

How to Recognize and Respond to Ministry Burnout
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Burnout defined:

- when passionate, committed people become deeply disillusioned with a job or career (*or ministry*) from which they previously derived much of their of identity and meaning.
 - from https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTCS_08.htm

- A state of mental and physical exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress.
 - from <https://mycounselor.online/burnout-ministry-symptoms-causes-prevention/>

- **3 components of burnout (Dr. Christina Maslach):**
 - **Depersonalization [DISENGAGED]**
 - Cynical feelings and detachment from ministry
 - Negative or inappropriate attitudes toward people, irritability, loss of idealism, withdrawal, numbness
 - Figures prominently for burned out men

 - **Decreased sense of accomplishment [INEFFECTIVE]**
 - Feeling ineffective and lack of motivation
 - Reduced productivity or capability
 - Low morale
 - Inability to cope

 - **Emotional exhaustion [OVEREXTENDED]**
 - Worn out, loss of energy, depleted
 - Fatigued instead of tired
 - Cognitive problems
 - Figures prominently for burned out women

Burnout stats:

- [Barna, March 2022: 42% of pastors have considered quitting full-time ministry within the past year](#)
 - Particularly an issue for younger pastors and clergy women

Interesting NY Times article on pastor burnout:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/28/opinion/pastor-burnout-pandemic.html?smid=url-share>

Recognizing Ministry Burnout

- **3 stages of ministry burnout** (from [MyCounselor Online, Josh Spurlock, LPC](#))
 - **Stressed, Overwhelmed, Crispy**

- **1st stage: Stressed**
 - Characterized by anxiety symptoms
 - Irritable, anxious/worried, higher blood pressure, bruxism (teeth grinding), insomnia, increased illness, loss of appetite or stress eating, unusual heart rhythms (skipped beats, rapid pounding), concentration difficulties or forgetfulness, headaches.

- **2nd stage: Overwhelmed**
 - Characterized by decreasing performance, increased negativity, withdrawal, and self-medicating attempts:
 - Lateness for work, procrastination, dreading returning to work, increased relationship/marriage conflict, decreased sexual energy, persistent morning tiredness, missing project deadlines, social withdrawal from family and friends, cynicism, resentment, increased caffeine and/or alcohol or marijuana consumption, apathy

- **3rd stage: Crispy**
 - Characterized by depression symptoms:
 - Sadness or depression, GI symptoms, mental fatigue, physical fatigue, headaches, hopeless discouragement, escape impulses or fantasies over running away, occasional thoughts of ending your life

Risk factors for burnout and how to respond: (these risk factors can transform stressors into burnout)

- 1) **Work overload:** You are doing more than you can do well. Overwork can feel holy in ministry.
 - **Response:** plan workload, prioritize work, delegate tasks, say no (see Jesus – Mark 1:35, Luke 5:16, Matt 14:22-23), let go of perfectionism and bad theology (all of these reduce workload to match capacity).
 - Weekly 24-hour Sabbath, Annual 2 - 4 week Sabbath, every 7 years take a 3 to 4 month Sabbath

- 2) **Lack of control:** You don't have enough control over demands (email, deadlines, schedule, etc.) or lack a say in decision-making or lack access to needed resources.
 - **Response:** Be curious about what's happening to cause you to feel out of control. Take steps to shift things.
- 3) **Insufficient reward:** You continually give more without recognition or reward.
 - **Response:** Be curious about what you need to feel properly appreciated. Take advantage of rewards offered, like vacation or comp time. Correct bad theology.
- 4) **Absence of equitable treatment:** You or others aren't treated in good faith, promises and trust are broken, sometimes in the name of "doing what's best for the ministry."
 - **Response:** Be curious about what you can do to address inequities and improve relationships around you. Correct bad theology.
- 5) **Socially toxic workplace/lack of community:** You feel like no one cares. You may feel alienated, like a Lone Ranger with no support system.
 - **Response:** Speak up and make requests for what you need in ministry setting/home.
 - Making connections and sharing support helps you complete the stress response cycle—tells your body that the stressor is over (laughing—recall a funny story that makes you laugh, crying, physical affection like a strong 20 second hug or 6 second kiss or playing with your pet). (Drs. Emily and Amelia Nagoski, [Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle](#)).
 - Other tips for managing stress from the sisters Nagoski: Physical activity (shake it out), creativity activities, deep breathing).
- 6) **Conflicting values:** Your values conflict with the organization's policies or behaviors or values.
 - **Response:** Talk to leadership about values. Be curious about whether you need to make a change in ministry settings.

“If you don't want to burn out, quit living like you're on fire.”

--Brene' Brown quoting a priest she met in AA.