

Western

MAGAZINE



FALL 2016 | WHEN MINISTRY DOESN'T GO WELL

WHEN MINISTRY DOESN'T GO WELL

The term “burnout” was coined and popularized by psychologist Herbert Freudenberger back in 1974. Prompted by his observations of attrition among people working in human service agencies, he defined it as “a state of mental and physical fatigue prompted by one’s professional life.” Lack of enthusiasm, cynicism, aloofness, and feelings of ineffectiveness are just some of the problematic dynamics that typically accompany this condition. In many ways, it is akin to an occupational midlife crisis where the “Is this all there is?” question gets asked and no satisfying answer is given. Even though the term is relatively new, the phenomenon isn’t. And because so many people in ministry today, whether paid or volunteer, suffer from it and leave ministry because of it, we decided it would be a timely topic to tackle in this issue of *Western Magazine*.

One of the primary causes of burnout is measuring ourselves by a faulty standard when it comes to defining ministry success. So I offer a summary and personal appreciation of a classic book written on that issue entitled *Liberating Ministry from the Success Syndrome*, authored by Kent and Barbara Hughes.

This issue also includes a range of related articles that take a further look at ministry burnout from various perspectives. Suggestions on how to recognize it and how to avoid it come from the pens (keyboards?) of four members of the Western community. Counseling professor Dr. Ken Logan provides a perceptive analysis on how to nurture the helpful habits and attitudes that build resiliency. Pastoral theology professor Dr. John Johnson, who recently retired from pastoring after spending over three decades in that role, shares what he learned about being able to minister for the long haul despite the inevitable seasons of special challenge. Current student (and co-director of The Verity Fellowship) Katie Roberts shares a similar story from the perspective of a pastor’s wife who also has her own ministry. Chad Hall, director of our coaching program, offers some helpful advice on how to receive (and give) criticism; for words can either build us up or break us down, and therefore need to be chosen (and sifted) carefully. We also provide a list of some recommended additional resources if you would like to dig a bit deeper into this theme.

Finally, we have also included in this magazine the most recent annual report, covering the 2015-16 academic year. Somewhat perplexingly, we experienced a financial loss for a second straight year (this year around \$430K) after significant increases the previous two years and despite increasing significantly the total number of lives impacted by our formal and informal training. I am grateful to be surrounded by such a committed and resourceful team that, by God’s grace, is able to touch so many lives in a redemptively-transformative way with much less capital to work with than other schools our size. We still need to grow our budget in a sustainable way to care better for that team and our facilities, however, while also keeping high-quality seminary training affordable for deserving students. So we will try something different in the coming year, a mini-campaign aimed at infusing some much-needed resources into the system while still honoring our Matt. 6:33 “be a blessing, and some will bless you in return” theology of stewardship. We covet your prayers for the wisdom to be able to model how to do ministry in the most God-honoring way.

May our Lord enable us all to “...not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we will reap if we do not lose heart” (Gal. 6:9).

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Western Seminary strives to serve as a catalyst and resource for spiritual transformation by providing, with and for the church, advanced training for strategic ministry roles.

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FOR BURN



By Dr. John Johnson

I can still remember the evening as if it was last night.

I was approaching my third year of ministry in the Netherlands. I don't remember the exact date, but I do recall it was late. Darkness had set in amidst a long Dutch winter. It was deathly quiet in this old reformed church building. The only sound was the rain off the North Sea that was pelting the windows of my upstairs office. I was not looking forward to the soaking I would endure on my four-mile bike ride home.

What made this night unusual was that another form of darkness was also at work, closing in on me. I have often wondered if it was demonic. All I know is that a sudden, desperate spirit came over me, and in this moment I wanted nothing more than to leave ministry. I remember calling my wife, Heather, and telling her I was done. Looking back, I am also certain that a lot of this had to do with something many pastors face—I was burned out. Or was it a blackout? Taking a page from Barbara Brown Taylor (*Leaving Church*), a tiredness had set in that was so deep it had seeped into my bones. My mind had begun to coast like a car out of gas. I was afraid I would be writing a book like hers.

It's not that burnout is unique to pastoral ministry. Most of the 300+ congregants in my church were expatriates on assignment, working for governmental agencies or corporations. They were the cream of the crop, putting in their own long hours attempting to meet the demands of multinational corporations. And a number of them lived on the same edge of exhaustion. But there is a brink pastors face, one unique to ministry, and one all too many have fallen off.

Looking back, I can see a number of factors that seem to have ganged up in that moment, each determined to push me over. Here are a few that made me think about leaving vocational ministry.

Expectations. Like most churches, my church had high hopes of me. Pastoring an international church, with thirty-five nationalities, you find yourself constantly juggling demands, seeking to satisfy different cultural expectancies. Some expected me to be their therapist; others assumed I would lead like a CEO; and others came with the anticipation they would hear from a gifted expositor. It's different in other churches; expectations are diverse and often vague. Each congregant has their own job description for the pastor.

Unfortunately, some of the highest expectations are the ones we place on ourselves. Fresh from the latest church growth conference, we feel the need to bring change. We also know we will hit the walls of congregational push-back and rigidity. But we have to press forward, for the adage, "What got you here won't get you there" keeps urging us on. It can lead to a driven—versus a called—life. We can also get caught up in the comparison game, along with the need to maintain a certain "persona." We must model a godly life: godly marriage, godly parenting, godly expenditures, godly decisions, etc. Whether a pastor wants to or not, he serves as a sort of reference point, and if he is not careful, he will become a stumbling block to the faith of others.

Preaching. I have always had a love/hate relationship with preaching. I love the challenge, and few things stir my passion like standing in a pulpit. There's simply nothing that, in my mind, matches this divine privilege. But there is this realization that you are expected to stand up and bring a life-changing word from God each week. We are driven by the constant

challenge to "hit it out of the park." And as soon as you finish, you are back on the clock. By Wednesday, you are getting nervous, Fridays can be unnerving, and by Sunday, you are a desperate man in panic mode. (As I think back on this dark night, it must have been Friday.)

Deficits. Most of us in ministry do what we do with limited resources. This is especially true when you pastor

burdens of people; it's the work (and privilege) of shepherding, and it comes with the calling. But compassion fatigue occasionally sets in. It did for me, this night. You become weary, especially when people make really bad decisions. People often come to you after they have made a bad decision or when things are close to the edge: a marriage on the verge of collapse; an investment that is about to go south; a pattern that has now become an addiction. We occasionally are on the receiving end of someone's toxic waste. We are physicians of the soul who do much of our work in the emergency room, where sins are stubborn and the trauma does not quickly subside.

Misunderstanding. Ministry and ministers are especially vulnerable to confusions and misconstructions. "No, I am sorry. You misinterpreted what I said last week in Proverbs 22:6. Just because your kids are living like hell does not mean you haven't been good parents." "No, I am not autocratic, but there comes a moment we have to get out of this valley of indecision." "Yes, I could have used a better illustration. And no, I wasn't talking about you." "My mistake. I did not mean to imply that all Korean food tastes as bad as kimchi."

Elders. Let me just say up front I have loved my elders. But I also realize that the devil will do all he can to divide leadership at the top. Added to my European stress was a South African elder chairman who inexplicably turned on me and determined to end my ministry. I have loved working with leaders, with godly men who have given so much of their time to guiding the church. But church meetings can often leave you staring at the ceiling until 3:00 am.

YOU'RE NEVER FINISHED POURING INTO A LIFE... THERE'S MORE THAT CAN, MUST BE DONE, AND THIS OFTEN HAUNTS YOU IN THE NIGHT.

overseas. Having just retired after thirty-one years of pastoral ministry, there are things I miss, but one of them is not the stewardship committee report to the elders. On the heels of great ministry testimonies, enthusiasm over changed lives, and dreams about the future, the reality that our resources cannot sustain our plans would often leave me discouraged—really discouraged. With few exceptions, most people give too little of their income to ministry, and over time it wears on you, especially if you are given to helping a church think in visionary and strategic ways.

Congregant sins. Chronically difficult people and continually hurting people take up a large part of your time. It's the nature of ministry to carry the

Mistrust. There's a diminishing trust in pastors. Part of it has to do with the declining credibility of the church in contemporary culture. Part of it often has to do with a predecessor's inclination to not work very hard, mishandle the budget, or have an inappropriate relationship. Pastoring in a Dutch culture, I encountered the occasional "Ik vertrouw je voor geen meter" (I don't trust you for a meter). Restoring trust is time consuming. This is why our most productive years of ministry do not happen before the five-year mark.

Incomplete. The work we do is open-ended. My father was a sales driver for Frito-Lay, and every Friday night he locked the door, drove home, and left everything behind. It must have been a wonderful feeling. But in ministry, things stay in front of you. It's Friday, but Sunday is coming. Everything always feels in motion. People ask me when I am finished preparing a message, and my standard answer is, "When I start preaching." But even here, the Spirit seems to be at work while I am preaching, suggesting a change in what I am about to say next (or is this me? Or is it...?). You're never finished pouring into a life; you never feel you have prayed enough. There's more that can, must be done, and this often haunts you in the night. We seldom see specific, concrete results of our work.

More could be said here. Thankfully we do not have to burnout or blackout. And by His grace, I did not that night. We serve a God who never, ever expects that we fall off the cliff. So what prevents the kind of breakdown that forces people out of ministry? Here is a shortlist—

A family who believes in you. Looking back, I am so grateful I had a wife who picked up the phone, listened, talked things through, and urged me to not give up.

A band of brothers who stands with you. The first thing Heather did was call my two closest friends in

The Hague, and within minutes they were at the church. Their compassion and counsel lifted me up, and their perspectives helped me get through the fog. Pastors who have no friends are setting themselves up.

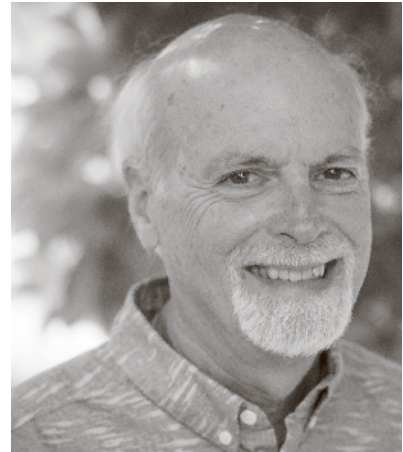
A healthy body that sustains you. Trite as this may sound, one of the payoffs of years of disciplined workouts is a body that can hold up under stress. High school athletics hardwired in me a conviction to take really good care of myself, and it has served me well in ministry.

A personal schedule that protects you. I have always put in long hours and at times have been overwhelmingly busy. But there is a certain rigidity required if we are to press forward. Early on, I set Friday nights for my family. Saturday mornings and Sunday afternoons are off limits to church work. Six and one-half hours minimum for sleep, and time aside for substantive reading.

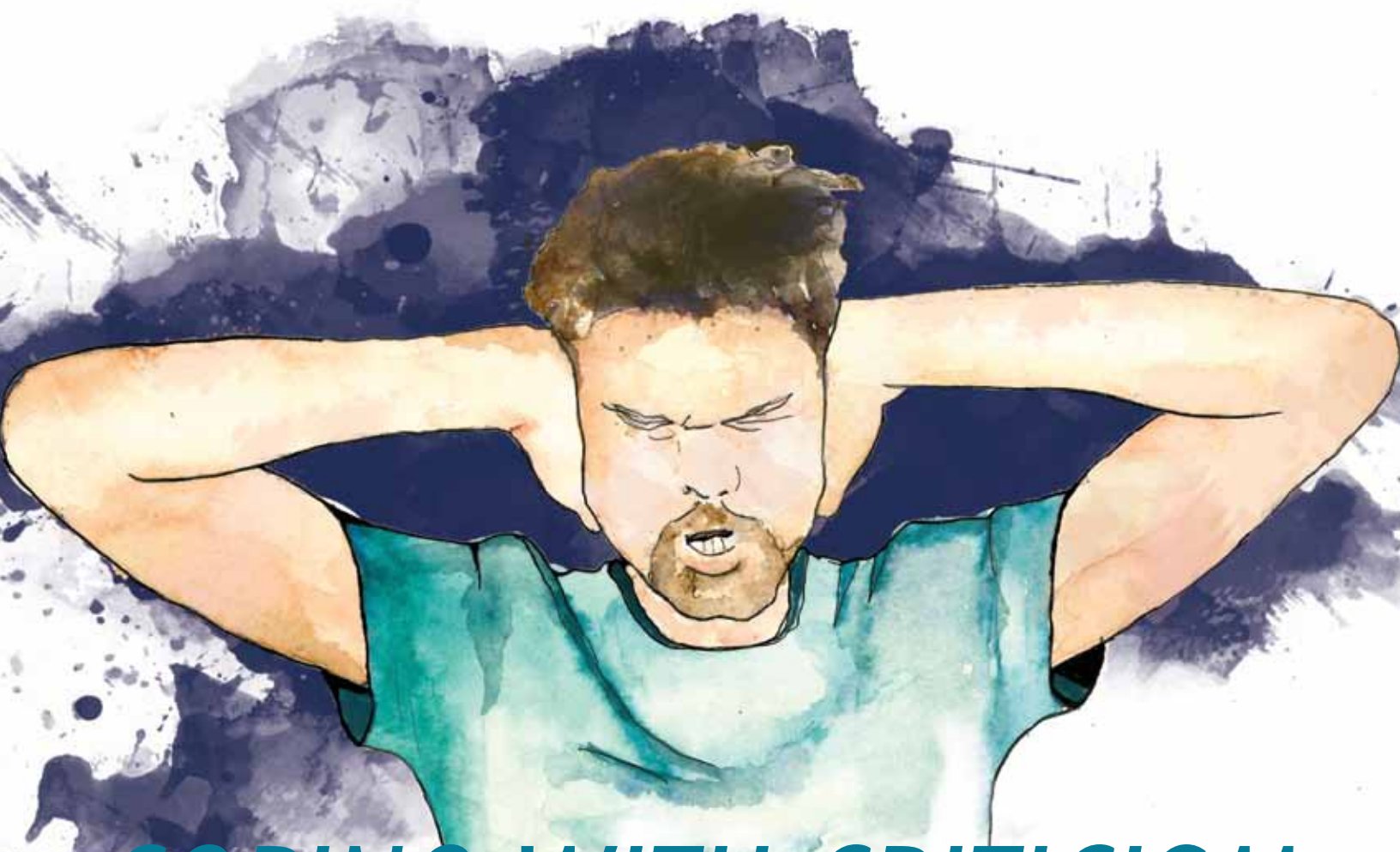
A daily time with God that renews you. One of my recurrent 5:00 am daily messages on my calendar is TWG (Time With God). I have learned, and continue to learn, that compromising this in any way leaves me vulnerable to weariness and stress. A day that begins with spiritual centering guards me from busyness, distraction, and darkness. And it restores what we in ministry desperately need each day—trust.

A priority list that guides you. One of my great friends in the Netherlands was at a conference in London, where his CEO gathered his best team and warned against incrementalism—a.k.a. small changes to small things. Much of what we do in ministry can amount to this (e.g. emptying the inbox and calling it accomplishment; chitchatting in the office hallway and justifying it as ministry; reading the latest political news and chalking it up as study). More than we might realize, all of this can contribute to "crazy busy" which, according to this CEO, is a waste of time.

Still, in the hyper culture we live in, many of us will set ourselves up for this dark night of the soul. We will be inspired by the words, "I would rather burn out than rust out." But looking back, I don't think either is a legitimate choice. Jesus' ministry certainly did not reflect either extreme. He simply calls us to finish well, to come to a place where we can, like Paul, say: "I press on to lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me" (Phil. 3:12).



John Johnson is the former lead pastor at Village Church in Beaverton, OR and Associate Professor of Pastoral Theology at Western Seminary. He also has a strong commitment to building the church worldwide, partnering and teaching ministries in Lebanon and India. Follow his blog at drjohnejohnson.com.



COPING WITH CRITICISM

By Chad Hall, MCC

Ministry is a rich and rewarding vocation—until it's not. For most of the ministry leaders I know, any idyllic notions they had of life as a pastor lasted about three weeks into their call. The honeymoon phase of ministry ends and real life sets in as the tide of warm smiles and kind compliments goes out, leaving behind rocks of criticism and complaint. If you're lucky in ministry life you will be buoyed along with enough compliments and encouragement, only occasionally experiencing the pain that comes from stepping on a sharp rock of criticism. If you're not so lucky, you'll grimace with every step because overly critical people litter your way with painful remarks and sharp jabs.

Criticism is a part of any minister's life, but it's also a reality. Research shows that criticism plays a significant role in ministry malaise. Pastors are quitting at rates higher than ever before, and some of those who don't leave the pastorate are far more miserable than many church members can imagine. Criticism has a lot to do with ministry misery and eventual burnout.

WHY DOES CRITICISM CONTRIBUTE TO BURNOUT?

It would be nice if criticisms did little harm, if we could just let them roll off like water from a duck's back as some of my Southern friends like to say. But it's not that easy. In fact, there are three specific reasons criticism often leads to burnout.

First, criticism lingers. When we receive criticism, we basically go through a variation of the stressful stages of grief: shock, anger, denial, and finally acceptance. Hearing a criticism is not just painful in the moment; criticisms pile up and continue doing harm by keeping us in a stressful state. I have a coaching client in the federal government whose boss fires a dart of criticism at him every few weeks. Just as the pain from one criticism begins to heal over, his boss opens the wound back up with a fresh critique, a harsh word, or a judgment that seems out of line. Each new criticism seems to find company with all the others he's received.

For whatever reason, most people carry around criticism far longer than they do words of encouragement. Like spent fuel rods from a nuclear power plant, words of criticism have a long half-life and remain toxic long after we think we've buried them. So today's criticism gets added to the pile of criticisms from days, weeks, and years gone by, and can renew the pain of those old hurts. All of this criticism from others eventually takes on the voice of the internal critic: that perpetual voice of shame, blame, judgment, and hurt.

Second, criticism has a spiritual aspect. God designed humans to be social beings who thrive in relationship to one another, but criticism can cause us to question those connections. As we're reminded in Genesis, it is not good

Like spent fuel rods from a nuclear power plant, words of criticism have a long half-life and remain toxic long after we think we've buried them.

for man to be alone. When a friend, family member, or co-worker finds fault with us or something we've done, we experience the criticism as a type of rejection resulting in aloneness. Deep down we all want to know that we are accepted and loved; criticism causes us to question our acceptance and doubt whether we belong.

In his provocative book *The Soul of Shame*, psychologist Curt Thompson describes shame as a powerfully painful emotional response to being criticized and judged. Yet this pain is more than just an emotion; it is a weapon in the hands of a spiritual enemy. Whether the criticism we receive is warranted or not, the enemy whispers a reinterpretation of that criticism with the "intention to dismantle us as individuals and communities and destroy all of God's creation" (p. 12).

Third, we are poor judges of reality. Criticism is not just painful; it can also cause confusion because we are often not sure whether to accept or reject it. We can get thrown into a spiritual and psychological tailspin when we debate the merits of a critic's words. Sometimes it's difficult to distinguish feedback from criticism.

I have a client in the software industry whose colleague told him he was too aloof and that he needed to hang out with the rest of the team more often. My client isn't sure whether his colleague is offering good advice or self-centered criticism. He said he knows the comment was painful, but it's not clear if the pain is like being stabbed with a knife, or cut with a scalpel. Should he resist his attacker, or bear the pain of his surgeon? This kind of confusion prevents my client from dealing with the criticism in a healthy way and has led him to try and avoid the colleague altogether.

HOW CAN YOU TAKE THE EDGE OFF AND RECEIVE CRITICISM WELL?

So how can we deal effectively with criticism so that it doesn't contribute to burnout? While there is no magic formula or simple recipe, there are some best practices. See how many of these four best practices work well for you.

First, make a distinction between criticism and feedback; after all, these are not synonyms. Criticism seeks to blame and find fault while feedback aims to improve and build up. Similarly, criticism usually points to the past or to a personal character trait while feedback has an eye for development and improvement. The giver of feedback appreciates the recipient and has hope for what follows the feedback, while the critic just wants to be heard and often does not take into account the feelings of the recipient. Feedback is constructive while criticism destroys.

Unhealthy criticism attacks the person while feedback addresses behavior. The critic says, "You are selfish," while the feedback provider says, "You are acting in selfish ways." Criticism is too often about one's being while healthy feedback is almost always about one's doing. Finding your identity in Christ provides a stabilizing protection against the shame and blame that come from critical attacks of your being and allows you to hear well the helpful input about how you can do things better.

Second, try dulling the pain of criticism by considering the source via wise counsel. The world is full of hurt

people, some of whom are accustomed to hurting others. You need a handful of people who are safe, honest, and can help you decide what criticism is valid and what should be ignored. And if someone is really toxic with his or her criticism, your trusted friends can help address the situation on your behalf.

Third, provide boundaries on feedback to keep it from becoming toxic criticism. Similar to the guardrails on a mountain road, good boundaries allow for the free flow of feedback while at the same time preventing criticism. Your goal should not be to create a roadblock to all feedback, but to guard against abuse, shame, and attack.

I have another coaching client who has a great approach to feedback that really helps him consider the source and keep feedback confined. He is a pastor, and he regularly tells his church that he is open to feedback and wants to hear it. He practically begs for it. He's also clear that the way to provide feedback is to share it with an elder. The elder will take notes and make sure he's heard the feedback accurately. Then the elder will share it with two other elders and together they will determine if the feedback is something for the pastor or really best directed to someone else. If they sense it's for the pastor, they will share it with him at the next elder board meeting where the feedback can be weighed and prayerfully considered in the midst of wise counsel.

Interestingly, the pastor starts every

board meeting by asking, "What feedback do you have for me?" The best way to receive feedback is to invite it and this pastor makes sure no unexpressed feedback sours into criticism.

Fourth, be open to encouragement. If criticism tears down, encouragement builds up. Too many Christians I know actually resist encouragement because they think it will lead to pride. But encouragement is the vaccine and the antidote to criticism. Each of us needs to read God's word and find the encouragement that comes from being a child in God's family. We need to hear and accept the kind words from friends and family, and we need to take them to heart. We also need to develop an inner encourager who can speak the truth of grace and God's provision.

IT'S BETTER TO GIVE THAN TO RECEIVE—HOW TO GIVE FEEDBACK WELL.

Not only is it important that we guard against criticism in order to prevent burnout, it is also necessary to not criticize others and burn them out. One of the best ways to avoid becoming a critic is to instead become very good at giving feedback. By modeling the way, you not only make less of a criticism contribution, but you also train others in how to give constructive feedback instead of destructive criticism. When you



Criticism seeks to blame and find fault while feedback aims to improve and build up.

try to give feedback, you realize it's not as easy as it seems. Here are three basic rules that will keep your feedback from turning into criticism.

First, don't technique people. There are lots of "techniques" for giving feedback, but usually these involve a sort of manipulation of the other person—creating the conditions in which they will hear you, lower their defenses and take the feedback to heart. One of the most popular is the "sandwich method" that teaches you to sandwich the criticism between two compliments. That technique has always seemed less than authentic to me, and I think people can sense the disingenuous "compliments" whose only real purpose is to help them swallow the criticism. If you have positive feedback, certainly don't hold back, but don't pollute it by letting it come in contact with spoiled criticism.

Second, stay focused on behavior and impact, steering clear of talking about character, intent, or the meaning behind a behavior. For example, consider a church leader who pulls the pastor aside and talks to him for several minutes after every church service. A critic might tell the person,

"You're selfish and seem to think you're the only person in the church because you corner me every week and prevent others from being able to talk with me." Giving the person constructive feedback will sound more like, "You might not realize it, but I have a fifteen-minute window each week after church when I need to talk with as many people as possible. During that time, I need to have a hundred or more brief conversations that are vital for helping people feel connected to the church. Talking with you for five minutes means I miss connecting with dozens of families and it's hurting my relationship with them. So I'd like for you to find a different time for our five-minute conversations." Of course there are plenty of other ways to express feedback, but a best practice is to describe the situation, then the person's behavior, followed by the impact of the behavior and finally a proposal for different behavior that will have a better impact on the situation.

Third, create a safe space for feedback. When we experience a threat, our immediate physical response is fight, flight or spit. An unsafe environment does not promote openness and the recipient of feedback will likely want to run away, argue, or reject the feedback. Be aware of your own emotions and how you present the issue. If you're nervous, angry, hostile, etc., you create an unsafe condition for the other person. The more "okay" you are, the safer the situation is for the other person. You cannot control the other person's response, but you can contribute to optimal conditions.

Finally, give feedback rarely and prayerfully. The truth is that most people don't want feedback and are not all that open to it. Feedback is not about getting something off your chest, but about helping someone else improve their performance or avoid sin. In other words, it's about them, not about you. Ask God for guidance and be open to God's telling you to "get over it."

James 3 reminds us that our words are powerful; they can light up a person or burn them down. The powerful beast that is the human tongue is only tamed by God, so be prayerful when considering what to say and how to say it. You are not going to be perfect, so also be quick to ask forgiveness should feedback morph into criticism.



Chad Hall is the Director of Coaching at Western Seminary, as well as the President of Coach Approach Ministries. He is a leadership coach and a writer. His 2015 eBook "The Coaching Mindset: 8 Ways to Think Like a Coach" has spent 20 weeks as an Amazon Bestseller in three categories. Follow Chad's blog at chadhall.com.

2015–2016 ANNUAL REPORT

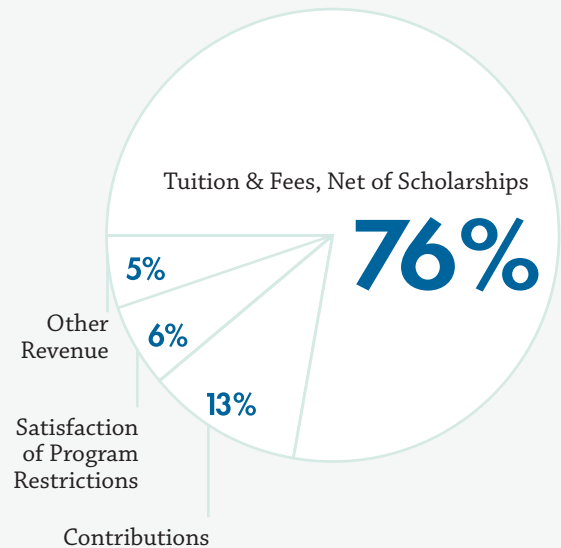
STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION (ALL FUNDS) FOR THE YEAR ENDED JUNE 30, 2016

Assets	
Cash and Cash Equivalents	\$473,981
Accounts Receivable, Other	155,898
Inventory	912,000
Investments	2,663,103
Property, Plant & Equipment, Net	941,352
<i>Total Assets</i>	<i>\$5,146,334</i>
Liabilities and Net Assets	
Accounts Payable & Other	\$278,193
Contracts Payable	456,000
Deferred Revenue	85,168
Gift Annuities & Life Income Payable	155,527
<i>Total Liabilities</i>	<i>\$974,888</i>
Net Assets	
Unrestricted	\$2,089,564
Temporarily Restricted	814,603
Permanently Restricted	1,267,279
<i>Total Net Assets</i>	<i>\$4,171,446</i>
<i>Total Liabilities and Net Assets</i>	<i>\$5,146,334</i>

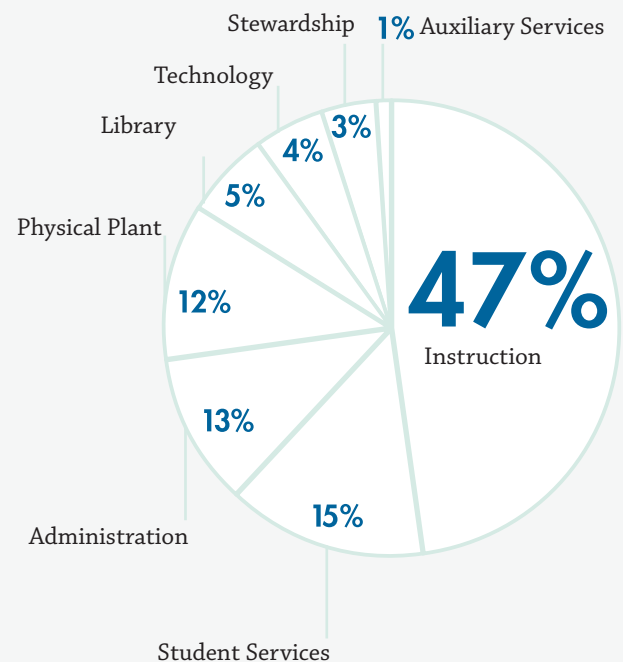
STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES (UNRESTRICTED FUND) FOR THE YEAR ENDED JUNE 30, 2016

Support, Revenue and Other Gains	
Tuition and Fees, Net of Scholarships	\$5,500,060
Contributions	904,012
Earnings on Investments	44,192
Satisfaction of Program Restrictions	412,542
Other Revenue	379,469
<i>Total Support, Revenue & Other Gains</i>	<i>\$7,196,083</i>
Expenses	
Program	\$5,178,094
General and Administrative	2,220,300
Fund Raising	224,446
<i>Total Expenses</i>	<i>\$7,622,840</i>
<i>One Year Change in Unrestricted Net Assets</i>	<i>(\$426,757)</i>

OPERATING REVENUE



OPERATING EXPENSES





THE GOSPEL FOR EVERY TRIBE AND TONGUE

Alice (not her real name) knew in high school, after a short term missions trip, that she wanted to be a missionary. She had no idea that this would lead to working with a remote tribe in Tanzania. After graduating from college, Alice pursued mission opportunities in Africa. However, a number of delays over the next couple of years found her looking to further her education and Western Seminary was willing give her credit for her time in the field. She graduated with her Master of Arts in Intercultural Studies in 2014 and completed her internship and her last two classes in Africa.

The rural tribe in Africa Alice is spending her time with has a population of which less than 1% is Christian. They rely on witch doctors to resolve spiritual issues which, at times, can be very dark. Bible translation and language have been the biggest challenges, as very little of their language is in written form. There are two women who, though they aren't believers yet, love to sing and tell stories through song and are helping Alice tell the gospel story through song.

When Alice and her team first arrived three years ago, the villagers were very distrusting, assuming that the group was there to take something of theirs to make money. Even as they dug holes for latrines, some thought they must be looking for oil or something in the ground that was worth money.

After some time off, Alice returned in the fall of 2016 with a renewed spirit and a team goal to complete the translation of fifteen Bible stories ranging from Genesis to Revelation. Having been there for three years, she returned with established relationships and the awareness of God at work in the region.

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CREDIT STUDENTS

BY PROGRAM

Master of Divinity	188
M.A. in Counseling/Marital and Family Therapy	208
M.A. (Biblical and Theological Studies)	176
M.A. in Ministry and Leadership	84
M.A. in Global Leadership	10
Master of Theology	34
Doctoral Programs	74
Certificates, Diplomas, Non-Degree	145

BY CAMPUS LOCATION


Portland	449
San Jose	201
Sacramento	141
Online	128

CREDIT ENROLLMENT

Credit Hours	Head Count
2013-2014 11,509	2013-2014 973
2014-2015 11,064	2014-2015 921
2015-2016 10,763	2015-2016 919

INDIVIDUALS SERVED | 5,061

Credit, Audit, and Enrichment students (1,160), Center for Leadership Development (579), The Spurgeon Fellowship (960), Women's Center for Ministry (726), ReGeneration Forum (500), Stewardship and Alumni (259), A New Day Counseling Center (443), Continuing Education Units (202), Verity Fellowship (473)



Pastors, youth workers, evangelists, Sunday school teachers, lay ministers, missionaries, Bible study leaders, Christian writers and speakers, and those in other areas of Christian service often face significant feelings of failure, usually fueled by misguided expectations for success.

“LIBERATING MINISTRY FROM THE SUCCESS SYNDROME”: A PERSONAL APPRECIATION

By Dr. Randy Roberts

So begins a classic book entitled *Liberating Ministry from the Success Syndrome*, written in 1987 by R. Kent Hughes (well-known pastor, author, theologian, and a former Western trustee) and his wife Barbara. I was reminded of this book's value as we were working on this issue regarding how to avoid ministry burnout so one can minister for the long haul. For the Hughes' address one of the primary causes of that burn-out: allowing one's criteria of "success" to be shaped more by culture than by Scripture. I will here summarize their insights (and add some personal comments) so you can be introduced to this important book.

In Part One, Kent shares a candid autobiographical narrative describing his personal struggle with this issue of defining ministry success. In the midst of leading a church plant where the prospects for rapid growth were seemingly all in place, the very opposite was occurring: attendance was instead in a disconcerting decline. That led to a crisis of faith in which Kent questioned the goodness, justness, and faithfulness of God, especially when He seemed to be blessing numerically the ministries of others. Flowing from that faith crisis were significant challenges on the emotional and relational fronts. You likely know the pattern.

Barbara tried to help, but her efforts didn't seem to be gaining much traction (one of the helpful contributions of this book is that both spouses reflect upon their experience). Kent and Barbara finally agreed that three key questions needed to be answered biblically: Can someone be a success in the ministry and pastor a small church? (This question can easily be expanded beyond pastoring to any form of ministry in which results can be measured quantifiably.); What is failure in the ministry?; What is success in the ministry?

The rest of the book reveals the answers the Hughes' discovered when they took a fresh look at the biblical data. It wasn't long before Kent noticed a disparity between what Scripture taught and one of the assumptions he had picked up during his seminary training (viz., "if you do this one thing well, your church will surely grow numerically"; in other words, follow this formula and growth in numbers will result). That insight led Kent to this critical conclusion:

"I realized that I had been subtly seduced by the secular thinking that places a number on everything. Instead of evaluating myself and the ministry from God's point of view, I was using the world's standard of quantitative analysis."

So what does "God's point of view" look like in contrast to a

strictly (or predominantly) numerical definition of success? Part Two of the book seeks to answer that question.

First and foremost, it consciously replaces the notion of success with a focus instead on faithfulness (cf. I Cor. 4:1-2). This faithfulness manifests itself in two "essential elements": obedience to God's Word (e.g., Josh. 1:7-8) and (perhaps surprisingly to some) hard work. The latter speaks of the dedication and diligence needed to faithfully fulfill one's responsibilities. Here the Hughes' express concern about a potential over-corrective related to a minister's self-care that could rationalize what is in fact laziness. Their concern, however, seems more focused on not falling prey to a dereliction of duty (because pastors have more discretion in setting their own schedules) than on any prescribed need to burn the candle at both ends. Longtime friends of Western will likely remember how Dr. J. Grant Howard (a former faculty member, now with the Lord) articulated a model of simultaneous vs. sequential priorities in *Balancing Life's Demands* that provides a very helpful framework for giving adequate attention to all God-given roles, relationships, and responsibilities. Howard's model incorporates appropriate self-care without making it an idol or an act of self-indulgence.

Part Two continues with seven additional chapters unpacking a biblical definition of success. The topics of serving, loving, believing, prayer, holiness, and attitude are all treated in turn, with a concluding chapter summarizing how they "...found success in a small church that was not growing. We found success in the midst of what the world would call failure" (p. 106). The Hughes' illustrate a gospel-centered approach in these chapters with quotes like: "When we keep our eyes on the cross, we want to serve" (p. 50); "Before all things, even service to God, we must love God with all of our hearts" (p. 58); "Part of the problem during the dark days in our ministry was faith: I was not believing what I believed [i.e., the reality of what he professed to believe had faded]" (p. 65); and "There are two attitudes that particularly characterize ministry failures: negativism and jealousy" (p. 96).

Part Three is comprised of a series of encouragements sourced in the faithfulness of God, the ramifications of one's call to ministry, the dynamic of experiencing God's empowering strength when we acknowledge our own weakness, the importance of being in a relational network of mutually supportive believers (especially, but not exclusively, important if one is single), and the motivation of



Liberating Ministry from the Success Syndrome

By R. Kent Hughes and Barbara Hughes

Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2008

(orig. 1987)

208 pages | \$13.44

future reward given by God to His faithful servants.

Part Four consists of two chapters discussing how one's spouse and one's congregation can help a pastor be faithful and avoid succumbing to a culturally-defined pursuit of success. The latter group is especially strategic, for pastors are often pressured by some congregational members to achieve (and measure) ministry success in terms of increases in budget, buildings and attendance.

Let me conclude by highlighting what I most appreciated about this book. While the Hughes' focus is understandably on pastors (because that has been their ministry role), as noted in the opening quote at the beginning of this article, their insights can obviously be applied to other ministries as well. Cross-cultural missionaries, counselors, teachers, etc. also struggle with the temptation to measure fruitfulness primarily through numbers rather than personal faithfulness, quality of life change produced, etc.

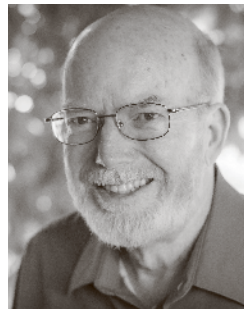
I believe their primary argument is crucial: success in ministry should be measured primarily in terms of faithfulness to one's God-given ability and opportunity rather than by culturally-emphasized numerical statistics. In other words, God doesn't grade on a curve; we therefore shouldn't be threatened by, or envious of, others whose ministry results might be greater in number than ours. For a variety of reasons, a missionary in the Philippines might see many more conversions than one in North Africa. A counselor dealing with especially problematic addictions might see a lower "success" rate than someone whose practice deals with less complicated issues. The amount of "talents" providentially given to each individual will also be a factor in the amount of fruit produced. So we need some sort of shared ministry benchmark equivalent to advancement's philosophy of "not equal gifts, but equal sacrifice"—and I think the Hughes' provide us with one.

One, of course, needs to be wary of an over-correction. Scripture is not totally opposed to using statistics when measuring the unfolding of God's purposes and/or His blessing on a particular ministry (cf. the book of Acts). That is why you will find some statistics in the annual report that is embedded in this magazine. But we share those numbers only to give those who invest in Western a sense of what their stewardship is producing and to honor the

kind of financial transparency needed today. And we recognize those numbers only tell a part of the story.

Hence, a proper view of numbers in determining ministry fruitfulness needs to be carefully nuanced. Without appreciating that nuance, we will likely be tempted on the one hand to rationalize minimal impact on others (often couched in "faithful remnant" terms) or, on the other hand, to adopt ministry methods more likely to produce impressive results (superficially-considered) but less substantive and permanent than the fruit produced from doing God's work in God's way. When what we offer in ministry must always be "bigger and better," aren't we setting ourselves up for the kind of stress that other church leaders experience when they talk about the constant need to "feed the beast" (e.g., make this worship service even more dynamic than last week's so people don't get tempted to go somewhere else)? And then what happens when your creativity and energy "hits the wall," or when people leave anyway? Doesn't that path lead almost inevitably both to burnout and an unhealthy sense of competitiveness as you seek to expand your ministry "market share"?

Pursuing faithfulness as described by Kent and Barbara Hughes, and in effect leaving the results to God (who ultimately can alone produce the fruit that counts), is a better path to follow. I encourage you to read their book and see if you agree.



Randy Roberts is the President at Western Seminary, as well as Professor of Spiritual Life Development. Parallel to his time at Western, Dr. Roberts has served in a variety of congregational lay leadership roles (elder, deacon, etc.) in both existing congregations and church plants. He continues to teach Sunday school classes and church workshops.

Recommended Resources

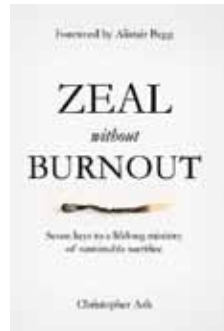
In addition to the other books highlighted in this issue, *Balancing Life's Demands: A New Perspective on Priorities* by Dr. Grant Howard and *Liberating Ministry from the Success Syndrome* by Dr. Kent Hughes and Barbara Hughes, we recommend the titles below for further reading on the subject of burnout. These books may be purchased through Amazon Smile, which returns a percentage of the profit back to Western Seminary.



Dangerous Calling

by Paul David Tripp

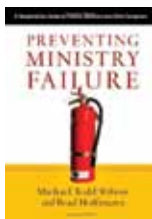
The culture surrounding many pastors today is unhealthy, undermining the well-being and effectiveness of our church leaders and thus, the entire church body. This book both diagnoses, offers cures, and gives solid strategies for maintaining well-being as a church leader.



Zeal without Burnout

by Christopher Ash

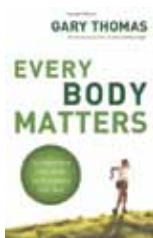
Thousands of people leave Christian ministry every month. They still love and desire to serve Christ, yet they are exhausted and cannot carry on. In this short, accessible book, Christopher Ash discusses seven keys to lifelong ministry.



Preventing Ministry Failure

by Michael Todd Wilson

Senior pastor Brad Hoffmann and licensed professional counselor Michael Todd Wilson work with pastors removed from their place of service. Observing patterns in those that experienced burnout, ineffectiveness, and moral failure, they've written a guidebook for pastors and caregivers to remain strong under common ministry pressures.



Every Body Matters: Strengthening Your Body to Strengthen Your Soul

by Gary Thomas

As mentioned throughout the magazine, personal physical health is an crucial element in maintaining emotional and spiritual health. Dr. Gary Thomas unpacks the direct connection between body and soul, challenging Christians to pursue holiness with their bodies.



Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us About Surviving and Thriving

by Bob Burns, Tasha Chapman, and Donald Guthrie

Coming from a five-year research project among working pastors, this book examines distinctive issues people in ministry face and examine five themes that promote sustainable ministry: spiritual formation, self-care, emotional and cultural intelligence, marriage/family and leadership.

THE TURNING POINT

By Katie Roberts

The breaking point came when I was talking to my mom. I was in the kitchen, scrubbing dishes in sudsy water, pressing the phone to my ear with my shoulder and pouring out my struggles to her. “Oh Sweetie,” she said in response, “The Lord loves you!” I paused for a moment, tears in my eyes. “Does He?” I replied. I wasn’t so sure anymore. And I wasn’t sure that I could keep going in ministry anymore either.

To be fair, it was a difficult season. Two years prior to that night, we moved to a small town in Eastern Washington with two tiny children, where my husband had his first pastorate. I divided my time between taking care of the kids and serving in the church. During the first year, my grandma and my brother died. Six months later, I was a wreck, struggling with depression and panic attacks. In addition to being a sufferer, I was a sinner. My heart was spiritually dry. Knowing I should love the people in our church, I felt self-righteous anger and resentment towards them instead. I was ready to throw in the towel, both for ministry and for life.

The turning point came the next day. In desperation, I cried out to the Lord, “Father, help me, please! Comfort me in my suffering and change my heart.” And He did.

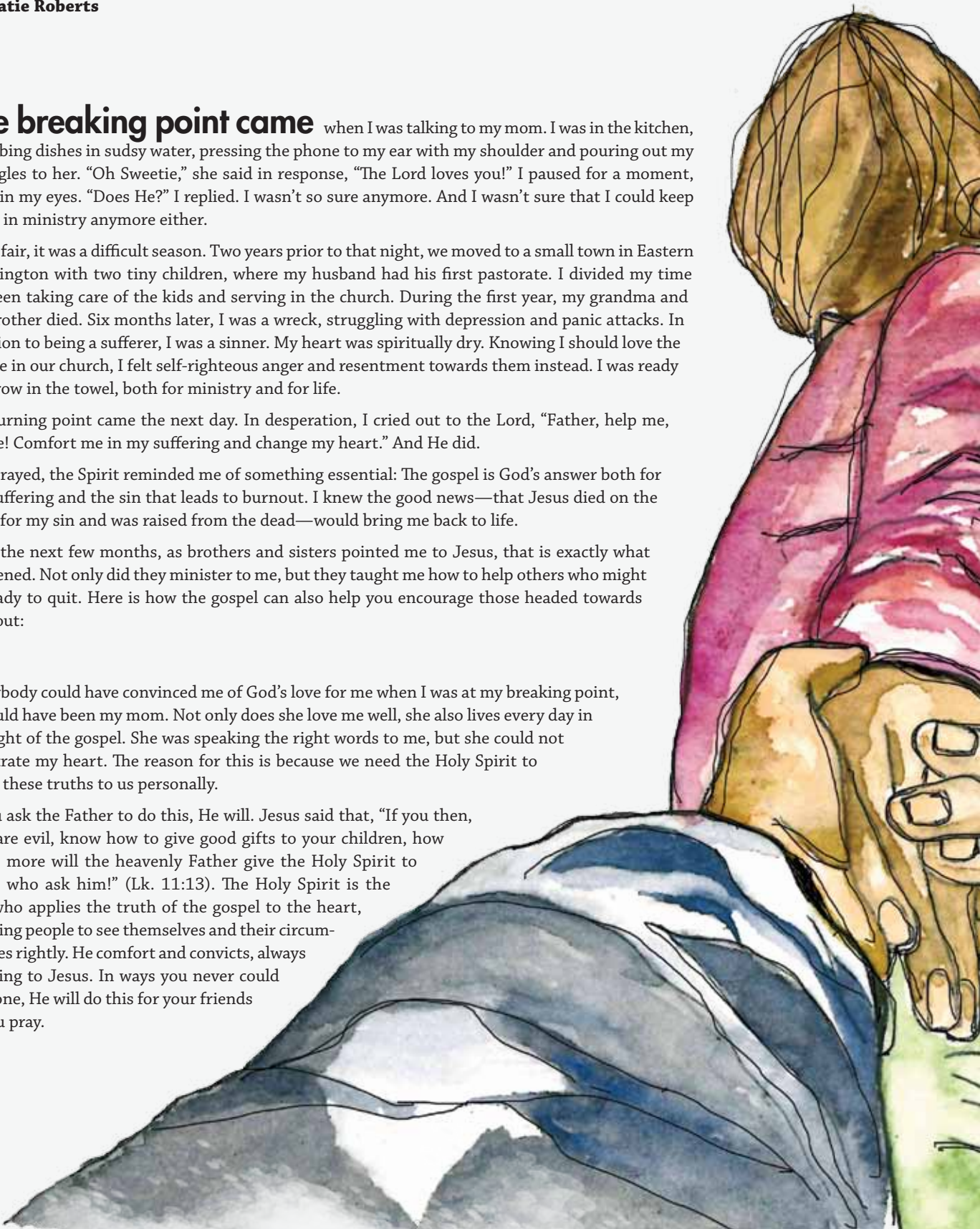
As I prayed, the Spirit reminded me of something essential: The gospel is God’s answer both for the suffering and the sin that leads to burnout. I knew the good news—that Jesus died on the cross for my sin and was raised from the dead—would bring me back to life.

Over the next few months, as brothers and sisters pointed me to Jesus, that is exactly what happened. Not only did they minister to me, but they taught me how to help others who might be ready to quit. Here is how the gospel can also help you encourage those headed towards burnout:

PRAY

If anybody could have convinced me of God’s love for me when I was at my breaking point, it would have been my mom. Not only does she love me well, she also lives every day in the light of the gospel. She was speaking the right words to me, but she could not penetrate my heart. The reason for this is because we need the Holy Spirit to apply these truths to us personally.

If you ask the Father to do this, He will. Jesus said that, “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Lk. 11:13). The Holy Spirit is the one who applies the truth of the gospel to the heart, enabling people to see themselves and their circumstances rightly. He comfort and convicts, always pointing to Jesus. In ways you never could do alone, He will do this for your friends as you pray.



LOVE WELL

When you first talk to someone on the verge of burnout, their pain makes an initial response of love fairly easy. When you listen to someone's story of an unappreciative congregation or an overbearing pastor, you rightly feel compassion.

However, all sufferers are also sinners and that means that we don't always respond well. Perhaps, like me, they will be wrestling with self-righteousness, anger or resentment. They might not be able to shake feelings of guilt and shame. It may be that they are stuck in a cycle of people-pleasing or are wallowing in self-pity. Eventually, these things will wear on you.

The solution? By God's grace, endure. Persevere. Be patient, be kind, be gentle. Why? Because this is what the Lord does with you. Think about how many times you have had to take the same sin to God. If you are like me, the number is in the thousands. Yet He draws near, He forgives, and He changes you. He never throws His hands up in hopeless frustration and walks away.

The reason for this is that you and your friend have been justified by faith in Christ. Moreover, because you are in Christ, change is inevitable. When you persevere in love, you will see the Spirit bring about transformation. It's worth the wait.

APPLY THE GOSPEL OF GRACE

To some degree, I lose sight of the beauty of Jesus and the glory of the gospel on a daily basis. Never was this more true, however, than when I was near burnout. I needed to apply what I knew about Christ and what He accomplished in order to be restored.

Here is one way I have seen this work. My friend was near burnout because of being treated badly by his local church. He needed to know the sympathy of Christ and he needed to forgive. Jesus sympathized with him because He too was treated badly. Judas betrayed Him and the rest of His disciples abandoned Him at His greatest moment of need. His own people crucified Him. Yet the cry of His dying heart was, "Father, forgive them" (Lk. 23:34). But there's more. It was our sin for which Jesus needed to die. Because my brother saw how much he had been forgiven, he wanted to extend forgiveness to the ones who were causing his hurt. His resentment melted away and was replaced by humble love. He sought their good by praying for them and finding ways to serve them. This is what the gospel does again and again.

REMEMBER THE MISSION

When a person is ready to give up on ministry, another underlying problem is mission amnesia. Sometimes this is due to a long season of faithful labor without seeing

fruit. Other times it happens because we abandoned God's mission and to pursued our own. Either way, the solution is to remember the privilege and the sure outcome of the mission to which gospel ministers have been called.

When someone is near burnout, Jesus' words in John 16:33 ring true: "In the world you will have tribulation." "Amen," says your weary friend. It's the other half of the statement that is difficult to believe: "But take courage! I have overcome the world."

At this point, they need you to remind them that Jesus' death and resurrection, with the subsequent pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost, means that the gospel is multiplying and producing fruit in the world. You and I are the ones through whom God has chosen to do this. It is a great honor. Though the road is long and paved with difficulty, the end is sure. Jesus will return and reap a great harvest. That means that your friend who is laboring without seeing fruit can be certain that she eventually will (Gal. 6:9). It also means that your friend who is convicted of seeking his own agenda can repent and begin to pursue the Lord's mission with the assurance of seeing fruit as well. This encouraging reminder is exactly what your friend needs to take courage and to find hope.

MY OWN REMINDER OF GOD'S LOVE

The turning point of my prayer was merely the beginning of God's restoration of my heart and my desire for ministry. The prayers, the love, and the gospel reminders from others were His means of doing so. As a result of God's great grace (and in spite of myself), I have been enabled to serve others in the body of Christ for fifteen years so far. Who knows how much fruit will be produced through your labor to help others reach the turning point?



Katie Roberts is the co-director of Verity Fellowship, a ministry of Western Seminary. She has taught women's Bible studies for the past thirteen years and has led women's ministry at her church in Eugene for the past seven. Katie earned her M.A. (Biblical and Theological Studies) from Western Seminary.



BUILDING RESILIENCY

By Dr. Ken Logan

Expectations placed on pastors can be unrealistic at times. In reality, those of us in vocational ministry are human just like everyone else. Pastors, counselors, and other ministry workers are not immune to stress and burnout simply because of a passion and calling. Research suggests we are actually more likely to experience burnout when we engage in work that we are deeply passionate about. This means that people in vocational ministry are more prone to experience exhaustion and burnout than other people. High perceived expectations can lead many of us to avoid seeking help or risk developing authentic and supportive connections with others. Likewise, others can have a hard time letting pastors honestly talk about their struggles and needs. Some of us may even resort to the virtual safety of hiding behind the mask of a leadership role. Internal expectations of “having it all together” and being successful can keep us from feeling like it is acceptable to reach out for help and support. The resulting isolation can cause us to not develop or access potentially supportive relationships for help. Sadly, by the time we become motivated to seek help, the situation can be so dire that the level of suffering and resulting consequences are severe. Ultimately, we would be wise to encourage and shift our reactive, crisis-oriented approach to care to a proactive, support-seeking and preventative care strategy.



PROACTIVE & PREVENTATIVE CARE

Similar to the treatment of cancer, catching burnout tendencies proactively and as early as possible is a best practice in dealing with the issue effectively. Since this is such a common experience for all of us, engaging in resilience building and preventative efforts is necessary, especially for those who are in ministry. To address this issue effectively, let's look at some of the common attitudes and attributes of burnout proneness and then offer antidotes to address burnout stages proactively.

ASSESSING OUR MOTIVATIONS: Godly Ambition or Harsh Determination

Assessing our motivation behind the work we do is important. As we begin to work, our ministry effort is often characterized by passion, enthusiasm, and eagerness to perform well. While this can be a good thing, sometimes our motivations drive us to go beyond Godly ambition to a harsh drive and motivation to be successful.

When we work in such a way that we cause neglect, damage, and end up overstraining our relationships with God and others, we are prone to burnout. In this mode of harsh determination, we try to create a sense of value and success through our work. We go above and beyond the call of duty in attempts to gain affirmation and establish a sense of identity and security. Our value and worth become dependent on the outcomes of our efforts. Over time, this mode can cause us to take on more and more work and to struggle with boundaries and limit-setting. We should be very cautious at this stage if we find ourselves believing that we are the only one who can do the work well enough.

While success is a good thing, our value and worth is based on He who made us, not on our works or efforts. We would be wise to determine if we are implicitly trying to prove our worth and gain value through our performance. Many folks are not aware of this motivation until they become aware of the consequences of living in this stage. Without insight, we will continue trying harder and harder, which inevitably will lead to burnout. Being mindful of this issue, we would be wise to allow God to show us what is truly motivating us and work on toning down any harsh determination and excessive ambitions.

PERSONAL NEEDS: Valuing or Neglecting

With increasing work requirements, basic needs like sleep schedules, eating with family, spending time enriching personal relationships with God and others, time in community, etc. can be challenged.

Those of us who are burnout prone may misinterpret burnout symptoms of increasing work efforts as a sign that we are

doing well, succeeding, valuable, and needed. I have seen some folks in this stage even convince family members that what they are doing is worth the relational sacrifice of the family. Be careful not to think of this as devotion and Godly sacrifice. The outcome of this distortion is burnout and harm to others.

Work on putting first things first. Intentionally value and work on spiritual and personal relationships. The goal is to balance self-care and relationship needs with our work efforts.

DEALING WITH REALITY: Seeing Truth or Hiding in the Bushes

As time moves on, some of us begin to sense that things aren't right. Many people experience signals of a developing problem before burnout sets in.

When we are approaching burnout we will tend to avoid seeing the reality of our situation. We can't face it because of the impending crisis that will set in. Facing reality is going to cost us something. We may minimize preliminary symptoms as temporary or not related to our poor work hygiene. As Christians, some of us will even resort to spiritualizing early consequences as an attack from the enemy or a sign of a weak faith. I have even seen some of us adjust our beliefs, theology, or values to devalue and dismiss our need for self-care. If we ignore the symptoms of this stage, our value becomes more fully based on our efforts and the outcomes. The result is we may more completely disconnect from reality and others will experience us as emotionally distant and numb.

Facing the truth of our symptoms is critically important in order to become proactive with healing our situation. Stepping out of the avoidance, facing the symptoms, and looking at the cause of the problem is essential. This is always a very difficult thing to do due to the real or perceived fear of what may precipitate in our life if we face reality. Do it anyway. By not facing it, the trouble we are storing up is only going to get worse over time.

PERCEPTIONS OF PEOPLE: Having Good Judgement or Being Judgmental

All work is stressful at times; this is part of the ebb and flow of the work of ministry. As the stress increases in a burgeoning state of burnout, we begin to distort and amplify negative perceptions of people, organizations, our calling, and even God. It is common for people at this stage to become cynical, passive aggressive, and very negative. We will misjudge others as being worse than they actually are as we amplify their negative traits. Tolerance and giving people the benefit of the doubt wanes. These reactions cause us to isolate from others even more, in an attempt to reduce our sense of stress from contact with others. The isolation then leads to profound feelings of hopelessness. It is common for us in this state to regress to engaging in sinful

A quick way to determine how burnout prone we are is to take some time and journal how our current ministry experience of items A - J below matches up to our personal work preferences, personal goals & dreams, fit to our perceived calling from God, and our preferred level of workload. Assess each item:

- amount of work engaged in on a daily basis **A**
- participation in decisions that affect work **B**
- quality of leadership above us **C**
- balanced level of recognition **D**
- opportunity to develop & grow **E**
- reasonable financial reimbursement **F**
- supportive interactions at work **G**
- personal friendships at work **H**
- potential of work to offer meaningful contribution **I**
- confidence in the relevance of the organization's mission. **J**

ARE YOU BURNOUT PRONE?

To assess burnout resilience we can rate ourselves on a scale from 1–5 on our ability to:

- 1 bounce back after difficult situations
- 2 make it through hard times quickly
- 3 recover from stressful situations with little wear and tear
- 4 utilize our relationship with God to help us work through difficult situations
- 5 seek out and receive support from others.

Notice that this doesn't mean using thinking, behaviors, God, or other relationships to avoid dealing with situations you might go through. If you notice any major mismatches in your processing or resilience limitations, you might consider processing this proactively with someone you trust and who has expertise in this area.

behaviors from earlier times in our life: alcohol, drugs, an eating disorder, engaging in inappropriate relationships, or sexually addictive behaviors. All of this in the attempt to alter feelings of isolation.

It is important to notice that as we become dysregulated with stress, our perceptions of people and groups become exaggerated and extreme. We amplify and skew reality negatively when we are suffering. Reaching out for help is critical at this stage in order to deal with the isolation, gain support, and work on gaining a more accurate perspective of people and our situation. Facing our addictive behaviors is also of critical importance at this stage as well.

RELATIONAL FEEDBACK: Facing the Truth or Hurting Self/Others

Once here, people who remain in our lives can no longer look past or deny our behaviors. This is due to the reality that our personality begins to change and we become more rigid in the way we relate to others. For example, a minister who was once lively and engaged may become very pessimistic, apathetic, mechanical, and report feeling empty inside. People begin to confront us about how we are different than we used to be, how we are letting them down, and how we are harming or neglecting them.

This stage, especially when accompanied with depression, leads to the stage we typically identify as “burnout.” We need to seriously consider reaching out for help at this point and begin to facing the truth that others are communicating to us. We need to encourage ourselves to get “sick and tired” about being “sick and tired.” We would be wise to press into the feedback and begin to own it, make changes, and grow.

FINAL STAGE: Turn to Others or Risk Potentially Severe Consequences

Burnout at this stage is holistic depression. Complex and pervasive symptoms of existential hopelessness, indifference, and withdrawal are present here. A sabbatical from work is not going to fix this. We didn’t get what we thought we were going to get from all the hard work we put into things. The worst part is that we paid a lot to not get it. Life, ministry, calling, marriage, family relationships, etc. all lose their meaning. Everything is given up on here.

As a result of this state, we begin to severely question or give up on faith, give up on hope, leave marriages and children, and even physically collapse. In extreme cases people can suffer with suicidal feelings and may even attempt suicide.

When we are in this stage, we need immediate medical, psychological, and spiritual attention. Being open to this helps. Many folks totally pull away and may need others to pursue and help them address the issue at this stage.

CONCLUSION

Adopting healthy attitudes that increase resilience and hope and decrease the likelihood of burnout can require the development of strategies that reduce our vulnerability to exhaustion. It is very important that we allow ourselves to apply and practice these ideas, as it is the experience that will contribute to our transformation and increase our well-being.

We would benefit greatly from accepting that we are human and are allowed to receive help like those whom we minister to, addressing our motivation to hide and dare to face what is really driving us, and determining to discover why we are able to care for others but are unable to receive help ourselves. Ask God to reveal to us why we are so driven, so harsh with ourselves, moralistic, and negative.

Be proactive and reach out for help when we need it. This is an absolutely necessity if we are receiving feedback from others about our working too much or if we are experiencing signs of depression. Commit ourselves to basic care needs. Eat healthy, get good sleep, exercise regularly, and connect with people that we can be ourselves with. Did I mention get good sleep? Engage in activities that bring pleasure and don’t violate our beliefs, values, or morals. Spend time with friends, family, and colleagues. Learn how to rest, relax, and worship while doing this. Listen more, talk less. Develop a culture of appreciation with family and friends and express gratitude for the relationships. Develop or rediscover hobbies and interests. Reminisce about previous experiences of God’s provisions and our successes. Practice being reliable in our relationships. Work and search hard for meaning in distressing circumstances. Give permission to learn from our circumstances and consequences. Translate feelings of condemnation to feelings of conviction. Give ourselves permission to be a student of God in our situations and stop trying to pretend we’ve got it all together. Everyone already knows we don’t. Finally, balance out forgiveness by emphasizing owning our part in things and make amends with others whenever appropriate and possible.



Ken Logan is the executive director of A New Day Counseling Center and Professor of Counselor Education at Western Seminary. You can visit his website at drkenlogan.com.



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