story illustrates how failure can consume a minister's energy, leaving the person completely drained and unable to move forward in their mind or bodies.

Paul, in 1 Corinthians 1:8, described burnout to the extent that he and his companions had given up on life. He pointed to an essential key to overcoming burnout when he stated that they had to rely on God for the strength to carry on and depend upon others for prayer support. Essential tools for preventing burnout include taking ourselves out of the primary role of sustainer and relying upon God first, and accepting the support of friends and family who lift us up in prayer.

³⁴ Elijah won a great victory over the priests of Baal on Mount Carmel. The drought ended, and the land had rain once again, proving Elijah served the one true God. Queen Jezebel ramped up her violence and suddenly Elijah felt all alone and declared he had enough, asking God to take his life.

³⁵ Sanford, *Ministry Burnout*, 84.

Modern-day Freedom

Before passing, my paternal grandmother recalled a news anchor explaining that in the century to come, people would have so much free time on their hands, they wouldn't know what to do with themselves. She remembered the point being that technology was going to make everything easier and faster. The problem with this foresight is that it ignores the human capacity to pack activity into our schedules so tightly we scarcely have any room in the margins of our lives.

Ministers concur with this sentiment. While technology has vastly improved mobility, communication, organization and of course the availability of information, most pastors felt rushed and stretched beyond capacity during an average work week. Research on ministerial burnout conducted by the Fuller Institute in the late 1980s provided statistics that were shocking to most. Some of those statistics were presented in Section 1. However, a greater examination is warranted here.

Dr. Richard Krejcir—a researcher, theologian, and lecturer from The Francis A. Schaeffer Institute of Church Leadership Development—gathered information from the 1989 Fuller Institute research. Krejcir's statistical evidence for ministry burnout corroborated the Fuller findings, as well as that of Focus on the Family's research in the following decade.³⁶

Between the late 1980s to 2006, the research revealed an unhappy and unstable environment for clergy in America.³⁷

³⁶ Krejcir, "Statistics on Pastors."

³⁷ Ibid.

- 35 to 40 percent of pastors leave the ministry after only five years; 60 to 80 percent of pastors will leave in their first decade, and a small percentage will make it an entire career.³⁸
- One study found that United Methodist clergy spend 56.2 hours per week in ministry and 12 evenings a month away from home on church duties.³⁹
- 60 percent of clergy expressed that their involvement in church leadership has negatively impacted their appetite for functioning in the church.⁴⁰
- 33 percent say that ministry is a hazard to their families.⁴¹

Gathering information from its more recent follow up to the 1980s study, The Schaffer Institute of Church Leadership Development noticed a trend of improvement by 2016. Dr. Krejcir stated, “Since first studying pastors in the late 80’s, we are seeing significant shifts in the last 20 years on how pastors view their calling and how churches treat them.”⁴²

The data collected indicated evidence of the previously highlighted origins and reasons of stress, burnout, and ministry dysfunction, leading researchers to make recommendations on paths to care. Glimpses of the more recent statistics are hopeful in some categories while still cause for concern in others:

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ VandeCreek and Burton, “Professional Chaplaincy,” 82.

⁴⁰ Barna, *Today's Pastors*, quoted in Cordeiro, *Leading on Empty*, 43.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Richard J. Krejcir, “Statistics on Pastors: 2016 Update,” ChurchLeadership.org, accessed November 7, 2017, <http://www.churchleadership.org/apps/articles/default.asp?blogid=4545&view=post&articleid=Statistics-on-Pastors-2016-Update&link=1&fldKeywords=&fldAuthor=&fldTopic=0>.

- 79 percent of Evangelical and Reformed pastors are happier personally.
- 88 percent of churches are treating their pastors better, too.
- 88 percent have a high view of Christ.
- 75 percent are better at their spiritual formation.
- 57 percent are more satisfied in their calling.
- However, 54 percent of pastors still work over fifty-five hours a week.
- 57 percent can't pay their bills.
- 54 percent are overworked and 43 percent are overstressed.
- 53 percent feel seminary had not properly prepared them for the task.
- 35 percent battle depression.
- 26 percent are overly fatigued.
- 28 percent are spiritually undernourished, and 9 percent are burnt-out.
- 23 percent are still distant to their families.
- 18 percent work more than 70 hours a week and face unreasonable challenges.
- 12 percent feel belittled.
- 3 percent have had an affair.
- Yet, 90 percent feel honored to be a pastor!⁴³

Named causes of burnout involved unwise leadership philosophies of ministry leaders, lay leaders, and church governance. A lack of clarity regarding responsibilities in job descriptions for pastors suggests that some churches continue to place excessive requests upon their leaders. Krejcir suggested there is hope. First, pastors need to delegate

⁴³ Ibid.

and train more leaders. Leadership teams and churches must improve their understandings of the appropriate responsibilities of their pastors and strive to labor alongside and not against them.⁴⁴

Section 1 explored various definitions of burnout. However, two additional definitions are offered here. An online dictionary defined burnout as “a state that occurs when energy is used up faster than it is restored.” It can also mean “physical or mental collapse caused by overwork or stress.”⁴⁵ Both definitions are applicable to ministry burnout. Ministry can consume a person. A pastor grows to learn that true spiritual ministry does not exist for the benefit of oneself. It is a call of God to persistently give of oneself—to invest time, talent, and treasure in work that often has only eternal reward.⁴⁶ As the above definition posits, burnout can happen when we are reduced “to nothing through use” or overdoing. The result of the reduction to nothing is burnout.

Religion is often confused with the gospel. Religion concerns itself with working toward God, earning God’s love. The gospel teaches that it is impossible to earn our way to God’s love; rather, God, in His love for us, came to humanity through Jesus Christ, even while we were sinners. The currency of religion is fear and obligation. The currency of the gospel of Christ is love and invitation.⁴⁷ When pastors dedicate the majority of their time trying to earn God's favor or that of the church, it always leads to more work

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ *Mosby's Medical Dictionary*, 8th edition, s.v. “burnout,” accessed December 19, 2017, <https://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/burnout>.

⁴⁶ Mark 9:41; Luke 12:34.

⁴⁷ Leonard I. Sweet, *Nudge: Awakening Each Other to the God Who's Already There* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2010), 21.

stress, more hats to wear, more committees to oversee, and ultimately, burnout.

Negativity

Three weeks before this writing, two pastors returned an inquiry call for an interview. The stark difference in these two stories warrants attention. Larry served as lead pastor for eleven years before burning out and leaving ministry permanently. He is currently working as a part-time barista, fifty miles from his previous church. Larry recalls the day he walked away from his growing church that once occupied most waking thoughts of his wearied mind.

“Most pastors would look at my life then and claim I had it made. But they didn’t know what I was going through on the inside,” he shared. Larry shared a heartbreaking story of how his children, both in their teens, had refused to talk to him for months and his wife of eighteen years wanted a divorce. He was aware of the growing need for more time with his family for at least two years before burning out, but he just couldn't seem to turn the corner. He attempted to share this with the chairman of the church council but was told, “We all have families and work hard jobs. What makes you so special?” Larry went as far as to book a few special getaways with the family, taking advantage of long weekends and holidays. Thinking back, he had canceled most of those at the last minute for needs that arose at the church.

When asked about self-care practices, Larry chuckled dryly into the phone and said he didn’t even know what self-care was until it was too late. Today, Larry and his wife are working on their marriage and the entire family is in counseling once a week. No

one attends church these days, though Larry admits he wonders what it would be like to visit one again someday.⁴⁸

Tom wrote his letter of resignation on a Monday morning, following what seemed to be a great weekend of three services and two classes for discipleship. A re-write was in order as the first page was stained with tears, he recalls. “I cried the entire time I wrote on my yellow notepad. That was the first time I had cried in years,” he explained. Tom delivered the letter to his leadership team vice-chair, Tony—a man he had hand-selected the year before to replace someone who had left the church. Tony looked him in the eye and said, “No! I’ll only accept this letter from you on one condition. You must go with me somewhere this afternoon and if you still want to turn it in, only then will I accept it.” Tom agreed, and they arranged to meet.

Tony drove Tom across town to a small church that had apparently been in existence for at least a hundred years. Inside, an elderly gentleman greeted them and walked toward a small office with two very worn yet comfortable loveseats. The old pastor began with one question, “So you want to quit your church, do ya?” Tom looked at the floor and sighed. For the next two hours, Tom listened to this seasoned minister describe the call of the pastor to serve God's church in today's culture. By the time he had finished, Tom said he couldn't remember the tears beginning to flow, but it must have been a long time as his shirt was soaked.

⁴⁸ Pastor Larry, interview by Rick Millikin, October 1, 2017.

Tom and Tony returned to their familiar building across town and sat in Tom's office. They constructed a plan of care that not only highlighted and honored the need for quality family time but placed it above the needs of the church. Tony promised to draft the proposal to the leadership team by the following week and was confident the majority of the board would approve. Asking Tom what happened to the letter of resignation, he reported that he still has it. Sealed in the same envelope, unopened, and tucked in an old Bible given to him by the elderly pastor who shared with him a lifetime of wisdom in just two short hours.⁴⁹

Historical Examples of Prevention

Biblical

The word *pastor* comes from the Latin, meaning to “lead to pasture, set to grazing, cause to eat.” While pastors never physically drive their congregants to a field to eat, the idea conveyed is similar to their ministerial role. Pastors and ministry leaders fill a commissioned office dedicated by God for servant leadership. Numerous scriptural examples of challenges for the minister exist but equally impressive is the acknowledgment of the tremendous rewards that are eternal.⁵⁰

Equally important in Scripture are the commands for pastors to care for themselves. Both physical and spiritual fitness is encouraged for anyone preparing to

⁴⁹ Pastor Tom, interview by Rick Millikin, October 13, 2017.

⁵⁰ There is no shortage of encouragement for those accepting the calling of minister: Jeremiah 3:15; Matthew 9:36; 25:32; 26:31; Mark 6:34; 14:27; Luke 2:8, 15, 18, 20; John 10:2-16; Acts 6:1-7; 20:28; Ephesians 4:11; Philippians 1:27; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; Hebrews 13:20; James 1:22; 1 Peter 2:25; 5:1-5.

serve in ministry.⁵¹ Sin plays an important role in debilitating a leader's spiritual and physical abilities. An individual may not consider the consequences before indulging in activity that is sinful, unaware of the chains that linger nearby, ready to entrap them. David was no stranger to the consequences of sin, as he describes in Psalm 38.⁵²

The psalmist seemed to have found the truth in a relationship with God through God's word. Psalm 119:141–152 describes a palpable stress that is relieved through meditation upon God's commands and statutes. Verses 33–40 of this same chapter reveal a prayer that was to understand the Word, whereas here it is to know the power of the Word to enable faithfulness against the background of weakness and the strength of the opposition.⁵³

Health

The physical and psychological health of leaders has been discussed at length among various industries attempting to understand the lack of resilience in a given profession.⁵⁴ Having spent a few years in the United States Army, sometimes as a trainer in various fields such as survival of a nuclear, biological, or chemical attack, this author

⁵¹ Biblical examples encouraging health and wholeness include 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; Romans 12:1-2; spiritual wellness—1 Timothy 4:7-9; Proverbs 3:7-8; 14:30; Matthew 11:28-29; Isaiah 40:29-31; Proverbs 17:22.

⁵² David's sin may not have caused burnout, but one can imagine he was very close to it. Had it not been for the confession we read in passage such as Psalm 38:1-4, we could wonder why he did not stress out and eventually burn out.

⁵³ Eric Lane, *Psalms 90–150: The Lord Reigns*, vol. 2, Focus on the Bible Commentary (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2006), 137. Ebook.

⁵⁴ Martin E. P. Seligman et al., "Positive Psychology Progress: Empirical Validation of Interventions," *American Psychologist* 60, no. 5 (June & July 2005), accessed October 30, 2017, doi:10.1037/0003-066x.60.5.410.

recognized the need for better psychological preparedness of service men and women in high-stress environments.

Studies of the effects of positive education revealed the potential of teaching resilience, especially to young adults. The Army had been experiencing higher levels of stress that eroded the performance of soldiers, including damage to relationships within their households. In 2008, the Army began to implement training protocols to accomplish this.⁵⁵ The goal of the program was to remove the psychiatric stigma that results from association with the medical corps, and add resilience to the education and training of all soldiers.⁵⁶

Rachel Schwartzhoffer, in her book *Psychology of Burnout*, revealed what psychologists have discovered in recent studies. Today's workforce finds itself managing obligations at home as well as mounting expectations and requests on the job. This combination often creates an increase of pressure and conflict. As a result, employees suffer from burnout, "a stress syndrome characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and diminished personal accomplishment."⁵⁷

Burnout affects family outcomes, and the research Schwartzhoffer uncovered demonstrated this to include diminished positive affect, increased marital disagreements, and high levels of stress among relatives. Organizational performance and commitment have decreased evidenced by increased levels of absenteeism. "Burnout is associated with

⁵⁵ Martin E. P. Seligman, *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-Being* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2011), 127.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁵⁷ Rachel V. Schwartzhoffer, *Psychology of Burnout: Predictors and Coping Mechanisms* (New York, NY: Nova Science Publishers, Inc., 2009), 2.

long-term job-related stress, which has been described as a feeling of ‘inability to cope’ along with the perception that the resources available do not match up-to the demands made.”⁵⁸

Studies found that burnout is specific to the work context and is situational, rather than a general depression. For instance, a U.K. study found changes affecting the medical practices of doctors and nurses showed decreased status and autonomy due to stress that resulted in a lack of control, leading to burnout.⁵⁹ The studies concluded that people suffering from poor strategic planning, demonstrated by taking more work home and disconnecting from relationships, experienced higher stress and burnout levels.

Additional research by Jianli Wang and Scott Pat Ten confirmed that coping strategies could influence stress levels. Nurses chose to mix more with friends and alter dining habits when surgeons would internalize. Focusing on emotional expression began to decrease the risk of depression.⁶⁰

Self-Care

History is the best storyteller. Within the biblical story, one finds narratives of people deaf to God's voice, characters blinded by ambition, leaders who forgot the sovereignty of their Creator, prophets who experienced burnout while trying to fulfill their calling, and disciples from all walks of life who realized that new zeal cannot

⁵⁸ Ibid., 112.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 113. Referencing Linzer M., et al., “Predicting and Preventing Physician Burnout: Results from the United States and The Netherlands,” *American Journal of Medicine* 111, no. 2 (2001): 170-175.

⁶⁰ Jianli Wang and Scott B Pat Ten, “The Moderating Effects of Coping Strategies on Major Depression in the General Population,” *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry* 47, no. 2 (2002): doi:10.1177/070674370204700207.

sustain one for the duration.⁶¹ What is missing from the plethora of experiences in these stories? Research points to elevated levels of stress and ultimately, a lack of self-care.⁶²

Pastors realize that today's ministry setting is a high-stress environment. Some ministers who have fallen victim to burnout believe today's environment is more stressful than that of the early church leaders.⁶³ Bob, a solo pastor in his forties, explained that bringing his church into the twenty-first century with social media, while a blessing, has also challenged his day-off routine, rendering downtime to almost non-existent. "Fridays were previously time to unwind, read, hike, and completely unplug from work, but a simple Facebook post or tweet about something I said this week could spiral out of control unless I address it right away, requiring replies, e-mails, and often phone calls to leadership."⁶⁴

The addition of electronic access to clergy, while time-consuming and potentially invasive, may pale in comparison to being forced to meet quietly in basements or hidden rooms for fear of death, such as experienced by Christians in the early church or violent

⁶¹ Jody Seymour, *A Time for Healing: Overcoming the Perils of Ministry* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1995), 103.

⁶² "Pastor Stress Statistics," Soul Shepherding, September 5, 2016, accessed August 30, 2017, <http://www.soulshepherding.org/2009/11/pastors-under-stress/>. David Ross and Rick Blackmon's "Soul Care for Servants" workshop reported the results of their Fuller Institute of Church Growth Research study in 1991 and other surveys in 2005 and 2006.

⁶³ Many pastors interviewed this year indicated external forces played a significant role in their demise, including social media demands, inescapable email, and the constant contact expectations, given the advent of electronic communication. Some went as far as to say it is more difficult today than it was for the early church leaders, even though they faced persecution unknown to the American church pastor today.

⁶⁴ Pastor Bob, interview by Rick Millikin, May 4, 2016.

regions of the world.⁶⁵ However, something can be said about the context of each minister exposed to cultural, re-shaping situations.

Pastor Carl explained that his ten years in the Navy and fifteen years in corporate America were high-stress jobs that required nowhere near the self-care regiment that pastoring a church has required.⁶⁶ “I could leave all my work at the office in my previous employment, but not at the church. I was always on call. Ready to accept the full brunt of the crisis of the day for the family that happened to call upon me. I wasn’t prepared and don’t recall training that would have prepared me for that.”⁶⁷

Perhaps it’s time to admit that the church may have neglected the importance of self-care in the last few centuries, allowing pastors and leaders to carry too much of the load without requiring investment in continued education, Sabbath, and spiritual formation. However, much of the responsibility lies with the pastors themselves.

During interviews with pastors who have become victims of burnout, when asked the question of why self-care was not an automatic requirement in their vocation, the majority answered that attention to oneself was considered to be self-centered.⁶⁸ Pastor Peter indicated that he believes most pastors know the importance of taking care of

⁶⁵ Persecution is when Christians and their communities experience specific pressure and/or violence in a situation of brokenness that is related to persecution dynamics prevalent in their environments and forces them to comply with the drivers of these dynamics. According to research from World Watch List, the top five most dangerous regions to live a Christian life are North Korea, Somalia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the Sudan. “World Watch List,” Open Doors USA, January 2017, accessed August 20, 2017, <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/>.

⁶⁶ Pastor Carl, interview by Rick Millikin, January 4, 2017.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ A differentiation of the words self-care, selfishness and self-centeredness may be of assistance here. Self-care is the practice of taking action to preserve or improve one’s own health. Selfishness would be the lack of consideration for others; concerned chiefly with a personal gain or pleasure. Self-centeredness is the preoccupation with all things concerning one’s own affairs.

oneself but place this priority down the list of responsibilities, following their overwhelming vocational commitments. The Body of Christ comes first and then our own selfish needs.⁶⁹ Pastor Dan admitted he was embarrassed to ask permission to attend to family matters, even when it pertained to his health.⁷⁰

Pastor Jean recalled the argument she had with her husband one night as they both sat exhausted on the edge of the bed. “Please turn off your phone tonight so we can get a decent night’s sleep. It's Saturday after all,” her husband pleaded.⁷¹ She explained that even that night, she just placed the phone on vibrate—the first time to even be so bold—so that the bright screen would at least alert her to a need without waking her sleeping spouse.

Pastor Ken, an eighty-something, retired bi-vocational pastor and teacher recalled a tearful moment three years after leaving ministry when the reality of poor choices finally settled on his heart. “I haven't cried so much in all my life. I blamed the church, my leadership team, the staff, and ultimately God for what happened to me. I was so blinded by self-effort to do everything I could to fix and grow the church. I never noticed how far I had wandered from my Provider.”⁷² When confronted with the idea of self-care, Ken said, “Being in ministry is about taking up the cross and denying self. Why would I take the time to focus on me when I’m called to focus on others?”⁷³ Ken realized that

⁶⁹ Pastor Peter, interview by Rick Millikin, November 16, 2017.

⁷⁰ Pastor Dan, interview by Rick Millikin, April 2, 2017.

⁷¹ Pastor Jean, interview by Rick Millikin, May 20, 2017.

⁷² Pastor Ken, interview by Rick Millikin, March 17, 2017.

⁷³ Ibid.

quoting Jesus (Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34) would never exclude any minister from implementing the basics in self-care, which need not be self-centered.

Respect for the call should require one's care for the very instruments God is using (heart, soul, mind, and strength). Would any pastor find comfort in neglecting the brakes on the church bus, purchased to pick up children for Sunday school? No! He or she would ensure against all the odds that the vehicle was in excellent working order and operated by the most qualified personnel possible. Pastors would require a regular maintenance inspection and report to ensure all equipment is above reproach. The first sign of potential problems would no doubt prompt an immediate response from church leadership and parents: what's going on with that bus and what are we going to do about it? Should not ministry leaders, especially pastors, place as high a respect for the call as they would the safety of the children entrusted to their care?

The apostle Paul suggested the importance of self-care for the minister as Paul admonished the young pastor, Timothy: "Train yourself to be godly" (1 Tim. 4:7). A few verses later, Paul added to the instruction: "Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands upon you" (1 Tim. 4:14). Apparently, Timothy was susceptible to the pitfalls of stress, and perhaps even neglect of the development of his gifting. Paul used the word *ameleō* ("do not neglect"), suggesting that Timothy may have been neglecting things.⁷⁴

Self-care is an enormous subject, spanning areas of mind, body, and spirit that no one author has managed to confront. The writers at Pastoral Care Inc. indicated that

⁷⁴ John MacArthur, *1 Timothy*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1995), 178. Ebook.

many pastors have their priorities out of balance, attempting to place the church above their families or even their relationships with God.⁷⁵ This agency identified five key areas that clergy must protect to overcome the stressors associated with ministry occupations:

- reserved family time—regarding time with family with definite boundaries that are respected over church appointments, calls, or demands.
- privacy – If possible, handle all church business at the church facility rather than home, even if the pastor lives in the parsonage.
- set clear expectations—Too often, congregations have unrealistic expectations of not only pastors but also their spouses. Determine expectations right away and make them fair for both sides of the equation.
- building friendships—Most pastors understand the need to set boundaries on friendships within the church; however, an alarming number of ministers (70%), state they have no accountable friends with whom they can share life’s problems.
- help—While pastors are fantastic at providing and recommending professional help for families in need, they rarely seek it for their own families. Church leadership and pastoral care teams should make this a priority for their pastoral staff.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ “Self Care List for Pastors,” Pastoral Care Inc., 2014, accessed December 16, 2016, <http://www.pastoralcareinc.com/pastoral-addictions/self-care-list/>.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

Warning signals often indicate the approach of brokenness, such as increased stress and people avoidance. However, more subtle indicators can go unnoticed:

- avoiding criticism from others—A pastor who is unwilling to receive criticism or opinions of others, including a spouse, colleague, elder, or close friend, has already begun the unintentional journey toward burnout.
- trust in one’s own achievement—A pastor who begins to feel his or her success is impermeable is shifting trust from God to his or her abilities.
- unmanaged expectations—A pastor is constantly dealing with the expectations of others. She or he can face exhaustion in the attempt to satisfy a long list of duties. Furthermore, anxiety and stress overwhelm pastors when the tasks remain incomplete.

An additional indicator, one this author has personally experienced, is busyness that preoccupies the minister with arriving at the destination quickly while ignoring the benefits of the journey. Leonard Sweet captured this idea brilliantly in his book, *11: Indispensable Relationships You Can’t Be Without* when he wrote: “The deeper I go into my spiritual life, and the more years I used up, the more important ‘finishing’ and ‘finishing well’ become. Disciples of Jesus are ‘finishers,’ sprinters who finish races, who ‘press toward the mark,’ toward “what lies ahead” and end up at the places to which they are summoned.”⁷⁷ Sweet clarified his thought that though Jesus himself acknowledges salvation for those who stand firm to the end, the Bible plainly emphasizes the journey. The good news (gospel) is a dialogue of the journey for any Christ follower

⁷⁷ Leonard I. Sweet, *11: Indispensable Relationships You Can’t Be Without* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2012), 18. Kindle.

who seeks to meet God on the final day, having met God time and again along the way. Regardless of the driving force that motivates our mode of arrival, relationships are a requirement to get there.

Managing Expectations

Clarifying expectations with church leadership in the beginning of a pastorate is important; however, additional expectations added throughout years of service accumulate easily. My journey exemplifies this pattern with a passionate zeal for service combined with naiveté for individual capacity. A 19-year-old student would find it difficult to pass up an opportunity to volunteer in a ministry role. Where academic training seemed to fall short, the part-time role of the associate pastor-in-training provided the hands-on experience an up-and-coming minister could use to advance a pastoral skill set.

Balancing college, a part-time paying job, and ministry roles seemed easy for a high-capacity achiever with hopes and dreams of pastoring a church one day. The call of God and the church reinforced this capable mindset. Overloading the schedule was of little concern. After all, God would never place more on my shoulders than I could handle.⁷⁸ The reality is that the Apostle Paul had written that no *temptation* would be more than a person can withstand, and with that temptation, a way out. The problem is one that often surfaces for ministers: conventional wisdom masquerades as biblical truth. Unbiblical notions that God will never ask a servant to take on more than one can handle

⁷⁸ A misunderstanding of Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 10:13.

points the minister toward unhealthy self-attained goals. The pastor looks inward rather than outward.

Disagreement

Although a wealth of information seems to be available regarding the statistical analysis of departing ministry leaders, at least one research model, a LifeWay Research poll disagreed with these findings. In an article by Lisa Cannon Green, LifeWay stated that despite stress over money and ministry demands, only 1 percent abandon the pulpit each year.⁷⁹ Green quoted Scott McConnell, the LifeWay research vice president, as saying, “Pastors are not leaving the ministry in droves.”⁸⁰ According to Green, LifeWay Research surveyed more than 1,400 pastors of evangelical and historically black churches and discovered approximately 13 percent of lead pastors in 2005 left the pastorate a decade later for causes other than death or retirement.

Research has shown that statistics on pastoral burnout have not significantly improved in recent years, indicating that more must be done to make clergy aware of the pitfalls. Jerry Edelwich and Archie Brodsky, in their book *Burnout*, defined burnout as a “progressive loss of idealism, energy, and purpose experienced by people in the helping professions.”⁸¹ The failure to recognize one's prerequisite for help leaves care providers with inadequate competence to provide care to others.

⁷⁹ Lisa Cannon Green, “Despite Stresses, Few Pastors Give Up on Ministry,” LifeWay Research, September 1, 2015, accessed December 15, 2016, <http://lifewayresearch.com/2015/09/01/despite-stresses-few-pastors-give-up-on-ministry/>.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Jerry Edelwich and Archie Brodsky, *Burn-out: Stages of Disillusionment in the Helping Professions* (New York, NY: Human Sciences Press, 1980), 77.

Individualism

Some attribute burnout as a result of self-sufficiency. The self-sufficient leader takes upon himself or herself the position of rescuer instead of allowing God to accomplish the work needed in someone's life. Needs suddenly become their calling, often to the neglect of reliance on God's wisdom and direction. Self-sufficiency manifests in church settings when a pastor attempts to do the work of the Body of Christ, as in a domestic setting when a mother or father takes responsibility for the achievement and joy of a child.

Dr. Robert Thompson attributes this to a new individualism in culture. “In the Western Church today, with its focus on individualism and professionalism, and its need to show results for its efforts, Christian leadership, it would appear, has adopted secular principles in addition to spiritual leadership.”⁸² This author would suggest that while some in Christian leadership could adopt different cultural principles, it would perhaps be a result of having experienced burnout rather than leading to burnout. Kevin Mannoia writes,

The secular leadership paradigm emphasizes function, results and performance. It says to would-be leaders, “learn the system” in an attempt to replicate results. Spiritual leadership must emphasize character, essence and nature while saying, “become.” At this point, spiritual leadership asserts itself as counter cultural and stands in stark contrast, and often opposition, to the basic elements of secular leadership. Becoming this kind of leader, then, is a process. Rooted in Scripture and largely dealing with the unseen dimension of identity, it is a journey in leader formation.⁸³

⁸² Robert Thompson, “The Study of Brokenness as a Critical Success Factor in the Elective Leadership of the Pastor” (PhD diss., George Fox University, 2017), 2, accessed October 11, 2017, <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin/213>.

⁸³ Kevin W. Mannoia, *The Integrity Factor: A Journey in Leadership Formation* (Vancouver, BC: Regent College Pub., 2006), 43.

Thompson, in his study of brokenness, suggested today's Christian leaders need to operate from a place of brokenness and humility. Scripture supports this suggestion; however, recognition of these traits may be difficult when under the influence of stress or burnout symptoms. Neglect of self-care is manifest in those who fail to understand how much God values them. They may ransom sleep, ignore healthy diets, sacrifice their schedules, or neglect their family needs in other ways. Irrespective of a lack of self-care or an assertion on self-sufficiency, burnout can begin from an absence of appreciation of the nature of God in our lives.

In his book *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote,

Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock. Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his son: "ye were bought at a price," and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us. Above all, it is grace because God did not reckon his Son too dear a price to pay for our life, but delivered him up for us. Costly grace is the Incarnation of God.⁸⁴

Reconciling Bonhoeffer's submission can lead any minister to the wanton awareness of self-sufficient tendencies. What becomes of a pastor blinded in the plight of his or her condition, beyond the capacity to recognize a need to reconcile?

⁸⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (London, UK: SCM Press, 2015), 47.

Summary

Eugene Peterson paraphrased Proverbs 21:5 as “careful planning puts you ahead in the long run; hurry and scurry puts you further behind.”⁸⁵ The research points toward many causes of burnout, and while a plethora of attempts to burnout avoidance have been attempted, higher than acceptable rates of ministry burnout exist. No one approach will suffice every ministry professional seeking to establish healthy self-care or avoid debilitating behavior, however, one thing stands out to this author; the condition of onset burnout can and does prohibit some pastors from implementing healthy practices when living symptomatic lives.

Section 3 proposes a solution to those held captive in a lack of awareness. Additional research provides the information for appropriate first steps toward situational awareness. Immediate immersion into a strategic course of action is sometimes pushed to the side or postponed indefinitely by ministers suffering from burnout. The solution requires a simple, inviting approach that might alleviate the angst of complicated solutions.

⁸⁵ Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message: Proverbs* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1995), 113.

SECTION 3:

THE THESIS

There are three things extremely hard: steel, a diamond, and to know oneself.

—attributed to Benjamin Franklin⁸⁶

Introduction

It is my objective to offer a starting place, a fresh opportunity for life in ministry, by assisting pastors and ministry leaders in recognizing the status of their spiritual and physical wellbeing. Section 1 recognized the problem of burnout facing ministers today. Section 2 identified historical approaches to the prevention of burnout and revealed that while best practices do exist, statistics confirm a high level of ministry stress and burnout. My logic for the stated objective is as follows: I assert that busy, overwhelmed, and potentially burned-out victims have intrinsic mental and emotional blocks prohibiting the recognition of at-risk behavior. A personal conviction assures me that pastors would recognize and receive help to prevent burnout given the right environment for awareness.

Almost 58 percent of U.S. churches are below weekend attendance of one hundred as of 2015, up from 47 percent in 2005.⁸⁷ Numerical growth of the church is not the focus of this study, but these statistics provide valuable insight into the growing

⁸⁶ “There Are Three Things Extremely Hard, Steel, a Diamond and To Know One’s Self,” Quote Investigator, September 4, 2017, accessed October 16, 2017, <https://quoteinvestigator.com/2017/09/04/self/>.

⁸⁷ David A. Roozen, *American Congregations 2015* (Hartford, CT: Hartford Institute for Religion Research, 2016), 1. PDF.

number of burnout victims in ministry. Pastors that carry the responsibility of churches in a solo role often work fifty to eighty hours per week.⁸⁸

Considering the statistics that 90 percent of pastors feel they are inadequately trained to cope with ministry demands, and that 70 percent do not have someone they believe to be a close friend,⁸⁹ is it any wonder they find difficulty recognizing they are at risk. “Needless to say, this statistical litany indicates that a large proportion of our spiritual leaders are currently experiencing an extraordinary level of job-related stress and burnout. As a result, many of them are leaving public ministry at an alarming rate. Many others limp along, hoping to find ways to survive with some portion of their spiritual vitality and personal integrity clearly intact.”⁹⁰

Books have been written, and websites have been developed to assist people in developing better self-awareness. In the context of ministry, some sites have come and gone, presumably due to lack of interest and participation by perspective ministry professionals. For instance, a doctoral student discovered a website developed by Dr. Samuel Rima, a specialist and the author of books specializing in the health of spiritual ministry:

Samuel D. Rima, *Leading from the Inside Out: The Art of Self-Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 29-30. For those who are interested in exploring the topic

⁸⁸ Mark Kelly, “Pastors’ Work Hours Tallied in New Survey,” *Baptist Press*, January 6, 2010, accessed June 3, 2017, <http://bpnews.net/31993>.

⁸⁹ Dean R. Hoge and Jacqueline E. Wenger, “Experiences of Protestant Ministers Who Left Local Church Ministry” (presentation to the Religious Research Association, Norfolk, October 25, 2003).

⁹⁰ David O. Williams, “Sustaining Spiritual Leadership for the Long Haul: The Center for Spiritual Renewal at Barclay College” (PhD diss., George Fox University, 2009), 2, accessed November 9, 2017, <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin/183>.

of self-leadership further, Rima has a website (www.samrima.com) which provides additional resources based on this book and its predecessor, *Overcoming the Dark Side of Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), co-written with Gary McIntosh. For a nominal fee, Rima promises to "coach you in completing the online, interactive workshops and assist you in developing your Personal Constitution, Self-leadership Plan, as well as your Dark Side Profile and a Personal Plan to manage your dark side so that it doesn't mitigate your leadership. Then, I will help hold you accountable for living out your self-leadership plans and coach you through the initial obstacles you will face." This author has found such resources to be of great benefit in the development of an ongoing plan for personal fitness, discipleship, and spiritual formation.⁹¹

The site no longer exists, and multiple searches revealed no alternative from Dr. Rima.

This author discovered, in multiple pastor interviews, a resistance to visiting such sites due to frustration with the complicated process and expense involved.

Isolation

Digging deeper would reveal a pattern of isolation in resistance to the possibility of colleagues or close friends discovering their spiritual demise.⁹² When coupled with the fact that pastors feel ill-equipped to function in their ministry role, isolation becomes the perfect breeding ground for complacency and self-reliance. In the discussion of clergy burnout, Dr. Jody Becker suggested that wholesome community is essential.⁹³ A Bowen

⁹¹ Ibid., 32.

⁹² Pastors Dan, Carl, Andrea, and Ben indicated a desire to find help but self-help websites, including those directed toward ministry professionals, seemed cumbersome and often required investment for personal coaching that placed help outside the realm of possibility financially.

⁹³ Jody Decker, "The Ecological Gift of Spiritual Formation: A Renewal for Healthy Clergy" (PhD diss., George Fox University, 2017), accessed August 4, 2017, <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin/229>.

systems theory perspective revealed supporting research toward the necessity of authentic relationships that are balanced with the practice of faith.⁹⁴

Leonard Sweet explained the value of relationships and the importance of others in one's future: “All notions of self-sufficiency need abandoning. Without the involvement of others in your future, you have no future the trinitarian nature of God, which means that my very ‘self’ cannot be found outside of relationships, outside the ‘three hypostases’ of communion with (or ‘hypostatic union’ of) God, self, and neighbor.”⁹⁵ This author agrees with Sweet in that the individual cannot be found outside of relationships, though some would seek such an existence if possible.

The family unit is an excellent example of the trinitarian nature of God. For instance, notice the diagram of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (see Figure 1). One could duplicate this triune relationship in various forms of society, even today. The subsequent diagrams (see Figure 2) demonstrate the trinitarian nature of the family and the church. The structure of the U.S. government⁹⁶ follows the same line of thinking.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Justin B. Poll and Timothy B. Smith, “The Spiritual Self: Toward a Conceptualization of Spiritual Identity Development,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 31, no. 2 (August 4, 2003), 129, accessed May 7, 2017, <http://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/facpub/2020>.

⁹⁵ Sweet, *11: Indispensable*, 21.

⁹⁶ The three main branches of the government are the legislative, executive, and judicial branches. The legislative branch is responsible for making laws, the executive branch is responsible for carrying out the laws, and the judicial branch is responsible for evaluating the laws.

⁹⁷ “Downloads for The Truth Project,” The Truth Project, 2006, accessed October 19, 2016, <http://www.thetruthproject.org/downloads/Download%20Content.aspx>.

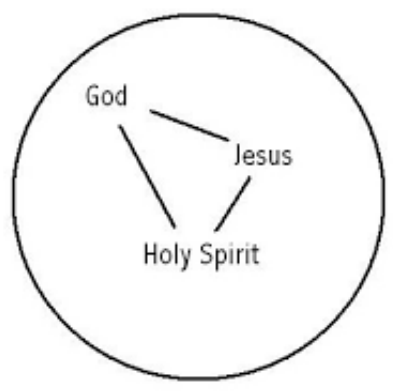


Figure 1. Triune nature of God.⁹⁸

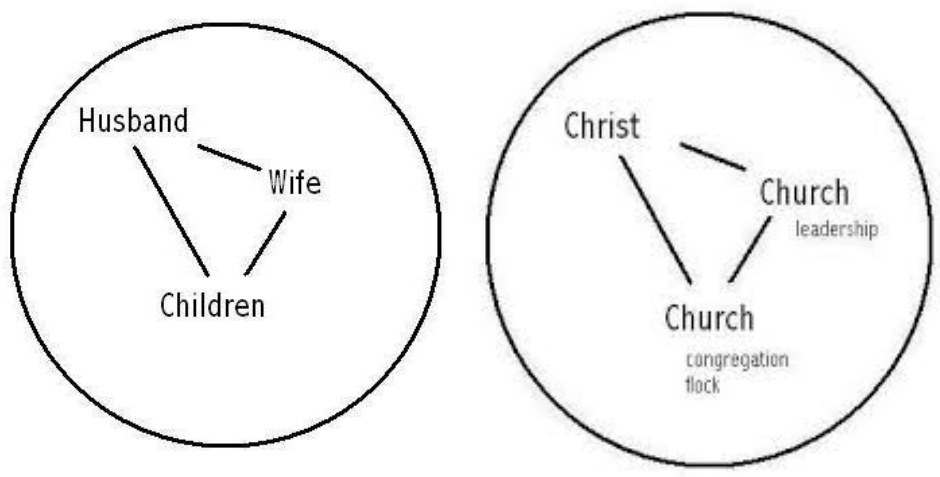


Figure 2. Triune nature of family and church⁹⁹

What is strikingly similar about each example is they exist only in relationship. When one branch of the government succeeds in operating outside the knowledge and relationship of the other two, disorder and chaos ensue.¹⁰⁰ When a father, mother, or child

⁹⁸ Ibid. Used by permission.

⁹⁹ Ibid. Used by permission.

¹⁰⁰ Consider any presidential administration in your lifetime, and you can witness the breakdown of a relationship. When a president acts above the Rule of Law and fights his or her wars, Congress should step in with legislative authority to bring things into check. When Congress fail to do so, the government

steps outside the family unit in pursuit of selfish desires, everyone in that relationship suffers.¹⁰¹

Research Discovery

The health of pastors in a holistic, Christ-centered development must be maintained over a lifetime. This involves several aspects of formation including vocational and biblical training and the renewal and refreshing of key leadership virtues that help one sustain a healthy, enduring ministry. Greg Warner describes the desperation found among men and women in ministry: “No one knows for sure how many ministers suffer from depression—or how many attempt suicide. Even those who counsel depressed clergy don’t know those numbers. H. B. London, vice president for pastoral ministry at Focus on the Family said “based on the research of ministering to ministers for a decade, 18 to 25 percent of all ministers are depressed at any one time.”¹⁰²

William Willimon disliked the metaphor of burnout as it suggests that ministry leaders just suffer from a lack of energy, which wouldn’t require leaving the ministry. “From what I observe, our pastoral problem of constancy is more a matter of ‘blackout’ or ‘brownout,’ the gradual dissipation of meaning in ministry, a blurring of vision, the inability to keep the theological rationale for ministry that is necessary to enliven our

cease to work efficiently. The same applies to the judicial branch in that the Supreme Court can attempt to rewrite the Rule of Law outside the jurisdiction of their oversight and to the detriment of the legislative and executive branches.

¹⁰¹ Seven pastoral burnout interviews conducted during this research project revealed family breakdown when one member of the family went beyond the established boundaries of acceptable behavior. Each resulted in varying levels of dysfunction; all felt the outcome caused irreparable harm to the family.

¹⁰² Greg Warner, “Depression Among Clergy,” BRnow.org, October 19, 2009, accessed May 2, 2017, <http://brnow.org/News/October-2009/Depression-among-clergy-similar-to-population>.

imagination. We wake up one day and no longer have a reason or purpose for doing the things that the church expects us, as pastors, to do.”¹⁰³ Willimon would continue to describe ministry as a call that an individual would never attempt on their own without the beckoning from God. This reasoning rings true of Quaker Douglas Steere, who proclaimed, “‘Who am I?’ is a question that is dependent upon the answer to the question, ‘Whose am I?’”¹⁰⁴

Three words surfaced consistently during this project: constancy, competence, and character. This prompted me to investigate the philosophy of these spiritual virtues, especially through the lens of one denomination that has been implementing processes for more than a decade. The idea of each of these was present in every interview conducted during this project, whether missing or practiced.

Constancy

Constancy is defined as the quality of being faithful, dependable, and enduring.¹⁰⁵ Paul, in his letter to the Romans, encouraged his readers “to rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulations, and be constant in prayer” (Romans 12:12 ESV). Paul was not admonishing the Christians to be in prayer twenty-four hours and seven days a week, but rather to persist in prayer with perseverance and devotion. So often we Christians find our prayer life to be sporadic or random at best. Recognizing that Paul was encouraging the devotion

¹⁰³ William H. Willimon, *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2016), 325, Kindle.

¹⁰⁴ Cited in Parker J. Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 17.

¹⁰⁵ *Oxford Living Dictionaries*, s.v. “constancy,” accessed November 19, 2017, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/constancy>.

to the one, most powerful means of communicating with God, we can surmise that Paul intended to strengthen the relationship between his readers and God. All relationships suffer without regularly focused attention. Constancy in prayer and other spiritual and physical aspects of life are required for our relationships to function correctly.

The beauty of Paul's message here is that the context of constancy is found while rejoicing in hope and being patient in tribulations. The irony is not lost on this author, having encountered several stories beyond his own that mirrored such communion of attributes. Tribulation is often the natural environment in which ministers serve. Job said, "Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward" (Job 5:7 ESV). Jesus observed that in this world we would have trouble (John 16:33).

Christ has burst into the midst of our tribulation and brought a new hope (Galatians 4:4-6). This is the reason to rejoice, as Paul would later describe to the Roman Christians, and I believe his point is that the rejoicing in hope flows back through God's people, providing the ability to endure the tribulations we face. How do we as ministers keep loving people, walking alongside stragglers, encouraging those suffering from broken relationships, all the while wearing the multiple hats that are required attire for every pastor? Just as Jesus did, when "for the joy that was set before him [he] endured the cross" (Heb. 12:2 ESV).

Competence

Competence is defined as the ability to do something successfully or efficiently and is synonymous with capacity, proficiency, adeptness, mastery, and aptitude.¹⁰⁶ Most denominations require a certain level of education to be considered for ordination in full-time ministry to the church.¹⁰⁷ In reality, most pastoral vocations will require a lifetime of study and development. Some denominations provide resources to assist pastors in maintaining their pursuits and development in the form of continuing education after they have been out of the education system for several years. This led me to inquire about my denomination's pursuit of pastoral health, which will be addressed.

In section 1, we discussed how the work of the minister is rarely completed, like that of other occupations. A mechanic, regardless of how difficult the intricate repair on a foreign auto may be, has the satisfaction of handing the keys to the satisfied customer to enjoy. The same applies to the contractor of a major skyscraper. They may employ thousands of workers via hundreds of sub-contractors, but within a specified (and often known) amount of time, the project is complete, and a degree of satisfaction is enjoyed. Not so with many in pastoral ministry who may spend months and years on the same projects of helping people put the pieces of their life back together.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd ed., s.v. "competence," accessed December 16, 2017, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/competence>.

¹⁰⁷ The denominations of the American Baptist Church, Evangelical Covenant Church, Evangelical Lutheran, Evangelical Presbyterian (to name a few), all require an MDiv or equivalent to be ordained in the highest call of a church pastorate.

¹⁰⁸ Willimon, *Pastor*, 316.

Character

Character is an important virtue that requires attention from every minister in a leadership role. *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines the word as the mental and moral qualities of an individual—those qualities that are distinct.¹⁰⁹ The Romans used the word character as the brand placed on a Roman soldier when enlisted in the military, giving them a new distinct character. Willimon posited that a person entering the ordination process for ministry receives a new character or brand, making the individual ontologically different.¹¹⁰

Consider the impact of insufficient character evaluation in modern culture. How many corporations, legislative offices, and news organizations bolstered their background investigation procedures in light of the recent barrage of sexual misconduct allegations? As this project is completed, managers, legislators, and chief executives are writing new policies in various offices around the nation to address the apparent lack of attention to an individual's moral character.¹¹¹ Churches across many denominations began addressing this perhaps decades ago in light of moral failures by ministry leaders.

This research led me to the involvement of my tribe's work to assist pastors in their vocations. The Evangelical Covenant Church of America (ECC) has dedicated resources in the last decade to the development of a department called Sustaining Pastoral

¹⁰⁹ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd ed., s.v. "character," accessed December 16, 2017, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/character>.

¹¹⁰ Willimon, *Pastor*, 43.

¹¹¹ Recent conversations with state and local municipalities in Alaska revealed the pursuit to evaluate and rewrite current policies that would require more thorough vetting of all potential candidates for public office.

Excellence (SPE). The ECC addresses character development through the spiritual direction department by providing resources specific to the clergy:

We affirm that our character as Christians—and as ministers—is deeply rooted in a Christ-defined identity that recognizes God’s working in every area of our lives. Through Sustaining Pastoral Excellence (SPE) we desire to connect Covenant pastors, missionaries, and chaplains with resources through which they can grow their connection to this working, and ultimately deepen their friendship with God. This is often experienced through the practice of spiritual direction.

Spiritual direction is a ministry of listening, discernment, and prayer in a confidential setting of encouragement and compassion. Through this department, one discerns the presence and work of God's Spirit with a companion who sets aside the concerns of their own life to attend to the experience of God in the life of another.¹¹²

The ECC offers spiritual direction in some ways, including free access to directors at each denominational gathering throughout the year, and by providing training for spiritual directors in each conference region.

The ECC addresses competency from multiple directions, as no two ministers are alike, nor do they serve in identical settings. The Department of Pastoral Arts and Cohort Experiences assists in the development of personal learning as a priority by providing two major platforms from which to learn:

Part one is a program called Leadership Cohort: The Art of Pastoral Leadership.

This nine-month cohort experience will expose ministry leaders to a diverse group of material, examining leadership ideas, concepts, theories, and realities through the lens of our Christian faith. Participants in the cohort are invited to a journey that will require a sense of exploration, adventure, discovery, and openness. Through a learning community setting each will find the ingredients for his or her leadership. Along with required reading and reflection assignments, participants will work together via an online classroom setting, in two retreats, and through ministry-based projects. Major topics for the cohort include *The Life of the Leader*

¹¹² “Character: Spiritual Direction,” The Evangelical Covenant Church, accessed May 22, 2017, <https://covchurch.org/vocational-ministry/spe/spiritual-direction/>.

(fall emphasis), *Culture, Change, and Conflict* (winter emphasis), and *Imagination, Creativity, and Mission* (spring emphasis).¹¹³

Participants attend two retreats during the nine-month experience, similar to modern seminary settings that combine online cohorts with annual advances to encourage personal growth. Each cohort is limited to sixteen participants.

Part two is a program called Living Forward: The Adventure of the Call. Guided by experienced pastors and leaders inside and outside the denomination, Living Forward is designed for the long-term pastor:

This is a three-retreat experience spanning eight months which will lead participants in an exploration of the third formational stage of ministry life. Ministers in this cohort are over 55 years of age and have spent 15+ years in ministry in either a congregational setting, on the mission field, or as a chaplain, educator or administrator caring for and speaking into people's lives and faith journeys. As they look toward the future, questions of gift, transition, change, and choices are of paramount importance. What might call look like for the next 15 to 20 years? What legacy will plant the seeds of ministry call for others?

Along with required reading and a final reflection paper, participants will come together for personal contemplative exercises, presentations for thought and discussion, group processing, spiritual direction, and discernment. Major topics for the cohort include *Identity* (fall emphasis), *Reality* (winter emphasis), and *Possibility* (spring emphasis).¹¹⁴

Consideration for the program requires participants to register and attend all three retreats.

The ECC addresses *constancy* through the approach of Sabbath and personal retreats for renewal. Ministers are encouraged to take an opportunity to pause and

¹¹³ “Leadership Cohort: The Art of Pastoral Leadership,” The Evangelical Covenant Church, accessed May 22, 2017, <https://covchurch.org/vocational-ministry/pastoral-arts/leadership-cohort/>.

¹¹⁴ “Living Forward: The Adventure of the Call,” The Evangelical Covenant Church, accessed May 22, 2017, <https://covchurch.org/vocational-ministry/pastoral-arts/leadership-cohort/>.

reconnect with Christ regularly in their spiritual lives. Ministers receive information about retreat centers that offer guided and silent retreats, as well as reasonable rates to clergy for short getaways. Leaders recommend that pastors spend three to seven days on personal or sabbatical retreats on a regular basis, though no instructions dictate a required schedule or frequency. Churches and regional conferences are expected to manage the process as needed:

Sabbath retreats are an opportunity for Covenant pastors, missionaries, and chaplains, offering the chance to revisit the practice of holy rest. Over the course of two-and-a-half days, participants will find the space to pause in the presence of God, moving through the Sabbath rhythms of relinquishing, receiving, and resting. Those who are selected to participate (up to 10 per retreat) will receive a grant, which includes:

- all expenses for the retreat experience including registration, lodging, food, and materials;
- a travel reimbursement of up to \$450 for transportation to and from the retreat location.¹¹⁵

Ministers are encouraged to seize an opportunity to pause and reconnect with Christ regularly. The denomination works with several retreat centers that offer guided and silent retreats, as well as reasonable rates to clergy for short getaways.

Proposed Solution

Realistically speaking, ministers who experience symptoms of burnout rarely possess the energy or motivation to work on the virtues of competence, constancy, and character. It seems daunting and impossible to undertake such a task.¹¹⁶ Here is where I

¹¹⁵ “Sabbath Retreat,” The Evangelical Covenant Church, accessed May 22, 2017, <https://covchurch.org/vocational-ministry/spe/retreats/sabbath-retreat/>.

¹¹⁶ Every pastor interviewed during this project expressed the frustration of working to improve spiritual health when operating in an environment void of spiritual and physical vitality.

introduce “Thriving,” a five-minute audio podcast that addresses the issue of burnout head-on, designed to reach ministry professionals (actually, any professional) who may be experiencing symptoms of stress and burnout.

Sections 4, 5, and 6 detail the podcast specifications and provide logistical information for its production. In advance of that, I propose why a podcast of this nature may offer a solution to the problem of burnout for those who fail to make time to address their situation.

Everyone can point to moments in their lives that are pivotal for grasping an idea or new way of thinking. These moments can shape a new identity, at least partially, by guiding one to the beginning of understanding who he or she is and whose he or she is. Needed change will become more apparent, which will lend strength to the fearful task of addressing spiritual and physical shortfalls in life. Abraham Heschel and Ilya Schor, in their book *The Sabbath*, reminded us that moments like this help a pastor recognize that the highest goal in his or her spiritual walk is not the accumulation of information, but to distinguish and embrace the sacred moments encountered.¹¹⁷ “Spiritual life begins to decay when we fail to sense the grandeur of what is eternal in time ... We must not forget that it is not a thing that lends significance to a moment; it is the moment that gives significance to things.”¹¹⁸

A personal example surfaced several months ago when an opportunity to have breakfast with lead mentor, author, and professor Leonard Sweet, presented itself. Dr.

¹¹⁷ Abraham Joshua Heschel and Ilya Schor, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York, NY: Farrer, Straus and Giroux, 2005), 191, Kindle.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

Sweet was visiting Alaska to speak at a conference, and we planned a time to meet and share together over a meal. I was not about to miss this opportunity, though my schedule was hectic and I was ever aware of looming academic deadlines that had come to define my schedule the previous two years.

The day arrived and my excitement had grown, only to be dashed as the exclusive restaurant I had selected was beyond capacity with an hour wait. Dr. Sweet was on a schedule, so we chose an empty Mexican restaurant a few blocks away. My mind focused on the dismal turn of events—the loss of an extra hour with Dr. Sweet replaced by a more hurried meal.

Two thoughts went home with me that day after returning Dr. Sweet to his hotel: (1) I had just wasted an incredible one-hour opportunity to pick the mind of a highly valued mentor in my life, and (2) that was damn good salsa. The conversation was excellent and just to sit in Dr. Sweet's presence was advantageous personally and culturally. The point is that my heart and mind were captivated by the things in the moment rather than the moment that lent significance to each of the things.

This reversal of importance happens as second nature to someone experiencing symptoms of burnout. Time becomes somewhat of a curse in that its elusiveness begins to dictate the importance of “things” that must get done at the sacrifice of the moments that bring value to those things.

One of the most notable words in the Bible is *qadosh* or holy, a word representing the secret and magnificence of the divine. Heschel and Schor noted that the first holy object in biblical history was not an altar or a mountain. Instead, *qadosh* describes

time.¹¹⁹ “God blessed the seventh day and made it holy” (Gen. 2:3a). The Ten Commandments reference this designation, and ironically, *qadosh* is applied to only one word within the commandments—sabbath.

The fact that *time* is considered holy even before objects most often attributed as holy in a historical context is significant. Why ascribe such importance to time before the sanctity of God’s people or that of a holy place, like the Tabernacle?¹²⁰ Pastors must embrace the holiness of time before the sanctity of people and place can become significant enough to maintain a life consecrated in service to God and the church.

Before entering full-time ministry, this author embraced a life of challenging work in providing for my family and future. I developed pride for achieving in business and conquering the hours of any given week, squeezing every ounce of provision from them. Each week presents 168 hours to live, work, play, and rest. Twenty-four hours is to be set aside for rest. Dominating the world for six days never led to the desire to rest for one. Fast-forward through several years in ministry, and this pattern continues.

Jesus addressed this pointedly when accused of abusing the Sabbath (Mark 2). Rather than argue with the Pharisees who condemned him and his disciples, the point was made that pollution of the very purpose of Sabbath had led God’s people to ignore the apparent needs around them. How quickly we shift the focus and benefit of a gift from God for the sake of serving self even though this act hurts us.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 295.

¹²⁰ Exodus 19:6 references the instance where God calls His people a holy nation. The erection of a tabernacle would come in response to the people worshipping a thing, the golden calf. Heschel and Schor elaborate that Sabbath celebrates *time*, not space. Eighty-five percent of our week is captivated by the *things of space* leaving fifteen percent to recalibrate life to the *holiness in time*.

What if we approached Sabbath differently? Rather than the Sabbath being celebrated as a day to repair, heal, and recover for the coming six-day work week, could it be observed as the climax of all that the labor has provided? When Jesus said that the Sabbath was made for humans (Mark 2:27), isn't that a gift? Treating the Sabbath as a day of preparation for more work is similar to a husband giving his wife a vacuum for her birthday. She waited all year to celebrate her special day, only to be rewarded with an object that ensures more efficient work tomorrow.

God created a holy gift in time that pastors would be wise to view as “she sheds” and “man caves.” A place longed for, a time to celebrate, while abstaining from doing, thinking, planning, or worrying about work. The holiness of time brings an opportunity to share in the likeness of God, in that we have in common the day set aside to relax and enjoy all that has been done.

Talking with pastors in the throes of burnout revealed a contempt for Sabbath talk. “How can I be expected to take an entire day off every week when I'm failing to produce the expected results for my church?”¹²¹ Amber shared her experience of losing the joy of Sabbath by her second year in ministry. The more the job demanded, the more attention she gave to accomplishing tasks each week. Demands outweighed the church's income; therefore, the church could not hire additional staff. Yet people's lives were being changed, and the church was doing well. God provided the energy and results to keep things going, at least for a time. “Sabbath became a mystical date in the distant future, that when enough time had been dedicated to the work of the church, I would be

¹²¹ Personal conversation with Pastor Amber, June 20, 2017.

rewarded with an extended sabbatical to renew my strength. It all sounded biblical and godly.”¹²²

Amber was one of many pastors who expressed concern about feeling isolated while serving as a pastor. However, the recognition of this problem in each case was in retrospect, sadly a common trend among those experiencing symptoms of burnout. Ben Staley reports that an illusion of peace and safety can lead men and women toward isolation. “In trying to keep strong enough to endure the challenges of ministry, it is a temptation for ministers to keep, or at least allow, a distance between them and other people. At the same time, it seems that forces of evil work all the angles to trouble ministers in relationships, often drawing men and women into isolation and despair.”¹²³

Larry Crabb highlighted the importance of connectedness. “Either we can live as unique members of a connected community, experiencing the fruit of Christ’s life within us, or we can live as a terrified, demanding, self-absorbed islands, disconnected from community and desperately determined to get by with whatever resources we brought to our island with us.”¹²⁴

During our second year in the DMin program at Portland Seminary, lead mentor Leonard Sweet asked my cohort to read several books. Each book was challenging in

¹²² Amber was in tears at this point. She commented later that hearing the story come out of her mouth eight years later saddened her. She wondered how could she or anyone serving with her could have believed this was a healthy approach. The only strategy attempted was to read some books and listen to a tape series on being an effective pastor, both of which she failed to complete even more than 20 percent.

¹²³ Benjamin C. Staley, “A New Way of Life in Ministry: Sustaining Hope in the Midst of Burnout” (PhD diss., George Fox University, 2012), 16, accessed July 19, 2017, <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin/20>.

¹²⁴ Larry Crabb, *Connecting: Healing Ourselves and Our Relationships* (Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group, 2006), 31.

fresh new ways, opening our eyes and minds to the ever-expanding universe of semiotics. During our cohort discussions of the book of the week, we often bumped into subjects that resonated with everyone.

One such topic was found in the opening chapter of Peter Scazzero's book, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*. One of the students posted this statement as a subject of discussion: "Time for church. Put your fake smile on."¹²⁵ The comments were priceless as we each shared how fake most people are when they arrive at the church. This author recalls only one instance of a person that always told the truth when greeted at the front door on Sunday with "hey, how are you today?"

I remember asking folks to be honest with me about how they were doing as it would help clarify the voice of the Holy Spirit when we should be addressing specific issues in the church. Wouldn't it be interesting to ask someone how she is doing and hear the truth rather than a fake answer? "My husband is sleeping with my cousin, I'm probably going to be laid off next week, and my youngest just wrote the "F" word in permanent marker on our neighbor's car, but other than that, things are just swell, Pastor."¹²⁶

A colleague attempted a greeting strategy that requested door greeters to wear a nametag that mentioned a shortcoming they dealt with regularly, such as: "Hi, my name is Bob, and I struggle with spending." Though short-lived, the conversations were rich for

¹²⁵ Gregg Farah introduced the topic for field input from others on how they approached the subject of God meeting someone through feelings of sadness, depression, and anger.

¹²⁶ An actual answer from a woman who attended a church I served in the lower 48. She was brutally honest and had she not been, we would have never known how to help her. She admitted that she was on her way to a nervous breakdown leading into that week.

a couple of weeks. People began to share their dirty laundry more openly, which occasionally led to fruitful discussions. It stagnated the greeting process, which eventually led to abandoning the idea since most people were never greeted by anyone. They continued to attempt this level of honesty in groups, with leaders opening the meeting by sharing something personal, and it seemed to catch on.

Many pastors struggle with the issue of personal honesty, especially when suffering from stress and symptoms of burnout. When this happens, conversations are kept at a professional level. A few samples from the “Thriving” podcast relate to offering hope in the midst of desperate situations (see Appendix B for eight podcast scripts).

Podcast Script—Episode 1: Introduction

Opener: Hello and welcome to “Thriving”—a five-minute podcast addressing a significant topic in your life—burnout. I’m Dr. Rick Millikin.

Today, I want to discuss perhaps the most critical first step—understanding the symptoms that might be there. Let me begin by asking a couple of questions.

First, do you ever catch yourself working at a frenzied pace, with little or no time for God?

Second, has the church or office loaded so much onto your plate, you find yourself dreading going to work? Or, let me ask a third—do you have a habit of pushing off prayer time or Bible study that has nothing to do with preparation for the weekend message?

If that sounds like you, those are early indicators that you might be over-doing some things, which experts say can and often will lead to ministry burnout.

Burnout has become a word we use to describe an individual who has become fatigued with his or her vocation or major life activity. Pastoral burnout continues to be a problem throughout western evangelicalism and according to author John Sanford, will never be an old subject. The longer one serves, a battle begins to rage in the mind of committed pastors, convincing them to ignore the signs of weakness and just work harder!

The following statistics encapsulate the responses of pastors from evangelical churches in North America addressing the consequences of vocational ministry. Do any of these resonate with you?

- Nearly 75 percent of pastors have considered leaving their jobs in the last quarter.

- 35 to 40 percent of pastors do leave the ministry after only five years; 60 to 80 percent of pastors will leave in their first decade, and a small percentage will make it an entire career.
- One study found that United Methodist clergy spends 56.2 hours per week in ministry and 12 evenings a month away from home on church duties.¹²⁷
- 60 percent of clergy expressed that their involvement in church leadership has negatively impacted their appetite for functioning in the church.
- 33 percent say that ministry is a hazard to their family.

Considering the implications of the data, the suggestion that fifteen out of every twenty ministry leaders are entertaining the idea of leaving vocational ministry is alarming.

As pastors, our capacity to lead can be dramatically affected by the stress of the call, obligations to family and church, and the lack of self-care.

So, what do you do about it? That's why I'm glad you're here. Each week, we're going to tackle one of the pitfalls that have sidelined ministers over the last few decades. I've put a lot of research into this study, and hope to offer some hope to those who might be getting close to burnout, or like me, experienced it in your ministry. Only by the grace of God was I able to put my life back together and serve Him once again.

Closing: Thank you for joining me for today's episode of “Thriving.” I want to invite you to participate in a special way. If you've been through a form of burnout, or perhaps you recognize the symptoms in your life, would you take a moment and write me? I'd love to hear your story. Maybe you've survived this debilitating affliction, and your story could help someone who's facing the same thing you endured. Would you email me? Thrivingpodcast@gmail.com. Hope to hear from you soon. Join me next time right here on “Thriving.”

Podcast Script—Episode 3: When Caring Kills

Opener: Hello and welcome to “Thriving”—a five-minute podcast addressing a very important topic in your life—burnout. I'm Dr. Rick Millikin.

Today, I want to discuss an important question. We continue to look for symptoms of burnout because it's different for everyone. Before I ask the question, let me share Pastor James's story with you.

Pastor James had been an energetic youth pastor for a growing church in the suburbs of a developing community. Young families had been moving into the area, so the growth came easy. James implemented every concept of successful ministry gained from four years in seminary. The young pastor prided himself on the accomplishments of digital/social media implementation since accepting the

¹²⁷ VandeCreek and Burton, “Professional Chaplaincy,” 82.

position, noting how quickly things fell into place. Five years later, he was managing a youth staff of two full-time employees and five part-time helpers. Life was good, or so he thought.

Beginning year six, pastor James started to notice the tension between not only he and his staff but the senior pastor as well. James was asked to present current and future ministry models before the church board. He lied during each presentation, including the private meetings with the senior pastor. "They were out to get me and were trying to take credit for the success that I had built with my own hands," James confessed.¹²⁸ "I don't even know why I lied, but it became a pattern for me." James left the ministry in year seven to pursue para-church organizational positions. When asked about the number of personal friendships maintained during this ordeal, James sat back to think for a minute and concluded that not one close relationship was fostered during the final two years. James was serving alone. Surrounded by people, you would wonder how anyone could consider him alone, but he was. Completely isolated.

How might this have played into his eventual burnout? There are a plethora of burnout definitions with most focused on the combination of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion from unmanaged stress. The Mayo Clinic extended the definition to include doubts about your confidence and value in your work.¹²⁹ High-achievers are frequently so zealous about what they do, they cultivate a disregard for evidence. They're working extraordinarily long hours, undertaking remarkably heavy workloads, and putting immense pressure on themselves to excel—marking them prime for burnout.

Author, pastor Peter Scazzaro said this about those who leave church:

After many years of frustration and disappointment, realizing that the black-and-white presentations of the life of faith did not fit with their life experience, they quit— at least internally. For the sake of their children, or perhaps for lack of an alternative, they have remained in the church, but passively. They can't quite put their finger on the problem, but they know something is not right. Something is missing. A deep unease in their soul gnaws at them, but they don't know what to do about it.¹³⁰

You might be curious as to how other occupations fare in the world of burnout, and you may or may not be surprised that burnout is not restricted to those in Christian service. There is a common burnout link between individuals with jobs in high-stress environments that require close or hands-on involvement.

¹²⁸ Personal conversation with Pastor James, January 5, 2017.

¹²⁹ "Know the Signs of Job Burnout," Mayo Clinic, September 17, 2015, accessed May 2, 2017, <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/burnout/art-20046642>.

¹³⁰ Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, 11.

Experts maintain that the top five occupations in which burnout presents itself are counselors, therapists, teachers, health care practitioners, and clergy, apparently, representing high-touch professions, which would suggest a desire to love and heal those who are hurting. Author Christina Maslach captures this idea when she details the response of a social worker named Carol. “When I try to describe my experience to someone else, I use the analogy of a teapot. Just like a teapot, I was on the fire, with water boiling— working hard to handle problems and do good. But after several years, the water had boiled away, and yet I was still on the fire, a burned-out teapot in danger of cracking.”¹³¹

Archibald Hart, a forerunner in the scholarship of ministry burnout, encapsulates his experience with pastors that have experienced burnout. “A pastor becomes reduced to useless, ineffective rubble, emotionally exhausted, and genuinely fearful. A pattern of emotional overload with little reward or appreciation in the context of feelings of helplessness is at the heart of the burnout syndrome.”¹³²

As pastors, our capacity to lead can be dramatically affected by the stress of the call, obligations to family and church, and the lack of self-care.

So, what do you do about it? That's why I'm glad you're here. Each week, we're going to tackle one of the pitfalls that has sidelined ministers over the last few decades. I've put a lot of research into this study, and hope to offer some hope to those who might be getting close to burnout, or like me experienced it in your ministry. Only by the grace of God was I able to put my life back together and serve Him once again.

Closing: Thank you for joining me for today's episode of “Thriving.” I want to invite you to participate in a special way. If you've been through a form of ministry burnout, or perhaps you recognize the symptoms in your life, would you take a moment and write me? I'd love to hear your story. Maybe you've survived this debilitating affliction, and your story could help someone that's facing the same thing you endured. Would you email me? Thrivingpodcast@gmail.com. Hope to hear from you soon. Join me next time right here on “Thriving.”

Podcast Script—Episode 4: All Alone

Opener: Hello and welcome to “Thriving”—a five-minute podcast addressing a very important topic in your life—burnout. I’m Dr. Rick Millikin.

Today, I want to discuss an important question. We continue to look for symptoms of burnout because it’s different for everyone. Before I ask the question, let me share Pastor Tom’s story with you.

Tom was washed up and a nervous wreck as we began our phone interview a few thousand miles apart. I could sense the unease with the topic and a reluctance

¹³¹ Maslach, *Burnout*, 56.

¹³² Hart, “Depressed, Stressed, and Burned Out.”

to discuss such private matters with a stranger. Tom recounted the agonizing two years leading up to this interview with a nervous twitch in his voice. He was about to marry a woman with whom he had cheated on his wife for twelve years.

Pastor Tom led a church of about 150 people for ten years. By the time he left, the attendance had dropped to 75. There had been no growth in that ten years, but the church seemed happy and involved during that time. What the church didn't know was that Tom was a complete mess inside. His prayer life and personal devotion time had ended around year five. He studied for Sunday, but even that was sparse in the last two years, enlisting the help of his spouse to write messages.

From the first five minutes of the interview, I knew the question I wanted to ask. "Who have you been sharing your struggles with during those last five years? Was there anyone close?" "No," came back the difficult answer. Let me play back a portion of the interview, which was recorded with permission.

My voice: "Why didn't you have someone in your life you could talk to about what was going on?"

Tom's voice: "Are you kidding me? Have you ever come to the place that things are so bad, you couldn't trust anyone to know what's going on? Have you? Who the hell are you to judge me on not being accountable to someone, when you have no idea how tough things were for me then?"

My voice: "Tom, I'm sorry, I don't mean to offend, and yes, I do know what that is like. I burned out within the first twelve years of ministry, and I too had isolated myself. So please forgive me for sounding judgmental, as that wasn't my intention."

Tom's voice: "Sorry to hear that happened to you. Were you having an affair like me or were you doing something else? It's usually money, drugs or women, what was yours?"

You can probably guess the question by now. It's one we all need to ask ourselves on a regular basis. Here it is: Who do I have in my life that I trust to share most everything? Do you have someone? Someone of the same sex that doesn't attend your church that you could call anytime day or night and share what is going on? Someone that has access to your life anytime? To your spouse with questions like "Hey, how's he/she doing? Is he/she drinking? Spending time with you? How many hours are they away from home?"

Jesus modeled the perfect ministry attitude when he said, "The Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does" (John 5:19).

Jesus also immediately chose people to walk with him. From them, he chose three who would become closer than the others, allowing them access to his more intimate details and struggles.

So, what do you do about it? That's why I'm glad you're here. Each week, we're going to tackle one of the pitfalls that have sidelined ministers over the last few decades. I hope to offer some hope to those who might be getting close to

burning out, or like me, experienced it in your ministry. Only by the grace of God was I able to put my life back together and serve Him once again.

This week, do yourself a favor. If you don't have someone in your life like we just talked about, find someone today. Pray about it. Ask God to reveal at least one person who could serve in this role, and then contact them. Ask them to help you in this area, and then ask them to help you find a second person. It's a good place to start.

Closing: Thank you for joining me for today's episode of "Thriving." I want to invite you to participate in a special way. If you've been through a form of ministry burnout, or perhaps you recognize the symptoms in your life, would you take a moment and write me? I'd love to hear your story. Maybe you've survived this debilitating affliction, and your story could help someone that's facing the same thing you endured. Would you email me? Thrivingpodcast@gmail.com. Hope to hear from you soon. Join me next time right here at "Thriving."

Summary

Burnout victims are in a state of being overwhelmed. The emotional and mental blocks that prohibit pursuit of healthy alternatives or shifts in lifestyle can be enough to prevent potentially salvageable ministry leaders from taking the necessary steps for recovery. This proposed solution could substitute, however remotely, for the missing relationships required to assist a struggling pastor. Isolation was a consistent theme in the research of actual burnout victims, to the extent that relationships were avoided in fear of discovery. Void of relationship, any pastor suffering the symptoms of burnout would be distressed in acknowledging failure.

A strategic focus on the virtues of constancy, competence, and character would prepare and sustain most any ministry leader. Guiding someone victimized by burnout to address these qualities requires a strategic planning all its own. The "Thriving" podcast would be useful for pastors, staff leaders, church council/leadership teams, and any professional needing encouragement to take the first step toward wholeness.

The project has developed through a process of trial and error as discoveries revealed potential pitfalls to the current approach, requiring a shift in thinking and implementation. The following sections detail the artifact specifications by outlining practical application, format, and organization. Furthermore, goals and strategies explore planning and assessment, the tools to measure success, target audience, and the scope and sequence of the project.

SECTION 4:
ARTIFACT DESCRIPTION

Introduction

The proposed artifact for this project is an audio podcast addressing the most popular pitfalls faced by ministry leaders who are at risk of burnout. A repeated symptom of pastors in stressful environments is the appearance of insufficient time. Foreseeing this obstacle as a potential hindrance to effectiveness, the podcast will be only five minutes in length and readily available for busy leaders to listen to on the go.

Practical Application

This podcast, currently called “Thriving,” offers the listener a look into the potential pitfalls of burnout when symptomatic indicators are ignored. “Thriving” will present realistic, transparent, and intimate views of the lives of colleagues who have suffered the consequences of burnout. Along with the statistical evidence, personal witness, and tragic stories of these victims will be the encouragement to stop and take notice of one’s own situation and begin to recognize the signs and symptoms of failure that could be lurking just around the corner.

This author believes the clear majority of those at risk for burnout go to great lengths to avoid confronting a debilitating condition. The pressure mounts to the point that attempting to read another book or call for help seems fruitless or impossible. A short podcast like “Thriving” can introduce just enough reality and inspiration to nudge an individual into action before it is too late.

Issues discussed in previous sections highlighted important steps for healing the brokenness of burnout and the destruction of an unhealthy spiritual environment. This

artifact will attempt to address many of the most neglected disciplines that are often the easiest to implement. The organization and employment of the podcast has been developed in the following ways.

Focus Group

I contacted a panel of ten prospective podcast audience members with instructions to answer a series of questions that address the most important topics of healthy spirituality in their ministry context. The questions were answered anonymously and included, but were not limited to, the following:

- Select by ranking from 1 to 10, 1 being the most important, the spiritual disciplines you would choose to work on if you had an extra five minutes every morning.
 - meditation
 - prayer
 - fasting
 - study
 - simplicity
 - solitude
 - submission
 - service
 - confession
 - worship
- What other topic or discipline would you suggest?

- Which is more difficult for you, confessing your sins to another or receiving forgiveness and grace from God and those around you?
- What lifestyle change would you make today if nothing were impossible?
- What are the top three things would you change about your church if anything were possible?
- If your boss were to instruct you to spend five extra minutes per week doing one of the following to improve your spiritual wellbeing, which would you be more apt to choose to discover important information related to a ministry problem?
 - read additional emails
 - read additional text messages
 - visit a website and search for information about that problem
 - listen to podcast

Format

Many ideas and thoughts were entertained regarding the appropriate format for such a venture. Having a history in broadcasting, radio has been an important and valued part of my previous roles in disseminating information. Electronic media has paved the way for numerous forms of communication such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube videos, e-mail, and instant messaging. Further reflection revealed the overwhelming propensity for important messages to get lost in these popular formats, since one rarely opens such an application to land upon merely one message in five minutes of free time.

The advent of the podcast has found a niche that proves to be the perfect vehicle for this artifact. While everyone interacts with e-mail and instant messaging daily, it's true that many ministry leaders may have never listened to a podcast before. However, of those that have, the majority can locate one that resonates with their situation or circumstance and subscribe accordingly. E-mail or messaging would easily get lost among the dozens if not hundreds of competing messages. The same is true for Facebook, Twitter, and other social media sites, though these would provide a handy and effective distribution platform.

Consider the comments of a respondent in the focus panel: "By 2 p.m., I'm sick of e-mail and replying to texts from my boss and co-workers. The thought of listening to something on my way to work or while I was shaving in the morning sounds like the kind of thing I could welcome any day of the week."¹³³ Eighty percent of the respondents selected podcast as their preferred method.¹³⁴ In addition, half of those admitting to never have listened to a podcast in the past indicated a willingness to learn if podcast was simple to subscribe to.

Organization

The next hurdle was to organize the most important topics to be covered in the podcast in such a way that perspective listeners could easily subscribe and be encouraged to listen to the episodes progressively, as applicable to their circumstances. For instance,

¹³³ Personal conversation with panel respondent Jerrod, October 1, 2017.

¹³⁴ Eight of ten respondents answered "podcast" to the question of preferred method for improving spiritual wellbeing when given only five additional minutes per day.

Pastor John has been listening for two months and shares the link with his friend and worship leader, Kerrie. Having listened to the next broadcast at John's recommendation, Kerrie can search past topics using tags, such as burnout, free time, family, prayer, stress, and so forth. These topics are organized in successive fashion, making it easier to listen, meditate, and build upon each discipline.

Opportunity of Community

One of the most important lessons learned during these past three years has been the importance of community. Lead mentor Leonard Sweet challenged our cohort's understanding of what community could and perhaps should look like. In his book *From Tablet to Table*, Sweet wrote, "The table is the place where identity is born—the place where the story of our lives is retold, re-minded, and relived."¹³⁵ The table is and always should be set in a variety of places in our lives—not only the small nook of our kitchens and dining rooms, but among friends, neighbors, and colleagues. This would lead to the next idea to help ministers create the environment for better self-care.

Rather than simply listening to a five-minute podcast¹³⁶ and moving on, we can harness the opportunity of community by inviting feedback to the podcast site in the form of written or voice communication. Both forms can be incorporated into future podcasts (with appropriate permission) to aid growth of the entire group. Is there anything quite as encouraging as hearing how someone else walked through a situation similar to the one

¹³⁵ Leonard I. Sweet, *From Tablet to Table: Where Community is Formed and Identity is Found* (Colorado Springs, CO: Nav Press, 2014), 3.

¹³⁶ After careful consideration, I chose the length of five minutes because of the balance between information and time commitment. Given that many ministers facing burnout are convinced they do not have time for one more thing, five rather than fifteen or thirty seemed appropriate for sustainability's sake.

you are in, and to find he or she made it through? Or to learn that they did more than survive—but perhaps even thrived?

SECTION 5:
ARTIFACT SPECIFICATIONS: GOALS AND STRATEGIES

Dissertation/Artifact Goals

My project is the development of a podcast with the purpose of addressing trends and pitfalls in ministry leadership that leads to burnout as found in the research section of the dissertation.

- Rather than suggesting the perfect solution for at-risk ministers, this project will aid in pointing listeners in the right direction to find help once they have recognized the patterns or symptoms that demonstrate potential risk.
- Establish and compile a list of the most popular pitfalls faced by ministry leaders that have struggled with burnout.
- Determine the viability of a five-minute podcast and the expense of production and distribution.
- Develop a weekly podcast that ministry leaders can listen to quickly (five minutes) for recognition of symptoms of burnout and healthy ideas that encourage leaders to avoid burnout.
- Distribute the podcast in a format that is easy to use and share among colleagues.
- Encourage membership (subscription) to stay connected with each new episode.

- Make room for adaptation as important topics arise. Develop a flexible plan that will allow movement of high priority topics as needed, such as following a mass shooting at a church or school.

Beta Version Plan/Assessment

- Develop a brand name through research.
 - Compile short list of ten potential names.
 - Share the list with colleagues for advice.
 - Examine Google Analytics associated with the words *ministry* *burnout*.
 - Utilize a web name generator for final ideas.
- Compile eight weeks of material for initial launch of podcast.
- Secure equipment and facilities to record and distribute the podcast.
- Produce eight episodes and distribute to a pre-determined test audience for feedback.

Success Measurements

- Positive feedback from test participants
- Confirmation of listenership
- Listeners subscribe to automatically receive future episodes.

Target Audience

Initial thoughts were that this podcast would target any ministry leader who has suffered the debilitating effects of burnout. However, as the idea continued to develop, it was obvious that a more appropriate audience would include:

- any professional who has never faced burnout,
- leaders who are experiencing symptoms of stress and burnout,
- church boards/council members who desire to establish a plan for their staff,
- pastors or ministry leaders who have left ministry due to stress or burnout,
- students about to enter the workforce, and
- missionaries.

Artifact Scope and Content: Development of Podcast

The development stage was very involved on a variety of stages, requiring research and field-testing that totaled more than one hundred hours. Meetings with expert advisors helped guide the process and develop the product on a firmer foundation for success. Much of the work centered in the following areas:

Logistics

- equipment—microphones, computers, mixing boards, software, and processing components.
- facilities—Local site that could accommodate the equipment and provide the Internet bandwidth to upload large audio files.

- distribution—web-hosting with enough space for current and archived podcasts.
- website or social media—Development of an interactive website for uploading content and subsequent reply/follow-up content seemed the obvious path; however, one expert advisor recommended postponing a website until appropriate branding has been established. Branding can take months or even years to accomplish, so save the money.
- Establish social media accounts using the most obvious platforms for podcasts: Spotify, Sound Cloud, and iTunes.
- Establish a Facebook page that will serve as the primary distribution module for each of the platforms.
- Budget planning has resulted in a turn-key operation that will cost approximately \$500 in upfront expenses. This amount includes consideration of equipment already owned. Additional costs would be incurred with the addition of a website, at a cost of approximately \$35 per month, if design and maintenance is managed personally.

Subject Research

- Research the most popular topics identified from focus group answers.
- Compile a large amount of material to sustain a weekly podcast for one year that will be recorded in advance, monthly. This allows for downtime, illness, and unexpected travel.

- Follow-up communication with special guests and hosts during featured topics, and with audience members who choose to reply or leave feedback appropriate for inclusion in a future podcast.

Technical Requirements

- Produce and record four five-minute podcasts a month in advance.
- Edit each podcast for content and quality.
- Upload the content weekly.
- Evaluate feedback/comments from listeners for connection to other professionals for help or for use in an upcoming episode.

Standards of Publication

Content Standards

- Follow all rules set forth in broadcasting by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).
- Submit first eight episodes to an industry professional for review.
- Maintain consistent, quality content that addresses the needs facing ministry professionals today.

Topic Standards

- Current and future research of burnout pitfalls and solutions will guide the topics of each episode.

- When listeners bring pressing issues, each will be addressed in a timely manner.

Transferability

- Each podcast will provide a link that is shareable with friends and colleagues and can be distributed via social media sites. Facebook will be the primary mode of transfer in the opening months, establishing a base of listenership through one of the most popular social sites on the Internet.
- Future work could include packaging the product into convenient gift sets in mp3 format to distribute to those in rural settings with inadequate access to Internet bandwidth.

SECTION 6:
POSTSCRIPT

Ministry is one of the most difficult professions in society. Talk with any pastor or leader who has finished his or her first two years in full-time ministry, and you will discover the bewilderment created by a fast-paced environment that demands attention across every skill level they acquired in seminary—and often some they never acquired.

The management of one's own spiritual health is very complex, as the statistics discussed in this project attest to, and can be a wakeup call for any pastor. Even more complex is the realization that a leader is not only responsible to manage one's own spiritual health, but must balance self-care with the responsibility of equipping others to lead in healthy ways. Lay leaders may not even encounter spiritual health training until they begin to serve in church.

When leaders come to terms with the fact that their success is dependent upon a healthy relationship with God as sustainer, they undoubtedly have found the grace and strength to survive the early pitfalls of stress and over-commitment. Alan Nelson reminded pastors that brokenness achieved in obedience to the call of developing spiritual disciplines will make it possible to help others.¹³⁷

The podcast “Thriving” has been launched in test mode with key leaders who have agreed to provide feedback as to the success and failure of the project. All feedback thus far has been positive, with new topics coming in each week.

¹³⁷ Alan E. Nelson, *Broken in the Right Place* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers, 1994), 137.

I am pleased with the podcast's reception among colleagues and am excited to report that it is being considered for a drive-time radio segment on five Christian stations in Alaska. Depending on the outcome of discussions, the podcast would be developed into a daily (weekday) show, requiring much more preparation and material. For now, the original podcast will remain as a weekly program, with a focus on helping leaders recognize, prepare for, and prevent burnout.

One issue that has presented itself during the test phase is balancing the effectiveness of a short podcast with the desire to speak more at length on a given topic. I'm considering adapting the program to a thirty-minute version, with the shorter, five-minute version always available. This is developing in such a way that a group of shorter episodes would represent the bulk of the longer episode. The full-length podcast would allow for fluid thoughts that contain both the problem and potential solutions in one presentation.

Future conversations with the Christian Broadcasting Network will help determine the outcome. If the radio show comes to fruition, the use of its equipment will enable me to more easily produce and edit podcasts of different lengths. Guest availability for recordings is another issue. Currently, this breaks my flow of recording episodes in one sitting to sometimes multiple recordings per week. Studio time will allow me to send questions to my guests and have them call in anytime to record their responses.

Overall, my expectations for the podcast have been exceeded. I'm thoroughly excited about the possibilities of this project in the future. I'm also humbled and thrilled

to be stretched in exciting new ways. My *Semiotics* journey has opened some challenging, yet rewarding doors.

What will happen to the large number of ministers who remain unconnected to relationships that can help them reach healthy self-care goals and *thrive* in ministry? The experiences shared in this document remain heavy on this author's heart. New conversations are developing within my own sphere of influence as we implement new policies and practices in our practicum of care among the ministerial participants.

Pastor Dave is gone. Though he hasn't left ministry entirely, he walked away from his church. He is pursuing a position with much less responsibility and the assumption of less stress and anxiety while still serving in a pastoral role.

Pastor Jeff continues to struggle, but he is committed to connecting with other pastors in his area, promising to implement some basic steps of care. He has garnered healthy advice from a mentor who has agreed to help guide him in the early steps of this process. At the very least, Jeff recognizes the pitfalls he has stumbled into in the last few years and is willing to admit he can't continue the living the same way. "I think I'm finally broken,"¹³⁸ Jeff said recently in a follow-up conversation.

These are just two stories of many that lack healthy connectedness in their ministry. More can and should be done to connect with those walking dangerously close to burnout, and especially those that have already fallen victim to it with little idea of how or if they will ever serve well in ministry again.

¹³⁸ Personal conversation with Pastor Jeff, November 1, 2017.

APPENDIX A:
MINISTRY BURNOUT SURVEY¹³⁹

Please take a few minutes to examine whether you may be experiencing burnout. Be honest in your consideration of each statement.

- I feel hopeless and trapped in my job.
- I am constantly tired.
- I am bored with my duties, co-workers, and church members.
- I am easily irritated and have little patience with people.
- I am cynical about the church, people, profession, and denomination.
- I want to change my daily routine, yet I feel threatened by change.
- I feel that I lack control over my circumstances.
- I have difficulty concentrating on specific tasks.
- I feel withdrawn, because working at problem solving seems futile.
- I occupy myself with trivial activities to escape more important responsibilities.
- I use to care about others, but now I'm too preoccupied with my own health, sanity, and career.
- I am restless and have difficulty relaxing or sleeping.
- I doubt that I really make a difference for my church members, co-workers, friends, and family.
- I have lost my professional and personal confidence.

¹³⁹ “Burnout Inventory,” Burnout Inventory for Ministers, 2017, accessed July 1, 2017, <http://www.pastoralcareinc.com/surveys/burnout-inventory/>. Used with permission.

- ___ I hate to get out of bed and dread going to work.
- ___ I put off making decisions because they seem overwhelming.
- ___ I don't want to hear about anyone else's problems.
- ___ I feel I have nothing more to give.
- ___ I am just going through the motions—waiting for change, a move, or retirement.
- ___ I've lost my sense of purpose or enthusiasm about my job.
- ___ I often use phrases such as “I don't care anymore” or “why bother, it won't make a difference anyway.”
- ___ I am highly critical of others. My self-esteem is low.
- ___ I use personal days a lot just to get away from work.
- ___ My social involvement has decreased both on and off the job.
- ___ I frequently complain and despair over problems.
- ___ I am now using alcohol and/or drugs as an escape.

How do you feel after talking this inventory? Do you have most of these symptoms? Do you feel helpless and hopeless?

APPENDIX B:

EIGHT “THRIVING” PODCAST SCRIPTS

Episode 1: Introduction

Opener: Hello and welcome to “Thriving”—a five-minute podcast addressing a significant topic in your life—burnout. I’m Dr. Rick Millikin.

Today, I want to discuss perhaps the most critical first step—understanding the symptoms that might be there. Let me begin by asking a couple of questions.

First, do you ever catch yourself working at a frenzied pace, with little or no time for God?

Second, has the church or office loaded so much onto your plate, you find yourself dreading going to work? Or, let me ask a third—do you have a habit of pushing off prayer time or Bible study that has nothing to do with preparation for the weekend message?

If that sounds like you, those are early indicators that you might be over-doing some things, which experts say can and often will lead to ministry burnout.

Burnout has become a word we use to describe an individual who has become fatigued with his or her vocation or major life activity. Pastoral burnout continues to be a problem throughout western evangelicalism and according to author John Sanford, will never be an old subject. The longer one serves, a battle begins to rage in the mind of committed pastors, convincing them to ignore the signs of weakness and just work harder!

The following statistics encapsulate the responses of pastors from evangelical churches in North America addressing the consequences of vocational ministry. Do any of these resonate with you?

- Nearly 75 percent of pastors have considered leaving their jobs in the last quarter.
- 35 to 40 percent of pastors do leave the ministry after only five years; 60 to 80 percent of pastors will leave in their first decade, and a small percentage will make it an entire career.
- One study found that United Methodist clergy spends 56.2 hours per week in ministry and 12 evenings a month away from home on church duties.¹⁴⁰
- 60 percent of clergy expressed that their involvement in church leadership has negatively impacted their appetite for functioning in the church.
- 33 percent say that ministry is a hazard to their family.

Considering the implications of the data, the suggestion that fifteen out of every twenty ministry leaders are entertaining the idea of leaving vocational ministry is alarming.

As pastors, our capacity to lead can be dramatically affected by the stress of the call, obligations to family and church, and the lack of self-care.

So, what do you do about it? That's why I'm glad you're here. Each week, we're going to tackle one of the pitfalls that have sidelined ministers over the last few decades. I've put a lot of research into this study, and hope to offer some hope to those who might

¹⁴⁰ VandeCreek and Burton, "Professional Chaplaincy," 82.

be getting close to burnout, or like me, experienced it in your ministry. Only by the grace of God was I able to put my life back together and serve Him once again.

Closing: Thank you for joining me for today's episode of "Thriving." I want to invite you to participate in a special way. If you've been through a form of burnout, or perhaps you recognize the symptoms in your life, would you take a moment and write me? I'd love to hear your story. Maybe you've survived this debilitating affliction, and your story could help someone who's facing the same thing you endured. Would you email me? Thrivingpodcast@gmail.com. Hope to hear from you soon. Join me next time right here on "Thriving."

Episode 2: Whose Strength?

Opener: Hello and welcome to "Thriving"—a five-minute podcast addressing a very important topic in your life—burnout. I'm Dr. Rick Millikin.

Today, I want to discuss an important question. We continue to look for symptoms of burnout because it's different for everyone. Before I ask the question, let me share Pastor Carl's story with you. From time to time, we'll have guests on the show, and we'll also read interview scripts from discussions I've had with pastors.

Pastor Carl's story went like this:

Carl's hands shook as he held the cup of coffee. We chose the small diner because it was quiet and Carl wanted to share his burnout story with as little interruption as possible. The story began like so many others during this project of discovery for ministry burnout, with Carl describing what felt like a blindside. "I had no idea it was this bad, and out of nowhere, everything seemed to fall apart." The ministry had seen exponential growth both numerically and spiritually in the previous ten years. The

pressure to surpass the previous year's accomplishments seemed reasonable to Carl and the leadership council, leading them to ignore the additional hours the pastor was putting in.

The position began with an expected forty-five-hour work week but had become a sixty-eight-hour grind. The rural ministry setting posed additional challenges in that Carl had limited access to resources that might alleviate the pressure. When the breakdown happened, pastor Carl was caught off guard, attributing the symptoms to declining health. The doctor explained that his body was ok, but the test revealed high levels of stress, putting his heart and other systems at risk.

Carl began to examine where his life had taken a turn, and that led him to write down all that he was doing on a weekly basis. It was obvious, in retrospect, why his family had abandoned him two years ago. Subtle hints from his spouse, the children, even parishioners he dismissed as petty squabbles, most likely perpetrated by the enemy. Carl made a note of how many hours he spent in sermon preparation, prayer and study. "Pathetic," he said. "I was spending a fraction of the amount of time doing those things compared to my first few years in ministry. My prayer life was almost non-existent compared to the early years.

He admitted that the strengths he cherished in the corporate world had kept him going those last few years. He had been relying on gifts, talents, and abilities he'd honed over several years in business and ministry. Carl tendered his resignation and began to seek help for putting his life back together. Upon reaching the decision, the instinct to call a friend and share the news revealed the most shocking truth of all—Carl had no friends to call.

You can probably guess the question by now. It's one we all need to ask ourselves on a regular basis. Here it is: Where does my strength come from for *this ministry*? Have you ever created a problem by trying to do God's work in your own strength? I have. It didn't end well. We often rush into a ministry because we see its potential and believe we possess the skills and abilities to do a good job. We assume God has called us to this because we are available and we can do it. We forget that God doesn't need our natural skills and abilities. He knows what He has designed each of us to do, and He wants to do it through us.

Jesus modeled the perfect ministry attitude when He said, "The Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does" (John 5:19).

Jesus was the Son of God, yet He did not attempt God's work in His human strength. He relied totally upon the Holy Spirit in everything He did. The apostles did the same. Many times in the book of Acts, before a mighty work was performed, Scripture records that they were "filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 4:8, 31; 7:55; 9:17). Christianity spread like wildfire throughout the known world in a very short time (Acts 2:41), due to the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

Listen, these same men who had deserted Jesus in fear (Mark 14:50) now spoke boldly in the public square (Acts 2:14), and traveled extensively sharing the good news. When they waited for the Holy Spirit, they accomplished what they could never have done on their own (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-5).

D. L. Moody said, “Before we pray that God would fill us, I believe we ought first to pray that He empty us.”¹⁴¹ I’ll never forget before I experienced burnout, I had stopped trusting God to use me, and I began to use myself. Working at an unsustainable pace to get everything done ... because I could do it. Friends, I regret that with all my heart.

So, what do you do about it? That’s why I’m glad you’re here. This week, I encourage you to evaluate everything you’re doing. Is it reasonable? Are you called and equipped to do that? Are there things that should be taken off your plate? Should you delegate? Then, spend some time each morning in prayer, asking God to help you put your trust and strength back where it belongs ... *in Him*.

Each week, we’re going to tackle one of the pitfalls that has sidelined ministers over the last few decades. I hope to offer some hope to those who might be getting close to burnout, or like me, have experienced it in your ministry. Only by the grace of God was I able to put my life back together and serve Him once again.

Closing: Thank you for joining me for today’s episode of “Thriving.” I want to invite you to participate in a special way. If you’ve been through a form of ministry burnout, or perhaps you recognize the symptoms in your life, would you take a moment and write me? I’d love to hear your story. Your story just might help someone else. You don’t have to use your real name, by the way. Would you email me? Thrivingpodcast@gmail.com. Hope to hear from you soon. Join me next time right here at “Thriving.”

¹⁴¹ Steve Miller, *D.L. Moody on Spiritual Leadership* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2004), 101.

Episode 3: When Caring Kills

Opener: Hello and welcome to “Thriving”—a five-minute podcast addressing a very important topic in your life—burnout. I’m Dr. Rick Millikin.

Today, I want to discuss an important question. We continue to look for symptoms of burnout because it’s different for everyone. Before I ask the question, let me share Pastor James’s story with you.

Pastor James had been an energetic youth pastor for a growing church in the suburbs of a developing community. Young families had been moving into the area, so the growth came easy. James implemented every concept of successful ministry gained from four years in seminary. The young pastor prided himself on the accomplishments of digital/social media implementation since accepting the position, noting how quickly things fell into place. Five years later, he was managing a youth staff of two full-time employees and five part-time helpers. Life was good, or so he thought.

Beginning year six, pastor James started to notice the tension between not only he and his staff but the senior pastor as well. James was asked to present current and future ministry models before the church board. He lied during each presentation, including the private meetings with the senior pastor. “They were out to get me and were trying to take credit for the success that I had built with my own hands,” James confessed.¹⁴² “I don’t even know why I lied, but it became a pattern for me.” James left the ministry in year seven to pursue para-church organizational positions. When asked about the number of

¹⁴² Personal conversation with Pastor James, January 5, 2017.

personal friendships maintained during this ordeal, James sat back to think for a minute and concluded that not one close relationship was fostered during the final two years. James was serving alone. Surrounded by people, you would wonder how anyone could consider him alone, but he was. Completely isolated.

How might this have played into his eventual burnout? There are a plethora of burnout definitions with most focused on the combination of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion from unmanaged stress. The Mayo Clinic extended the definition to include doubts about your confidence and value in your work. High-achievers are frequently so zealous about what they do, they cultivate a disregard for evidence. They're working extraordinarily long hours, undertaking remarkably heavy workloads, and putting immense pressure on themselves to excel—marking them prime for burnout.

Author, pastor Peter Scazzaro said this about those who leave church:

After many years of frustration and disappointment, realizing that the black-and-white presentations of the life of faith did not fit with their life experience, they quit— at least internally. For the sake of their children, or perhaps for lack of an alternative, they have remained in the church, but passively. They can't quite put their finger on the problem, but they know something is not right. Something is missing. A deep unease in their soul gnaws at them, but they don't know what to do about it.¹⁴³

You might be curious as to how other occupations fare in the world of burnout, and you may or may not be surprised that burnout is not restricted to those in Christian service. There is a common burnout link between individuals with jobs in high-stress environments that require close or hands-on involvement.

¹⁴³ Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, 11.

Experts maintain that the top five occupations in which burnout presents itself are counselors, therapists, teachers, health care practitioners, and clergy, apparently, representing high-touch professions, which would suggest a desire to love and heal those who are hurting. Author Christina Maslach captures this idea when she details the response of a social worker named Carol. “When I try to describe my experience to someone else, I use the analogy of a teapot. Just like a teapot, I was on the fire, with water boiling— working hard to handle problems and do good. But after several years, the water had boiled away, and yet I was still on the fire, a burned-out teapot in danger of cracking.”¹⁴⁴

Archibald Hart, a forerunner in the scholarship of ministry burnout, encapsulates his experience with pastors that have experienced burnout. “A pastor becomes reduced to useless, ineffective rubble, emotionally exhausted, and genuinely fearful. A pattern of emotional overload with little reward or appreciation in the context of feelings of helplessness is at the heart of the burnout syndrome.”¹⁴⁵

As pastors, our capacity to lead can be dramatically affected by the stress of the call, obligations to family and church, and the lack of self-care.

So, what do you do about it? That's why I'm glad you're here. Each week, we're going to tackle one of the pitfalls that has sidelined ministers over the last few decades. I've put a lot of research into this study, and hope to offer some hope to those who might be getting close to burnout, or like me experienced it in your ministry. Only by the grace of God was I able to put my life back together and serve Him once again.

¹⁴⁴ Maslach, *Burnout*, 56.

¹⁴⁵ Hart, “Depressed, Stressed, and Burned Out.”

Closing: Thank you for joining me for today's episode of “Thriving.” I want to invite you to participate in a special way. If you've been through a form of ministry burnout, or perhaps you recognize the symptoms in your life, would you take a moment and write me? I'd love to hear your story. Maybe you've survived this debilitating affliction, and your story could help someone that's facing the same thing you endured. Would you email me? Thrivingpodcast@gmail.com. Hope to hear from you soon. Join me next time right here on “Thriving.”

Episode 4: All Alone

Opener: Hello and welcome to “Thriving”—a five-minute podcast addressing a very important topic in your life—burnout. I’m Dr. Rick Millikin.

Today, I want to discuss an important question. We continue to look for symptoms of burnout because it’s different for everyone. Before I ask the question, let me share Pastor Tom’s story with you.

Tom was washed up and a nervous wreck as we began our phone interview a few thousand miles apart. I could sense the unease with the topic and a reluctance to discuss such private matters with a stranger. Tom recounted the agonizing two years leading up to this interview with a nervous twitch in his voice. He was about to marry a woman with whom he had cheated on his wife for twelve years.

Pastor Tom led a church of about 150 people for ten years. By the time he left, the attendance had dropped to 75. There had been no growth in that ten years, but the church seemed happy and involved during that time. What the church didn't know was that Tom was a complete mess inside. His prayer life and personal devotion time had ended around

year five. He studied for Sunday, but even that was sparse in the last two years, enlisting the help of his spouse to write messages.

From the first five minutes of the interview, I knew the question I wanted to ask. “Who have you been sharing your struggles with during those last five years? Was there anyone close?” “No,” came back the difficult answer. Let me play back a portion of the interview, which was recorded with permission.

My voice: “Why didn’t you have someone in your life you could talk to about what was going on?”

Tom's voice: “Are you kidding me? Have you ever come to the place that things are so bad, you couldn't trust anyone to know what's going on? Have you? Who the hell are you to judge me on not being accountable to someone, when you have no idea how tough things were for me then?”

My voice: “Tom, I’m sorry, I don’t mean to offend, and yes, I do know what that is like. I burned out within the first twelve years of ministry, and I too had isolated myself. So please forgive me for sounding judgmental, as that wasn’t my intention.”

Tom’s voice: “Sorry to hear that happened to you. Were you having an affair like me or were you doing something else? It’s usually money, drugs or women, what was yours?”

You can probably guess the question by now. It’s one we all need to ask ourselves on a regular basis. Here it is: Who do I have in my life that I trust to share most everything? Do you have someone? Someone of the same sex that doesn't attend your church that you could call anytime day or night and share what is going on? Someone

that has access to your life anytime? To your spouse with questions like “Hey, how's he/she doing? Is he/she drinking? Spending time with you? How many hours are they away from home?”

Jesus modeled the perfect ministry attitude when he said, “The Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does” (John 5:19).

Jesus also immediately chose people to walk with him. From them, he chose three who would become closer than the others, allowing them access to his more intimate details and struggles.

So, what do you do about it? That's why I'm glad you're here. Each week, we're going to tackle one of the pitfalls that have sidelined ministers over the last few decades. I hope to offer some hope to those who might be getting close to burning out, or like me, experienced it in your ministry. Only by the grace of God was I able to put my life back together and serve Him once again.

This week, do yourself a favor. If you don't have someone in your life like we just talked about, find someone today. Pray about it. Ask God to reveal at least one person who could serve in this role, and then contact them. Ask them to help you in this area, and then ask them to help you find a second person. It's a good place to start.

Closing: Thank you for joining me for today's episode of “Thriving.” I want to invite you to participate in a special way. If you've been through a form of ministry burnout, or perhaps you recognize the symptoms in your life, would you take a moment and write me? I'd love to hear your story. Maybe you've survived this debilitating affliction, and your story could help someone that's facing the same thing you endured.

Would you email me? Thrivingpodcast@gmail.com. Hope to hear from you soon. Join me next time right here at “Thriving.”

Episode 5: Churches, Pastors, and a Plan, Part 1

Opener: Hello and welcome to “Thriving”—a five-minute podcast addressing a very important topic in your life—burnout. I’m Dr. Rick Millikin.

Today, I want to talk about some research done by our friends at ChurchLeadership.org.

Pastors receive criticism, and congregations fear change; it comes with the job. Pastors and anyone in church leadership must learn to not take it personally; rather, listen, give empathy, encourage, and allow congregants to vent. Listen carefully as the criticism may be valid; apologize and heed. Some criticism may come from malevolent people who just are hateful; exercise church discipline. However, most of the time, the criticism comes from a fear—of change, of loneliness, of not being a part of the community, not being fed. These people feel they are irrelevant. They feel unloved and unheard. Listen and let them know they are listened to. Give them a forum for input and ownership of what is going on so they are part of the process. Put in lots of prayer, too. This solves most issues.¹⁴⁶

Church Leadership’s research shows that the biggest problems stem from a lack of desire to please Christ, a lack of love for one another, a lack of spiritual growth,

¹⁴⁶ Krejcir, “Statistics on Pastors: 2016 Update.”

and a lack of prayer. Take care of these, and you will be *an incredibly faithful and abundant church and a content pastor.*

Here are some tried and true items gleaned from these studies that pastors and church leaders can do to move things on the right path:

- Pastors must build their own spiritual formation before they lead or teach others. You cannot lead where you do not know the Way!
- Pastors must have two full days off a week and should not work more than fifty hours per week!
- Pastors must have at least three weeks of vacation and periodic sabbaticals.
- Pastors must be given a living wage or expect church hours to cut so the pastors can be bi-vocational.
- The laity must respond to the work God has called and not expect the pastor to do it all.
- The laity must realize the biblical role and responsibility of the pastor and respect their “office” even if they do not personally like them.
- The laity and leadership must keep their pastor in prayer and give them encouragement! This also gives reassurance to the pastor’s family.
- The laity must respond to their responsibility as the ministry engagers, not to be pew-sitters.
- The laity and leaders must realize the work of God, not compare their church or pastor to others. Do not give in to the numbers game or an expectation of growth; rather, seek faith and fruit.

- If there are way too many meetings; cut them! Meetings must be restructured so they are the “huddles to the game.” That is, only have meetings when they are necessary for planning; meetings are not the ministry. Have clear agendas and talking points that are given in advance. Listen, open and close on time, and pray, significantly! This will save countless hours of wasted time and stress and get your church on God's purpose. And help you recruit and keep volunteers and leaders!¹⁴⁷

So, what do you do about it? That’s why I’m glad you’re here. Let me ask you this question: How do you delegate and train lay people and staff to share the workload? The pastor becomes the main trainer and equipper for the church ministry. In addition, church boards need to understand the biblical role of a minister of God and make an effort to work with them. Seek out some resources this week to help you delegate and train others to serve in ministry with you. We’re here to help equip the saints. If you need some help, email me. I’d be happy recommend some resources.

Each week, we’re going to tackle one of the pitfalls that has sidelined ministers over the last few decades. I’ve put a lot of research into this study, and hope to offer some hope to those who might be getting close to burnout, or like me, have experienced it in your ministry. Only by the grace of God was I able to put my life back together and serve Him once again.

Closing: Thank you for joining me for today’s episode of “Thriving.” I want to invite you to participate in a special way. If you’ve been through a form of ministry

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

burnout, or perhaps, you recognize the symptoms in your life, would you take a moment and write me? I'd love to hear your story. Your story just might help someone else. You don't have to use your real name, by the way. Would you email me?

Thrivingpodcast@gmail.com. Hope to hear from you soon. Join me next time right here at "Thriving."

Episode 6: Churches, Pastors, and a Plan, Part 2

Opener: Hello and welcome to "Thriving"—a five-minute podcast addressing a very important topic in your life—burnout. I'm Dr. Rick Millikin.

Today, I want to talk about some research done by our friends at ChurchLeadership.org. This is part 2 of what we began last week. Here is what we discussed so far.

Pastors receive criticism, and congregations fear change; it comes with the job. Pastors and anyone in church leadership must learn to not take it personally; rather, listen, give empathy, encourage, and allow congregants to vent. Listen carefully as the criticism may be valid; apologize and heed. Some criticism may come from malevolent people who just are hateful; exercise church discipline. However, most of the time, the criticism comes from a fear—of change, of loneliness, of not being a part of the community, not being fed. These people feel they are irrelevant. They feel unloved and unheard. Listen and let them know they are listened to. Give them a forum for input and ownership of what is going on so they are part of the process. Put in lots of prayer, too. This solves most issues.

Here are some tried and true items gleaned from these studies that pastors and church leaders can do to move things on the right path.

- The pastor's family will not be perfect, because they are no different than any other family birthed in original sin and living in a fallen world. Realize they need understanding, compassion. They need to be heard, and sometimes, left alone.
- Pastors must grow their faith, spending at least thirty minutes a day on personal growth, Bible reading, prayer, and devotions outside of teaching preparation. The more the better! Budget that time!
- The congregation must realize not everyone will like the pastors; but, they must empower them to do as they are called. We are to love Christ, not our pastor; rather, we respect them, for they are to lead us!
- Unhealthy churches consider their pastors and staff as farm hands to do all of the work of ministry. Healthy churches respect their pastors as equippers of the ministry.
- Pastors must realize they will not please everyone. Some people will not like you. That's ok. Seek to please Christ, and the rest will sort out.
- Pastors need to fight personal apathy, doubt, depression, pessimism, and bitterness.
- Workaholism is the enemy to the church and to the pastor's home; do not allow it!¹⁴⁸

So, what do you do about it? That's why I'm glad you're here. Let me ask you this question: Does your church have a written job description for you and other staff

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

members? If you were to write down everything you do every week, would it surprise your leadership team or those close to you? Work on getting things in order this week or at least starting the ball rolling. Once you gain some momentum, you'll be surprised how quickly things get better.

Each week, we're going to tackle one of the pitfalls that has sidelined ministers over the last few decades. I've put a lot of research into this study, and hope to offer some hope to those who might be getting close to burnout, or like me, have experienced it in your ministry. Only by the grace of God was I able to put my life back together and serve Him once again.

Closing: Thank you for joining me for today's episode of "Thriving." I want to invite you to participate in a special way. If you've been through a form of ministry burnout, or perhaps, you recognize the symptoms in your life, would you take a moment and write me? I'd love to hear your story. Your story just might help someone else. You don't have to use your real name, by the way. Would you email me? Thrivingpodcast@gmail.com. Hope to hear from you soon. Join me next time right here at "Thriving."

Episode 7: Churches, Pastors, and a Plan, Part 3

Opener: Hello and welcome to "Thriving"—a five-minute podcast addressing a very important topic in your life—burnout. I'm Dr. Rick Millikin.

Today, I want to talk about some research done by our friends at ChurchLeadership.org. This is part 3 and the wrap up of what we began two weeks ago. Here is what we discussed so far.

Pastors receive criticism, and congregations fear change; it comes with the job. Pastors and anyone in church leadership must learn to not take it personally; rather, listen, give empathy, encourage, and allow congregants to vent. Listen carefully as the criticism may be valid; apologize and heed. Some criticism may come from malevolent people who just are hateful; exercise church discipline. However, most of the time, the criticism comes from a fear—of change, of loneliness, of not being a part of the community, not being fed. These people feel they are irrelevant. They feel unloved and unheard. Listen and let them know they are listened to. Give them a forum for input and ownership of what is going on so they are part of the process. Put in lots of prayer, too. This solves most issues.

Here are some tried and true items gleaned from these studies that pastors and church leaders can do to move things on the right path.

- The pastor is not to be the primary caregiver. They are to or equip the people to recruit, train, and empower volunteers and small group leaders to do the lion's share of the ministry and pastoral care.
- Unless the pastor is a trained and licensed counselor, refer people out. Only give spiritual advice, encouragement, and light practical counseling.
- In the eyes of many people, you will never be good enough. Keep your focus on pleasing Christ, not people.
- Spiritual warfare is real. The enemy will attack the pastor first, then the church!
- People will compare your ministry to other churches. Do not compare; only seek God's special call to you.

- Pastors, find the joy in your calling and your church and your family. This stems from your contentment in the Lord.
- People will expect the pastor to be available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. The elders need to have their pastor's back and give clear office hours. Others need to fill that "availability" expectation, not just the pastor. Pastors need to let go of responsibilities and concentrate on the equipping.
- Last, but most important, being a pastor is a special calling, and it is worth it, if you keep the main thing the main thing—glorifying Christ as Lord!¹⁴⁹

So, what do you do about it? That's why I'm glad you're here. This week, evaluate if there are things you should completely remove from your plate. Like counseling. If you're one of the rare pastors that also has a counseling degree, never mind, but if not, keep your counseling to a minimum and ask the leadership for help in doing this. Find licensed counselors you can refer to after a first visit. Your input could be as simple as identifying that maybe counseling would be good. Give some spiritual advice and pray with the person seeking help.

Each week, we're going to tackle one of the pitfalls that has sidelined ministers over the last few decades. I've put a lot of research into this study, and hope to offer some hope to those who might be getting close to burnout, or like me, have experienced it in your ministry. Only by the grace of God was I able to put my life back together and serve Him once again

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

Closing: Thank you for joining me for today’s episode of “Thriving.” I want to invite you to participate in a special way. If you’ve been through a form of ministry burnout, or perhaps, you recognize the symptoms in your life, would you take a moment and write me? I’d love to hear your story. Your story just might help someone else. You don’t have to use your real name, by the way. Would you email me?

Thrivingpodcast@gmail.com. Hope to hear from you soon. Join me next time right here at “Thriving.”

Episode 8: Merry-Go-Round

Opener: Hello and welcome to “Thriving”—a five-minute podcast addressing a very important topic in your life—burnout. I’m Dr. Rick Millikin.

Listen to the story of Dave Wiedis, the founder and Executive Director of Serving Leaders Ministries. He offers some very practical advice on avoiding the merry-go-around of burnout:

Twenty-five years ago, I knew I was burned out when I carelessly walked in front of a city bus and stupidly tried to defensively block it with a karate move. I had been working in a large Philadelphia law firm, and the relentless pressure and demands of practicing law had gradually depleted my energy and judgment (who walks in front of a bus and tries to block it?). The near miss with the bus, whose driver’s quick reflexes saved me from tragedy, convinced me that I was beyond burned out, needed a break, and had to make wiser choices in my life.¹⁵⁰

Burnout is a real problem, and for pastors, it is a real threat to you, your family, your ministry, and your church. According to one study on why pastors leave the ministry, moral failure is only the second most common reason pastors leave the ministry. The first is burnout.

¹⁵⁰ David Wiedis, “Dealing with and Healing from Burnout,” ServingLeaders Ministries, June 28, 2011, accessed March 30, 2017, <https://www.servingleaders.org/blog/2017/10/3/dealing-with-and-healing-from-burnout>.

When burnout runs its course, pastors often report that they have no initiative or drive, little energy, don't want to visit with people, and just want to be left alone. Other symptoms include depression, anxiety, irritability, and disillusionment with people, loss of confidence, a feeling of being mistreated, and feelings of detachment. Of course, with the intense and unrelenting demands of ministry, there is a spiral effect; burnout causes inefficiency, inefficiency creates increasing demands, demands create pressure and concomitant guilt for not achieving desired goals, added pressure and guilt causes stress, and stress causes a depletion of energy and drive, which in turn causes inefficiency.

Sound familiar? Want to get off that vicious merry-go-round? Here are some practical tips to help.

- 1. “Take heed to yourself”** in accordance with Paul’s exhortation to Timothy (1 Tim. 4:16 NKJV). Paul was first concerned with Timothy the person before he was concerned for Timothy the pastor. Many pastors are reluctant to take an honest look at their own lives. Paul understood the wounds, discouragement, and fears that besieged Timothy and afflict many pastors. Accordingly, pastors should heed Paul’s wise command to pay careful attention to yourself. This includes remembering your calling and the redemptive story of God’s hand in your life, taking an honest assessment of your strengths and weaknesses, and wisely providing care for yourself and your family.
- 2. Cultivate dependence on God** for the strength and power needed in your ministry. Remember, your ministry is not yours; it is God’s. He has called you, and He must accomplish His work in you. Therefore, stop trying to control

what you can't control and manage what you have no business managing. This includes managing other's opinions of you and their reactions to you.

- 3. Lower your expectations** (and those of your congregation). Learn to say no and to delegate by asking others to employ their gifts. Biblically speaking, being a pastor is not a one-person show. Have you turned it into one?
- 4. Learn to balance your life and pace yourself.** Ministry is not a sprint; it is a marathon. Take the long view and realize that sometimes slowing down will make you more effective. Create margins of time so that you are not always rushed. Take frequent breaks. Give yourself permission to take a nap and to rest.
- 5. Create time away to get refreshed.** When I coach pastors, they often look at me incredulously when I tell them to include time spent in solitude, recreation, and refreshment as part of their working hours. Why? Because your "job" requires you to be spiritually fit, and you can't be in good spiritual condition by always being on the go. Jesus often "withdrew to a quiet place" and effectively said no to ministry opportunities. You should do no less. A practical way to actually implement this suggestion is to regularly schedule your times of refreshment on your calendar and treat them as real appointments. If you are asked for a meeting at that time, your honest response will be "I have an appointment." Protecting these appointments is not being selfish; it is exercising good stewardship, will increase your effectiveness, and will protect you from burnout.

Next week, we'll wrap up David's advice.

Closing: Thank you for joining me for today's episode of "Thriving." I want to invite you to participate in a special way. If you've been through a form of ministry burnout, or perhaps, you recognize the symptoms in your life, would you take a moment and write me? I'd love to hear your story. Your story just might help someone else. You don't have to use your real name, by the way. Would you email me?

Thrivingpodcast@gmail.com. Hope to hear from you soon. Join me next time right here at "Thriving."

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