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# Combating Ministry Burnout By Honoring Human Limitations

Dominic Abaria

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

COMBATING MINISTRY BURNOUT  
BY HONORING HUMAN LIMITATIONS

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

BY

DOMINIC ABARIA

PORTLAND, OREGON

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Portland Seminary  
George Fox University  
Portland, Oregon

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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DMin Dissertation

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This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

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has been approved by  
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for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Leadership and Spiritual Formation

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To the under-shepherds in the frontlines of ministry.  
May God grant you grace to burn brightly without burning out.

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## Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	V
ABSTRACT .....	XI
SECTION 1: EXPLORING THE PROBLEM .....	1
The Cultural Development of Burnout .....	3
The Progress of Technology and Burnout .....	3
Modern Technology and Burnout.....	6
Performance-Based Identity.....	7
Understanding Burnout: Psychological and Spiritual Perspectives.....	9
Maslach’s Burnout Inventory (MBI) .....	9
Burnout as a Spiritual Issue .....	11
Risk Factors for Burnout.....	13
Gender Factors .....	13
Generational Factors .....	14
Physical and Mental Health Factors – ICD-11 and the DSM-5.....	15
Physical Health Factors.....	17
Spiritual Health Factors .....	17
Personality Factors.....	18
Technological Factors .....	20
Human Service-Specific Factors.....	21
Grassroots Voices .....	24
SECTION 2: OTHER PROPOSED SOLUTIONS .....	30

The Non-Classification Classification .....	30
A Medical Approach to Addressing Burnout .....	31
A Psychological Approach to Addressing Burnout .....	33
A Critique of Work Engagement as a Solution to Burnout .....	36
A Christian Theological and Spiritual Approach to Burnout .....	39
An Interdisciplinary Approach to Burnout .....	44
Conclusion .....	48
SECTION 3: THESIS .....	50
Moving Beyond Treating Symptoms.....	50
The Significance of Acknowledging Burnout Symptomology.....	52
Identifying the Root Causes and Temptations Leading to Burnout.....	53
The Bible and Burnout.....	53
What Did God say?.....	54
The Consequences of Sin.....	58
Lessons from Genesis 3 .....	60
The Temptation to Question God's Word .....	61
The Temptation to Be Omnipotent .....	62
The Temptation to Be Omniscient.....	64
The Temptation to Be Self-Reliant.....	66
Creating Focus on Character over Productivity .....	67
A Biblical View of Personal Value and Burnout.....	68
A Biblical View of Rhythm and Rest .....	71
A Biblical View of Restoration.....	72

Solitude and Silence.....	73
Corporate Restoration .....	75
Defining the Processes and Principles of Personal and Systemic Change .....	76
Adaptive Leadership .....	76
Spiritual Formation: A Model for Personal and Systemic Change.....	80
Conclusion .....	82
SECTION 4: ARTIFACT DESCRIPTION .....	84
SECTION 5: ARTIFACT SPECIFICATION .....	87
Artifact Goals.....	87
Audience .....	88
Scope and Content .....	88
Budget.....	100
Post-Graduate Considerations.....	100
Standards of Publication .....	101
SECTION 6: POSTSCRIPT .....	102
Gains and Challenges.....	102
Future Development.....	103
Lessons Learned.....	104
APPENDIX A: ARTIFACT .....	106
HOW TO USE THE REFINE PROGRAM.....	109
A GUIDE FOR SPIRITUAL LEADERS .....	111
Meeting 1 – Gaining the Right Perspective (One-on-one) .....	114

Meeting 2 – Looking at the Spiritual Landscape Together (Group).....	116
Meeting 3 – Uncovering the Roots of Spiritual Burnout (One-on-one) .....	117
Meeting 4 – Identifying Ways Individuals and Communities Burnout (Group) .....	119
Meeting 5 – Dispelling the Myth of Independence (One-on-one).....	120
Meeting 6 – Creating Space for Interdependence (Group).....	122
Meeting 7 – Fighting the Temptation to be Omniscient (One-on-one) .....	123
Meeting 8 – Honoring the Limits of the Mind in Community (Group).....	126
Meeting 9 – Internal Character vs Ministry Production (One-on-one).....	127
Meeting 10 – Creating a Culture that Values Character (Group) .....	130
Meeting 11 – Learning Limits from the Master (One-on-one).....	131
Meeting 12 – Practicing Limits Like Jesus in Community (Group).....	133
Meeting 13 – Practicing Spiritual Disciplines (One-on-one) .....	135
Meeting 14 – Practicing Communal Spiritual Disciplines (Group).....	138
Meeting 15 – Celebration and Planning Next Steps (One-on-one) .....	140
Meeting 16 – Communal Celebration and Creating A Covenant (Group) .....	142
EPILOGUE .....	144
APPENDIX B: FIELD RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE .....	147
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	156

## ABSTRACT

The risk of burnout threatens anyone working in human-service vocations but presents an especially volatile risk for those in ministry. This threat is compounded by the confluence of technological advances, performance-based identities, and a frugality mentality prevalent within nonprofit organizations, including churches and parachurch organizations. Since the early 1980s, the three common elements of burnout have been observed and analyzed in the field of psychology: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. However, most approaches to treating burnout only seek to mitigate symptomology without treating the underlying cause.

This dissertation explores the development of a burnout culture in the United States, which has consistently impacted Christian churches and parachurch organizations. Next, it provides a brief overview of medical and psychological approaches to mitigating burnout. Last, it presents a biblical solution to ministry burnout that is grounded in a biblical anthropology. This dissertation posits that burnout occurs when people extend themselves beyond their human limitations, giving in to the ancient Edenic temptation that one can “be like God.”

Thus, to remedy ministry burnout, men and women must choose to live within healthy limits, avoiding temptations toward omnipotence, omniscience, and independence. Finally, this dissertation offers an artifact, namely a spiritual formation program, to combat ministry burnout that utilizes an interdisciplinary approach, founded upon a biblical anthropology. This artifact focuses on honoring human limitations as a way to combat burnout resulting in vibrant, effective, enduring ministry. This dissertation

gleans information and lived experiences from ministers from various nonprofit organizations in Portland, Oregon. The majority of burnout research and focus of application pertain to the ministry of Portland Rescue Mission, the largest Christian nonprofit homeless ministry in Portland, Oregon.

## SECTION 1: EXPLORING THE PROBLEM

*Karōshi* (過労死) is a Japanese word that was created to describe the 1969 death of a “29-year-old, married male worker in the shipping department of Japan’s largest newspaper company.”<sup>1</sup> A stroke was the documented medical cause of death. Yet the term *karoshi* was created to explain the factors that led to this untimely and mysterious death: “death from overwork.”<sup>2</sup> Since this term originated, there has been an observable increase of documented cases of death from overwork on an international scale.<sup>3</sup> Overwork and burnout have grown to become global epidemics, widely recognized as hazards in the fields of medicine, psychology, and spirituality.

On May 28, 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) added “burnout” to the 11<sup>th</sup> Revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) as a hazardous occupational phenomenon that can be identified by Christina Maslach’s three classic burnout characteristics: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal satisfaction.<sup>4</sup> In the WHO’s pursuit of addressing burnout as an occupational hazard, it announced, “The World Health Organization is about to embark on the development of

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<sup>1</sup> Katsuo Nishiyama and Jeffrey V. Johnson, “Karoshi-Death from Overwork: Occupational Health Consequences of the Japanese Production Management,” *International Journal of Health* 6th ed. (1997), 1, <https://web.archive.org/web/20090214232217/http://workhealth.org/whatsnew/lpkarosh.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Koji Marioka, “Work Till You Drop,” *New Labor Forum* 13, no. 1 (2004): 80–85, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40342456>.

<sup>4</sup> Christina Maslach, Susan Jackson, and Michael Leiter, *Maslach Burnout Inventory*, 3rd ed. (Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press, 1996), 192.

evidence-based guidelines on mental well-being in the workplace.”<sup>5</sup> As evidenced by burnout research, the threat of overwork leading to burnout has powerful implications for a person’s physical and psychological well-being.<sup>6</sup>

While the World Health Organization rightly realizes the threat that burnout presents to the world, I would also posit that burnout has powerful implications for the spiritual well-being of ministers and people in helping professions. While burnout has gathered increasing international attention with foci on physical and psychological effects by the medical and psychological communities in the last few decades, only recently has burnout been studied and addressed on a spiritual level. It is important to take a holistic view of burnout that seeks an integrated understanding of the spiritual, physiological, and psychological effects of burnout.

While burnout does not lead to certain mortality, the devastating effects of burnout from overwork negatively affect thousands of men and women who serve in ministry, decreasing their ministry effectiveness and longevity. Personal and professional lives suffer immensely as ministers in both church and nonprofit organizations fall victim to burnout. This dissertation explores the historical development of burnout. Section one summarizes various elements that contribute to burnout in modern US-American society. Next, Section two summarizes various views on burnout—specifically focusing on the fields of social psychology and Christian spirituality—and looks at integrated approaches to addressing and mitigating burnout. Finally, Sections three through six present a thesis

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<sup>5</sup> “Burn-out an ‘Occupational Phenomenon’: International Classification of Diseases,” World Health Organization International, last modified May 28, 2019, [https://www.who.int/mental\\_health/evidence/burn-out/en/](https://www.who.int/mental_health/evidence/burn-out/en/).

<sup>6</sup> Nishiyama and Johnson, 1, 4–6.

and corresponding artifact that seek to address ministerial burnout specific to Christian 501(c)3 organizations. The majority of burnout research and focus of application pertain to the ministry of Portland Rescue Mission, the largest Christian nonprofit homeless ministry in Portland, Oregon.

### **The Cultural Development of Burnout**

There are various contributing factors that have led “US-American culture” to become synonymous with “burnout culture.”<sup>7</sup> Yet, as with any cultural shift, this progression toward a burnout culture did not occur instantaneously. Recent history reveals a cultural trend that elevates productivity and autonomy, ideals that feed into the burnout. This brief historical summary tracks how US-American society moved away from agrarian culture toward this current “Digital Age.” This cultural evolution includes the unexpected, exponential progress of technology, and a psychological shift toward performance-based identities.

#### *The Progress of Technology and Burnout*

With the advent of modern technology, US-American culture is now moving into uncharted territory.<sup>8</sup> Before discussing the correlations between the Digital Age and burnout, it is helpful to set some context about what led to this point. In the not so distant past, culture and pace of life was dictated by the availability of sunlight. In an agrarian

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<sup>7</sup> Steven Hopper, “How America Created Burnout Syndrome,” *Medium Digital Journal*, June 3, 2019, <https://medium.com/@thestevenpost/how-america-created-burn-out-syndrome-ba1cb6815bf0>.

<sup>8</sup> I was drawn to these series of events after reading John Mark Comer’s chapter “A Brief History of Speed” in *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry: How to Stay Emotionally Healthy and Spiritually Alive in the Chaos of the Modern World* (Colorado Springs, CO: Penguin Random House, 2019), 29–44.

culture, “The sun set our rhythms of work and rest... and it did so under the control of God.”<sup>9</sup> People worked when light was available and when the sun set, people rested. Agrarian life followed the rhythms of the seasons: more sleep and rest during cold, dark months; more activity and work during warm, bright months. For thousands of years, the sun functioned as the clock that regulated human busyness: light and darkness created rhythms for all people.

In the year 1752, Benjamin Franklin conducted his famous experiment, drawing electricity from storm clouds with a kite. This spurred on dozens of inventors and entrepreneurs, including Alessandro Volta, who found a way to draw electricity into a machine that produced a consistent, safe source of light in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>10</sup> Yet, it was not until Thomas Edison created the mass replicable light bulb in 1879 that culture was forever transformed.<sup>11</sup>

With the ubiquity of mass-produced light bulbs, humans no longer needed the dictates of the sun to set rhythms of work and rest. Work could be done at all hours, and humanity was faced with a new frontier as former limitations gave way to new possibilities. In becoming independent from creation’s rhythms, humanity embraced a new way of life: people began to work more and rest less. People even changed their sleep habits: “Before Edison, the average person slept eleven hours a night... now people

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<sup>9</sup> Comer, 50.

<sup>10</sup> Bern Dibner, *Immortals of Science: Alessandro Volta and the Electric Battery* (Lexington, NY: Moffa Press, 1964), 28–29.

<sup>11</sup> Elizabeth Palermo, “Who Invented the Light Bulb?” *Live Science*, August 17, 2017, <https://www.livescience.com/43424-who-invented-the-light-bulb.html>.

sleep about seven hours a night.”<sup>12</sup> The ability to work longer hours presented the world with new opportunities. The light bulb, along with other labor-saving devices, such as the typewriter and mechanical reaper, were accepted as tools that would help people work more efficiently and open up more opportunities for wealth, leisure, and rest.

Despite the influx of technology and labor-saving devices, the world today is a far cry from what the inventors of such devices foresaw for the present time. One famous Senate subcommittee in 1967 was tasked with predicting what the US-American’s work life would look like in subsequent decades. This subcommittee was told that by 1985, the average US-American might only work “twenty-two hours a week for twenty-seven weeks a year.”<sup>13</sup> As director and filmmaker Arwen Curry comments, “Everybody thought the main problem in the future would be too much leisure.”<sup>14</sup> This Senate concern seems surreal through the lens of the Digital Age as it does not reflect the lived experience of people today who feel busier than before. When I shared this quote with people during field research, most expressed disbelief, sadness, and anger. Ministers expressed that technology has created a culture where they felt busier than ever and Sabbath rest was a “pipedream.” One staff member interviewed even went so far to express that his phone felt like “an electronic leash, which offers everything—except rest.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Arwen Curry, “How Electric Light Changed the Night,” KQED, January 20, 2015, [www.kqed.org/science/26331/how-electric-light-changed-the-night](http://www.kqed.org/science/26331/how-electric-light-changed-the-night).

<sup>13</sup> *Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Retirement and the Individual of the Special Committee on Aging*, 90th Cong., 1st sess., pt 1, June 7–8, 1967, 52–58, <https://www.aging.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/publications/671967.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> Kerby Anderson, *Technology and Social Trends: A Biblical Point of View* (Cambridge, OH: Christian Publishing, 2016), 102.

<sup>15</sup> Anonymous Interviewee 8, “Field Research Experience: Understanding the Experience of Burnout Among Employees at the Portland Rescue Mission,” interviewed by Dominic Abaria at Portland

## *Modern Technology and Burnout*

In 2007, a convergence of technological events forever changed the landscape of modern society:

Steve Jobs released the iPhone into the wild... it was also a few months after Facebook opened up to anybody with an email address, the year a microblogging app called Twitter became its own platform, year one of the cloud, along with the App Store, the year Intel switched from silicon to metal chips ... and a list of other technological breakthroughs.<sup>16</sup>

This series of events directly impacted the majority of Americans: “The vast majority of Americans—96%—now own a cellphone of some kind. The share of Americans that own smartphones is now 81%, up from just 35% in Pew Research Center’s first survey of smartphone ownership conducted in 2011.”<sup>17</sup> With this influx of convenient technology and available information, people have grown increasingly attached to technological devices.

User engagement with smart phones has increased at an alarming rate: “The average iPhone user touches his or her phone 2,619 times *a day*.”<sup>18</sup> A recent study also found that the average person actively engages their phone for an average of 2.5 hours a day, with millennial men and women on their phone about five hours every day.<sup>19</sup>

Researchers Lee Rainie and Kathryn Zickuhr found that,

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Rescue Mission, November 22, 2018.

<sup>16</sup> Comer, 57.

<sup>17</sup> “Mobile Fact Sheet,” Pew Research Center – Information and Technology, June 12, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/mobile/>.

<sup>18</sup> Comer, 36.

<sup>19</sup> Julia Naftulin, “Here’s How Many Times We Touch Our Phones Every Day,” *Business Insider*, July 13, 2016, [www.businessinsider.com/dscout-research-people-touch-cell-phones-2617-times-a-day-2016-7](http://www.businessinsider.com/dscout-research-people-touch-cell-phones-2617-times-a-day-2016-7).

As cellphones and smartphones become more widely adopted and play a larger role in people's daily communications, their owners often treat them like body appendages. Nine-in-ten cellphone owners say they "frequently" carry their phone with them, while 6% say they "occasionally" have their phones with them. Just 3% say they only "rarely" have their cellphones with them and 1% of cellphone owners say they "never" have their phone with them.<sup>20</sup>

When people begin to treat technology like a body appendage, it is not surprising to see the challenge of being fully detached from work and the demands of life. The ubiquity of technological connectedness has contributed to widespread burnout as people have been unable to set healthy boundaries between work and rest. While modern technology has certainly served to help bring information and connectivity to people, not many people ever stop to think about how this is affecting them on a personal or spiritual level.

### *Performance-Based Identity*

Another cultural factor that leads to overwork and burnout is an unhealthy separation of identity and action. This is epitomized in icebreaker conversations where people are meeting for the first time. One of the most asked questions is, "What do you do for work?" This simple question inquires much more than information about how one makes a paycheck; it speaks about a person's value as an individual based on the work that they perform. The faster or more prestigious the work, the more honor. The less busy and mundane, the less honor:

In our [modern US-American] culture *slow* is a pejorative. When somebody has a low IQ, we dub him or her slow. When the service at a restaurant is lousy, we call

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<sup>20</sup> Lee Rainie and Kathryn Zickuhr, "American's Views on Mobile Etiquette Chapter 1: Always on Connectivity," Pew Research Center – Internet, Science and Tech, August 26, 2015, <https://www.pewinternet.org/2015/08/26/chapter-1-always-on-connectivity>.

it slow. When a movie is boring, again, we complain that it's slow. Case in point, Merriam-Webster: "mentally dull, stupid: naturally inert or sluggish: lacking in readiness, promptness, or willingness."<sup>21</sup>

Many people silently adopt the notion that being busy is a sign of significance, worth, and identity. This is especially true in Christian ministry contexts. In providing life-sustaining services to men, women, and children, the staff I interviewed at the Burnside Shelter expressed feelings of indispensability. The Burnside Shelter is the largest Christian non-profit homeless ministry in downtown Portland, Oregon. It boasts twenty-four-hour services, open seven days a week, 365 days out of the year. Managers especially expressed feeling "so needed that their organization will collapse if they are not working long hours."<sup>22</sup> Many had given in to the ideology that fast was good and slow was bad. Due to this, many feel unable to do everything that needs to get done with the allotted time.

There is an unspoken expectation that being busy is morally better than living a slower pace of life. It is noticeable in virtually every sphere of life. As Brady Boyd remarks in his book *Addicted to Busy*, "Every problem I see in every person I know is a problem of moving too fast for too long in too many aspects of life."<sup>23</sup> This addiction to busy extends far beyond work and ministry. People can easily allow their desire for busyness to negatively affect relationships with family and friends.

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<sup>21</sup> Comer, 39.

<sup>22</sup> Beth Kanter and Aliza Sherman, *The Happy, Healthy Nonprofit: Strategies for Impact Without Burnout* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2017), 16.

<sup>23</sup> Brady Boyd, *Addicted to Busy: Recovery for the Rushed Soul* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2014), 44.

In every area of life, US-American culture has sold the idea that busy is better. It is even reflected in how advertisements have changed in the last few decades: “Leisure used to be associated with wealth. Now wealth is associated with the busyness of New York or downtown LA.”<sup>24</sup> As “busyness” has become synonymous with “success” and “moral good,” people have driven themselves harder and harder to prove they have value and are important based on the work that they do. Many in ministry have expressed the same stress, indicating Christian culture has adopted greater US-American societal values. It is rare to see a church culture that has escaped the influence of the US-American idolization of busyness.

Relentless pursuit of personal value not only permeates the US-American culture, but it has also become deeply integrated into the human psyche. US-Americans can feel the unspoken pressure to feel important by keeping busy with important tasks. Living a slower pace of life can lead one to feel ashamed or embarrassed. Psychological feelings of shame and worth have become tied to notions of productivity and usefulness. Thus, to understand burnout, the work of social psychologists who have sought to dissect and analyze the burnout phenomenon needs to be examined.

### **Understanding Burnout: Psychological and Spiritual Perspectives**

#### *Maslach’s Burnout Inventory (MBI)*

The advent of the field of psychology has created a new way of understanding the human experience of burnout. Any discussion on the psychological factors and symptomology of burnout must interact with the research of Christina Maslach, the

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<sup>24</sup> Comer, 54.

psychological pioneer of burnout research. Working with a team of researchers in the early 80s, Maslach began to study the burnout phenomenon among US-American employees in human service fields who worked with clients to address “the client’s current problems (psychological, social, or physical).”<sup>25</sup> What she observed was striking: due to the nebulous nature of many problems in the clients’ lives, “The situation becomes more ambiguous and frustrating. For the person who works continuously with people under such circumstances, the chronic stress can be emotionally draining and lead to burnout.”<sup>26</sup> Maslach goes on to define “burnout” as “a psychological syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who work with other people in some capacity.” Maslach describes these three dimensions further.

Emotional exhaustion occurs “as emotional resources are depleted, workers may feel they are no longer able to give of themselves at a psychological level.”<sup>27</sup>

Depersonalization expresses itself as “negative, cynical attitudes and feeling about one’s clients.”<sup>28</sup> Finally, reduced personal accomplishment “refers to the tendency to evaluate oneself negatively, particularly with regard to one’s work with clients. Workers may feel unhappy about themselves and dissatisfied with their accomplishments on the job.”<sup>29</sup>

These three dimensions are used as metrics in Maslach’s Burnout Inventory (MBI) to gauge a person’s level of burnout, specifically in human services jobs.

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<sup>25</sup> Maslach, Jackson, and Leiter, *Maslach Burnout Inventory*, 192.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

Virtually all psychological research concerning burnout utilizes Maslach's Burnout Inventory (MBI) as a foundational assessment tool to understand a person's relationship to the work they do with their client. In particular, the three dimensions of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment have been a long-accepted standard measurement of burnout among human service vocations. While other psychological researchers continue to understand the intricacies of the burnout phenomenon, no other opinions deviate from Maslach's original work. The import of these ideas reaches beyond the psychological realm, and intersects with burnout on a spiritual level.

### *Burnout as a Spiritual Issue*

The burnout phenomenon has not only been a focus of social psychology, but Christian spirituality as well. As Christian leaders navigate new technological and societal frontiers in this Digital Age, ministerial burnout has been identified as a personal and occupational risk. As workers in human service vocations, many ministers struggle to find a sustainable pace of ministry that promotes personal health and ministerial longevity. Christians have a divine mandate to love and serve other people, yet they often struggle to love and honor themselves in the process.<sup>30</sup>

As evidenced in this field research, it is "rare to find clarity about where to draw the lines" in serving other people and honoring one's personal limitations. In this ministry, there is even an unspoken ethos that ministry leaders ought to work without rest in order "to be worth keeping around." More than half of those I interviewed echoed what

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<sup>30</sup> Mark 10:45; Matt. 22:37–39

John Mark Comer expresses in his book *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*: “I feel like a ghost. Half alive, half dead. More numb than anything else; flat, one dimensional.”<sup>31</sup> As a ministry leader himself, Comer entered into full-on burnout that seemed to affect more than just his body and emotions; it affected him on a spiritual level. This experience of personal spiritual exhaustion seems to be common among the majority of ministry leaders.

In tracking burnout symptoms among clergy and ministers, Diane Chandler, a researcher who focuses on ministerial health, found an interesting contributing factor that leads to burnout. She writes in the conclusion of her study, “Pastoral Burnout and the Impact of Personal Spiritual Renewal, Rest-taking, and Support System Practices,” “Spiritual dryness emerged as the primary predictor of emotional exhaustion, the stress dimension of burnout... This finding reinforces the premise that pastors, by virtue of their calling, need to nurture an ongoing and renewing relationship with God to maintain life balance, reduce stress, and avoid burnout.”<sup>32</sup> Thus, is it of vital importance for ministry leaders to maintain a refreshing, rejuvenating spiritual life. To serve others while neglecting one’s own spiritual health will ultimately lead to truncated ministry and spiritual burnout.

Chandler’s research adds an important dimension to the conversation about burnout as she focuses on spirituality as a root issue and primary predictor of burnout symptoms among spiritual leaders. Most of the academic research on burnout usually

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<sup>31</sup> Comer, 9.

<sup>32</sup> Diane J. Chandler, “Pastoral Burnout and the Impact of Personal Spiritual Renewal, Rest Taking, and Support System Practices,” *Pastoral Psychology* 58, no. 3 (2009): 284.

grounds emotional exhaustion as a psychological condition, and Maslach herself defined burnout as a “psychological syndrome.”<sup>33</sup> Yet, I agree with Chandler that spiritual health is not only a contributing factor to burnout prevention: it is the root cause of burnout among clergy and ministers. While US-American culture values performance-based identity, independence from divine rhythms, and incessant technological connectedness, there are a host of other factors that contribute to the risk of burnout.

### **Risk Factors for Burnout**

#### *Gender Factors*

An expectation I had about burnout and gender was that women were at a higher risk for burnout due to their ability to create and sustain deep relational connections with others. Other researchers shared this assumption, including Maslach,<sup>34</sup> who believed that “burnout is automatically labeled a female experience.”<sup>35</sup> What came from Radostina Purvanova’s 2010 meta-analysis of burnout and gender in the United States and Europe was that “Even though popular opinion holds that women are more psychologically distressed than men, these characterizations are largely unfounded with respect to work-related burnout.” She goes on to say that while burnout is a common experience among men and women, the specific facets about expression and symptomology vary: “Women

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<sup>33</sup> Maslach, Jackson, and Leiter, *Maslach Burnout Inventory*, 192.

<sup>34</sup> Christina Maslach, Wilmar B. Schaufeli, and Michael Leiter, “Job Burnout,” *Annual Review of Psychology* (2001): 399.

<sup>35</sup> Radostina K. Purvanova, “Gender Difference in Burnout: A Meta-Analysis,” *Journal of Vocational Behavior* (October 2010): 175, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/229389297\\_Gender\\_differences\\_in\\_burnout\\_A\\_meta-analysis](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/229389297_Gender_differences_in_burnout_A_meta-analysis).

may tend to be more emotionally exhausted than men, but men tend to be more depersonalized than women.”<sup>36</sup> Thus, while Maslach’s three-dimensional approach to diagnosing burnout has the ability to capture burnout on a general level, women tend to experience the dimension of emotional exhaustion and men tend to experience the dimension of depersonalization and cynicism, with no significant difference in experiencing reduced personal accomplishment. So while the expressions of burnout may seem different between men and women, the root issues of burnout are experienced in similar ways between men and women.

### *Generational Factors*

Generational and age differences appear to make an impact the personal risk of burnout. A study done by Fairfield University researchers sought to determine the differences in the work ethic of Baby Boomers (born 1946–1964) and Generation X (born 1965–1983). It revealed that Baby Boomers were “willing to work long hours to obtain rewards.” This study also found, “In line with the idea that Boomers work to live whereas Xers live to work, Boomers were significantly more likely to agree that work should be one of the most important parts of a person’s life.”<sup>37</sup> This generation difference in approaching work seems to have a powerful impact on those from certain generations that more readily find their identity in the work that they do.

The idea that one’s personal value is intertwined in one’s occupation is still expressed in colloquial language and questions, revealing Gen Xers and Boomers may

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<sup>36</sup> Purvanova, 178.

<sup>37</sup> Sherry E. Sullivan, Monica L. Forret, Shawn M. Carraher, and Lisa A. Mainiero, *Using the Kaleidoscope Career Model to Examine Generational Differences in Work Attitudes* (Fairfield, CT: Fairfield University, 2009), 6.

still find a correlation between their work and worth. As previously mentioned concerning performance-based identities, seeking to discover what someone does for work can equate to expressing their value as a person. When people most readily find their identity in the work they do, it creates a dangerous relationship wherein the line between work and self gets blurred. This seems to indicate that people who find their identity in their work are at a higher risk of burnout since their value is intimately tied to their work. It has yet to be determined if younger generations will define their personal worth outside their occupations or vocations.

### *Physical and Mental Health Factors – ICD-11 and the DSM-5*

Since the American psychologist Herbert Freudenberger coined the term “burnout” in the 1970s, experts in the fields of mental health and medicine have sought to determine if burnout is a medical condition. Linda Heinemann and Torsten Heinemann have observed, “Even though burnout is one of the most widely discussed mental health problems in today’s society, it is still disputed and not officially recognized as a mental disorder in most countries.”<sup>38</sup> Part of the reason why this seems to be is due to the overwhelming research which seems to focus on “causes and associated factors.” These researches also note, “Only a very small number of articles deal with psychological and somatic symptoms of burnout and attempt to develop diagnostic criteria,” thus leading to a level of ambiguity to defining burnout as a medical condition.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Linda V. Heinemann and Torsten Heinemann, “Burnout Research: Emergence and Scientific Investigation of a Contested Diagnosis,” *Sage Journals* (March 6, 2017), 1.

<sup>39</sup> Heinemann and Heinemann, 1.

Heinemann and Heinemann's assessment appears to be correct. There is a much heavier emphasis on burnout as a mental health issue rather than a somatic issue that could be diagnosed by medical professionals. While burnout is discussed as a mental health issue, it is striking that it has taken so long for the World Health Organization to add burnout to the International Statistical Classification of Diseases Related to Health Problems Manual (ICD).

The American Psychiatric Association (APA) has yet to recognize burnout as a mental or psychological disorder in their Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). The closest description in the most recent revision of the DSM (DSM-5) that matches the three-dimensional description of burnout by Maslach is "Adjustment Disorder" which is described in the DSM-5 as "the presence of emotional or behavioral symptoms in response to an identifiable stressor/s, which occurred within three months of the beginning of the stressor/s. In addition, one or both of the following criteria must exist:

- Distress that's out of proportion with the expected reactions to the stressor.
- Symptoms must be clinically significant. They cause severe distress and impairment in functioning.<sup>40</sup>

The lack of clarity to define the burnout phenomenon creates a greater threat. Without a clear consensus on the common experience of burnout, it is impossible to pursue a remedy. With the emergence of burnout as a formal classification in the ICD-11, perhaps it will be formally recognized in the next revision of the Diagnostic and Static Manual in future years.

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<sup>40</sup> *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5* (Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Association, 2013), 286–88.

### *Physical Health Factors*

Although burnout is not currently considered a medical condition, there do seem to be physical factors that may contribute to the decline of a person's mental and physical wellbeing in a work-obsessed society. In particular, Kanter and Sherman highlight some of the findings from Dr. James A. Levine, an obesity researcher with the Mayo Clinic who made a connection between office environments and expectations on productivity:<sup>41</sup> "The office chair—a public health enemy—became a staple of the office environment and began to contribute to a more sedentary culture. Sitting became an indicator of productivity in an office. If you were not sitting at your desk all day long, you were not working. Walking around equaled goofing off."<sup>42</sup> In a human service industry, the unspoken expectation is that the more work you do, the more help you provide. Coupling this idea with an increasing sedentary culture, it seems like a logical conclusion that the US-American "sitting society" has contributed to burnout as workers feel guilty or unproductive if they are not directly dealing with situations from their desk for eight hours a day. As psychological and physiological factors combine to create burnout risks, it is important to also acknowledge spiritual factors that may increase the risk of burnout among ministers and staff within human services vocations.

### *Spiritual Health Factors*

In tracking burnout symptoms among clergy and ministers, Diane Chandler, a researcher who focuses on pastoral health, found an interested contributing factor that

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<sup>41</sup> James A. Levine, *Get Up: Why Your Chair Is Killing You and What You Can Do About It* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 3–7.

<sup>42</sup> Kanter and Sherman, 21–22.

leads to emotional exhaustion. She writes in the conclusion of her study, “Pastoral Burnout and the Impact of Personal Spiritual Renewal, Rest-taking, and Support System Practices,” “Spiritual dryness emerged as the primary predictor of emotional exhaustion, the stress dimension of burnout... This finding reinforces the premise that pastors, by virtue of their calling, need to nurture an ongoing and renewing relationship with God to maintain life balance, reduce stress, and avoid burnout.”<sup>43</sup> This conclusion adds a wonderful dimension to the conversation about emotional exhaustion and burnout as Chandler engages the angle of spirituality.

Most academic research on the burnout phenomenon grounds emotional exhaustion as a psychological condition, and Maslach herself defined burnout as a “psychological syndrome.”<sup>44</sup> In light of the previous research about burnout neither being formally diagnosed as a medical nor a mental health issue, this added dimension of spirituality opens the door for further research about burnout as a spiritual condition. While researchers in various disciplines seek to define burnout and its contributing factors, there remains a nebulous understanding of the origins, impacts, and effects of burnout in the various dimensions of a person’s life.

### *Personality Factors*

When considering various personality dimensions and burnout among the clergy and those who serve in human services, researchers Laura Barnard and John Curry found that “burnout is not one-dimensional... but is defined by both high emotional exhaustion

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<sup>43</sup> Chandler, “Pastoral Burnout,” 284.

<sup>44</sup> Maslach, Jackson, and Leiter, *Maslach Burnout Inventory*, 192.

in ministry and low satisfaction in ministry.”<sup>45</sup> In studying common personality traits among ministers—such as “desire to please others,”<sup>46</sup> “guilt or shame proneness,”<sup>47</sup> “self-care,”<sup>48</sup> and “differentiation of self from role”<sup>49</sup>—the only major correlation found in this study was that “self-compassion”<sup>50</sup> was the only common factor among those ministers who felt high levels of vocational satisfaction and low levels of emotional exhaustion. As they state in their conclusion, the research “models revealed that only self-compassion significantly predicted variation satisfaction.”<sup>51</sup> This seems to suggest is that the very nature of ministry has the potential to cause emotional exhaustion, “a decline in energy, motivation, and commitment” to the mission of the organization.<sup>52</sup>

While ministry initially draws people committed to the mission and vision of a service-oriented organization, the mission to serve others can lose focus on care for the staff and ministers who provide the care. The clear need here is that “self-compassion,” or “self-care,” needs to be given a place of greater importance and higher priority in organizations that focus on ministering to the needs to others. This self-care is characterized by self-patience and self-forgiveness, fighting off shame as part of the

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<sup>45</sup> Laura Barnard and John Curry, “The Relationship of Clergy Burnout to Self-Compassion and Other Personality Dimensions,” *Pastoral Psychology* 61, no. 2 (2012): 150, ISSN: 2213-0586.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 153–55.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

process of loving and serving others. This tangible type of care is an essential component in ministry and human services, yet it is difficult to practice in the digital revolution.

### *Technological Factors*

As previously seen in the historical progression toward this Digital Age, technology has been both a blessing and a curse to the world. Technology has greatly enhanced communication, trading, and accessibility to information. The availability of information has been a helpful tool in human services organizations. In other ways, it seems that technology may be harming people, heightening their risk of burnout. In a world that increasingly utilizes technology for work and ministry, the lines are becoming blurred about how to responsibly use technology.

While technology can be harnessed to provide greater care to others, many do not consider the ethical challenges of technological ubiquity. In a Christian ministry that says it values rest and Sabbath,<sup>53</sup> technology, the Internet, and mobile devices make it hard for well-meaning employees to fully remove themselves from work. Without being able to fully unplug, it is impossible to experience Sabbath rest. Many ministers find themselves torn between two good things: to serve others and to honor God by resting. Mere access ought not dictate moral responsibilities, yet it is difficult to practice boundaries when screens and technology have become so integrated in US-American life and culture.

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<sup>53</sup> Gen. 2:2–3; Exod. 31:13–17; Deut. 5:13–14; Mark 2:27–28

### *Human Service-Specific Factors*

Specific factors, unique to professionals and employees in human service fields, contribute to burnout. In particular, there are predictable struggles among most non-profit organizations, which seek to do the most good, with the least amount of money, with little thought about how outward services impact staff and ministers within an organization. While these factors are not exclusive to this human service-specific field, the prevalence of these factors seem noteworthy in its correlation to burnout.

*Secondary Trauma Stress.* Secondary trauma stress (STS) occurs when jobs require “frequent and intense contact with traumatized clients and chronic exposure to traumatic content at work.”<sup>54</sup> This type of stress “is common among nurses, urgent care professionals, relief workers in war-torn regions, and workers dealing with other emotionally charged situations.”<sup>55</sup> This type of stress is something I have seen dozens of men and women experience in homeless ministry in downtown Portland. In stepping into relationship with guests, the unavoidable truth is that many suffer from mental illness, drug addiction, and a severe lack of emotional and social maturity. Even on the best days, there is no avoiding this “frequent and intense contact,” and over the course of months and years, I have seen it wear down the most well-intentioned and well-supported individuals. STS also seems to be related to compassion fatigue as workers in this field become desensitized to the darkness and chaos of the frontlines of ministry.

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<sup>54</sup> Kotaro Shoji et al., “What Comes First, Job Burnout or Secondary Traumatic Stress? Findings from Two Longitudinal Studies from the U.S. and Poland,” August 25, 2015, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4549333/>.

<sup>55</sup> Kanter and Sherman, 21.

*Scarcity Mind-Set.* Scarcity mind-sets plague non-profit organizations that seek to provide the most possible services for as little money and resources possible. While frugality remains a virtue, it cannot be the only consideration when considering how an organization must operate: “A scarcity mind-set is defined as the belief that everything is limited.”<sup>56</sup> In the nonprofit world, I have consistently seen this mindset that focuses more on preservation of resources than utilizing resources well. In a recent elder meeting to discuss the finances of the church, the elder responsible for financial stewardship talked about a portion of the budget that has not been used for its allocated purpose of leadership development. As he suggested that the money be used to bless and equip the leadership, another lead elder voiced his concern about spending money, even though it was available. He said, “I just have to be honest; my tendency is to squirrel away the money and continue to make do like it didn’t exist.” That mentality has helped the church grow from a church plant to an established church, yet continuing with that mentality can quickly lead to burnout as leaders anxiously wait for the next crisis to come.

A senior leader in a local homeless ministry nonprofit organization also voiced this scarcity mindset as the leadership team spoke about the need to raise compensation for staff to offset the rising cost of living. In the discussion, he pointed to an imaginary spot on the wall in his office and said, “See that bloody spot there? That is where countless people have rammed their heads trying to get more pay. It’s not going to happen.” Though meant as a joke, it communicated a grim reality to those within the organization: their skills, ability, tenure, and effectiveness in their work would never be fully compensated. In pursuit of saving money, the organization silently denigrated its

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<sup>56</sup> Kanter and Sherman, 15.

own employees. They had offered their own workers as a sacrifice on the alter of frugality.

In a work culture that focuses on scarcity rather than abundance, self-care is usually one of the items that get sacrificed on the alter of preservation: “Self-care measures are not even considered for implementation because they are perceived as unaffordable luxuries. A culture dominated by ‘do without’ thinking accelerates staff burnout.”<sup>57</sup> As responsibilities rise and compensation for staff fall, it is no surprise that people leave these organizations exhausted, cynical, and robbed of joy. This trifecta of burnout is the same symptoms Maslach noticed at large among human service employees. While some cling to this type of work for the sense of importance it brings, this too becomes a pitfall that can lead people further into burnout.

*Myth of Indispensability.* Employees who choose to work in human service fields usually do so because they care deeply about the mission and vision of the organization. They see their work as meaning and important. Yet sometimes the line that separates one’s personal identity and one’s work becomes blurred. Some services in the nonprofit field are so essential that they truly are a matter of life and death. Without the food, shelter, and clothing offered at Portland Rescue Mission, many people would suffer from starvation and exposure to the elements and the violence of the street culture. Some helpers working in human services “begin to feel indispensable and that their organization will collapse if they are not working long hours.”<sup>58</sup> This false belief leads people to such extremes in their work that their health and wellbeing is jeopardized for

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<sup>57</sup> Kanter and Sherman, 16.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

the “greater good.” Case managers consistently ask if they have done enough. Many remain on-call and respond to urgent needs, feeling that boundaries are harsh and unrealistic. In the pursuit of caring for others, one can easily begin to neglect his or her own needs.

### **Grassroots Voices**

In seeking to understand these dimensions of burnout among staff at Portland Rescue Mission, I conducted a Field Research Project that sought to assess the experience of other staff members within the organization. The Portland Rescue Mission is a local non-profit organization that works to combat homelessness and the addiction epidemic in Portland, Oregon. Field research was conducted between April 1 and April 19, 2019.

The field research began with a group session among the stakeholders who are impacted by the ministry. This session sought input from men and women who were involved in varying levels of engagement with clients, program participants and homeless guests. The first group represented is the Staff Ministry, who are primarily responsible for Human Resources and providing pastoral care for the rest of the staff in the organization. The second group consisted of staff members in Direct Ministry. Those serving in Direct Ministry spend the majority of their work hours directly ministering to homeless guests and program participants. The last group was staff in Indirect Ministry. Their primary work does not involve direct interaction with homeless guests or program participants, but may be working with customers, volunteers, outside partner agencies, or internal affairs. I asked open-ended questions to start discussion among staff about their experience of stress and self-care.

I also created a survey, which I then sent out to employees at all five sites at Portland Rescue Mission to gauge their levels of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. The survey presented twelve statements with the option for a scaling response from one to ten, one being “disagree” or “not satisfied” and ten being “agree” or “very satisfied.” This field research found some noteworthy conclusions from the surveys and responses from the staff members.

The first thing I noted in the group session was the overall attitude toward burnout and self-care. Those in indirect ministry or staff ministry assumed self-care was happening among staff in direct ministry. One man interviewed in Indirect Ministry asked, “Isn’t doing discipleship self-care? Isn’t it supposed to be life-giving?” There seemed to be an underlying assumption that doing meaningful work directly equated to practicing self-care. Yet as previous sections make clear, human-service vocations are by their very nature, exhausting and emotionally taxing. Another staff member in leadership said, “The [Portland Rescue] Mission has a yearly training to equip staff. It’s their responsibility to make it happen.” This statement assumed self-care was more focused on the individual. If that is true, then if a staff member experiences burnout, it is actually his or her fault. It left little responsibility to the organization to equip and care for staff beyond a two-and-a-half hour training once a year.

Some staff who had been there for multiple years revealed that self-care was hardly ever talked about. A Direct Ministry staff member said, “We have a training about [self-care], and my manager asked about my workload once a year, usually during my annual review. Most of my conversations with managers have to do with my work, not

how I am doing.” This response revealed a theme prevalent in other nonprofit organizations: Focus on outward service trumps inward care toward staff.

Among some leaders in the organization, there was concern about the financial cost of practicing staff self-care throughout the entire organization. When asked about the resources available for staff care, one staff member said, “That’s what PTO [paid time off] is for. People should find time outside their work to stay grounded and healthy.” Another manager talked about outsourcing self-care, “Our insurance covers counseling, you just have to pay the co-pay.” As observed by the Center on Nonprofits and Philanthropy, “Organizations resort to the strategies of low pay, make do, and do without”<sup>59</sup> mentality, which I certainly heard echoes of in this study. It seemed the actionable work overshadowed the importance of self-care, thus relegating self-care to the world of unrealistic luxury.

A common theme that was tracked across the survey was that those who were in Direct Ministry experienced higher levels of emotional exhaustion than any other area of ministry. Among those in Direct Ministry 100 percent reported all three major symptoms of burnout (emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced personal satisfaction). 70 percent of staff in Indirect Ministry reported all three symptoms of burnout. Staff Ministry reported the least amount of burnout, with only 50 percent reporting agreement with burnout symptomology.

It is not surprising that Direct Ministry had such high levels of burnout since their primary role involves dealing with the consistent stream of chaos and instability from

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<sup>59</sup> Mark A. Hager et al., “Getting What We Pay For: Low Overhead Limits Nonprofit Effectiveness,” Nonprofit Overhead Cost Project of the Center on Nonprofits and Philanthropy at the Urban Institute and the Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University (January 2004): 2–3, <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.12856.55040>.

homeless guests and program participants. Out of the three different groups of staff, Direct Ministry consistently identified depersonalization and cynicism as part of their daily work experience. This consistency was lacking among those in Indirect Ministry and Staff Ministry.

The effects of burnout seemed to occur surprisingly quickly. All staff in Direct Ministry reported an agreement to the symptoms of burnout, even within the first year of employment. Those who worked Indirect Ministry or Staff Ministry did not report major issues of burnout within the first three years of employment, yet those numbers increased across all sites starting after three years of employment. Many men and women who were fairly new to the organization—zero to three years of employment—identified their overall levels of stress to be fairly low, work to be more manageable, and emotional and spiritual support from other staff members and managers to be high. These newer employees consistently marked “very satisfied” when considering support structures within the organization.

In contrast, those who had been at the organization for more than three years had higher levels of stress, a more unmanageable workload, and reported lower levels of emotional and spiritual support within the organization. One staff member who had been there for five years explained it this way: “So many people get burned out, and instead of dealing with it, they just replace them. It’s like we’re cogs in a machine, and when one wears out, it doesn’t get repaired, it gets replaced.” Of the men and women who had been there beyond three years, more than half marked “not satisfied” when asked about their workload and levels of daily stress. This seems to point to the reality that burnout occurs

over the course of time, and with this organization in particular, the risk for burnout rises sharply after three years.

Indirect Ministry's responses seemed to highlight a different aspect of burnout in that they identified emotional exhaustion and reduced personal satisfaction as consistent feelings in work. There was a sense of disconnection, and some staff responses in Indirect Ministry longed for more meaningful work, which they assumed was happening in places with Direct Ministry. While they did not face the cynicism and jadedness that came working in Direct Ministry, they certainly found it difficult to connect their work with the overall mission of the organization. In losing focus on that wider mission, it is no surprise it was difficult to maintain personal satisfaction in the work. One Indirect Ministry staff member reported that she had found an important rhythm that keeps her satisfied. After working at the organization for three years, she had worked out a schedule with her manager to spend two hours a week helping onsite with Direct Ministry: "It helps to see the faces and get to know the names of the people we are really helping. I realized I needed that after all these years."

At the end of survey, I asked open-ended questions to ask about any other aspects of staff care that would be helpful in practical ministry. In response to the open-ended question, "What else would you need to be able to flourish in your current ministry context?" one employee summed up many opinions from the surveys when he wrote, "[We need] more skilled and experienced people in teaching [sic] staff about the intensity of ministry and assistance with counseling costs." This common theme revealed that many employees are expected to take on the intensity of ministry without much direct guidance, nor the financial support to address their emotional and spiritual wellbeing.

These findings from “grassroots voices” from the Portland Rescue Mission show that while burnout is a threat to any person in human services field, it is a greater threat to those whose primary work involves direct interaction with clients. The other important highlight is realizing the exhaustion that sets in after three years of ministry. Speaking to this very point, authors Beth Kanter and Aliza Sherman, who have spent years studying organization health in the non-profit sector, say, “Burnout sneaks up on you, seeping into your life little by little, making it hard to recognize and easy to ignore. If undetected and untreated, burnout can lead to an extreme situation where you are no longer able to function effectively on a personal or professional level.”<sup>60</sup> These issues of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment are experienced in ministry vocations as well as human services vocations.

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<sup>60</sup> Kanter and Sherman, 8.

## SECTION 2: OTHER PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

### **The Non-Classification Classification<sup>61</sup>**

On May 28, 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) added Burnout to the 11<sup>th</sup> Revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) as a hazardous occupational phenomenon that can be identified by Christina Maslach's three classic burnout characteristics: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal satisfaction.<sup>62</sup> In the WHO's pursuit of addressing burnout as an occupational hazard, it announced, "The World Health Organization is about to embark on the development of evidence-based guidelines on mental well-being in the workplace."<sup>63</sup> This initial announcement about burnout created a widespread stir among human service agencies.

Inclusion in the ICD-11 might actually mean burnout could be defined as a disease. As a diagnosable occupational hazard, it would inevitably lead to eligibility requirements for insurance agencies to treat burnout as a work-related hazard. This understanding of burnout as a medical condition would radically change how employers would have to address and treat burnout among its employees. However, within hours of the initial announcement, the WHO put out an urgent statement attempting to clarify that

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<sup>61</sup> Terminology borrowed from Jennifer Moss, "Burnout is About Your Workplace, Not Your People," *Harvard Business Review Online*, December 11, 2019, <https://hbr.org/2019/12/burnout-is-about-your-workplace-not-your-people>.

<sup>62</sup> Christina Maslach, Susan Jackson, and Michael Leiter, *Maslach Burnout Inventory*, 3rd ed. (Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press, 1996), 192.

<sup>63</sup> World Health Organization, Organization of Services for Mental Health, 2003, accessed December 1, 2019, [https://www.who.int/mental\\_health/evidence/burn-out/en/](https://www.who.int/mental_health/evidence/burn-out/en/).

“burnout is an ‘occupational phenomenon’ not a disease.”<sup>64</sup> The WHO goes on to state that while burnout is clearly recognized as an issue leading people to “seek care,” it is not considered a medical condition.<sup>65</sup>

This type of ambiguity has plagued any efforts to address and mitigate the effects of burnout among those who serve in human services. While most professionals accept a modified version of Christina Maslach’s original psychological symptomology of burnout, there is little research or writing that presents a unitive or interdisciplinary approach to addressing the root causes of burnout. The following section briefly summarizes how various fields of study have sought to address and mitigate burnout, starting with secular voices, moving to spiritual voices, and finally presenting an integrated, interdisciplinary approach to addressing and mitigating burnout.

### **A Medical Approach to Addressing Burnout**

The medical community has been surprisingly silent concerning burnout. While most of the medical community would define burnout as a mental health condition to be treated by psychologists and psychiatrists, there is an undeniable reality that overwork and burnout creates tangible medical issues, sometimes leading to death. The burnout phenomenon has been internationally recognized for years. In Japan, “salary men” who found meaning and fulfillment in work after World War II began clocking more and more

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<sup>64</sup> World Health Organization, Organization of Services for Mental Health, 2003, accessed December 1, 2019, [https://www.who.int/mental\\_health/evidence/burn-out/en/](https://www.who.int/mental_health/evidence/burn-out/en/).

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

hours. Some people began working as many as one hundred hours of overtime every week, and their bodies began to take the toll.<sup>66</sup>

Seemingly young, healthy men and women began dying of strokes and heart attacks after working eighty to one hundred hours of overtime in the week preceding their death, leading to the epidemic now known as *Karoshi*, or “death from overwork.” Since the late 1980s, Japan has collected information about *karoshi* deaths, forming the National Defense Council for Victims of *Karoshi*, which helps bereaved family members collect around \$20,000 per year from the Japanese government as compensation for victims of *karoshi*.<sup>67</sup> In 2015, ninety-six Japanese workers died “due to brain and heart illnesses that were recognized as the result of overwork,” while “2,159 people killed themselves due at least in part to difficulties they faced on their job over the same period.”<sup>68</sup> This deadly burnout phenomenon is documented in other countries as well.

In China, the Mandarin word *guolaosi* was created to describe the same lethal burnout phenomenon experienced in Japan’s *karoshi*: every year, “China loses around 600,000 people to *guolaosi*... around 1,600 every day.”<sup>69</sup> Similarly, South Korea uses the term *gwarosa* to describe lethal occupational burnout, spurring the government to create a medical council to outline limits on work hours for every sector in their country.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Minako Suematsu, “The Government’s ‘Karoshi’ Report,” *Japan Times*, October 12, 2016, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2016/10/12/editorials/governments-karoshi-report/#.XqCZgdNKiu4>.

<sup>67</sup> Zaria Gorvett, “‘Death From Overwork’ Is So Common in Japan There’s Even a Word for It. But Is It Physically Possible?” *bbc.com*, September 13, 2006, <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20160912-is-there-such-thing-as-death-from-overwork>.

<sup>68</sup> Suematsu.

<sup>69</sup> Gorvett.

<sup>70</sup> Dong-hwan Ko, “[K-Termonology] Koreans Being Overworked to Death in ‘Kwarosa,’” *Korea Times*, February 28, 2017, [http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/culture/2017/02/641\\_224791.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/culture/2017/02/641_224791.html).

While the United States has yet to coin their own medical term for lethal occupational burnout, it is striking that “work-related stress causes 120,000 death and results in \$190 billion in healthcare costs yearly.”<sup>71</sup> In light of such staggering numbers, it seems the World Health Organization understates the severity of burnout as an “occupational phenomenon” rather than a potentially lethal condition or disease. While medical professionals give advice and lead government councils on workplace health, there does not seem to be any direct medical intervention to deal with burnout aside from individual recommendations for personal stress management. Since the medical field fails to draw conclusion about the diagnosis and treatment of burnout, it is helpful to observe how researchers in the field of psychology approach the burnout epidemic.

### **A Psychological Approach to Addressing Burnout**

The field of psychology has been the primary area of research, study, and analysis of the burnout phenomenon. Any psychological discussion about burnout must interact with Christina Maslach’s foundational research on burnout. Christina Maslach worked with a group of social psychologists in the early 1980s, pioneering the foundational research about the burnout phenomenon.

Maslach began her work researching and documenting burnout symptomology among employees in human service fields. Her primary human service employees worked with clients to address “the client’s current problems (psychological, social, or

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<sup>71</sup> Milja Milenkovic, “42 Worrying Workplace Stress Statistics,” American Institute of Stress, September 23, 2019, <https://www.stress.org/42-worrying-workplace-stress-statistics>.

physical).”<sup>72</sup> Maslach came to define “burnout” as “a psychological syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who work with other people in some capacity.” She goes on to further describe these three dimensions: Emotional exhaustion occurs “as emotional resources are depleted, workers may feel they are no longer able to give of themselves at a psychological level.” Depersonalization expresses itself as “negative, cynical attitudes and feeling about one’s clients.” Reduced personal accomplishment “refers to the tendency to evaluate oneself negatively, particularly with regard to one’s work with clients. Workers may feel unhappy about themselves and dissatisfied with their accomplishments on the job.”<sup>73</sup> Based on these components of burnout, Maslach and her research partners presented the idea of “Work Engagement” as a solution to mitigate burnout.

Work Engagement can be defined as, “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption.”<sup>74</sup> Maslach and fellow researcher, Michael Leiter, describe the correlation between burnout and work engagement as a “continuum between the negative experience of burnout and the positive experience of engagement.”<sup>75</sup> They believed the more a person pursued work engagement, the less they would experience the negative effects of burnout.

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<sup>72</sup> Maslach, Jackson, and Leiter, *Maslach Burnout Inventory*, 192.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Christina Maslach, Susan Jackson, and Michael Leiter, *The Truth About Burnout: How Organizations Cause Personal Stress and What to Do About It* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1997), 2.

<sup>75</sup> Christina Maslach and Michael Leiter, “Early Predictors of Job Burnout and Engagement,” *Journal of Applied Psychology* 93 (2008): 498–512.

Maslach's Burnout Inventory (MBI) focused on six central areas that encapsulated the central themes collected from thousands of surveys and research questions given to employees working in human services: workload, control, reward, community, fairness, and values.<sup>76</sup> "Workload" considers the overall amount of physical and psychological work in light of current emotional, financial, and time resources. "Control" includes aspects of management including feeling micromanaged, organizational structural communication avenues, and overall levels of personal power and influence within an employee's immediate work environment. "Reward" describes financial compensation, verbal and cultural acknowledgement, and personal feelings of satisfaction. "Community" includes aspects of isolation, interpersonal conflict, and respect and disrespect within one's personal work area. "Fairness" describes issues of discrimination, favoritism, and subtle or subversive forms of manipulation. Finally, "values" include ethical considerations and meaningless tasks that value or devalue one's time, energy and reputation.<sup>77</sup>

The results of properly pursuing positive work engagement would create a renewed, healthier way of engaging work. Maslach and Leiter describe the positive effects of engagement: "Think about increasing the number of positives, and of building the opposite of burnout... When burnout is counteracted with engagement, exhaustion is replaced with enthusiasm, bitterness with compassion, and anxiety with efficacy."<sup>78</sup> This

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<sup>76</sup> Christina Maslach and Michael Leiter, "Reversing Burnout: How to Rekindle Your Passion for Work," Stanford University and Stanford Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society, *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (2005): 44.

<sup>77</sup> Maslach, Jackson, and Leiter, *Truth about Burnout*, 32.

<sup>78</sup> Maslach and Leiter, *Reversing Burnout*, 43.

polarized approach to mitigating burnout is the central theme of Maslach's theory of work engagement.

Over the years, Maslach has gone beyond individualistic paths of work engagement, incorporating an organizational path, which includes management: "An organizational approach, in contrast [to an individual approach], starts with management first identifying mismatches that are commonly shared, and then connecting with individuals to narrow these person-organization gaps."<sup>79</sup> In both the individualized and organizational paths toward positive work engagement, all burnout mitigation is applied individually based on a person's identified key areas of burnout according to the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI).

### **A Critique of Work Engagement as a Solution to Burnout**

While Maslach's observations of the causes and symptoms of burnout seem to be widely accepted, there is a growing amount of research that challenges the idea that positive work engagement is the solution to burnout. Researchers Wilmar Schaufeli and Arnold Bakker have made the astute observation that the absence of burnout does not necessarily correlate to the presence of positive work engagement. They note, "The negative correlations between vigor and exhaustion and between dedication and cynicism do not appear to be the strongest."<sup>80</sup> Another group of researchers built on these conclusions, further analyzing the correlations between burnout and work engagement:

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>80</sup> Wilmar Schaufeli and Arnold Bakker, "The Measurement of Work Engagement with a Short Questionnaire," *Educational and Psychological Measurement* 44, no. 4 (2002), 703.

Confirmatory factor analysis showed that the distinction between burnout and engagement is elusive. Moreover, although the indicators of burnout and those of engagement differed in terms of their job-related correlates, these patterns of associations only partly supported previous theorizing on the antecedents of burnout and engagement. We conclude that burnout and engagement are to a large degree overlapping concepts and that their conceptual and empirical differences should not be overestimated.<sup>81</sup>

Thus, it appears that while burnout and work engagement include similar elements, they are not necessarily polar opposites that exist within a single continuum. It is very possible that an individual or organization can both promote high levels of work engagement and create a culture of burnout at the same time.

Other researchers have discovered that high levels of positive work engagement do not necessarily equate to an overall healthier outcome for an individual. While an individual can become driven, focused, and satisfied with their work, their energy spent on work can correlate to a higher risk of neglecting their families or outside relationships.<sup>82</sup> In essence, an individual can trade being burned out at work with becoming burned out in their home life. Another downfall of work engagement is that it does not offer healthy boundaries for work that speaks directly to intentional disengagement. Long hours that may be personally fulfilling may actually backfire, resulting in further burnout for the individual, resulting in detrimental outcomes for the organization as a whole: “Considerable evidence shows that overwork is not just

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<sup>81</sup> Toon Taris, Jan Ybema, and Ilona van Beek, “Burnout and Engagement: Identical Twins or Just Close Relatives?” *Burnout Research* vol. 5 (2017): 7–8.

<sup>82</sup> Jonathan Halbesleben and Jaron Harvey, “Too Engaged? A Conservation of Resources View of the Relationship Between Work Engagement and Work Interference With Family,” *Journal of Applied Psychology* 94, no. 6 (2009), 4, <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0017595>.

neutral—it hurts us and the companies we work for.”<sup>83</sup> This research helps elucidate the reality that quality of work is just as important, if not more important, than the quantity of work.

Jennifer Moss, an international speaker, author, and expert in utilizing neuroplasticity to promote workplace happiness, also challenges the idea that positive work engagement is the solution to mitigating burnout. By tracking “high performing” employees in various occupational fields, she found that surveys measuring work engagement can score high, even as the employee decides to leave a workplace due to burnout.<sup>84</sup> Positive work engagement usually measures overly simplistic data such as liking the type of work and recommending similar jobs to other people. Moss definitively states, “Engagement is not the definition of wellness, wellbeing and happiness. It is important and connected to our happiness... but if we are looking at [engagement] as a measure of success, it is absolutely, 100%, a false measure.”<sup>85</sup> While there is clear merit in pursuing positive work engagement as a tool to mitigate burnout, it is clear that work engagement alone cannot fully address the burnout phenomenon on a personal or organizational level.

The medical and psychological communities are not the only pertinent voices in the conversation around burnout. Since burnout has long been observed in human

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<sup>83</sup> Sarah Green Carmichael, “The Research Is Clear: Long Hours Backfire for People and for Companies,” *Harvard Business Review*, August 19, 2015, <https://hbr.org/2015/08/the-research-is-clear-long-hours-backfire-for-people-and-for-companies>.

<sup>84</sup> Halbesleben and Harvey, 8–10.

<sup>85</sup> Jennifer Moss, “Award-Winning International Speaker and Author – Jennifer Moss – 2020: Introduction to Workplace Happiness,” Virtual Keynote: Post-Traumatic Growth on Jennifer-Moss.com, January 9, 2020, <https://youtu.be/P0XcMrWBVtQ>.

services occupations, those who work in the realm of spiritual care have dealt with addressing and mitigating burnout in ministry for decades. The next section summarizes various Christian approaches to addressing the burnout phenomenon.

### **A Christian Theological and Spiritual Approach to Burnout**

The burnout phenomenon has been increasingly discussed, studied, and written about in Christian circles over the last four decades. One of the earliest books to deal with ministry burnout was written by John Sanford. As a psychologist and Anglican clergyman, Sanford worked to integrate the worlds of theology and psychology, attempting to speak to the burnout phenomenon in Christian churches. *Ministry Burnout* was published in 1982, just as Maslach's work elevated the idea of burnout within the wider world of popular culture. In his book, Sanford defines ministry-specific issues that lead pastors and ministers into burnout. In particular, he deals with such issues as ministry as an endless task, dealing with exhaustion within the ego, and managing spiritual expectations.

In the final chapter, Sanford offers readers some general ways to revitalize their energy. Some of these methods have clear roots in his Jungian psychological training such as paying attention to dreams and fantasies, journaling about them as a pathway to understand the inner ego. There are also other methods listed such as building healthy relationships and getting physical activity.<sup>86</sup> Far from defining a pathway toward burnout mitigation, he simply says, "This book... can be looked upon as a kind of cookbook: a

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<sup>86</sup> John A. Sanford, *Ministry Burnout* (Louisville, KY: Paulist Press, 1982), 106–14.

list of recipes that have proved useful for some people” dealing with ministry burnout.<sup>87</sup>

This unsystematic treatment of burnout mitigation does little to tangibly help people suffering from ministerial burnout. While Sanford certainly had positive intentions in helping men and women struggling in ministry, this woeful lack of tangible application leaves more questions than answers. What recommendations produce the greatest results in mitigating burnout? Concerning burnout, it is an individual issue or an organizational issue? After discovering information about burnout, what are next tangible steps for someone in ministry facing immanent burnout? While culture and ministry have evolved, this simplistic treatment of ministry burnout seems prevalent in popular culture.

More recent authors have also voiced their ideas on how to systematically mitigate burnout from a Christian perspective. David Murray, a Reformed theologian and pastor, recently wrote a book entitled *Reset: Living a Grace-Paced Life in a Burnout Culture*. In this book, Murray builds a theological foundation that humans are finite, created beings that cannot function apart from regular times of rest and renewal. These periods of rest and renewal are opportunities to be empowered and rejuvenated by the grace of God.

Murray observes that most people who experience ministerial and spiritual burnout do so because they operate in a in a state of “deficient grace”: “Where grace is not fueling a person from the inside out, he burns from the inside out.”<sup>88</sup> Utilizing automotive language, he arranges his book chapters as a series of “repair bays” in which certain grace-based truths of God come to bear in the lives of individuals. The consistent

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>88</sup> David Murray, *Reset: Living a Grace-Paced Life in a Burnout Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Publishing, 2017), 12.

warning throughout the book is that humans were created for times of work and times of rest. Murray writes, “If we don’t take time off, we will be forced to do so through ill health and lose more time than we ever imagined.”<sup>89</sup>

Murray’s book presents a real-time commentary about the burnout epidemic in this nation, especially among ministers. Yet, one of the glaring issues that he never addresses deals with organization and systemic causes of burnout in ministry environments. His ideas are helpful and practical on a personal level, but he fails to address larger issues such as toxic work environments or deal with the expectations others place on ministers. In addressing a personal pathway to live a “grace-based life,” he fails to engage the burnout culture in any meaningful, lasting ways.

Other prominent Christian leaders have spoken to the burnout epidemic. The late Eugene Peterson, a preeminent pastoral theologian, said, “I don’t think pastors ‘burn out’ because they work too hard. People who work hard often do so because they’re good at what they’re doing and they enjoy doing it. I think burnout comes from working with no relational gratification.”<sup>90</sup> Peterson’s extensive writing on pastoral theology never directly addressed the burnout epidemic, yet he consistently spoke about the need to create rhythms of life and ministry that honor our humanity by observing the Sabbath:

When we remember the Sabbath and rest on it, we enter into and maintain the rhythm of creation. We keep time with God. Sabbath-keeping preserves and honors time as God’s gift of holy rest: it erects a weekly bastion against the commodification of time, against reducing time to money, reducing time to what we can get out of it, against leaving no time for God or beauty or anything that

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<sup>89</sup> Murray, 103.

<sup>90</sup> “Committing to Mutuality: An Interview with Eugene Peterson,” interview by Dan Woods with Alban, Duke Divinity School, Published January 10, 2007, <https://alban.org/archive/committing-to-mutuality-an-interview-with-eugene-peterson/#.VgBOwdKx6Nk.email>.

cannot be used or purchased. It is a defense against the hurry that desecrates time.<sup>91</sup>

While Peterson's words are immensely helpful for personal spiritual formation, like Murray, it does not substantively interact with cultural or systemic factors that contribute to burnout. While his suggestion to integrate rhythms of Sabbath rest and renewal hint at systemic or corporate spiritual disciplines, Peterson never details how that might manifest itself in community or individually.

Dallas Willard also addressed ministry burnout and sustainability in his extensive writing on spiritual formation. In his book *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ*, Willard outlines a general pattern that promotes spiritual wellbeing based on an exegesis of Jesus' own life in the Gospels. The pathway toward internal spiritual formation can be expressed in the acronym VIM: vision, intentionality, and means. According to Willard, many programs for spiritual renewal fail because they are based on external conformity, rather than true internal change. If ministerial burnout is addressed, it must be done through a consistent pattern that models the 12-Step Recovery Program from Alcoholic Anonymous: "Any successful plan for spiritual formation, whether for the individual or group, will in fact be significantly similar to the Alcoholics Anonymous program."<sup>92</sup> While Willard did not write a book addressing burnout specifically, many of his mentees expounded on Willard's keen insights about stress, hurry, and their effects on ministry.

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<sup>91</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmann Publishing, 1999), 111.

<sup>92</sup> Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting On the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002), 85.

John Ortberg, a mentee of Dallas Willard, remembers advice that was given to him in a busy season of life and ministry in which burnout was imminent. On a long-distance call, after describing the frenetic pace of life Ortberg was experiencing with ministry and family, he asked Willard, “What do I need to do to say spiritually healthy?” Willard replied simply, “You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life... There is nothing else. You need to ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life.”<sup>93</sup>

In 2019, John Mark Comer, a pastor, author, and mentee of Ortberg, wrote a book about that very phrase. In it, Comer addresses the issues faced by millennials who live in the burnout-prone US-American culture. In *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, Comer reveals the various ways US-American ministry is prone to burnout. He covers issues such as technology, screens, boundaries, and expectations. Comer’s solution reaches back to the Rule of St. Benedict as a means of creating a “Rule of Life” that maintains healthy rhythms that honor human limitations.<sup>94</sup> Like previous Christian writings about burnout prevention and mitigation, Willard and Comer only present an individualistic view of addressing burnout. Aside from trying to isolate and break away from culture and work, there is little advice given on how to mitigate burnout on a systemic scale.

Surveying this brief overview of burnout, there is no clear, concise approach to dealing with burnout from a theological or biblical perspective. While theologians, pastors, and Christian psychologists interact with burnout from a spiritual perspective, many do not interact or integrate psychological or medical research in pursuit of a

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<sup>93</sup> John Ortberg, “Ruthlessly Eliminate Hurry,” *Christianity Today*, July 2002, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2002/july-online-only/cln20704.html>.

<sup>94</sup> John Mark Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry: How to Stay Emotionally Healthy and Spiritually Alive in the Chaos of the Modern World* (New York: Crown Publishing, 2019), 95.

remedy for ministry burnout. Each author posits an approach to mitigating burnout, yet few seem to acknowledge the underlying cause that creates burnout in the first place. Furthermore, all the authors focused solely on an individualistic approach to dealing with burnout, ignoring the organizational and systemic influences that contribute to ministry burnout.

### **An Interdisciplinary Approach to Burnout**

This next section summarizes an integrated approach to dealing with the burnout phenomenon presented by Diane Chandler, a Christian academic who integrates spirituality, psychology, and statistical research to address professional and ministerial burnout. Diane Chandler provides a helpful way to address burnout as she builds a theological foundation for understanding burnout, while also utilizing clinical research to study the effects of ministerial burnout. In her book, *Christian Spiritual Formation: An Integrated Approach for Personal and Relational Wholeness*, Chandler creates the following model for holistic health:

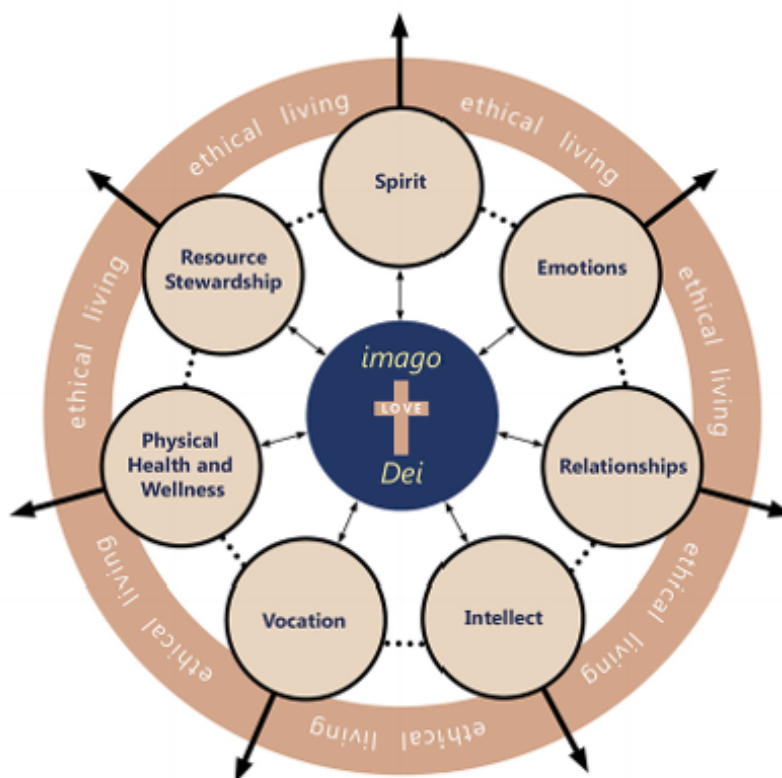


Figure 2.1 *An Integrated Approach to Spiritual Formation.*<sup>95</sup>

This integrated approach to spiritual formation presents seven dimensions—spirit, emotions, relationships, intellect, vocation, physical health and wellness, and resource stewardship—that serve to create “holistic integration.”<sup>96</sup> At its core is the theological conviction that humans were created as image-bearers of God, represented as the central hub, and through redemption in Jesus Christ, the perfect *Imago Dei*, one can become restored to holistic health in all areas of life as reflected in the seven dimensions “to coalesce into an ethical lifestyle.”<sup>97</sup>

<sup>95</sup> Diane J. Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation: An Integrated Approach for Personal and Relational Wholeness* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2014), 275.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

In tracking burnout symptoms among clergy and ministers, Chandler found an intriguing contributing factor to emotional exhaustion. She writes in the conclusion of her study, “Pastoral Burnout and the Impact of Personal Spiritual Renewal, Rest-taking, and Support System Practices,” “Spiritual dryness emerged as the primary predictor of emotional exhaustion, the stress dimension of burnout... This finding reinforces the premise that pastors, by virtue of their calling, need to nurture an ongoing and renewing relationship with God to maintain life balance, reduce stress, and avoid burnout.”<sup>98</sup> Chandler’s research seems to suggest that the very nature of ministry has the potential to cause burnout, “a decline in energy, motivation, and commitment” to the mission of the organization.<sup>99</sup>

The clear need is that “self-compassion,” or “self-care,” needs to be given a place of greater importance and higher priority in organizations that focus on ministering to the needs to others. By addressing burnout as a psychospiritual issue, and presenting a multi-layered approach to spiritual renewal, Chandler offers one of the best comprehensive solutions to dealing with the burnout phenomenon. By using biblical truth to provide a foundational anthropology, drawing on psychological research, and creating an integrated application that includes relationships, vocation, emotion, spirit, intellect, and physiology, this model presents one of the best solutions to addressing the complex issue of burnout.

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<sup>98</sup> Diane J. Chandler, “Pastoral Burnout and the Impact of Personal Spiritual Renewal, Rest Taking, and Support System Practices,” *Pastoral Psychology* 58, no. 3 (2009), 284.

<sup>99</sup> Laura Barnard and John Curry, “The Relationship of Clergy Burnout to Self-Compassion and Other Personality Dimensions,” *Pastoral Psychology* 61, no. 2 (2012): 150, <https://www.researchgate.net/deref/http%3A%2F%2Fdx.doi.org%2F10.1007%2Fs11089-011-0377-0>.

While Chandler's model to spiritual renewal and burnout mitigation provides detailed, comprehensive ideas, the seven dimensions can be overwhelming, complex, and difficult to execute in real life. What makes sense on paper does not easily import into practical, spiritual living. While the various theological elements seem sound, this approach seems too difficult to practice apart from a dedicated spiritual director or pastoral counselor who would be able to keep a practitioner focused on these various dimensions in a systemic, intentional way. In addition to these challenges, it is obvious that the pathway toward spiritual growth and health does not fit a generalized path, as various seasons in life require focus to shift on different dimensions or require foci on various dimensions at the same time. Chandler also does not include personalized aspects of spiritual growth and renewal that are nuanced to each individual. While focusing on emotional and relational health may be life-giving to one person, another person may find rejuvenation in vocational calling and intellect. Thus, this model for spiritual health only outlines a linear path without offering much freedom to explore each dimension in spontaneous ways.

It is also important to note that this approach by Chandler fails to properly address organizational and systemic issues that contribute to burnout. Like many of the other voices seeking to provide relief and respite from the onslaught of ministry, taking an individualistic approach does little to help a burned-out minister move in a direction of wholeness and spiritual health. If the cultural medium breeds burnout and spiritual exhaustion, one must not only address the individual, but also the context at large in order to revitalize spiritual health and create sustainable, impactful ministry.

## Conclusion

Burnout has been identified and addressed in the fields of medicine, psychology, and Christian spirituality. While researchers in each field present common symptomology and propose solutions, most burnout researchers lack an integrated approach to dealing with burnout. The fields of medicine, psychology, and spirituality seem to operate siloed from one another, thus depriving a holistic approach to dealing with burnout. Most of the research also seems to focus on individualistic experiences of burnout, rather than acknowledging the organizational and systemic influences that contribute to burnout among groups of people. This individualized approach puts pressure on individuals to adapt rather than acknowledge the potential existence of toxic work or ministry environments. Without acknowledging systemic influences, burnout becomes a personal problem revealing some character deficiency or lack of resilience on part of an individual.

While much has been researched about burnout symptomology, there exists a surprising lack of information or research about why burnout occurs. Medical and psychological researchers fail to discuss the root cause of burnout as their fields of study do not take into account a holistic view of humanity. Western medicine and psychology seek to dissect an issue to understand its individual function, overlooking a holistic approach to dealing with burnout. Thus, proposed solutions from medicine and psychology seek to resolve symptoms rather than treat underlying causes of burnout. Christian spirituality is unique in that it not only deals with the existence of burnout, but accesses biblical truth that informs a holistic view of humanity. By utilizing a biblical

anthropology, Christian spirituality can address burnout on a foundational level that goes beyond treating symptoms, creating lasting, positive change.

## SECTION 3: THESIS

### **Moving Beyond Treating Symptoms**

In seeking to provide an effective solution to ministry burnout, a remedy must go beyond analyzing and mitigating symptomology. While Christina Maslach was able to identify and analyze the common elements of burnout—emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal satisfaction—she and other social psychological researchers failed to discover the underlying reasons as to why burnout occurs. Even in treating the six dimensions of work life that contribute to burnout—workload, control, reward, community, fairness, and values—there is no focus given as to why people need balance, empowerment, fairness, and moral alignment. In failing to analyze or address the underlying, foundational causes of burnout, any research that seeks to mitigate burnout symptoms fails to provide lasting solutions. Without a concerted, focused effort to understand and address the root causes of personal and systemic burnout, any abatement of symptoms is, at best, temporary.

By considering the practice of medicine, one can distinguish the difference between treating symptomology (e.g. a cough) and treating the underlying cause of the illness (e.g. a cold). While a medical remedy can suppress the cough, it does not mean the illness is cured. With this understanding, great harm can be done if a medical doctor only works to treat symptoms and insists that a person is cured since the symptoms have abated. Similarly, I argue that masking or suppressing various elements of burnout symptoms can likewise be harmful in that the root cause of burnout never gets properly

addressed. These symptoms seem important as they signal a deeper issue that needs to be addressed to achieve enduring, holistic change.

In a similar manner, Maslach's approach to treating burnout symptoms through "Work Engagement" only provides superficial solutions that do little to engage the foundational causes of burnout. This fragmented approach to dealing with burnout may abate symptoms, but does little to bring lasting holistic, effective change. While there is certainly benefit in treating the symptoms of burnout, the greater goal is to understand and address the underlying causes, which in turn, would also provide remediation for symptoms and provide enduring wholeness and health for ministers struggling with burnout.

Workplace wellness expert Jennifer Moss, also noticed the common tendency for burnout to be addressed on an emergent or symptomological level. She argues for creating burnout mitigation strategies that are further "upstream." As she unpacks the importance of burnout prevention, she writes, "Burnout can be prevented if interventions are initiated further upstream. The success of those upstream interventions will require shifting attention from coping strategies to increased prevention strategies."<sup>100</sup> Thus, a preventative approach seems effective for combating burnout. Rather than treating burnout and its symptoms as an emergent issue, it is best to address it proactively and preventatively.

Medical science has seen the importance of shifting focus and energy from emergent care toward prevention and mitigation. Many large-scale medical systems were created to identify and treat sickness rather than prevent the onset of disease. The recent

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<sup>100</sup> Jennifer Moss, "Rethinking Burnout: When Self Care Is Not the Cure," *American Journal of Health Promotion* 34, no. 5 (June 1, 2020): 565, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0890117120920488b>.

shift from reactive care to preventative care marks a new chapter in societal healthcare where resources are diverted away from acute care, and focused more on prevention of illnesses through proactive and predictive healthcare systems.<sup>101</sup> Thus, a proactive and predictive approach to mitigating the burnout phenomenon among ministers would create a lasting and effective solution to ministerial burnout.

### **The Significance of Acknowledging Burnout Symptomology**

In the realm of Christian ministry, I have interviewed many men and women who equate experiencing burnout with ministry failure. There seems to exist an unhealthy expectation for ministers to shoulder immense spiritual burdens while simultaneously living with constant energy and joy. One person interviewed about her burnout experience expressed anxiety and fear in admitting her limitations: “It’s unsafe to show your weakness... Like you can lose credibility in the organization or (sic) your boss if people see you don’t have your life together.”<sup>102</sup> This type of fear-driven response discourages ministers from acknowledging and embracing the reality of their own burnout, which can lead to chronic anxiety and spiritual dryness.

In creating a healthy, honest environment where burnout symptoms are not demonized, but rather embraced as morally neutral indicators of stress, ministers can be set free from negative stereotypes, instead being invited into a place of honesty,

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<sup>101</sup> Alexis Wise et al., “Transforming Health: Shifting from Reactive to Proactive and Predictive Care,” *Transforming Health MaRS Market Insights*, March 29, 2016, <https://www.marsdd.com/news/transforming-health-shifting-from-reactive-to-proactive-and-predictive-care/>.

<sup>102</sup> Interviewee 2, “Field Research Experience: Understanding the Contributing Factors to Burnout Among Direct Ministry Employees at the Portland Rescue Mission’s Burnside Shelter,” interviewed by Dominic Abaria at Portland Rescue Mission, September 26, 2019.

vulnerability, and transparency. By acknowledging the painful experience of burnout, ministers can find comfort in the knowledge that they have not failed as spiritual leaders. Put simply, being burned out is not a sign of moral defect or failure, but rather a sign that something needs to change. Pain is a morally neutral experience that is meant to keep one's body safe from harm. Pain is meant to inform people that something needs to be adjusted or changed. To simply mask or ignore the pain of burnout may actually be detrimental in that masking pain can blind a person to areas of his life that needs to change or improve.

### **Identifying the Root Causes and Temptations Leading to Burnout**

As seen in the previous sections, treatment for burnout has traditionally been treated as an emergent issue. Medical diagnosis and treatment focus on the ailment, rather than maintaining holistic health. As burnout research reveals, many solutions seek to abate symptoms rather than treat the roots cause of burnout. While there is merit in dealing with emergent issues stemming from burnout, a wiser approach would be to focus on foundational issues that create burnout in the first place. Medical and psychological researchers do not posit a holistic anthropological approach to burnout mitigation. They never seek to answer why humans experience burnout. Christian spirituality offers a foundational understanding of burnout stemming from a biblical anthropology.

#### *The Bible and Burnout*

If burnout symptoms exist to reveal an underlying root issue that needs to be addressed, it is wise to take a biblical approach to understanding how and why people experience burnout. Since social psychologists limit the scope of their work to the

observation and analysis of symptoms, they are unable to present a compelling reason as to why humans experience emotional and spiritual disintegration in burnout. Without this important foundational concept of humanity, it is difficult to postulate healthy behaviors or limitations that are impactful or enduring. Thus, the first step in discovering a solution is to understand how God designed humanity.

While the Bible does not contain the specific term “burnout,” there is a direct parallel between the psychological phenomenon of burnout and the curse of sin. In seeking to utilize biblical anthropology as the foundation of mitigating burnout, the story of the Garden of Eden provides a helpful way to understand humanity’s relationship to burnout. The first narrative after the creation account introduces the fall of humanity into sin. In this well-known passage, the conversation between Eve and the serpent, as well as the subsequent curses from God, contain themes of burnout. By analyzing these themes, it becomes clear that the elements of burnout are the direct consequences of sin. This biblical anthropology illuminates not only how burnout exists, but also why it occurs within people.

### *What Did God say?*

After God established the created order, he instructed Adam, ““You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.””<sup>103</sup> In context, this verse was specifically spoken to Adam before the creation of Eve. One may assume that God, Adam, or both, reiterated this prohibition to Eve after her creation in verse 22. As the

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<sup>103</sup> Gen. 2:16–17

serpent entered the narrative in chapter 3, he immediately began to question the veracity of God's declared boundary. The serpent asked Eve, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'"<sup>104</sup> The serpent's primary target is to cast doubt on the words of God. This first temptation is actually a theological issue in which the serpent confuses the boundaries that separate Creator and creature. By attacking this core belief, the serpent opens the pathway toward sin and burnout.

Eve responds to the serpent, saying, "'We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.''"<sup>105</sup> Whether Eve discovered this boundary from God, or whether it was a reiteration of the original command from God via Adam in Genesis 2:22, it is clear that Eve understood the prohibition to eat the forbidden fruit.

A closer look at Eve's words reveals an extra clause that contains some significance for this study on burnout. Eve seems to add the phrase, "Neither shall you touch it." There exists the possibility that perhaps God outlined in greater detail the prohibition of interacting with the forbidden fruit, but nothing in the biblical text seems to indicate this.<sup>106</sup> In assuming humanity's moral innocence before the act of disobedience before eating the fruit, it can be understood that Adam and Eve created this extra

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<sup>104</sup> Gen. 3:1

<sup>105</sup> Gen. 3:2–3

<sup>106</sup> For further discussion, see P. Wayne Townsend's "Eve's Answer to the Serpent: An Alternative Paradigm for Sin and Some Implications in Theology," *Calvin Theological Journal* 33 (1998): 399–420, [http://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/ted\\_hildebrandt/OTeSources/01-Genesis/Text/Articles-Books/Townsend\\_EvesAnswer\\_CTJ.pdf](http://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/ted_hildebrandt/OTeSources/01-Genesis/Text/Articles-Books/Townsend_EvesAnswer_CTJ.pdf).

boundary concerning this forbidden fruit. This one and only prohibition seemed to carry great weight in the minds of Adam and Eve.

Within this realm of clarity and boundaries, the serpent works to cast doubt and confusion. After indirectly attacking the surety of God's commands, the serpent then goes on to directly defy the words of God, "But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.'"<sup>107</sup> Embedded in this temptation is a foundational attack on the essential limitations of humanity.

In this short reply, the serpent directly opposes God's declared consequences of sin: "You will not surely die." The serpent goes on to suggest that the eyes of humanity would be opened, that they would become like God and have the ability to discern the difference between good and evil. Considering systematic theology's attributes of God, this temptation is nothing less than an offer at omnipotence, omniscience, and immortality. The serpent tempted Eve with an offer of being completely self-reliant, removing humanity's need for God's power, wisdom, and life.

The danger of this demonic temptation is that it is infused with half-truths. While eating the forbidden fruit did not lead to immediate physical death, the death that God referred to was spiritual death. Marcio Antonio Campos, pastor and teacher at the Evangelical College of Parana, describes spiritual death as "something that takes man

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<sup>107</sup> Gen. 3:4–5

apart from God, a spiritual death, in the sense that the access to God is now closed and can be restored only through faith.”<sup>108</sup>

The immediate effects from eating the fruit were as the serpent said. Neither Eve nor Adam experienced physical death. The eyes of both humans were “opened,” and the first thing they experienced was shame in their nakedness. In their sorrowful attempt to hide from each other, they sewed fig leaves together as a barrier between their bodies. In addition, they sought to hide from God due to the awakened sense of shame and fear.<sup>109</sup> The half-truths of the serpent were realized, but came at a great cost. Adam and Eve were now set on a path of estrangement, separation and hostility between each other and with God. By allowing the line between creature and Creator to become blurred, the first humans wrought upon themselves the terrible consequences of choosing to deny their humanity.

It is important to note that the deception in the Garden of Eden receives further comment in the New Testament. The revelation from 1 Timothy 2:4 says that “Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived”<sup>110</sup> This insight, coupled with the reality that Adam was fully present during the temptation with Eve and the serpent,<sup>111</sup> communicates the severity of Adam’s culpability. What is clear from the Biblical witness is that Adam received the initial prohibition from God, was present during the demonic temptation, was not deceived, and thus willfully ate of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil.

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<sup>108</sup> Marcio Antonio Campos, “Did Peace and Love Reign in the World Before the Original Sin?” *Common Questions* (blog), May 18, 2020, <https://biologos.org/blog/did-peace-and-love-reign-in-the-world-before-the-original-sin>.

<sup>109</sup> Gen. 3:7–8

<sup>110</sup> 1 Tim. 2:4

<sup>111</sup> Gen. 3:6

While Eve's fall into sin involved deception, Adam's fall into sin contains elements of intentionality, erasing any notion that Adam was an innocent victim or that Eve was solely responsible for introducing sin into the world.

### *The Consequences of Sin*

As God interrogates and declares judgments upon Adam and Eve, the righteous consequences of their sin are put on display. Embedded in these curses are significant themes that tie to the various elements of burnout: "To the woman he said, 'I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be to your husband, but he shall rule over you.'"<sup>112</sup> As God outlines the curses that befall Eve, there is a striking change in her relationship to Adam. Eve, whose relationship with Adam was formerly defined by help and companionship, now takes on a sense of broken desire. While there are a variety of hermeneutical positions on this exact idea, what is clear is that the intimacy and unity between the first humans was spoiled by sin.<sup>113</sup> Unmet desire and broken relationship entered the world as humans sought to live outside of God's declared will for their lives.

Furthermore, there seems to be a breaking of relationship between Eve and her children. While Eve had yet to bear children, this curse seems to indicate that the pain of the childbirth process takes on a higher level of intensity than before the Fall. While Eve's relationship to Adam disintegrates to one of broken desire, Eve's relationship to

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<sup>112</sup> Gen. 3:16

<sup>113</sup> For further reading on the "desire" of woman, see Susan T. Foh, "What is the Woman's Desire?" *Westminster Theological Journal* 37 (1974/75): 376–83, [http://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/ted\\_hildebrandt/OTeSources/01-Genesis/Text/Articles-Books/Foh-WomansDesire-WTJ.pdf](http://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/ted_hildebrandt/OTeSources/01-Genesis/Text/Articles-Books/Foh-WomansDesire-WTJ.pdf).

her children originates in pain and suffering. These curses upon Eve directly speak about a breaking of harmonious relationship that seemed to be the original plan before the curses in Genesis 3.

This theme of broken relationships mirrors the effects that occur within the burnout phenomenon. Aspects of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal satisfaction all describe a disintegration of harmonious relationship among humans. When Eve gave in to the temptation to live beyond her human limitations, the consequences were pain and brokenness within her relationship to self and others.

The consequences of sin extended beyond Eve and Adam's relationship. God goes on to bring a curse upon Adam, introducing themes of weariness and struggle between humanity and the rest of creation. Before this point, there is no indication that stewarding creation was difficult or burdensome. Yet, in their pursuit to become like God through taking the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve no longer enjoy stewarding creation with ease and comfort. Their lives are marked by pain and strife:

And to Adam he said,

“Because you have listened to the voice of your wife  
and have eaten of the tree  
of which I commanded you,  
‘You shall not eat of it,’  
cursed is the ground because of you;  
in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;  
thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;  
and you shall eat the plants of the field.  
By the sweat of your face  
you shall eat bread,  
till you return to the ground,  
for out of it you were taken;  
for you are dust,  
and to dust you shall return.”<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Gen. 3:17–19

As God outlines the curses for Adam's disobedience, there are clear themes of toil and exhaustion. The Hebrew word for "toil" here also describes the work of the woman in childbearing, extending the image of weariness to all aspects of human life. The work of stewardship over the earth that had once been filled with purpose and joy is now infused with exhaustion, suffering, and hopelessness. Instead of eating effortlessly of the trees in the garden, the man is forced to work the cursed land. The joy of eating for nourishment and pleasure becomes a toilsome burden, a fight for mere survival. In the course of cultivating the land, the cursed ground brings forth pain and toil, not simply fruitful produce. The eyes of man, which once oversaw all the beauty of creation are now downcast, locked in an unbreaking, morbid gaze with the dirt; a source of sustenance, and simultaneously a vivid reminder of his impending death. By choosing to dishonor his human limitations, Adam experienced the effects of broken relationships with his wife, the land, all creation, and ultimately God. The themes of emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and hopelessness clearly reflect the elements of burnout experienced by humanity today.

### **Lessons from Genesis 3**

By analyzing the details of Genesis 2 and 3, it becomes clear that burnout is as ancient as sin itself. It can be understood that the elements of burnout are the tangible consequences of humanity's attempt to live beyond their human limitations, placing themselves in a position of self-reliance and rebellion against God's created order. In other words, humanity experiences burnout when men and women attempt to be God rather than live within their God-given limitations. Concerning this discussion of burnout,

there are four important ideas that can inform a biblical approach to combat burnout and honor human limitations.

### *The Temptation to Question God's Word*

The beginning of Genesis 3 reveals the origin of sin and burnout: questioning God's Word. The subtle danger that set Eve and Adam on a path of rebellion was allowing an ongoing dialogue with the serpent, which from the very beginning sought to undermine and challenge God's Word. The clarity of God's word was attacked in two ways. First, the serpent challenged the veracity and accuracy of God's command. This subtle subversion seems like a harmless theological discussion, yet the implications are profoundly significant and far-reaching. The consequences of this curse not only affect humanity, but also introduce struggle, strife, and death to every created thing.<sup>115</sup> By speaking half-truths under the veneer of God's word, it carried the visage of holiness but secretly created a poisonous distrust and inclination toward rebellion.

Another way God's word as challenged was by allowing human tradition to stand in the place of God's word. As Eve responded to the serpent, the added command to not touch the fruit created a layer of confusion.<sup>116</sup> As Jesus quoted the prophet Isaiah, "In vain do they worship me, teaching the doctrines of men as the commandments of God."<sup>117</sup> As humanity sought to define the boundaries of their obedience, intermingling their interpretation with God's expressed command led them down a slippery slope

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<sup>115</sup> Rom. 8:19–23

<sup>116</sup> Gen. 3:3b

<sup>117</sup> Matt. 15:9

toward sin. In the course of this short interchange, the serpent declared the first challenge against God's word, "You will not surely die."<sup>118</sup> Emboldened by this lie, they were deceived and wrought immeasurable suffering for themselves and their kin.

By dishonoring their place in the created order, Adam and Eve experienced the debilitating effect of exhaustion, depersonalization, and hopelessness. These same symptoms of burnout continue to be experienced today as humans choose to live and minister beyond their human limitations. In the pursuit to serve God, there exists a hidden temptation to be like God. Yet humans are called to honor their human limitation in every area of their lives, including service to others. These opening chapters in Genesis create a biblical anthropology that invites people to live within their limits as created beings.

### *The Temptation to Be Omnipotent*

The details of the serpent's offer underscore foundational temptations that continue to plague humanity: the desire to live like God. While it was always a part of God's plan to bring humanity into the fullness of his image,<sup>119</sup> Adam and Eve gave in to the temptation of bypassing God's timing, and instead sought to attain godlike power, wisdom, and independence by their own means and in their own timing. By suggesting to Eve, "You will be like God," the serpent was offering a chance to live without boundaries or limits. This temptation is directly tied to the first lie the serpent offered: "You will not

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<sup>118</sup> Gen. 3:4

<sup>119</sup> 2 Cor. 3:18; 2 Pet. 1:1–4. For further reading on this idea, see Michael W. Austin's "The Doctrine of Theosis: A Transformational Union with Christ," *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 8, no. 2 (2015): 172–86.

surely die.”<sup>120</sup> While Eve and Adam did not experience immediate physical death, they certainly experienced a death in a myriad of ways. Their relationships to one another and with God ceased with this disobedience. Their rule over the created world ceased as God cursed the land. Adam and Eve would struggle with the inevitability reality that their bodies decay and die, returning to the dust from which they were formed.<sup>121</sup>

The limited details in Genesis 3 leave readers with a sense of curiosity about what tempted Adam and Eve to want to be like God. What is known from this brief account is that Adam and Eve knew their rightful place before God. God created them, the world, and the rules that govern everything in existence. They also knew that they were to obey the command of God, so much so that they even committed to memory those commands so that in God’s absence they could still obey. What is also clear is that the first humans had an all-encompassing vocation to steward the entirety of creation. In this role, they were ambassadors and vice-regents of God in creation.<sup>122</sup>

Yet, some authors keenly observe the difference between God’s authority and the vested authority in humanity. Author and pastor, Greg Gilbert writes, “Adam’s authority over creation, however, was not absolute. It was derived from and circumscribed by God Himself. People often wonder why God put the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil in the garden. The reason is that tree reminded Adam and Eve that their authority to rule and

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<sup>120</sup> Gen. 3:4

<sup>121</sup> Gen. 3:19

<sup>122</sup> Gen. 2:15

subdue the earth was not absolute.”<sup>123</sup> This correlation between the power of God and the wisdom of God leads to the next temptation.

### *The Temptation to Be Omniscient*

When the serpent set out to deceive Eve, he brought her primary focus to the forbidden fruit, which grew on the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The beginning of his statement is noteworthy: “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened.”<sup>124</sup> The serpent seemed to suggest that God had been keeping a secret from Adam and Eve. The serpent quietly implied that he, too, had secret knowledge, yet positioned himself in a place where he sought to serve humanity by leading them toward enlightenment. In this twisted reversal, the serpent led Eve to believe that he was on their side, while God was purposefully keeping them in the darkness of ignorance. The tension that arose is that obedience to God would leave them blind and ignorant. The irony and tragedy of this conversation is that the serpent exploited their innocence, leveraging their inability to discern as a weapon against them.

The text makes clear that Eve “saw the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes.”<sup>125</sup> This repeated mention of sight and eyes is held in tension with the reality that their thoughts and actions were dictated by their spiritual blindness rather than divine insight. This theme begins a pattern that is carried through the entire Bible in

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<sup>123</sup> Greg Gilbert, “What is Man?” *TableTalk Magazine*, January, 2015, <https://tabletalkmagazine.com/article/2015/01/what-man/>.

<sup>124</sup> Gen. 3:5

<sup>125</sup> Gen. 5:6

which sin is described as doing “what was right in his own eyes.”<sup>126</sup> When humanity ate of the fruit, their eyes were truly opened. Yet the opening of their eyes did not create a spiritual liberation, but the exact opposite: “Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.”<sup>127</sup> Far from experiencing the anticipated freedom of god-like wisdom, the first thing their newfound insight created was shame leading to separation and isolation. The first act of shame took on the form of fig leaf clothing, which served to conceal their bodies from each other. The introduction of clothing and concealment is ironic. While humans wanted to see more, they ended up seeing less of each other and, ultimately, God.

As Adam and Eve overstepped their boundary by seeking knowledge and wisdom reserved for God, they experienced a relational and psychological depersonalization and cynicism. What had once been unified and whole had now been fissured. What had been a relationship characterized by joy and wholeness descended into blame and resentment.<sup>128</sup> In the pursuit of becoming like God, Adam and Eve tragically fell further from perfection, experiencing isolation, estrangement, shame, and hopelessness. These themes of burnout echo through this narrative into the lived experience of ministers today. Any time people disregard their limits in power or ability, the curses of Eden manifest as burnout. Beyond ignoring limitations in power or energy, ministers may also seek to live in a false sense of independence from God or others.

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<sup>126</sup> Deut. 5:1–21; Josh. 5:16; Judg. 2:11, 21:25; Matt. 19:16–22; 1 Tim. 1:8–11

<sup>127</sup> Gen. 3:7

<sup>128</sup> Gen. 3:12–13

### *The Temptation to Be Self-Reliant*

The unspoken allure behind the serpent's temptation was the offer to be autonomous from God, the Creator and Designer of humanity. In presenting a way of life free from death ("you will not surely die"),<sup>129</sup> free from limits ("you will be like God"),<sup>130</sup> and free from ignorance ("your eyes will be opened... knowing the difference between good and evil"),<sup>131</sup> the serpent was offering humanity the gift of divinity. This temptation offered the gifts of God without the necessity of relying on God. As the Bible unfolds, it becomes abundantly clear that this deceptive serpent was no mere crafty animal. The serpent is revealed to be Satan. As the Revelation of John records, "The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray..."<sup>132</sup> When humanity accepts the lie that they can exist and work like God, it is a sin that inevitably leads to burnout.

Thus, a brief analysis of humanity's fall into sin outlines the same temptations that must be resisted if burnout is to be mitigated and healed. Rather than seeing human limitations as negative prohibitions, these limits on power and knowledge must be embraced as an expression of God's mercy, wisdom, and love. Living beyond one's means is nothing less than living outside God's will for his or her life. As Peter Scazzero, author of *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, writes, "We will find God's will for our lives

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<sup>129</sup> Gen. 3:4

<sup>130</sup> Gen. 3:5

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Rev. 12:9

in our limitation.”<sup>133</sup> This invitation to practice healthy limitations is the pathway toward sustainable, lasting ministries that do not succumb to burnout.

### **Creating Focus on Character over Productivity**

Another danger that occurs in Christian ministry is focusing on the results of ministry rather than offering ministry as an act of worship to God: “Corrie ten Boom once said that if the devil can’t make you sin, he’ll make you busy... Both sin and busyness have the exact same effect—they cut off your connection to God, to other people, and even to your own soul. The famous psychologist Carl Jung had this little saying: Hurry is not *of* the devil; hurry *is* the devil.”<sup>134</sup> The move toward healthy ministry involves fighting against the ancient temptations to live beyond one’s means. This also includes learning to value personal character rather than the volume of ministry output.

The further US-American culture has moved away from biblical principles for work and life, the greater the threat of burnout. I argue that a return to biblical anthropology and values will help mitigate the epidemic of burnout. In acknowledging and honoring God’s design for creation and humanity, people can experience freedom from this problematic burnout culture.<sup>135</sup> The following section will compare and contrast biblical values that can combat the cultural factors that contribute to burnout in the world.

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<sup>133</sup> Peter Scazzero, “Six Marks of a Church Culture that Deeply Changes Lives: Part 1,” Emotionally Healthy, March 5, 2019, [www.emotionallyhealthy.org/podcast/detail/Six-Marks-of-a-Church-Culture-that-Deeply-Changes-Lives:-Part-1](http://www.emotionallyhealthy.org/podcast/detail/Six-Marks-of-a-Church-Culture-that-Deeply-Changes-Lives:-Part-1).

<sup>134</sup> John Mark Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry: How to Stay Emotionally Healthy and Spiritually Alive in the Chaos of the Modern World* (Colorado Springs, CO: Penguin Random House, 2019), 20.

<sup>135</sup> David Murray, *Reset: Living a Grace-Paced Life in a Burnout Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Publishing, 2017), 11.

*A Biblical View of Personal Value and Burnout*

When it comes to ministry leadership, the New Testament has some clear expectations about what determines value in a person. In particular, there are two passages about eldership in which the Apostle Paul outlines the qualification for valued leaders: 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9. In each passage, Paul seeks to equip young church leaders with guidelines about how to identify people who are capable to provide spiritual leadership and oversight to others. By exploring these qualifications, a picture can be painted about what values the New Testament places on spiritual leaders.<sup>136</sup>

One category that Paul focuses on is reputation: An elder ought to be “above reproach,”<sup>137</sup> “respectable,”<sup>138</sup> and “well thought of by outsiders.”<sup>139</sup> Next, Paul speaks about their relationships with family: “the husband of one wife”<sup>140</sup> who “manages his household well,”<sup>141</sup> and whose “children are believers not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination.”<sup>142</sup> Then Paul speaks about personal temperaments and character traits: “sober-minded,”<sup>143</sup> “self-controlled,”<sup>144</sup> “not greedy for gain,”<sup>145</sup> “not

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<sup>136</sup> Alex Strauch, “The Biblical Qualifications for Pastoral Eldership (Titus, Timothy and Peter),” *The Gospel Leads Us to Godliness*, August 12, 2015, <https://bible.org/seriespage/2-biblical-qualifications-pastoral-eldership-titus-15-9-1-tim-31-7-1-peter-51-4>.

<sup>137</sup> 1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6

<sup>138</sup> 1 Tim. 3:2

<sup>139</sup> 1 Tim. 3:7

<sup>140</sup> 1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6

<sup>141</sup> 1 Tim. 3:4

<sup>142</sup> Titus 1:6

<sup>143</sup> 1 Tim. 3:2

<sup>144</sup> Titus 1:8

quick tempered,”<sup>146</sup> “not quarrelsome,”<sup>147</sup> “not a drunkard,”<sup>148</sup> and “disciplined.”<sup>149</sup> Paul also identifies characteristics of personal integrity: “hospitable,”<sup>150</sup> “a lover of good,”<sup>151</sup> “not greedy for gain,”<sup>152</sup> “upright,”<sup>153</sup> “trustworthy as taught,”<sup>154</sup> and “holy.”<sup>155</sup> The last qualification is that an elder must “be able to teach.”<sup>156, 157</sup>

What is striking about this list of qualifications for eldership is that the overwhelming majority of qualifications listed concern the character of the individual. There only appears to be one listed qualification that has to do with skills or abilities—being able to teach.<sup>158</sup> Yet upon further inspection, the expectation that an elder is skilled in teaching seems to be paralleled by Titus 1:9, which speaks of one who ought to be “holding fast to the word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able

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<sup>145</sup> Titus 1:7

<sup>146</sup> Titus 1:7

<sup>147</sup> 1 Tim. 3:3

<sup>148</sup> 1 Tim. 3:3

<sup>149</sup> Titus 1:8

<sup>150</sup> 1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8

<sup>151</sup> Titus 1:8

<sup>152</sup> Titus 1:7

<sup>153</sup> Titus 1:8

<sup>154</sup> Titus 1:9

<sup>155</sup> Titus 1:8

<sup>156</sup> 1 Tim. 3:2

<sup>157</sup> Jeramie Rinne, *Church Elder: How to Shepherd God’s People Like Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Publishing, 2014), 24.

<sup>158</sup> While it can be argued that it takes skill and ability to be a person of integrity and character, the Pauline listed qualifications seems to present these primarily as character traits rather than skill sets.

both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.” Furthermore, as theologian Kenneth Berding states, “The only other time that *didaktikos* (‘able to teach’) is used in the NT is 2 Timothy 2:24, which is also about correcting those who err in their knowledge. So it is probably incorrect to think of ‘able to teach’ in 1 Timothy 3:2 as a *skill*,” which leads him to conclude, “Character is more important in ministry than skills.”<sup>159</sup> Author Tim Challies concurs as he writes that Christian leaders “are called and qualified to their ministry not first through their raw talent, their finely-honed skill, or their great accomplishments, but through their godly character.”<sup>160</sup>

This biblical picture of value seems to be the exact opposite *modus operandi* to US-American culture, which places greater value on people who are skilled and have unique abilities. Those who are “skilled” are placed in positions of power while people with mere high integrity and character get overlooked. Imagine how different organizations and ministries would be if there were a higher emphasis on staffing people with admirable character traits over those who are skilled at entertaining and drawing crowds. This cultural change would be a personal invitation to people who are exhausted by continuously trying to prove their worth by their accomplishments, and serve to invite a slower, and more meaningful, pace of life that focuses on personal character growth rather than frenetic busy work. Along with a focus on character, it is essential to focus on human limitations and the need for rest.

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<sup>159</sup> Kenneth Berding, “Skills vs. Character: Which is More Important in Ministry Leaders? The Good Book Blog Series from Talbot School of Theology,” *Good Book* (blog), April 2, 2014, <https://www.biola.edu/blogs/good-book-blog/2014/skills-vs-character-which-is-more-important-in-ministry-leaders>.

<sup>160</sup> Tim Challies, “Why We Must Emphasize a Pastor’s Character Over His Skill,” *Challies*, August 30, 2017, <https://www.challies.com/articles/why-we-must-emphasize-a-pastors-character-over-his-skill/>.

*A Biblical View of Rhythm and Rest*

With the advent of the light bulb and a cultural divorce from the rhythms of work and rest initiated at the creation of the world, humanity progressively moved toward a false belief that they could operate autonomously from God and his creation. In this silent and perhaps unintentional rebellion from the divine rhythms of work and rest, there are echoes of the ancient, evil temptation from the Garden of Eden: “You will be like God.”<sup>161</sup> In refusing to honor human limitations and need for rest, burnout has become the consequence that forces people to slow down against their wills.

Consider the ways that overwork have plagued the health of the US-American workforce: “Some 225 million workdays are lost every year in the United States due to stress; that’s nearly a million people not working every workday.”<sup>162</sup> In avoiding times of rest and replenishment, human bodies find ways to rest that usually involve injury or illness. Wayne Muller writes in his book *Sabbath*, “We make war on our own bodies, pushing them beyond their limits.”<sup>163</sup> As a result, heart disease due to chronic stress has become the leading cause of death in the United States.<sup>164</sup> Refusing to slow down and acknowledge one’s need for rest is killing hundreds of thousands of people every year.

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<sup>161</sup> Gen. 3:5

<sup>162</sup> Murray, 11.

<sup>163</sup> Wayne Muller, *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives* (New York: Bantam, 2000), 130.

<sup>164</sup> Kenneth D. Kochanek et al., “Deaths: Final Data for 2009,” *National Vital Statistics Reports* 60, no. 2 (December 29, 2011), [https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr60/nvsr60\\_03.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr60/nvsr60_03.pdf).

God observed Sabbath, signifying its importance in the fabric of creation.<sup>165</sup> When God commanded his people to practice the Sabbath in Exodus 20:8–11, he grounded it in rhythm of creation as a reminder of their creatureliness. As a holy and unique day, it signified a time when God was contented with his work of creation, and took a day to rest, bless, and celebrate. In commanding people to observe the Sabbath, God invites his people to remember our humanity, and his place as creator, sustainer, and savior God. As pastor and theologian John Piper describes it,

[God] is saying in effect, “Let my highest creature, the one in my image, stop every seven days and commemorate with me the fact that I am the creator who has done all this. Let him stop working and focus on me, that I am the source of all that he has. I am the fountain of blessing. I have made the very hands and mind with which he works. Let one day out of seven demonstrate that all land and all animals and all raw materials and all breath and strength and thought and emotion and everything come from me.”<sup>166</sup>

Rather than continuing with the false belief that ministers are omnipotent and indispensable, honoring the Sabbath reminds men and women of our human limitations. By valuing and practicing Sabbath, people can begin to dismantle “hurry sickness” and combat ministry burnout.<sup>167</sup>

### *A Biblical View of Restoration*

Two thousand years ago, the Apostle Paul warned the church in the city of Rome, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that

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<sup>165</sup> Gen. 2:2–3

<sup>166</sup> John Piper, “Remember the Sabbath Day to Keep It Holy,” Sermon, Bethlehem Church, Minneapolis, MN, October 6, 1985, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/remember-the-sabbath-day-to-keep-it-holy>.

<sup>167</sup> Comer, 75.

by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”<sup>168</sup> Paul understood that the influence of culture had great power over the ways people think and behave. In the incessant flow of cultural influence, Paul warned the church about allowing their minds to be conformed to cultural norms, but rather to renew their minds toward the will of God. Paul’s admonition is just as needed today as it was two thousand years ago. While Sabbath creates space and time to re-orient our lives, minds, and bodies back toward God, what practices must be adopted in order to defend against the ubiquity of technology that breeds hurry, exhaustion, and burnout?

Multiple pastors, authors, and theologians have written about disciplines that create space for minds to be transformed, and for Christians to create space for the Holy Spirit to do the work of character transformation toward holiness and godliness. Dozens of men and women have written books about individual and corporate spiritual disciplines. The two specific disciplines that combat ministry burnout are silence and solitude. As foundational disciplines, they create a protected time and space where other disciplines can be practiced.

### *Solitude and Silence*

In this digital age, it is almost impossible to be bored since most people have access to virtually unlimited information in their pocket. Most people welcome distraction as a substitute for boredom. In fact, it was discovered that 77 percent of

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<sup>168</sup> Rom. 12:2

people reach for their phone to avoid boredom and silence.<sup>169</sup> In doing so, distraction and hurry destroy any sense of connection and attention to God in times of solitude.

This US-American culture seems to exist in juxtaposition to Jesus's habits of finding solitude in deserted, lonely, and desolate places.<sup>170</sup> Far from solitude being a place of weakness and isolation, Jesus withdrew to these places in preparation for significant events like facing off against Satan, choosing disciples, and preparing for the cross. As Comer rightly identifies, solitude "isn't the place of weakness; it's the place of strength: "Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness" because it was there, and only there, that Jesus was at the height of his spiritual powers. It was only after a month and a half of prayer and fasting in the quiet place that he had the capacity to take on the devil himself and walk away unscathed."<sup>171</sup>

It is only in those places of solitude and silence that people can remember what is true about God and humanity. It is only in solitude and silence that people can find spiritual equilibrium, deal with internal turmoil, and avoid the anesthetic of technological distraction. These ancient spiritual disciplines are the foundational practices that provide spiritual renewal for a culture that is over-connected, over-worked, and burned out. Like physical discipline, the practice of engaging spiritual disciplines is difficult to practice alone. Thus, it is important to introduce a corporate aspect to spiritual disciplines that may aid people seeking to engage in silence, solitude, and Sabbath.

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<sup>169</sup> Kevin McSpadden, "You Now Have a Shorter Attention Span than a Goldfish," *Time*, May 14, 2015, <http://time.com/2858309/attention-spans-goldfish>.

<sup>170</sup> Matt. 14:23; Mark 1:35; Luke 5:15, 22:41–42

<sup>171</sup> Comer, 125.

## *Corporate Restoration*

Most might consider the disciplines of silence, solitude, and Sabbath as individual practices. However, rather than implementing these on a strictly individual basis, it is essential to address burnout on a systemic level. Jennifer Moss keenly writes,

We tend to think of burnout as an individual problem, solvable by “learning to say no,” more yoga, better breathing techniques, practicing resilience—the self-help list goes on. But evidence is mounting that applying personal, band-aid solutions to an epic and rapidly evolving workplace phenomenon may be harming, not helping, the battle. With “burnout” now officially recognized by the World Health Organization (WHO), the responsibility for managing it has shifted away from the individual and towards the organization. Leaders take note: It’s now on *you* to build a burnout strategy.<sup>172</sup>

The trouble with an individualistic approach to dealing with burnout is that it does nothing to address the toxicity that exists within systems. If a lake is filled with poisonous water, it does little good to rehabilitate a fish, only to throw it back into a toxic environment. As the US-American burnout culture seeps into every facet of Christian life, it becomes all the more important to create systemic, organizational change that empowers and encourages individuals to embrace healthy limitations in their personal and ministry lives.

Christina Maslach and other researchers also observed the difference between targeting individuals and organization, writing, “Workplace interventions that are designed for the entire organization, and especially when the interventions take place for an extended period of time, are more likely to report successful outcomes.”<sup>173</sup> By moving

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<sup>172</sup> Jennifer Moss, “Burnout Is About Your Workplace, Not Your People,” *Harvard Business Review*, December 11, 2019, <https://hbr.org/2019/12/burnout-is-about-your-workplace-not-your-people>.

<sup>173</sup> Michael P. Leiter, Arnold B. Bakker, and Christina Maslach, eds., *Burnout at Work: A Psychological Perspective* (London, UK: Psychology Press, 2014), 148.

beyond individualistic approaches to mitigating burnout, systems and organizations can become proactive in creating burnout-resilient workplaces. To this end, it is essential to address systemic burnout from an organizational leadership level.

### **Defining the Processes and Principles of Personal and Systemic Change**

Organizational change is difficult to produce without buy-in from leaders and participants within the organization. To create a burnout ministry culture requires intentional leadership and relational influence that includes formal and informal leadership. In the following section, aspects of Adaptive Leadership will be analyzed as a way to influence organizational change to combat burnout.

#### *Adaptive Leadership*

The form of leadership that best addresses the issue of organizational burnout is Ronald Heifetz's Adaptive Leadership model. Adaptive Leadership moves beyond temporary fixes and instead focuses on changing the ethos of an organization by creating lasting, "adaptive" change within individuals in an organization. By offering diagnostic and action steps, this form of leadership creates clear pathway toward change. Adaptive Leadership is defined as "The practice of mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges and thrive."<sup>174</sup> This model of leadership is specifically designed to address problems without quick, technical fixes in order to address underlying systemic challenges by

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<sup>174</sup> Ronald A. Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Martin Linsky. *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2009), 14.

making lasting adaptive changes in organizations, specifically through helping people change their thinking surrounding problems within the organization.

Utilizing this approach to mitigate burnout avoids the temptation of abating symptoms, and creates space and focus to deal with the underlying cause of burnout. In other words, rather than treating the individual experiences of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal satisfaction, adaptive leadership reframes the adaptive challenge of changing broken systems that propagate ministry burnout. By honing the various aspects of adaptive leadership within a ministry, leaders can work to mitigate burnout by creating a healthy ethos in which ministers can honestly embrace their limitations and provide sustainable ministry in a life-giving context. The various components of adaptive leadership can be broken into areas of diagnosis and action.<sup>175</sup>

### *Diagnosis*

*Get on the Balcony.* The first step in adaptive leadership is to gain a new perspective that creates greater insight, providing the necessary information to find a path forward. The process of “getting on the balcony” encourages leaders to step away from the fray of frontline ministry, inviting them to gain a sweeping, higher perspective. This perspective would certainly include working to understand the biblical view of humanity, character, and end goals of ministry. This process of withdrawing to see with clarity allows leadership to discern what are necessary components of ministry, and what are expendable. In light of a biblical anthropology, it is necessary to see beyond the current

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<sup>175</sup> Peter Northhouse took the elements of Adaptive Leadership, organizing them into diagnosis and action in his book, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 8th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2019), 263.

ministry context, and include the depth of integrating biblical truths into present ministry circumstances.

*Identify and Diagnose the Adaptive Challenges.*<sup>176</sup> The second step of diagnosis is identifying and diagnosing adaptive challenges. This involves parsing out the technical challenges from the more complex adaptive challenges. Ronald Heifetz defines technical challenges as “a mode of action required to deal with routine problems.”<sup>177</sup> This leadership approach values the practical technical fixes that exist in every organization. He further describes technical challenges as “that demand innovation and learning... providing a framework for assessing resources and developing a leadership strategy depending upon whether one has or does not have authority.”<sup>178</sup> This level of clarity helps create focus and inspire innovation toward people-centered aspects in need of change. The process of parsing out technical and adaptive challenges also creates the opportunity to create organizational change rather than mere behavioral compliance on an individualistic level. Once diagnosis is complete, adaptive leadership provides key points of action.

#### *Action*

*Regulate Distress.*<sup>179</sup> A key element of adaptive leadership is its focus on creating safe “holding environments” where ministry leaders can navigate the dangers, challenges, and opportunities of ministry. These holding environments are relational spaces where

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<sup>176</sup> Northhouse, 263.

<sup>177</sup> Ronald A Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 8, Kindle.

<sup>178</sup> Northhouse, 263.

<sup>179</sup> Northhouse, 265.

the tensions of change can be safely expressed without damaging other people or the ministry. This act of leadership involves discerning how much change and challenge people can take as adaptive challenges are identified and addressed. This process of holding others' tensions "has some similarities to the way a mother and father hold their newborn and maturing children."<sup>180</sup> As such, this nurturing, pastoral role is best done by leadership who are spiritually sensitive and responsive to the emotional needs of those they lead. Within this task of regulating distress, ministers are invited to be vulnerable and honest with their struggles as they reorient themselves toward a healthier pathway of ministry.

*Maintain Disciplined Attention.*<sup>181</sup> The next important task is for the leader to continue to bring the focus back to the adaptive challenge, rather than getting distracted by technical challenges. In this process, the leadership must consistently cast vision, reorienting people toward the adaptive change that must take place. This involves creating rhythms and cultural norms that keep the adaptive challenge central in ministry. For those I serve with at Portland Rescue Mission, this process involves reminding ministers that they are not in the place of God. While God uses them as instruments of redemption in our ministry, the adaptive challenge is cultivating a relentless focus on surrendering to God and honoring human limitations as the chief responsibilities of ministry.

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<sup>180</sup> Heifetz, 104.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 267.

*Give the Work Back to the People.*<sup>182</sup> A third key element in adaptive leadership involves delegating the work of adaptive change back to the people. In a safe holding space, leaders must prayerfully allow people to do the work of creating rhythms and practices to keep them focused on how their individual work contributes to the overall ministry of the organization. As Heifetz puts it, “Leaders mobilize people to face problems, and communities make progress on problems because leaders challenge and help them do so.”<sup>183</sup> While the leader can maintain disciplined attention, it is the work of the ministers to create change through learning and experiencing new ways of doing ministry that stave off the temptation to be self-reliant, leading to burnout.

*Protect Leadership Voices from Below.*<sup>184</sup> The final action point of adaptive leadership involves intentionally inviting all people in the system to have a significant voice in addressing the adaptive challenge. In my ministry, this means creating genuine interest, trust, and desire in front-line ministers who do not usually have places of influence in the organization. Listening, validating, and advocating for their voices and experiences create a more holistic approach to identifying and addressing adaptive challenges.

### *Spiritual Formation: A Model for Personal and Systemic Change*

While adaptive leadership provides the trellis upon which adaptive challenges can be defined and addressed, the task of creating true personal and organizational change must include more than teaching; it requires transformation at a deeper level. Accurate

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<sup>182</sup> Heifetz, 269.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 274.

and pertinent information about burnout mitigation only go so far. Until this information is integrated into personal experience, impacting an organization's ethos, it remains ineffectual. True integration requires addressing beliefs, emotions, and actions.

For any change to occur, action must be properly founded on the acknowledgement of emotions, which are sourced in a belief system. Achieving enduring change in belief systems requires a commitment to spiritual formation. Jeffrey Greenman defines spiritual formation as the, "continuing response to the reality of God's grace shaping us into the likeness of Jesus Christ, through the work of the Holy Spirit, in the community of faith, for the sake of the world."<sup>185</sup> This definition of spiritual formation encapsulates the essential components of holistic change, which can mitigate ministerial burnout.

Much like adaptive leadership, this response to God's grace focuses on the process rather than the outcome. Focusing on grace as the foundational concept of transformation creates room and expectation for the Holy Spirit to create internal change in beliefs and emotions, ultimately leading to new actions. God's grace replaces human effort as ministers focus on responding to the shaping influence of the Gospel in their own ministry. Instead of taking on the burden of saving souls or earning God's favor, ministers are instead free to rest in God's finished work. By relying on God's grace, ministers can work in a place of spiritual surrender rather than frenetic anxiety.

The intended purpose of this formation is to bring ministers into holistic alignment with the likeness of Jesus Christ. This includes aligning their orthodoxy,

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<sup>185</sup> Jeffrey P. Greenman, *Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective: Classic Issues, Contemporary Challenges in Life in the Spirit: Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective*, ed. Jeffrey P. Greenman and George Kalantzis (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 24.

orthopathy, and orthopraxy in conformation to Christ, who perfectly embodied healthy ministry limitations as evidenced in the Gospels. This process of becoming godly helps elucidate the danger of trying to become god-like, dishonoring their human limitations. When godliness becomes the goal, it allows room for ministers to surrender to the truth that only God can save the world. This transformational process is the work of the Holy Spirit as believers are transformed into God's image by beholding the glory of Jesus Christ, becoming that which they behold.<sup>186</sup>

Finally, this definition of spiritual formation highlights the importance of transformation within the community of believers. In ministry, a primary path to burnout comes as men and women fool themselves into thinking they must shoulder the responsibility of ministry alone. As Dr. MaryKate Morse teaches, "Without community, vision consumes you."<sup>187</sup> By engaging in spiritual formation in community, ministers can combat the temptation toward self-reliance and cultivate teachability through humility.

## Conclusion

In summary, burnout cannot be remedied by merely addressing the individual elements of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal satisfaction. A biblical anthropology is required to uncover the underlying cause of burnout, which is believing the ancient lie that humanity can live and provide ministry as if they were God. Burnout exists as the consequence of dishonoring our human limitations on power,

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<sup>186</sup> 2 Cor. 3:17

<sup>187</sup> MaryKate Morse, Portland Seminary Doctor of Ministry Spring Face-to-Face Intensive, Cohort 4, *Essentials for Spirit Formation Discussion*, Cannon Beach, OR, March 4, 2019.

knowledge, and dependence. Thus, it is necessary to return to a biblical view of ministry that values character rather than production, and faithfulness over fruit production. To that end, utilizing adaptive leadership creates potent opportunities for leaders to address a burnout culture by addressing and diagnosing the adaptive challenges that perpetuate a burnout culture. In order to integrate these personal and systemic changes in ministry, it is essential to address these issues through individual and communal spiritual formation. The following sections outline a spiritual formation program that integrates adaptive leadership and biblical anthropology in a taxonomic approach that leads to individual spiritual growth and organizational transformation.

## SECTION 4:

### ARTIFACT DESCRIPTION

The artifact that will implement the ideas of this dissertation is a spiritual formation program entitled “Refine: Navigating the Crucible of Ministry without Getting Burned Out.” The theme of a refiner’s fire has been with me since the beginning of this doctoral journey, and it seemed fitting that it would also be the fruition of this doctoral program and dissertation. The fire of ministry can either be a dangerous inferno leading to burnout, or a meaningful flame that can purify and strengthen the soul of ministry leaders.

Refine is a spiritual formation program intended to function within any Christian 501(c)(3) ministry organization, including local churches and parachurch ministries.<sup>188</sup> The primary audience for Refine is ministry leaders who are at-risk of experiencing ministry burnout. Refine consists of sixteen sessions over the course four months. Eight of the sessions are one-on-one sessions with a qualified chaplain or spiritual leader. The remaining eight sessions occur within a small group setting, also led by a qualified pastor or spiritual leader. These small groups range in size between three and five participants, not including the group leader.

The group leader incorporates elements of adaptive leadership as they work through the various processes of Refine. The primary role of the leader is to host a space in which spiritual formation and communal transformation can occur. This includes creating a distraction-free environment where participants experience separation from the

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<sup>188</sup> While this program is easily adapted to any 501(c)(3) Christian ministry, it was originally developed for Direct Ministry staff members at the Portland Rescue Mission’s Burnside Shelter.

constant demands of their ministry. In this space, the leader invites participants to see their lives and ministries from a different perspective where biblical truths are integrated, and false beliefs are released. The leader also helps participants discern areas of their lives and ministries in need of adaptive change. Thus, instead of following a rote curriculum, Refine allows the spiritual leader to elucidate the underlying adaptive challenges to spiritual thriving, rather than merely offering technical fixes.

In creating a holding space that regulates distress, the leader seeks to maintain a healthy level of stress that is manageable, supportive, and challenging to individuals and groups as they work through this spiritual formation program. The leader also brings disciplined focus and attention to the adaptive challenges. These challenges are presented to participants with a focus on how the Holy Spirit is shaping them individually and corporately. For the first process, I will lead Direct Ministry staff from Portland Rescue Mission's Burnside Shelter through the Refine program.

The content of Refine, which is outlined in the following section, is structured with an ongoing interplay between learning biblical truths, introspection and application of truth, and a plan to live out those truths in measurable, tangible ways. The program also holds the balance of experiencing spiritual formation on individual and communal levels. Since the transmission of information is not enough to cultivate spiritual transformation, these various modes of interaction seek to create a sacred space where the Spirit of God can move within the individual and community, cultivating growth and maturity on individual and corporate levels. The three specific areas of growth focus on right beliefs (orthodoxy), right feelings (orthopathy), and right actions (orthopraxy). Refine invites participants to allow Scripture to renew and purify their beliefs. Next,

Refine utilizes solitude, one-on-one connection, and communal settings to help reform emotions around right beliefs. Finally, Refine offers practical steps through a Rule of Life that helps participants embody their new beliefs and emotions on an individual and communal level.

Since my field research revealed an unspoken fear about struggling with burnout in front of managers and directors, these groups maintain a separation between ministers and their direct managers. In so doing, it creates a space for people to engage with honesty, and without fear of retribution. In conjunction with this managerial separation, the small groups consist of ministers and staff who serve in similar capacities. Thus, for Portland Rescue Mission, there will be a distinction between groups in Direct Ministry and those in Indirect Ministry. Keeping consistency with participants helps to create a level of limbic resonance, which aids in the process of formation.

These one-on-one meetings, as well as the group formation meetings, occur during staff work hours in a designated staff care room. The Director of Hope Ministries and the executive leadership of Portland Rescue Mission have supported the first implementation of Refine in an attempt to address and mitigate burnout among employees. Hosting a space on-site and integrating these meetings into regular work hours remove the potential barriers of time and cost associated with an external space.

## SECTION 5:

### ARTIFACT SPECIFICATION

#### **Artifact Goals**

The goal of Refine is to help ministers thrive in their current ministry contexts by identifying and mitigating the causes of ministry burnout. The desired outcome is for participants of Refine to successfully identify and live within healthy limitations in their lives and ministries. Though Refine outlines the first steps of ministering with healthy boundaries, it is clear that the risk of ministry burnout is a constant threat for every person in ministry. Thus, Refine helps identify a “Rule of Life,” which will serve as a trellis upon which ministers’ reliance and relationship with God can continue to grow.<sup>189</sup> This rule of life includes measurable, actionable practices that beckon accountability and transparency. It is also understood that a participant of Refine can reenroll in the program as a form of accountability and continued spiritual growth.

These goals of identifying and mitigating ministry burnout are measured in a variety of ways. First, before beginning Refine, each participant fills out a ministry burnout assessment that measures levels of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal satisfaction. Second, there is a monthly assessment based on observable vital behaviors. Third, there is an assessment survey halfway through the process to evaluate the efficacy of the program and invite input from the participants about how the process could be more impactful. Fourth, the final meeting includes an evaluative

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<sup>189</sup> Ken Shigematsu, *God in My Everything: How an Ancient Rhythm Helps Busy People Enjoy God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 2013), 215.

questionnaire that compares their responses from their first assessment in order to elucidate tangible growth areas. Finally, a focus group with participants and management staff is conducted upon completion of the first round of Refine.

### **Audience**

The general audience for Refine is ministers in any 501(c)(3) organization, including local churches and parachurch organizations. The specific audience is direct ministry staff at Portland Rescue Mission's Burnside Shelter. For many at the Burnside Shelter, this is their first experience in paid professional ministry. Experiencing the demands of ministry without a helpful framework to honor their human limitations can create negative experiences that leave new ministers jaded or traumatized by ministry. Thus, Refine is designed to equip those in ministry with the tools, resources, and supportive community to thrive in ministry with vibrancy and longevity. While new believers can grasp the basic idea of honoring their limitations and humanity, Refine invites ministers of every maturity level to engage in a spiritual formation process that combats burnout. In working with ministers in Christian organizations or churches, it is also assumed that participants hold the Bible as an authoritative source of truth.

### **Scope and Content**

Refine is a spiritual formation program that provides biblical truth in the context of supportive community to identify and mitigate the dangers of ministry burnout. The sessions are structured in a way that builds on one another in content and depth. Beyond the mere transmission of information, this program seeks to create a sacred space where individuals and groups can experience the refining power of the Holy Spirit, helping them

navigate the struggles of ministry in a way that produces character and endurance rather than leading to ministry burnout. The program curriculum serves to create a theological and spiritual foundation upon which the leader and participants prayerfully consider how this is meant to impact their current ministry contexts. This program includes visual and kinesthetic learning—a printed e-book and a reflection journal—auditory learning via stories and group processing, and individual and group learning environments.

The following section outlines the sixteen meetings. The full details can be found in the Appendix in the completed Artifact.

1. Refine – Meeting 1 (Individual)

- a. Topic: Vision
- b. Goal: To “climb the balcony” in order to gain a sweeping view of the current ministry context
- c. Illustration: Lewis and Clark – Discovering the Northwest Passage and Pacific Ocean
  - i. In the midst of the monotonous grind of traveling, hunting, bugs, and survival, these explorers had a driving vision that motivated them to place their hardships in the context of their overall mission
- d. Application:
  - i. What is the overall mission that brought you to work in this ministry in the first place?
  - ii. Is that a vision that has faded over time?
  - iii. What makes it hard to maintain this vision in your day-to-day ministry?

- iv. You are invited to recast the vision that put your struggles in context
  - e. Scriptural Meditation: Hebrews 12:1–3
  - f. Formation Work:
    - i. Prayerfully consider what God has invited you to in this ministry
    - ii. Are you willing to climb the hills to maintain that vision that keeps your mission alive? What will it cost you to do that?
2. Refine – Meeting 2 (Group)
- a. Topic: Vision
  - b. Goal: To “climb the balcony” together in order to gain a sweeping view of the current ministry context
  - c. Illustration: Lewis and Clark
  - d. Group Work Application: What is the vision God gave you from the balcony?
    - i. Are you willing to share that with the others in this group?
    - ii. How do you feel as you picture that view from the balcony?
    - iii. What similarities or differences do you notice about the different visions God has given us?
    - iv. Can you identify the hurdles that will stop you from keeping in touch with that vision?
    - v. What needs to change in order for you to continue to minister with health?

- e. Scriptural Meditation: Hebrews 12:1–3
- f. Formation Work: Introduction of a Rule of Life
  - i. Vital behaviors that keep us alive and healthy

### 3. Refine – Meeting 3 (Individual)

- a. Topic: Temptation to burn out by being omnipotent
- b. Goal: Uncovering the origins of sin in the dishonoring of our humanity in Gen. 3
- c. Illustration: Charles Spurgeon – Good wheat and little fields
  - i. In ministry, there are many who assume they are called to achieve the biggest and the best. A young preacher once came to Charles Spurgeon, dismayed that he was unable to preach like him and grow his church. Spurgeon counseled, “Be content to talk to one or two in a cottage; very good wheat grows in little fields.”
- d. Application:
  - i. The temptation to live beyond limits is an echo of the ancient temptation, “You will not die”<sup>190</sup>
  - ii. What areas of your ministry do you feel the temptation to overextend yourself?
    - 1. Where do these expectations stem from?
    - 2. How do you feel when you are unable to achieve your goals?

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<sup>190</sup> Gen. 3

- iii. What “little field” do you sense God is calling you to tend?
  - iv. What things are you able to control, and what things are you required to place in God’s hands?
- e. Scriptural Meditation: Matthew 5:1–11
- f. Formation Work:
  - i. Ask the Holy Spirit to illuminate areas where you have overextended yourself
  - ii. What expectations need to be adjusted in order for you to feel more contentment?

- 4. Refine – Meeting 4 (Group)
  - a. Topic: Temptation to burn out by trying to be omnipotent
  - b. Goal: Uncover the root temptations to live beyond our limits that lead to burnout
  - c. Illustration: Charles Spurgeon – Good wheat in little fields
  - d. Group Work Application: In your respective ministries, what places do you feel the temptation to overextend yourselves?
    - i. Are you willing to share that with the others in this group?
    - ii. How does it make you feel when you are able to achieve?
    - iii. How does it feel when you are unable to achieve this goal?
    - iv. Does your experience of God’s grace grow or diminish as you pursue these goals?

- v. What needs to change in order for you honor your human limitations in this ministry?
- e. Scriptural Meditation: 1 Kings 19:1–13
- f. Formation Work: Rule of Life
  - i. Corporate Sabbath behavior that enforces a healthy honoring of limitations

#### 5. Refine – Meeting 5 (Individual)

- a. Topic: Temptation to live and minister independent from God and others (independence)
- b. Goal: To identify the ways we seek to live and do ministry apart from God
- c. Illustration: The story of Moses and burnout
  - i. After leading the entire nation of Israel out of slavery in Egypt, Moses attempted to be the only minister, the sole representative of God to the people. From morning until evening, Moses attempted to judge and minister alone. Jethro wisely identifies the unsustainable practice: “The thing is too heavy for you. You are not able to do it alone”<sup>191</sup>
- d. Application:
  - i. The temptation to be independent of God (and others) is an echo of the ancient temptation to be like God—sovereign and omnipotent

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<sup>191</sup> Exod. 18:18

- ii. What areas of your ministry are you attempting to carry all on your own?
  - iii. What false beliefs make you feel like you must shoulder these burdens alone?
- e. Scriptural Meditation: Exodus 18:13–27
- f. Formation Work:
  - i. Prayerfully consider where you feel isolated in your ministry
  - ii. Consider who God has placed around you to help you carry that burden
  - iii. Determine how and when others can help you carry that ministry burden

#### 6. Refine – Meeting 6 (Group)

- a. Topic: Fighting for dependence on God and others
- b. Goal: To identify the ways we seek to live and do ministry apart from God
- c. Illustration: Moses and Jethro
- d. Group Work Application: Where have you felt isolated or alone in your respective ministry areas?
  - i. Are you willing to share that with the others in this group?
  - ii. What areas do you struggle to include others in your ministry?
  - iii. What areas do you struggle to include God in your ministry?
- e. Scriptural Meditation: Exodus 18:13–27
- f. Formation Work: Rule of Life

- i. What vital behavior will serve to keep you regularly grounded in community as you continue your ministry?

7. Refine – Meeting 7 (Individual)

- a. Topic: Fighting the temptation to know everything (omniscience)
- b. Goal: Discover healthy boundaries with knowledge and information
- c. Illustration: The ubiquity of information and media
  - i. Recent polls reveal that the average US-American spends between ten and fourteen hours in front of screens every day
  - ii. Average US-Americans consume fifty times more information per day than people one generation ago
- d. Application:
  - i. The overconsumption of information echoes the ancient sin that we can regulate knowledge apart from God, “Your eyes will be opened”<sup>192</sup>
  - ii. How does it make you feel when you are constantly plugged in to social media and the 24-hour news cycle?
  - iii. What does it benefit you to create boundaries with screens and technology?
  - iv. What would it cost you to remove these things from your life?
- e. Scriptural Meditation: Ecclesiastes 1:18
- f. Formation Work:

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<sup>192</sup> Gen. 3

- i. Prayerfully consider how technology and information has severed your connection with God
- ii. By limiting your screen time and information consumption, you will create more space in your life. How can you use that space and time to experience God?

#### 8. Refine – Meeting 8 (Group)

- a. Topic: Honoring human limitations by not needing to know all things
- b. Goal: Discover ways to create boundaries with screen, technology and information
- c. Illustration: Exponential increase of technology and information
- d. Group Work Application: Honoring human limitations with information boundaries
  - i. What limits have you been compelled to set for your consumption of information and technology?
  - ii. Would you be willing to share that with the others in this group?
  - iii. Can you identify the hurdles that will stop you from keeping those commitments?
  - iv. What will you add to your life to fill that void?
- e. Scriptural Meditation: Romans 1:22–25
- f. Formation Work: Rule of Life
  - i. What daily, weekly, or monthly rhythm will create distance margin and space for you to experience God?

### 9. Refine – Meeting 9 (Individual)

- a. Topic: Character versus Production
- b. Goal: To discover the Biblical call for leadership
- c. Illustration: Saul versus David
  - i. Many assume that the outward appearance signifies value. Saul was chosen based on his stature, while David was truly a man after God's own heart
- d. Application:
  - i. Can you differentiate the difference between character and reputations?
- e. Scriptural Meditation: 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9
- f. Formation Work:
  - i. Does your ministry value character or production more?

### 10. Refine – Meeting 10 (Group)

- a. Topic: Character versus Production
- b. Goal: To value character over reputation or production
- c. Illustration: Farmer versus Entrepreneur
  - i. One learns to work with the mystery of God and patiently wait for fruit to grow in season
  - ii. The other works hard day and night to produce something of value

d. Group Work Application: How does your ministry acknowledge character growth or production more?

- i. In what ways are people recognized for their accomplishments?
- ii. In what ways are people valued for their character?
- iii. In what ways are you cultivating your fruit of holiness in your life?
- iv. In what ways are you overextending yourself, trying to produce something divorced from your character?

e. Scriptural Meditation: Matthew 9:13; Hosea 6:6

f. Formation Work: Rule of Life

- i. Vital behavior that cultivates character over performance
- ii. Who will you include to help keep focused on biblical character versus ministry output?

#### 11. Refine – Meeting 11 (Individual)

- a. Topic: How Jesus honored his human limitations
- b. Goal: To explore Gospel examples of Jesus Christ honoring limitations
- c. Scriptural Meditation: Philippians 2:5–11

#### 12. Refine – Meeting 12 (Group)

- a. Topic: Following Jesus' example
- b. Goal: Discipleship means following Jesus' example of shepherding
- c. Scriptural Meditation: Luke 5:52

13. Refine – Meeting 13 (Individual)

- a. Topic: Solitude, silence, and stillness
- b. Goal: Learning to withdraw in order to engage in ministry well
- c. Scriptural Meditation: Isaiah 30:15

14. Refine – Meeting 14 (Group)

- a. Topic: Corporate solitude, silence
- b. Goal: Learning to withdraw in context of community
- c. Scriptural Meditation: Mark 6:31–32

15. Refine – Meeting 15 (Individual)

- a. Topic: Creating and practicing a Rule of Life
- b. Goal: Celebrate work and finalize individual practices that honor human limitations in body, mind, and soul
- c. Scriptural Meditation: Hebrews 12:1–3

16. Refine – Meeting 16 (Group)

- a. Topic: Creating as organization Rule of Life
- b. Goal: Celebrate work and develop and begin practicing corporate vital rhythms that embrace human limitations within the context of ministry
- c. Scriptural Meditation: Lamentations 3:40

## **Budget**

The primary cost for participating in Refine will be absorbed by Portland Rescue Mission as they will host the space and allow staff to participate during their work hours. For this first iteration, there will be a total of 10 participants. Each will have his or her own printed copy of Refine. By utilizing Kindle Direct Publishing via Amazon, I am able to print copies of Refine for roughly \$4 (USD) each. I will be request the Staff Ministry department to cover the full cost \$40 (USD) from its budget for staff professional development.

In the event that the Refine spiritual formation program is offered to other 501(c)(3) organizations, it will be offered at \$7.50 (USD) to cover the cost of publication, printing, and shipping via Amazon. Any other costs associated with Amazon, including membership and access to Kindle Direct Publishing and Kindle Create, are already paid in full by my personal subscription, which I indefinitely intend to keep. All related expenses with Kindle Publishing and its editorial applications are included in my existing Amazon subscription.

## **Post-Graduate Considerations**

In considering the future of Refine, I fully intend to further develop and hone the curriculum on a yearly basis. I have also considered whether four months is enough time to allow for substantial individual and communal change. There is certainly a possibility of extending the program to six months, nine months, or even one year. As I work with Kindle Publishing, there is also a hope to offer this program in a digital format to reach beyond the Portland-Metropolitan area. As the program is adapted and honed over the

next few months, I hope to update the digital copy in the Amazon libraries, which would make it available to a wider audience.

My goal is to build on the foundational curriculum, receiving input from participants about what to retain and what to alter. In my research, I have not come across any Bible-based programs that seek to address burnout through an interdisciplinary approach focusing on biblical anthropology, spiritual formation, and organizational transformation. I have spoken to many pastors and Christian non-profit directors who have shown great interest in participating in this process after its completion.

### **Standards of Publication**

This dissertation has been written in accordance with the Turabian style requirements, as required by Portland Seminary. The artifact, however, requires no specific standard of publication, and Kindle Direct Publishing requires no specific formatting in order to be qualified for publication as an e-book (digital book).

## SECTION 6: POSTSCRIPT

The Refine program is complete and began its first process with participants at Portland Rescue Mission's Burnside Shelter on October 26, 2020. This first process consists of ten individuals in two groups of five. I am currently serving as the spiritual leader, providing one-on-one meetings, as well as facilitating the group processes. While still early in the process, many participants in this program have expressed relief as the organization has allowed them the time and space to focus on their spiritual health in the midst of demanding ministry. In previous years, the board of directors and executive leadership had voiced the importance of spiritual health, yet it lacked a tangible medium to affect lasting change at ministry sites.

Due to the chaotic nature of Direct Ministry at Portland Rescue Mission's Burnside Shelter, staff members have had access to licensed, off-site counselors to help process the direct and vicarious trauma experienced in ministry. Participants in Refine report the effectiveness of having the process led by someone who has experienced the same ministry traumas they currently endure. This type of limbic resonance creates a unique relational bond, affirming the idea Refine should be led by spiritual leaders who are native to each ministry. Thus, if Refine is adopted in within other Christian ministries, it may be necessary to create a certification or training for spiritual leaders.

### **Gains and Challenges**

An expected result of the Refine program is that spiritual formation has begun to directly affect the ethos of my ministry site. I had hoped that Refine would reignite a holistic ministry that is fueled by healthy, vibrant spiritual lives. Meetings that had

primarily focused on operations now include the conversation about the spiritual grounding and motivation behind our services and operations. We have recently installed a prayer board that staff can contribute to as we consider how we can support and pray for one another. Also, the desire to grow in spiritual maturity and depth led to the creation of a small staff library where staff members can share books and devotionals that help them focus on homeless ministry as an act of devotion. These specific gains have slowly shaped a new ethos in which one staff member commented, “It feels alive again.”

An unexpected challenge is maintaining consistency in the midst of the Coronavirus pandemic. So far, there is a high level of participation in both individual and group meetings due to volunteer and off-site staff support. Yet, the growing concerns about the Coronavirus pandemic has led to a sharp decline in volunteerism within the last couple weeks. This leaves many gaps that must be covered by staff members, leaving some needing to reschedule or postpone their one-on-one meetings. In light of this challenge, it is necessary to adapt the Refine process’ timelines to accommodate various staff scheduling conflicts. At the time of this writing, one staff member has recently tested positive for COVID-19, and it is imperative to create a contingency schedule that will allow individuals to catch up from previous meetings while allowing groups to continue on at a healthy pace. At this point, the best approach seems to be allowing for a later end date to allow space for absences due to illness or vacation.

### **Future Development**

Leading this group has helped me understand the challenge of offering this program in different settings. The primary difficulty lies in the fact that the Refine program is not simply information that needs to be transmitted. It is a nuanced process of

setting a healthy and safe environment where spiritual growth can occur. To that end, it is important to develop a spiritual leader guide that outlines the goals of spiritual growth. This guide would train leaders to implement various elements of adaptive leadership in a discipleship setting to set specific, measurable, achievable, measurable, and time-specific. Further, it would be important to train leaders in how to deal with the dynamics of leading a small group, including aspects of high control and low control based on the maturity and personalities represented in the group.

### **Lessons Learned**

I have observed the powerful relationship that exists between spiritual health and ministry. They coexist and profoundly impact one another. Thus, it is vitally important to keep spiritual formation at the core of any Christian ministry. The powerful influence from US-American society quietly shapes the expectations and values of ministries, yet it is important to prioritize spiritual health over ministry output. For many who enter into ministries of service, it is usually with the hope to make an impact on others. Yet, God seems to use ministry as a way to impact a minister's heart. By living in humble awareness of one's human limitations, healthy spirituality can flourish and provide a foundation that supports the demands of ministry to others. By fighting against the spoken and unspoken lies of omnipotence, omniscience, and independence, ministers can be set free to serve yoked to Jesus Christ who teaches, leads, and empowers ministers to be under-shepherds to the flock of God.

I have also seen the important role that small groups play in the spiritual formation process. I had initially assumed that the group processes would support the personal growth of individuals in their one-on-one meetings, but the opposite seems to be

true. In Refine, it seems that God works in more impactful ways within group settings. Thus, I now see communal spiritual formation is not simply an optional aspect of Christian ministry, it is foundational.

This dissertation process has illuminated a path forward to address ministry burnout in tangible ways. Rather than simply treating the symptoms of burnout, the solution lies in a deeper transformation that harkens back to a biblical anthropology, which informs how men and women ought to live and minister. I have discovered that burnout occurs when people choose to live beyond their human limitations, pretending to be like God in power, independence, and wisdom. The clarion call is to learn to live with healthy limits. This honors our humanity, and glorifies God, who alone is omnipotent, omniscient, independent, and worthy of all praise. The Refine program curriculum offers a pathway to integrate these truths into lived ministry experience, and can be found in Appendix A.

## APPENDIX A:

## ARTIFACT

*Refine*

A Spiritual Formation Program to Combat Ministry Burnout

*“What is to give light must endure burning”*

—Victor Frankl

If you are reading this, it is because God has called you into a life of ministry. Christian ministry provides a unique joy that is found in no other vocational calling, yet it also demands emotional endurance and spiritual strength. In caring for the spiritual needs of others, it is of vital importance to maintain a close watch on your own soul.<sup>193</sup> As Jesus asked, “What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?”<sup>194</sup> I would ask you, “What will it profit you to have a thriving ministry and destroy your soul in the process?” This program will outline a path for soul care that will help you, as a Christian minister, endure and thrive for the long haul.

In so many ways, ministry is the crucible, the holy fire, which God offers to his under-shepherds as a pathway to become like Jesus Christ, the Chief Shepherd of our souls. While some have found ways to endure the refining fire of ministry, many others have experienced the despair of ministry burnout. In my time in ministry, I have seen this

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<sup>193</sup> 1 Tim. 4:16

<sup>194</sup> Matt. 16:26

crucible serve to purify and strengthen the souls of leaders, preparing them for a lifetime of devoted service to God. I have also seen the terrible effects of ministry burnout, which leave men and women emotionally traumatized, cynical, and hopeless.

What is the difference between these two groups? How are some able to withstand the fiery demands of ministry and others are not? The medical and psychological fields have written much about identifying and addressing burnout on a secular level, yet these approaches lack a biblical basis for dealing with burnout.

This program offers a Biblical approach to mitigating ministry burnout. To be clear—this is not a Bible study. This is an invitation to a new way of life and ministry that honors our human limitations. This program outlines a spiritual journey of ongoing response to the grace of God, specifically for those who have been called into ministry for the sake of the world. As you engage Refine, may it lead to more than an increase of *information*, but instead an abiding *transformation* in which your soul embraces struggle as a pathway toward acceptance and peace. As you journey onward, my prayer for you is that you fulfill God’s calling in your life: to burn brightly without burning out. May your light shine for God’s glory, for your holiness, and for the good of the world.

## Table of Contents

<i>HOW TO USE THE REFINE PROGRAM</i> .....	109
<i>A GUIDE OF SPIRITUAL LEADERS IN REFINE</i> .....	111
Meeting 1 – Gaining the Right Perspective (One-on-one) .....	114
Meeting 2 – Looking at the Spiritual Landscape Together (Group).....	116
Meeting 3 – Uncovering the Roots of Spiritual Burnout (One-on-one) .....	117
Meeting 4 – Identifying Ways Individuals and Communities Burnout (Group) .....	119
Meeting 5 – Dispelling the Myth of Independence (One-on-one).....	120
Meeting 6 – Creating Space for Interdependence (Group).....	122
Meeting 7 – Fighting the Temptation to be Omniscient (One-on-one) .....	123
Meeting 8 – Honoring the Limits of the Mind in Community (Group).....	126
Meeting 9 – Internal Character vs Ministry Production (One-on-one).....	127
Meeting 10 – Creating a Culture that Values Character (Group) .....	130
Meeting 11 – Learning Limits from the Master (One-on-one).....	131
Meeting 12 – Practicing Limits Like Jesus in Community (Group).....	133
Meeting 13 – Practicing Spiritual Disciplines (One-on-one) .....	135
Meeting 14 – Practicing Communal Spiritual Disciplines (Group).....	138
Meeting 15 – Celebration and Planning Next Steps (One-on-one) .....	140
Meeting 16 – Communal Celebration and Creating A Covenant (Group) .....	142
EPILOGUE .....	144

## **How to Use the Refine Program**

This spiritual formation program is designed to be engaged with the help of a spiritual leader who will provide guidance and support during this process. The spiritual leader will be responsible to host a sacred space and time in which you will be invited to consider how Refine might impact the ways you practice ministry. The ultimate goal of this program is to create spiritual and emotional resilience in order to thrive in ministry.

This program utilizes various modes of engagement and learning: one-on-one settings, group settings, individual work (including introspection and prayer), and a tangible call to action, which will be summarized at the end of the program. It is recommended that the group meetings range between three and five people.

Meetings are to occur every week, alternating between one-on-one meetings and group meetings. In a single month, you will engage in two one-on-one meetings and two group meetings. The material is meant to be followed in progressive order, yet the spiritual director can choose to linger on certain processes or move on to other more pertinent topics as he or she feels appropriate. The same topic will be discussed over the course of two weeks.

Each individual meeting will follow a similar rhythm. Time together will begin in silence and prayer. After this time of centering prayer, the spiritual leader will tell a story illustrates the spiritual lesson. Then questions will serve as a guide as you discuss how that topic relates to your current ministry context. Then a Scripture passage will be read, inviting God's wisdom and Word to transform our beliefs, emotions, and actions. Finally, the individual meeting will end with "formation work" that will serve to inform the group meeting the following week.

The group meetings will also follow a similar rhythm. Silence and prayer will begin group meetings. There will be no story and fewer questions to allow the group to interact more substantially. A communal Scripture passage will guide discussion on how the Spirit of God is leading the community toward transformation. Finally, the group meetings will end with a focus on how to build a Rule of Life together.

As a spiritual formation program, you are invited to participate in this holy act of abiding in Christ as you minister.<sup>195</sup> The Holy Spirit has already begun a good work in you, and you are invited to join in that process as the Spirit shapes you into the very likeness of Jesus Christ.<sup>196</sup> Just as botanical fruit grows as the crowning achievement of a tree, so too the fruit of the Spirit will grow in you. Be patient, cultivate the soil, and carry a joyful expectation.

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<sup>195</sup> John 15:4

<sup>196</sup> 2 Cor. 3:18

## A Guide for Spiritual Leaders

The task of providing spiritual leadership for this transformative process is a difficult, yet not impossible, task. As Jesus once described the nuance of the Holy Spirit's work, it is like tracking the wind.<sup>197</sup> While we may not fundamentally grasp the movement of God through the Holy Spirit, we are able to notice the impact of the wind in the environment around you. The trees sway to an invisible rhythm. The clouds shift ever so subtly. The wind caresses your skin, leaving behind a fleeting impression, an influence beyond your realm of control. While you may never be able to fully discern the where the wind comes from or where it is going, you can help others notice ever present movement of the Holy Spirit around them.

As a leader, you must believe that God has already begun refining the souls of those you lead. This leads to a joyful expectation and anticipation. You get a front row seat to watching the Living God convict, comfort, and conform people into the very image of Christ. Your work as a leader is partnering with the Holy Spirit, helping participants move closer to the ultimate goal of conformity to Jesus Christ. This transformation is holistic, impacting their beliefs (orthodoxy), their feelings (orthopathy), and actions (orthopraxy). This sanctifying work is from the Holy Spirit, who helps believers become more like Christ in every way.<sup>198</sup>

Your task as an under-shepherd is helping those you lead become aware of the divine reality that God is transforming their minds, hearts, and lives. This awareness can grow as you create a safe spiritual space where participants can rest, notice, and respond

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<sup>197</sup> John 3:8

<sup>198</sup> 2 Cor. 3:18

to the invitation of God in their lives and ministries. In this process, you are their chief encourager, anchoring them in the hope that God seeks to renew and refine their souls to become instruments in the Redeemer's hands.

Along with cultivating a healthy, safe space for souls to grow, you are called to navigate a path forward, founded on spiritual disciplines. While much of your work as a leader involves intangible, spiritual realities, you must also create tangible, concrete goals that can be noticed and celebrated by participants. These tangible goals ought to be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-based. By incorporating tangible goals, accountability can be practiced. Practically speaking, the weekly meetings ought to inform better ministry.

As a leader, you are expected to understand your own spiritual journey, allowing that to impact the ways you companion participants in this program. The pillars of prayer—solitude, silence, stillness, and discernment—provide a foundation to their spiritual growth process. You must help them build a Rule of Life that incorporates individual and communal spiritual disciplines that will serve to refine their souls, leading to better ministry.

This Rule of Life, founded on spiritual disciplines, provides vehicles of grace, through which participants can deeply connect with God, the True Vine, through whom we have life. As Jesus so clearly taught us, “Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”<sup>199</sup> The Refine process ultimately culminates in a Spirit-led Rule of Life that functions as a spiritual and relational trellis on which ministers can grow, flourish, and stay deeply connect with

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<sup>199</sup> John 15:5

Christ. As you meet with participants from week to week, take note of what rhythms of discipline ought to be included in each participant's Rule of Life.

Pray for those in your care. Share their burdens, honor their choices, and move at a pace they can sustain. Feel free to dwell on a topic longer than the curriculum outlines. Show grace in areas of struggle and resistance. Approach each meeting and group session with humility, allowing the Spirit to challenge and surprise you. Set aside your earthly expectations for those you serve, seeking instead to see them as Christ sees them. Each soul you serve reflects a unique light, a one-of-a-kind presence that can only be sourced in God, the fountain of creativity and grace.

Thank you for your willingness and openness to lead. May this process refine you as much as it refines those you serve.

### **Meeting 1 – Gaining the Right Perspective (One-on-one)**

**Goal:** Remove yourself from daily demands in order to gain a sweeping view of your ministry and spiritual health.

**Story:** In 1804, Meriwether Lewis and William Clark were commissioned by President Thomas Jefferson to explore the lands west of the Mississippi River. The recent purchase from France, called the Louisiana Purchase, encompassed a massive 530 million acres. Lewis and Clark were tasked with discovering a passage that led to the Pacific Ocean.

For eighteen long months, Lewis and Clark provided leadership for a small band of men called the Corps of Discovery. A reading through their journals reveals an almost humorous mundane repetition to their journey: traveling, hunting, fending off bugs, and infighting among the men. When the band of explorers began to lose hope, it was usually tied to them losing sight of the greater mission.

At times like that, Lewis and Clark would do the hard work of climbing the highest landforms in order to gain a sweeping view of the landscape before them. Lewis and Clark's ability to remove themselves and "climb the balcony" provided vision, inspiration, and clarity. It gave meaning to the suffering they, and their men, were experiencing.

Sometimes ministry can feel this way. It can be easy to become so flooded with the consistent and urgent demands of ministry that you lose sight of why you're fighting so hard in the first place. It is now time to climb the balcony and gain a sweeping view of your internal landscape. What is the vision that drives you? Perhaps more importantly, what is the sweeping view God has for you?

**Questions for Discussion with your Spiritual Leader:**

- What is the overall mission that brought you to work in this ministry in the first place?
- How has this vision changed over time?
  - If your vision has changed, what drives you to continue on in ministry now?
- What robs your attention and focus most days?
- What makes it hard to maintain this vision in your day-to-day ministry?

**Scriptural Meditation:** Hebrews 12:1–3

- How did Jesus' ability to focus on a greater vision drive him?
- What does this Scripture mean to you in your current ministry context?

**Formation Work:**

- Prayerfully consider what God has invited you to in this ministry.
- Taking time to maintain your ministry vision comes at a cost. List the various sacrifices needed to take time to tend to your spiritual health and stay connected to your ministry vision.
- What will it cost you to do that?

## Meeting 2 – Looking at the Spiritual Landscape Together (Group)

**Goal:** Climb the balcony together in order to see the landscape.

### Group Work:

- What vision did God give you from the balcony?
  - If you're willing, share that with the others in this group.
  - How do you feel as you picture that view from the balcony?
  - What similarities or differences do you notice about the various visions God has given us?
  - What hurdles might stop you from staying connected to that vision?
  - What organizational or communal factors need to change in order for you to continue to minister with health?

### Scriptural Meditation: Hebrews 12:1–3

- What does this passage tell you about community?
- What do you learn about God from this Scripture?
- What does this passage reveal about your heart?

### Group Formation Work: Introduction to a Rule of Life

- Vital behaviors that keep us alive and healthy

### **Meeting 3 – Uncovering the Roots of Spiritual Burnout (One-on-one)**

**Goal:** Identify the roots of spiritual burnout.

**Story:** Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–1892) has been titled “The Prince of Preachers.” His sermons and writings remain some of the most influential among Christians of various denominations. His larger-than-life personality, coupled with his keen insight and rigorous work ethic, led many Christian leaders to come and glean wisdom from him.

The story is told of a young preacher who came to Spurgeon in distress. He was disheartened and discouraged because he felt like he had so little impact in the church or on the world. Spurgeon replied, saying “Don’t hold back because you cannot preach in St. Paul’s; be content to talk to one or two in a cottage. Very good wheat grows in little fields. You may cook in small pots as well as in big ones. Little pigeons can carry great messages. Even a little dog can bark at a thief, wake up the master, and save the house. A spark is fire. A sentence of truth has heaven in it. Do what you do right thoroughly, pray over it heartily, and leave the result to God.”

Sometimes our hearts desire more than our human limits allow. This temptation to live beyond our limits led to the original fall of humanity in Genesis 3. Satan had convinced humanity that “they could be like God.” The serpent suggested that humans wouldn’t die, could have knowledge to discern good and evil, and ultimately, would not need God to function in this world. By dishonoring their human limitations and trying to be God, Adam and Eve invited death, broken relationships, and burnout into our world.

The temptation to live beyond our human limitations is not relegated to the Garden of Eden. It still plagues us today. Every time you and I believe we can live

outside our human limits in power, knowledge or independence, we will experience burnout.

**Questions for Discussion with your Spiritual Leader:**

- In what areas of your ministry do you feel the temptation to overextend yourselves?
  - Where do these expectations stem from?
  - How do you feel when you are unable to achieve your goals?
  - What “little field” do you sense God is calling you to tend?
  - What things are you able to control, and what things are you required to place in God’s hands?
  - Begin discussion with your spiritual leader about starting a Rule of Life. What areas of your life need to be tended and nourished?

**Scriptural Meditation:** Genesis 3; Matthew 4:1–11

- Where do you see burnout language in this passage?
- What motivated Eve in her conversation with the serpent?
- What motivated Jesus in his temptation with Satan?

**Formation Work:**

- Ask the Holy Spirit to illuminate areas where you have overextended yourself.
- What expectations need to be adjusted in order for you to feel more content?

## **Meeting 4 – Identifying Ways Individuals and Communities Burnout (Group)**

**Goal:** Identify together the ways we are prone to burnout

### **Group Work:**

- In your respective ministries, what places do you feel the temptation to overextend yourselves?
  - If you are willing, share that with the others in this group.
  - How does it make you feel when you are able to achieve your goals?
  - How does it feel when you are unable to achieve your goals?
    - How does your experience of God's grace grow or diminish as you pursue these goals?
  - What organizational change will help you better live within your limits?

### **Scriptural Meditation:** 1 Kings 19:1–13

- What do you learn about how God communicates in this Scripture?
- In what ways are you like Elijah?
- Take a minute to silence your hearts. What is the small voice of the Spirit saying to you now?

### **Group Formation Work:** Rule of Life

- What Sabbath practice(s) will help you stay grounded in your limitations?
- How often will you practice this Sabbath rhythm?

## Meeting 5 – Dispelling the Myth of Independence (One-on-one)

**Goal:** Identify ways you live and minister apart from God and others.

**Story:** Moses had the incredible privilege and responsibility of liberating an entire people group from slavery. In fighting against the kingdom of Egypt, the most powerful nation in the world, Moses was like God (Exodus 7:1). He was the vehicle through which God manifested his unquestionable sovereignty over creation. Through ten devastating plagues and a miraculous escape through the Red Sea, Moses performed some of the greatest miracles of all time.

Yet in just a few short chapters, Moses began to realize the limits of his power. He was caught dealing with the internal personal conflicts of a newly liberated nation. The Bible records that from sunrise to sunset, Moses would sit, surrounded by thousands of grumbling people who brought their cases before him. Moses had become the fix-it man, teaching people the things of God and deciding between all their quarrels.

It is in the context of this exhaustion that Moses receives a visit from this father-in-law, Jethro. Jethro wisely identifies the unsustainable chaos of that ministry. He tells Moses, “The thing is too heavy for you. You are not able to do it alone” (Exodus 18:18).

Moses had fallen prey to the lie that he was supposed to do everything because God had called him to lead. This lie still plagues ministers today. It is easy to adopt the destructive lie that you are supposed to do it all alone. The ancient lie offered to Eve was that she wouldn’t need God or Adam to help her discern right from wrong. In her innocence, she believed she could do it alone.

Today, you're invited to remember that you are not alone. Jesus has called you to lead, but he has also created you to do that in partnership with him and others.

**Questions for Discussion with your Spiritual Leader:**

- Which areas of your ministry are you trying to carry on your own?
  - What satisfaction or security do you get out of doing this work alone?
  - What fears stop you from asking for the help of others?
  - What would happen if you asked someone to help you carry your load?
- In what areas of your life outside of ministry do you carry burdens alone?
- Begin to create a Rule that will help you navigate this.

**Scriptural Meditation:** Exodus 18:13–27

- Do you ever feel like Moses, overwhelmed from sunrise to sunset? What does that look like in your current ministry context?
- How do you cope when you feel overwhelmed by the demands of ministry?
- What stops you from sharing your ministry responsibilities with others?
- What would it look like to allow other people to share you ministry load?

**Formation Work:**

- Where do you feel isolated in life and ministry?
- Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the beliefs that keep you from sharing your burdens with others.
- Ask the Lord to reveal who he has placed in your life as helpers.
- Pray for courage to ask them to partner with you.

## **Meeting 6 – Creating Space for Interdependence (Group)**

**Goal:** Cultivate humility and dependence on God and interdependence with others

### **Group Work:**

- Share with the group the areas of life and ministry where you have felt isolated or alone.
  - What would help you feel more comfortable to receive help from others?
  - What would you like to say to other members of this group who struggle to ask for help?
  - What are specific things for which you'd like to ask for help?
  - What areas of joy would you like others to celebrate with you?
  - What would help and partnership look like for you?

**Scriptural Meditation:** Ecclesiastes 4:9–12; Matthew 18:20

- How do you feel as you envision being braided with others for strength?
- Who is God inviting you to consider as a partner in ministry?

### **Group Formation Work:** Rule of Life

- How often do you need others to check in with you about your spiritual health?
- How often are you willing to partner with other participants?

### **Meeting 7 – Fighting the Temptation to be Omniscient (One-on-one)**

**Goal:** Discover healthy limits to knowledge and information.

**Story:** Recent studies on technology use revealed that the average American spends between ten and fourteen hours in front of screens every single day. Compared to Americans fifty years ago, today's Americans are consuming fifty times more information on a daily basis. The evolution of technology has hijacked human bodies and minds. While technology has evolved at exponential rates, the ethics that look at the moral impact of unlimited technological access lags further and further behind.

As Christians who minister in this new digital age, the ubiquity of technology has been nearly impossible from which to unplug. The constant demands of life and ministry are just a couple taps away at every moment. While you may have heard of the benefits of unplugging from technology for your own emotional and spiritual health, it becomes apparent that this is no simple task. Social scientists, advertisers, and media giants have waged a war to keep you digitally connected. This war for our attention has left a long list of casualties. Our bodies suffer from inactivity, our children and families are neglected, and our personal spiritual growth is stunted.

Hidden beneath the façade of modern technology is an ancient lie. Our thirst for knowledge was originally exploited by Satan. Humans fool themselves into thinking they ought to have unfiltered access to as much information as possible. The cruel effect of this desire to be omniscient is that we become emotionally exhausted and jaded. Our little bodies and minds were never meant to carry the weight of the knowledge of the entire world. The 24-hour news cycle leaves us cynical and concerned about the future of the

world. Social media reveals the hatred and darkness of human hearts. We take on the stress of situations that are completely out of our control. Pursuing too much information creates burnout as we dishonor our human limitations for knowledge.

This meeting will help uncover ways we are prone to burnout on information, and identify healthy boundaries to keep our souls safe as ministers.

**Questions for Discussion with your Spiritual Leader:**

- How many hours are you in front of a screen (phone, computer or television)?
- How does it make you feel when you are constantly plugged in to social media and the 24-hour news cycle?
- What do you think it would feel like to be completely unplugged from technology?
- What would it cost you to remove these things from your life?
- What false belief drives you to think you should be “in-the-know” at all times?

**Scriptural Meditation:** Ecclesiastes 1:18

- Why do you think sorrow and knowledge grow together?
- How does this Scripture invite you to honor your limits?
- What do you feel as you are invited to lay down the pursuit of knowledge? Offer that to God.

**Formation Work:**

- How has technology and information has severed your connection with God?
- By limiting your screen time and information consumption, you will create more space in your life. How can you use that space and time to experience God?

## **Meeting 8 – Honoring the Limits of the Mind in Community (Group)**

**Goal:** Discover healthy limits to knowledge in the context of community.

### **Group Work:**

- Share with the group what limits on technology and information you’ve decided in the last week.
  - How was the experience of setting boundaries with access to knowledge?
- How do you think the rest of the world reacts to people who are not always plugged in?
  - Why do you think so many people seek information and news? What do you think they get out of it?
- What challenges will arise as you choose to set aside the pursuit of information?

### **Scriptural Meditation:** Proverbs 3:5–8

- What does it mean to “not lean on your own understanding” or to “not be wise in your own eyes”?
- Why do you think trust in the LORD is juxtaposed to personal understanding?
- What would obedience to this teaching look like in our world today?

### **Group Formation Work:** Rule of Life

- What kind of habits or rhythms will rejuvenate your mind in healthy ways?
- What activities bring you into a place of surrender and rest?
- How often do you need to unplug from information and technology?

## Meeting 9 – Internal Character vs Ministry Production (One-on-one)

**Goal:** Meditate on the Biblical qualification for Christian leaders.

**Story:** When God liberated the nation of Israel from slavery in Egypt, he made it clear that they were to be special. Unlike the societies and kingdoms that surrounded them, Israel was not to have a king because God was their King. Yet over the course of time, the people of Israel demanded the prophet Samuel anoint a king who would rule over them. As Samuel prayed to the Lord for guidance, God said, “Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them.”<sup>200</sup>

Saul, the first king of Israel was a man who was tall and handsome. He was the obvious pick for someone who was to be leader and king. Yet, the Bible reveals his character and heart to be dreadfully insufficient for the call of leading God’s people. The next king anointed after Saul was small and scrawny, yet King David was described as “a man after God’s own heart.”<sup>201</sup> His desire to lead the people in the ways of God was a more robust qualification for leadership than a handsome appearance.

The Bible tells story after story about the ways people go astray when they choose to judge the world and people through their own eyes rather than with God’s eyes. In the Garden of Eden, Eve was deceived when “she *saw* that the tree was good for food, and

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<sup>200</sup> 1 Sam. 8:7

<sup>201</sup> 1 Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22

that it was a delight to the eyes.”<sup>202</sup> The Book of Judges records a sickening pattern of people “doing what was right in their own eyes.”<sup>203</sup> The Psalmist speaks about the wicked person who has not fear of God in his eyes, and “flatters himself in his own eyes.”<sup>204</sup>

When it comes to leadership, God cares more about your character than your appearance. Taking it one step further, God cares more about the posture of your heart than the ministry products you can create. This week, we will outline the pursuit of Biblical character over ministry output.

### **Questions for Discussion with your Spiritual Leader:**

- How do you differentiate between character and reputation?
  - What things in your life damage your character?
  - What things in life help your character mature and grow?
- How do you feel when people notice your ministry production?
  - How do you feel when people notice your character?
- Who has God placed in your life that can see your true heart and character?

### **Scriptural Meditation:** 1 Timothy 3:1–7; 1 Samuel 16:7

- What makes it hard to see with God’s eyes?

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<sup>202</sup> Gen. 3:6

<sup>203</sup> Judg. 17:6, 21:25

<sup>204</sup> Ps. 36:1–2

**Formation Work:**

- Does your ministry place more value in production or character?
- What “masks” do you wear to protect who you really are?
  - What would it take for you to remove your mask to reveal your heart more clearly?

## **Meeting 10 – Creating a Culture that Values Character (Group)**

**Goal:** Focus on communal character over ministry production.

### **Group Work:**

- From your experience in this ministry, does it seem like your managers value character growth? Why or why not?
  - What makes you come to that conclusion?
  - Where does that expectation come from?
- How has your character grown since you started in this ministry?
- How do your leaders invest in your character?
  - How would like them to invest in your character?
- How might you to honor others' character in your daily ministry?
- Whose character can you affirm within this group?

### **Scriptural Meditation:** Matthew 9:13 and Luke 10:38–42

- Do you identify more with Mary or Martha? In what ways?
- How do you think Martha felt when Jesus responded to her?
- Does your ministry feel more like mercy or sacrifice and why?

### **Group Formation Work:** Rule of Life

- How often do you need others to check in with your spiritual health?
- How often are you willing to partner with other participants?

## Meeting 11 – Learning Limits from the Master (One-on-one)

**Goal:** Understand how Jesus honored his human limitations and seek to do the same.

**Story:** Since the very beginning of Jesus's public ministry, Jesus attracted crowds. The gospel accounts are filled with stories of hundreds of people seeking Jesus in hopes of healing or a miracle. With the authority to cast out demons, power to heal the sick and raise the dead, hundreds of people from dozens of towns followed after Jesus. It is surprising to realize the impact of Jesus's three years of ministry *still* impacts our world 2,000 years later!

Yet a careful observation of the gospel accounts reveals that Jesus did not live and minister relying on his divine nature. Jesus resisted burnout from ministry because he was careful to observe his full humanity. The healthy rhythms of Jesus' life and ministry have been preserved in the Scriptures.

Jesus regularly withdrew in solitude and prayer in order to stay intimately connected with his Abba. Jesus was sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit, allowing the Spirit to dictate his commitments and actions. Jesus did not allow the crowds, his family, nor his disciples to determine the priorities in his life. Jesus slept, ate food, celebrated with friends, accepted invitations to parties and weddings, went on retreats, hiked with his friends, and observed holidays. Jesus lived a fulfilling life even though he was constantly surrounded by ministry needs.

This week we will be focusing on the sweet example of Jesus' life and ministry.

### **Questions for Discussion with your Spiritual Leader:**

- Close your eyes and picture Jesus during his ministry. What is the expression you see on his face?
- How do you think Jesus was able to say “no” to the needs of the crowd and say “yes” to meeting his human needs?
- What kind of relationship did Jesus have with his Father that enabled him to live in freedom from ministry demands?
- What kind of ministry demands in your life feel like Jesus’ “crowds” screaming for your attention?
  - What do you think you will gain by withdrawing in silence and solitude?
  - What will it cost you to practice ministry like Jesus did?

### **Scriptural Meditation:** Luke 5:15–16

- Why do you think Jesus withdrew when crowds demanded his attention?
- What do you think Jesus gained by prioritizing time for prayer?

### **Formation Work:**

- Read through the Gospel of Mark or the Gospel of Luke this week
  - Write down every event where you notice Jesus honoring his human limitations.

## Meeting 12 – Practicing Limits Like Jesus in Community (Group)

**Goal:** Discern how to minister like Jesus by honoring our humanity.

### Group Work:

- Share the summary of your observations from reading through the Gospel this week.
  - What was the most striking observation about how Jesus honored his human limitations?
  - Did the Holy Spirit bring conviction, comfort or clarity about the ways you engage in your current ministry?
- How do you think Jesus experienced his times of prayer and solitude?
  - Do you think you would be able to experience silence and solitude like Jesus?
    - Why or why not?
- How do you think the people around you would respond if they were to see you practice self-care?

### Scriptural Meditation: Matthew 11:28–30

- In what ways are you “heavy-laden?”
- In yoking with Jesus, you’re still working, but you’re allowing Jesus to lead, guide, and provide the power for your ministry. What would it look like to allow him to lead your work this week?

- What do you think Jesus means by “gentle and lowly in heart”?

**Group Formation Work: Rule of Life**

- How do you best experience physical rest?
- How do you best experience emotional rest?
- Create a plan to practice these areas of self-care every single week
  - Include others who can hold you accountable and check in with you weekly

### Meeting 13 – Practicing Spiritual Disciplines (One-on-one)

**Goal:** Incorporate spiritual disciplines as a means of sustaining grace.

**Story:** To be a disciple of Jesus Christ means following him as our Rabbi and Teacher. The Gospel accounts present Jesus as consistently active and engaged in ministry. The Apostle John, one of Jesus’ closest friends, concluded his Gospel by saying Jesus did “many other things... Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.”<sup>205</sup> Yet in the midst of such action, Jesus never experienced burnout.

Jesus faced trials that would most certainly cause the greatest Christian ministers to falter—public scandal about his family of origin, temptation and trial from Satan, consistent animosity from the Pharisees, incessant demands from incredibly needy people, demonic encounters, personal betrayal, and conflict with the greatest empire in the world. Yet Jesus remained stable, emotionally healthy, and overflowing with compassion. His drive and mission were not diminished by these trials. In fact, the Scriptures say that Jesus grew in the face of these troubles.<sup>206</sup>

While some may simply attribute this to Christ’s divine nature, you are invited to realize this type of life and ministry is absolutely possible for you. When Jesus beckons, “Follow me,” he outlines a way of life and ministry you are called to observe and emulate. To be a disciple means participating in spiritual disciplines just as Jesus did. By practicing silence, solitude, and stillness, Jesus revealed that withdrawing from ministry

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<sup>205</sup> John 21:25

<sup>206</sup> Luke 2:52; Heb. 2:10

is just as important as the ministry itself. These spiritual disciplines are a “means of grace,” through which you can receive clarity, focus, power, and vitality in your ministry. Solitude makes you available to God. Silence allows you to listen to God. Stillness brings focus back to God.

This week we will be focusing on the practices of silence, solitude, and stillness.

### **Questions for Discussion with your Spiritual Leader:**

- What do you think Jesus did when he withdrew from the disciples and crowds?
  - What challenges do you think Jesus faced as he withdrew from the constant demands of ministry?
- What comes to mind for you when you think of “disciplines”?
- If physical discipline and spiritual discipline are connected, what do you expect as you participate in these spiritual exercises?
- How does the idea of being still, silent and alone strike you?
  - What, if anything appeals to you about these practices?
  - What makes you feel anxious or unsettled?

### **Scriptural Meditation:** Luke 6:12–16

- Why do you think Jesus entered this solitude before calling his apostles in the next verse?
- How do you think Jesus continued in prayer all night?
  - What do you think it cost Jesus to practice this discipline?
  - What do you think it gained Jesus to practice this discipline?

**Formation Work:**

- This week, choose 3 times in your calendar where you will practice silence, solitude and stillness between 30 minutes and 1 hour.
  - Journal about this experience. Where did you experience spiritual consolation and connection with God? Where did you feel spiritual desolation and distance from God?

## Meeting 14 – Practicing Communal Spiritual Disciplines (Group)

**Goal:** Incorporate communal spiritual disciplines for ministry.

### Group Work:

- Share a summary of your experience of spiritual disciplines from the last week.
  - Was there anything surprising that came as a result of practicing these disciplines?
  - What was the greatest struggle in practicing these disciplines this week?
- What do you think is the most noticeable difference in your ministry this last week?
- How did your experience of ministry change in light of these disciplines?
- What ministry expectations need to change in order for you to participate in life-giving spiritual practices?

### Scriptural Meditation: Mark 6:30–34

- Imagine yourselves among the disciples. How do you feel as Jesus invites you to solitude and rest?
- When the crowds followed after Jesus and his disciples, who provided for their needs?
  - How do you think the disciples felt when Jesus did the work for them?
  - What would it look like for you to continue to rest while Jesus carries on the ministry?

**Group Formation Work: Rule of Life**

- Create a weekly or daily rhythm to practice silence, solitude, or stillness.
  - Where, when, and how will you practice these things?
- What will you remove from your schedule to make room for this in your life?

## Meeting 15 – Celebration and Planning Next Steps (One-on-one)

**Goal:** Celebrate your progress and finalize your Rule of Life.

**Story:** Beauty and grace seem to come as a divine gift of God. Consider professionals who have mastered their craft. Michael Jordan seemed to be able to fly through the air, gaining him the moniker “His Airness.” Misty Copeland’s flawless ballet performances have led to some considering her the best ballerina of this generation. One chess grandmaster described Bobby Fischer’s chess style this way: “I can’t tell you about Bobby Fischer’s style, because perfection has no style.”

It is easy to assume that these people were granted special favor and skill from God. Yet the truth is less miraculous. The path toward mastery always includes a rhythm of life that includes intention and discipline. How can we learn this type of discipline?

The created order has a beautiful way of reminding us how to live. In a healthy ecosystem, vines or plants that are meant to grow upward find a structural support system called a trellis. In the wild, grapevines will utilize anything near them: cliff walls, fallen trees, or even bramble over itself. It is in their nature to seek a stabilizing structure.

In a similar way, you are now invited to create a support structure in your life that allows you to grow upward toward God. By creating discipline and structure, you will bear ministry fruit for the nourishment and joy of others.

As you begin these final meetings, envision the beauty and ease of a grapevine, growing upward with vitality and hope. The purpose of creating a Rule of life is not to create a source of shame and punishment. The goal is not to stifle you, but instead, give

you sacred space to grow, thrive, and ultimately bear fruit for the glory of God and the good of others.

**Questions for Discussion with your Spiritual Leader:**

- What associations, positive or negative, do you have with the word “rule”?
- How do you see the structure of a Rule of Life helping you flourish in life and ministry?
- Do you think you live by an unconscious rule now? What does that look like?
- What rule would provide the most care for your body?
- What rule would provide the most care for your mind?
- What rule would provide the most care for your soul?
- What rule would help your relationships with family and friends flourish?

**Scriptural Meditation:** John 15:1–8

- What do you think it looks like to be disconnected from Jesus?
  - In what ways do you feel disconnected from him now?
- What comes to your mind when you think about “abiding” or “remaining”?

**Formation Work:**

- Finalize your Rule of Life and be prepared to share that with the group next week.

## **Meeting 16 – Communal Celebration and Creating A Covenant (Group)**

**Goal:** Celebrate together and create a communal covenant around your Rule of Life.

### **Group Work:**

- Looking back on the last 4 months, what is the area that you’ve experienced the most challenge and growth?
  - How has this impacted your ministry to others?
- How have you seen the others in this group grow?
  - Celebrate and affirm the Lord’s work in their lives.
- How has your understanding of burnout changed in the last four months?
- How has your experience of ministry changed?
- What areas of your ministry do you feel compelled to reform or change?
- Work with your spiritual leader to create a “Ministry Covenant” that each member will uphold to honor the progress of the group.

### **Scriptural Meditation:** Lamentations 3:40

- Are there any areas of repentance that you’d like to give to God now? List them off in your journal.
- In what ways have you experienced the encouragement and comfort of God from this passage?

### **Group Formation Work:** Rule of Life

- Complete the final assessment.

- Identify and ask at least one other person to partner with you as accountability to your Rule of Life.
  - Give a copy of your Rule of Life to that person and make a plan for monthly or bi-monthly accountability.
- Plan how you will continue to grow after this group is complete.
  - Participate in Refine in an upcoming season?
  - Find a spiritual director?

## Epilogue

The Book of Psalms contains fifteen Songs of Ascent (Psalm 120–134). Many historians and scholars believe these psalms were sung by faithful pilgrims as they ascended the long road to Jerusalem to observe the great Feasts. Eugene Peterson beautifully connects this pilgrimage with the life of ministry: *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*. You have successfully begun a spiritual pilgrimage toward the very heart of God.

This path of spiritual formation is a well-worn path, marked by the footsteps of spiritual giants: Moses and Daniel, Isaiah and John the Baptist, Peter and Paul, Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, Martin Luther and John Calvin, Ignatius of Loyola and George Fox. These, and countless others, offer you their wisdom and guidance as you follow in this glorious path. You are not alone. Your spiritual guide and group journey with you toward these next steps.

The end of this program is not a finish line.

It is the starting line.

You have taken the first steps of a long obedience in the same direction.

At the end of this road lies the true finish line. It is there that I humbly but urgently ask you to cast your eyes. There at the finish line stands the trailblazer, the pioneer and author of our faith. Do you see him there?

He has locked eyes with you. He is pleased and he smiles at you with patience, acceptance, and excitement. He is proud of you and loves you. His arms are open wide as he waves you closer and closer to the finish line. Can you hear him?

Jesus Christ beckons you onward, because you are his and he is yours. Race toward him with focus, endurance, and joy. Jesus is the great joy of our lives, the heart of our ministry, and the glorious goal for which we endure.

May this long road refine you so that as you near him, you will become like him.

May your heart burn brightly for Christ, but may you never burn out.

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.*

—Hebrews 12:1–3

## APPENDIX B: FIELD RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

What department are you currently working in?

(Circle One)

Administration

New Life

Ventures

Facilities

Staff Ministry

Outreach

How many years have you been an employee with this organization?

(Circle One)

0-1

1-3

3-5

6-9

9+

Are you female or male?

(Circle One)

Female

Male

Are you currently serving in a “direct ministry” position or “indirect ministry” position?

(Circle One)

Direct Ministry

Indirect Ministry

How would you rate your overall level of stress related to your work?

0-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

No/Low Stress

High stress

What has been your lowest level of stress at work in the last week?

0-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

No/Low Stress

High stress

What has been your highest level of stress at work in the last week?

0-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

No/Low Stress

High stress

What is you rate your overall satisfaction with your working environment?

0-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

Not Satisfied

Very Satisfied

**How would you rate the following statements?**

*This organization provides support systems and resources to help me flourish in ministry*

0-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

Disagree

Agree

*My managers have a good sense of how I am doing emotionally and spiritually*

0-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

Disagree

Agree

*My coworkers have a good sense of how I am doing emotionally and spiritually*

0-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

Disagree

Agree

*My workload is manageable*

0-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

Disagree

Agree

*I feel appreciated as a member of this organization*

0-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

Disagree

Agree

*I feel my work is meaningful and important to this ministry*

0-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

Disagree

Agree

*I look forward to coming to work everyday*

0-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

Disagree

Agree

*I receive appropriate compensation for the work I provide*

0-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

Disagree

Agree

*Outside of work, I have a support system in place to keep me emotionally and spiritually healthy*

0-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

Disagree

Agree

*I feel well supported by my organization*

0-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

Disagree

Agree

*The longer I work here, the more I want to stay working here*

0-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

Disagree

Agree

*My relationships with my coworkers is more fulfilling than the work I do*

0-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10  
Disagree Agree

*I would consider working somewhere else with comparable compensation*

0-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10  
Disagree Agree

*I feel empowered to set personal and professional boundaries in my work*

0-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10  
Disagree Agree

*My organization cares about me as a person*

0-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

Disagree

Agree

*This organization has a healthy support system to help me cope with stress*

0-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

Disagree

Agree

**Please answer the questions below in the space provided.**

What initially brought you to work here?

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What areas of your work create the most stress for you?

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What areas of your work bring you the most joy?

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How have you grown as a person since working here?

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In terms of pastoral care, what things have your organization done well?

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In terms of pastoral care, what things can your organization do better?

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What would you need to be able to flourish in your current ministry context?

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(OPTIONAL) If my opinion is used in the dissertation, I would like to be mentioned by name:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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