

# 8 Tips For Pastors Struggling With Burnout



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Substitutes of extended leaves.

My role meant that I handled the disgruntled phone calls, read all the angry comment cards, and had the difficult conversations when it was decided someone could no longer be on staff.

When I left in 2014, a friend asked me if I had experienced burnout.

I replied, “Burnout? I’m not sure. I know I’m tired.”

Then I looked up the definition of burnout. It’s in the Merriam-Webster dictionary, which means it’s a legitimate word, right? They define it as “the condition of someone who has become very physically and emotionally tired after doing a difficult job for a long time.”

Guilty as charged. I was really tired.

Burnout is the real deal. And certainly anyone in any profession can experience feeling burned out, but those who serve churches in **leadership positions** are particularly susceptible.

Travis Collins, author of *For Ministers about to Start...or about to Give Up*, says the research is both alarming and consistent. Through his research, he found that:

- 28 percent of ministers report being “forcefully terminated.”
- 33 percent say being in ministry is “an outright hazard” to their families.
- 75 percent experience “severe stress causing anguish, worry, bewilderment, anger, depression, fear and alienation” during their careers.
- Ministers join doctors and attorneys among those with the highest rates of addiction and suicide.

The pace is relentless, the needs are unending, and the expectation that we should have the right answer for every question is ever-present.

Here are 8 tips for those who are getting close to, or are right in the middle of, a season of burnout.

## 1. Get some far-away friends.

It's true that you shouldn't complain to people in the church about your cranky deacons, nor should you get advice about whether to **fire a staff member** from your small group. But you still need to talk about that stuff. I'd recommend finding two or three friends who don't live in your town and don't attend your church. Ideally, these would be other pastors or church leaders who know you well and understand the dynamics of leading in a church context. They can **provide perspective and wisdom** that will lift you out of the quicksand you currently find yourself in.

## 2. Amp up your learning.

It is really easy for the well to run dry when we aren't constantly filling it back up. If you are going to stay fresh, you need to continually be learning. In addition to **books or blogs or podcasts**, I'd suggest going away a couple times a year to learn from others. By getting away, you are clearing your mind and freeing yourself to think new and different thoughts, without being stuck in your current reality.

## 3. Take a sabbatical.



sabbatical every seven to ten years. A good friend of mine was able to **take a sabbatical** after 20 years of ministry, and he said it wasn't until the second month before his mind was really free enough to be renewed at a deep level in his soul and heart.



#### 4. Find a hobby.

If your entire life revolves around your church, then you are heading down a path toward disaster. Whether it is golf, video games, cooking, house projects, or underwater basket-weaving—find something you can do that uses an entirely different side of your brain and brings you joy.

#### 5. Build a team.

This is especially directed toward those who are **creating sermons** every week—put together a creative team to help brainstorm, research, write, and even deliver your sermons. News flash: You don't have to be the origin of all sermon content at your church! There are great people

It is not a failure to seek counseling.

Sometimes when we can talk to someone else about the darkest, driest, most hidden parts of our soul—we can find healing and freedom before we make a choice that will sideline our ministry.

## 7. Do something else.

It's possible you are feeling burned out because you are doing something that is sucking the life out of you. Perhaps it was exactly what you should have been doing for a season. But as the ministry grows or the **culture changes**, if you find yourself no longer enjoying the work of the ministry, then let go of those internal expectations and begin doing something that will bring life to you and your family. Remember, you can do ministry and live out your mission even when you are no longer in a paid church position.

## 8. Go somewhere else.

Sometimes it is your setting that is burning you out. I visit enough churches to know that some ministry cultures are **not healthy**. You might find yourself spending so much time on sideways energy (i.e. fighting with the elders, dealing with a relationally dysfunctional boss) that your soul is being drained of all that is good and right. You might have even convinced yourself that all churches operate the same way. I have good news: there



devastate a local church. So whether it's new friends, calling a counselor, or picking up your favorite video game on the way home—take a step toward health and wholeness today.

*What are some strategies you've used to battle burnout?*

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