



## **BURNOUT – IT CAN HAPPEN TO EVEN ME**

While a biblical student at Tennessee Temple University in the late 1970's, I often heard big-name preachers ridicule the idea of "burn-out." To them, burn-out was a cop-out by lazy pastors. "Wear out before you rust out" was the motto of some.

However, there is ample evidence today of the reality of burnout in pastor after pastor.

It happened to me in my 14th year without a break in pastoring. I was a bi-vocational pastor for those fourteen years. I worked forty hours per week in the accounting department of the utility company AEP then spent the rest of my time preparing three messages per week plus trying to be a help to my wife and three young children.

I was Superman in those days. I burned the midnight oil! I burned the candle at both ends and even more ends if that was possible. I can recall calling my wife at 11:00 pm. from a home visit at Bob and Kat Chinn's more than once!

The warning signs associated with burnout were there, but I chose to miss them or minimize them because I had a Lord/church to serve!

However, in the 14<sup>th</sup> year my attitude toward the ministry changed in spite of my persistence. I actually began to resent the ministry which I loved. Why? The ministry was taking time away from my family, was providing constant stress and frustration, required enormous hours of sermon preparation, and was literally consuming me from the inside out.

I recall limping through Vacation Bible School – for the third straight year we achieved the largest VBS in the church's history. And I felt absolutely nothing.

I eventually burned out. I then made an important decision which turned out to be the smartest decision I could have made.

I walked away from the ministry. Totally walked away. Friends told me I was "burned out" and I finally accepted that reality.

I then laid down my Bible (except for personal devotions) and dropped out of all church work for six months. I did not preach a single sermon nor work on a single sermon nor do any deep study of any kind. I

attended church, but I did not meet with any pastor search committees though quite a few called.

I instead deliberately took a sabbatical to stop and smell the roses of my wife, children, extended family, and hobbies. What hobbies? Well, one hobby is reading. I enjoy fiction. Pastoring had robbed me of the time for reading (which is another way of relaxing).

I took the next six months and caught up on my reading. I had read less than ten books in the past fourteen years. But that was about to change.

My father was an avid reader. He funneled quite a few suggestions to me.

I read everything written by Jack Higgins, Clive Cussler, and others! I actually kept track of the books. I read over 50 novels in the next six months! And I did not resent a single moment of it.

It was time for me to heal...and my hobbies (such as reading) are the best way for me to unwind from the pastoral stress.

Did churches ever call for me to speak? Oh, yes! But I had enough discipline to say, "Call me back when my six months are up." And when the six months ended, they did indeed call. As a matter of fact, I ended up pastoring one of those churches which waited.

In looking back on it, I know firsthand the risk that burnout brings to the ministry. I have witnessed burnout in others, too. I know burnout can be so severe that it eliminates the minister from any further service.

Please be alert to the danger signs. Listen to your spouse and your friends; watch for increasing mood swings, depression issues, and an attitude of resenting the ministry. You're human. At some point, you must take time to heal yourself if you are to minister to others. Schedule time each week for the people closest to you as well as your hobbies. And listen to those who know you best! God bless!