

Avoiding Burnout

Caring for Trauma Survivors Without Becoming
Overwhelmed

My Story

Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill
the law of Christ.

Galatians 6:2

Defining Burnout

"Burnout is a psychological syndrome emerging as a prolonged response to chronic interpersonal stressors on the job. The three key dimensions of this response are an overwhelming exhaustion, feelings of cynicism and detachment from the job, and a sense of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment." - Maslach and Leiter, *World Psychiatry* (2016)

Contributions to Burnout

- Secondary trauma
 - "Vicarious trauma"
 - Indirect exposure to another's trauma
 - Can have similar responses as the one who experienced the trauma
- Personal sin
 - Pride/self-reliance
 - Ministry identity
 - Desire for approval/control
 - Desire for "busyness" as form of escapism
- Ministry burden

Red Flags of Secondary Trauma & Burnout

- Compassion fatigue
- Chronic exhaustion/physical ailments
- Dissociation
- Feelings of numbness/inability to empathize

Red Flags of Secondary Trauma & Burnout

- A sense that you can never do enough
- Anger & cynicism
- Inflated sense of self-importance in ministry
- Hypervigilance

Red Flags of Secondary Trauma & Burnout

- Emotional overwhelm
- Disturbances in eating/sleeping patterns
- Inability to concentrate
- Self-medicating

The Tension

What is a “normal” or healthy response to the pain of another?

At what point do healthy responses become problematic responses?

“Look at Jesus. He was perfect, right? And yet he goes around crying all the time. He is always weeping, a man of sorrows. Do you know why? Because he is perfect. Because when you are not all absorbed in yourself, you can feel the sadness of the world. And therefore, what you actually have is that the joy of the Lord happens inside the sorrow. It doesn’t come after the sorrow. It doesn’t come after the uncontrollable weeping. The weeping drives you into the joy, it enhances the joy, and then the joy enables you to actually feel your grief without its sinking you. In other words, you are finally emotionally healthy.”

-Tim Keller

Steps to Avoid Burnout

1. Know your Refuge

Psalm 46:1 - God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble

Psalm 23:3 - He (God) restores my soul

Matthew 11:28 - He carries my burdens

Steps to Avoid Burnout

2. Counsel from a healthy soul

Proverbs 4:23 - The condition of my heart impacts everything else

Counseling from a Healthy Soul

- *How is your relationship with the Lord?*

Matthew 6:33 - Seek first God's kingdom

Psalms 103:13 - God is a compassionate Father

Psalms 119:105 - His Word is a lamp unto our feet

Counseling from a Healthy Soul

- *Do you have friends/mentors/counselor who knows you/your weaknesses and strengths?*

Proverbs 27:27 - Iron sharpens iron

Hebrews 10:24 - Encourage one another toward love and good deeds

Counseling from a Healthy Soul

- *Do you have an accurate understanding of what is in your control and what isn't?*

Psalms 115:3 - God does whatever pleases him

Ephesians 1:11 - God works out everything according to his purposes

Proverbs 16:9 - It is the Lord who establishes steps

Counseling from a Healthy Soul

- *Do you have a sense for your personal indicators that the burdens you carry are too much?*
- *What is your response to feeling overwhelmed?*

Steps to Avoid Burnout

3. Create space for lament

Share with God the pain, sorrow, grief, frustrations of living in a broken world (Psalms 13; 17; 40; 55)

A cry for justice is healthy (Psalms 82; 94)

Steps to Avoid Burnout

4. View care for trauma survivors as stewardship, not ownership

We care for other's burdens (Gal. 6:2), but also bring those burdens to Christ (Matt. 11:28)

Trauma Care as Stewardship

Remember: Our response cannot ultimately make them healed or whole, nor can it change what they endured

Be a good steward of God's grace (1 Peter 4:10) - but remember it is **God's** grace

Moreover, I gave them my Sabbaths, as a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctifies them.

Ezekiel 20:12

² But I have calmed and quieted myself,
I am like a weaned child with its mother;
like a weaned child I am content.

³ Israel, put your hope in the Lord
both now and forevermore.

Steps to Avoid Burnout

5. Be able to sit in stillness

Take a day off

Pause to pray, reflect

Psalm 131

My heart is not proud, Lord,

my eyes are not haughty;

I do not concern myself with great matters

or things too wonderful for me.

Steps to Avoid Burnout

6. Steward your body well by caring for it

Are your eating/sleeping habits healthy? What needs to change?

Do you exercise?

1 Kings 19 - Elijah

Steps to Avoid Burnout

7. Walk in repentance

When ministry challenges and pain/suffering expose sin in us, we can walk the well worn path to the cross

Has ministry become an identity, more than Christ?

Do I assume responsibility for things that I was never meant to hold?

Where has self-reliance/pride taken over my approach of care for others?

Matthew 3:8 - Produce fruit in keeping with repentance

1 John 1:9 - We are offered forgiveness when we confess our sins

Revelation 3:19 - God rebukes and disciplines those whom he loves

Steps to Avoid Burnout

8. Embrace your limitations

Psalm 103:13-14 - The Lord has compassion on us, he knows we are dust

2 Corinthians 12:9 - His grace is sufficient for us in our weakness

Steps to Avoid Burnout

9. Give and receive

The helpers must also be the helped

1 Corinthians 12:14 - The body is made up of many parts

1 Corinthians 12:26 - We both give and receive the comfort we have been gifted in Christ

When Feeling Burned Out - Consider

Why do I do what I do (counsel)? What story has God been writing through my life?

What is the Lord putting on my heart?

What does scripture say? What do faithful friends/advisers say?

A Healthy Soul is...

Stewarding the body well for God's purposes

Dependent on the Lord

At rest in the Lord

Secure in an identity rooted in Christ