

Book Review: Burnout In Ministry | How to Recognize It x How To Avoid It

Citation: Faulkner, Brooks R. *Burnout in Ministry*. Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1981.

Main Theme: Brooks R. Faulkner examines the physical, emotional, spiritual and social dimensions of burnout in order to find ways to deal with ministry burnout redemptively.

Chapter One: Burnout – The Closet Sin of Ministers

Chapter One has a primary focal point on burnout being considered as a “closet sin” of ministers in that when they experience it, they do not talk about it. It is almost as if they try to hide it in a closet. Oftentimes, ministers feel embarrassed about feeling burned out and they do not want to be looked at any differently by their peers or the members of their congregations. Therefore, it is almost easier to hide and it is less burdensome to deal with if it is not confessed to others. Oftentimes, ministers hold a sense of pride and they do not always think or feel it is okay to feel burned out even if it is a common thread amongst even the greatest leader, minister or pastor. According to Faulkner, ministers need a safety net similar to that of an alcoholic. Alcoholics often attend anonymous meetings to gather with others who have the same struggle as they do. In today’s vernacular, we call these AA meetings. Faulkner suggests that “we need a similar system for ministers” (Pg 11) in order to create a healthy and safe environment that lacks judgment and criticism so that they can have a better chance of overcoming burnout in their ministerial career. Faulkner suggests that “ministers need someone to confide in, ministers need to confess and/or confront the problem, ministers need to know others care and ministers need to know that they are okay.” (Pg 12)

Chapter Two: Burnout In The Minister’s Home

Faulkner suggests that there is no one who pays a higher price for burnout than a minister's family as “the minister’s home suffers first.” (Pg 23) When a minister experiences burnout, the minister can often be found taking it out on their family members. In addition, the wife and children are subject to burnout in ministry as well. Oftentimes, the wife can feel alone and unable to either be herself or share with others and be transparent about her needs. Faulkner also suggests that the wife can also feel that she “must compete for her husband’s time.” (Pg 26) According to Faulkner, “It is the wife and minister who begin to see the minister in his listless “I don’t care attitude” which precedes or includes burnout.” (Pg 23) As a result of this, the minister may be found spending less and less time with his family and they may begin to become frustrated and angry with him. Another problem experienced with this is that many times, the children are held to high expectations. According to Faulkner, “they have expectations thrust on them. They cannot live up to all the expectations. They may not want to live up to them.”(Pg 31)

Chapter Three: Burnout In The Minister’s Professional Life

Oftentimes, ministers can experience burnout in their professional life due to the fact that they lose love for their profession. When people fall out of love with what they do, sometimes they can experience burnout by it because it is no longer fun. When you no longer have a passion for what you do, you can burn out easy when you no longer want to do something. It is in this light that Faulkner paints burnout in the minister’s professional life. According to Faulkner, “at its very worst, burnout occurs when there is really nothing that the person cares about.” One of the main factors of burnout in the professional life is “exhaustion.” (Pg 40) Ministers can avoid exhaustion by learning how to manage and balance the “demands” (Pg 47) of ministry.

Chapter Four: Burnout In The Minister’s Physical Life

Due to the physical demands of ministry, oftentimes, ministers can suffer physically as a result of what comes with their calling. Burnout in the minister's life is often shown in declining health as a result of all the minister's responsibilities. One must maintain himself before he can help to maintain others. The minister must prioritize his or her health in order to remain effective in ministry. According to Faulkner, some of the physical danger signs are "fatigue, overweight, less active, sexual dysfunction, weight loss, stimulant dependence, irregular exercise, fewer responsibilities, less rest, exhaustion and unavoidable vulnerability." (Pg 60) When these danger signs are recognized, it is imperative to realize how physical burnout can be resolved.

Chapter Five: Feeling Good About Feeling Bad- Irrational Guilt

Many times, it is easy for ministers to feel better about the difficulty that comes with ministry by talking bad about it and feeling guilty about the hard work that comes with the territory of ministry. Ministers must embrace the call of ministry with great joy instead of feeling down and depressed about the trials and tribulations of the calling. Therefore, it is imperative that ministers find ways to speak positively about God's call on their lives so that they don't get burned out by living in the misery of the difficulty that sometimes accompanies ministry. According to Faulkner, "it is easy to be down on yourself than to be up on yourself." (Pg 73) Therefore, if a minister can learn to be positive and encourage himself, he will find a better way to cope and avoid feeling good about feeling bad.

Chapter Six: Burnout Is Anger Turned Inward

According to Faulkner, many times burnout is nothing more than anger turned inward. When a minister becomes angry, oftentimes, he or she has nowhere to take it and nowhere to express it. Due to the fact that they may not feel as if they have anywhere to go, they may result in turning their anger inward. As a result of turning their anger inward, "It becomes depression." (Pg 87)

When anger becomes depression, the minister now has a more complex problem which requires help outside of himself. This causes an even bigger problem because oftentimes ministers are prideful and don't feel as if they need help from anyone. The key here is to get the minister to find a way to cope with their anger in order to avoid an unwanted explosion on those around him or her. Oftentimes, ministers tend to deny that they are angry. However, Faulkner presents that the way to recognize symptoms of anger are: exhaustion, detachment, cynicism, irritability and suspicion." (Pg 89) When these symptoms are realized, it is critical and key for the minister to find coping skills in order to help them overcome. According to Faulkner, some solutions include: "get outside yourself, listen first, be open and not brutal, help others take the pressure off, cultivate intimacy and don't give up." (Pg 95-99)

Chapter Seven: Burnout Is An Authority Problem

While many do not know that burnout can be considered as an authority problem, Faulkner suggests that ministers struggle with the need to be in charge. Oftentimes, this feeling and need to be recognized as the one in charge causes undue stress on him or her as a leader. When a minister doesn't feel as if he is in charge, the minister often feels as if he or she has lost control. Having the need to feel in charge can often be considered a self-esteem issue. If this goes unchecked in their childhood or even adulthood, this will pose problems in leadership positions. In order for a minister to overcome this, the minister must understand who he is in Christ and who he is called to be in ministry. Having this confidence in his call will help him to avoid feeling as if he needs to be in charge or in authority all the time. It is imperative that a minister remember that it is God who called them and not the people. Knowing this simple fact will help reduce tension and stress as it pertains to authority. According to Faulkner, "burnout is an

authority problem. But an authority problem can be solved. It can be solved with the development of inner strength.” (Pg 112)

Chapter Eight: Burnout And The Priorities Dilemma

Burnout often occurs due to a lack of discipline with priorities. Ministers must ensure that they set their priorities in order in order to prevent burnout. They must weigh and balance the responsibilities of the calling on their lives. They must understand that if their priorities are not set in place, it is easy for them to become overwhelmed. According to Faulkner, “each day the minister must make deliberate decisions about his time. He has to choose priority time with planning skill.” (Pg 113) Faulkner also suggests that the minister “avoid time wasters such as haste, casual visitors, overcommitment, telephone, indecision and inefficiency.” (Pg 121)

Chapter Nine: Refueling to Avoid Burnout

All in all, the minister must refuel in order to avoid burning out. The minister must find ways to handle the stress that he experiences as a result of his or her call in ministry. There are many ways that a minister can do this, but Faulkner names a few that are helpful and they include “professional intervention, peer intervention, self-intervention and divine intervention.” (Pg 128-129) Other coping skills that the minister can use are “speaking to intimate friends, family, professional support, helping acquaintances, challengers, mentors, educators and support groups.” (Pg 134-136) Faulkner suggests that other means to “refuel burnout are to eat right and live right by exercising and taking care of their health.” (Pg 137) According to Faulkner, “very few engage in a regular exercise program. Yet it is the most vital part of our body’s ability to function with the day to day stress which is brought on by one continuous emotional strain after another.” (Pg 137)

Conclusion

In conclusion, Faulkner indicates that it is important to be able to recognize burnout in ministry. If one is to be successful in their ministerial career, they must be able to both identify and avoid the traps and pits of burnout in ministry. Faulkner provides practical tips as to how to avoid burnout in ministry so that the minister can walk out his or her calling with joy, vigor and excitement until they have finished their race.