

How to Beat Pastoral Burnout

May 14, 2012 By [Rick Warren](#)

Ministry is a marathon – not a 50-yard dash. It's tough. You're in an invisible war where all kinds of forces are conspiring to keep you from doing what God wants you to do.

A few years back I made a list of young pastors in America that I needed to be praying for – like others had prayed for me when I was young. Today, more than half of the young pastors on that list are no longer in ministry—either they had financial problems, marital problems, or just got tired and gave up.

Pastor, we need for you to last in ministry.

The story of Elijah's ministry burnout in Kings 19 gives us some great insights into how the cause and cures of our own burnout.

No doubt you're familiar with the story. Elijah had challenged the 400 prophets of Baal to prove who was real: Baal or God. And, of course, God won the contest! Everyone in the nation turned back to God.

You'd think Elijah would be on a high after that. But he wasn't. Ministry successes can drain you just as fast as ministry failures. When Queen Jezebel heard about what happened, she threatened Elijah's life. Rather than being emboldened by this great ministry success and the revival of the nation, Elijah got so scared he ran to the other side of the desert, hid in a cave and asked God to kill him.

Elijah's story gives us four signs of ministry burnout.

1 – We depreciate our worth. “Take my life for I'm not better than my fathers.” (I Kings 19:4, HCSB) Like Elijah, when we start telling ourselves we have no value, it's a sign we're burned out. Notice how Elijah compares himself with others. When you start comparing your accomplishments, your talents, or even your pain or problems with others, you're headed down the wrong road.

You are your own worst critic. If you talked to other people in the same way you talk to yourself, you wouldn't have any friends.

2 – We underrate our ministry. “Lord God Almighty, I have always served you—you alone. But the people of Israel have broken their covenant with you, torn down your altars, and killed all your prophets. I am the only one left—and they are trying to kill me!” (1 Kings 19:10, NIV) Elijah starts berating himself for things that aren't his fault. The nation of Israel was crumbling around him, and Elijah took it personally.

Trying to control everything – as if you're holding your church together by yourself – will have disastrous results. Truth is, it's not up to you to make the world work. God never intended for you to carry that kind of burden. You're not responsible for anyone else's response. You're responsible for proclaiming the truth and leading people the best you can – but not the responses of others. You are only responsible for your own response. You're responsible to teach God's truth but not what they do with it.

3 – We exaggerate our problems. “I am the only one left—and they are trying to kill me!” (1 Kings 19:10, NIV) Elijah said he was the only one left trying to do what was right, but that just wasn't true. The nation had just experienced a revival, but Elijah's view was distorted.

Never make a major decision when you're depressed, discouraged or tired. It'll be the wrong decision! When you're on empty, you inevitably don't have a clear view of reality. Elijah was so drained from being in the midst of a spiritual high that he couldn't see the situation clearly. The whole nation wasn't against him. It was one woman who made an empty promise!

Dig into God's Word. You can't focus on your emotions. The Bible doesn't say that your emotions will set you free. It says the Truth will set you free. The more you know the truth, the freer you will be.

4 – We abdicate our dreams. “I have had enough, Lord,” he said. “Take my life.” (1 Kings 19:4) When you get depleted of energy, you start shrinking your dreams to the size of your remaining energy. You lose your vision and forfeit your goals. This is the most destructive sign of burnout because when you lose your dreams, you lose hope. You want to give up.

Don't you dare give up. Don't give up on your family, on your church, on your dream or on your life.

Fortunately, the Bible doesn't just tell us the causes of burnout. It tells us the cures as well! To get out of burnout and back on the road to recovery, you need to do the four things that Elijah did in this story.

- **Recharge.** (1 Kings 19:5-8) God's first prescription for Elijah's burnout isn't a sermon, confession or a lecture. He lets him eat and sleep. You need this, too. Sometimes the most spiritual thing you can do is take a nap. Vince Lombardi once said, "Fatigue makes cowards of us all." You need a day off. In fact, if you're not taking a day off every week, you're breaking one of the 10 commandments.
- **Release your frustrations.** (1 Kings 19: 9-19) God can handle your frustrations. When you take it to other people, that's gossip. When you take it to God, that's worship. Complaining to God can be an act of worship because you're telling God you trust Him with your feelings. Twice during this passage God encourages Elijah to tell Him what's on his heart. God isn't shocked when you complain. If you're feeling down and depressed, tell it to God. It also helps to tell *at least* one other person. You need a spiritual confidant or a small group where you can unload.
- **Refocus on God. (1 Kings 19:11)** Get your eyes off of your problem and onto God. Get alone with Him. God loved Elijah so much he sent a multi-media presentation to Him. He sent a hurricane wind, an earthquake, and a firestorm – until God finally spoke through a soft whisper. God showed his power and lets him know that He is in control. You need to relax. The root of all of your burnout is trying to be God. Whenever I start getting burned out, I get alone with God and focus on Him instead of my problems.
- **Resume serving others.** (1 Kings 19:15-16) God gave Elijah a new assignment. He wasn't done with him. And He isn't done with you either. You've got to start thinking of someone other than yourself. The quickest way to defeat depression is to get involved in helping other people.

Some days you may not feel like getting out of bed. If you're sick and tired of being sick and tired, follow these steps. This is God's recovery plan.