

## Seven Keys to Preventing Pastoral Burnout

By Thom Rainer  
ChurchCentral.com

I have the incredible opportunity to interact with pastors regularly. Among these ongoing discussions in recent times: an informal survey in which I posed two questions. First I asked, “Have you ever experienced burnout in your ministry?” Then, I followed up with: “What do you do to prevent pastoral burnout?”

Interestingly, every pastor with whom I spoke had experienced some level of burnout. And so they spoke from the voice of experience when they shared with me what they do to prevent burnout now. Rather than any particular order or priority, I aggregated their responses into seven keys to preventing pastoral burnout.

### The keys

- 1. Remember your call.** Ministry can be tough and dirty. It can be frustrating and confusing. But if we remember Who called us and Who sustains us, we are able to persevere. We understand that we are not doing ministry in our own power.
- 2. Pray for your critics.** Criticism is one of the most frequently mentioned causes of burnout. Pastors on the other side of burnout told me that they had learned to pray for their critics, almost every day. That gave these pastors a fresh perspective. A few pastors noted significant change in their critics shortly after they started praying for them.
- 3. Wait a day before responding to critics.** Somewhat related to number two above, some pastors shared that ministry started taking its toll when they engaged their critics negatively in writing, in person or by phone. Now these pastors wait a full day before responding. They are amazed at how differently their responses take shape once they allowed the emotion of the moment to cool down.
- 4. Be intentional about down time.** Pastors need it. Their families need it—every week. Don’t skip vacations. Go on occasional retreats. Whatever release valve you choose, don’t lose your family by trying to save your church.
- 5. Find a friend to share your burden.** For some pastors, it is another pastor; for others, a retired pastor. Some mentioned that key confidants in the church became their best friends. Pastors need someone they trust to whom they can unload their burdens.
- 6. Do not neglect your prayer life.** Pastors told me repeatedly that, as their prayer life waned, their feelings of burnout increased. In addition to ongoing conversations with God, prayer represented a precious time for spiritual refueling.
- 7. Do not neglect your time in the Word.** We heard similar stories from those pastors who neglected their time in the Bible. As that time waned, burnout flared. All the pastors noted that time in the Word meant time beyond sermon preparation—in personal devotion and study.

### The seriousness of the situation

Pastors are burning out every day. Many are leaving the ministry as a result. It is a real and immediate problem with many pastors and many churches.

