

# Avoiding Church Burnout

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**Burnout** is a state of emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion. It occurs when you feel overwhelmed, emotionally drained, and unable to meet constant demands, whether real or perceived. Eventually, you find you literally have nothing left to give, either emotionally or physically. This state often leads to a range of issues including anxiety, depression, insomnia, anger and ill health.

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## Church Burnout

Burnout, particularly in relation to church life, is a subject that doesn't get as much discussion as it should. Perhaps it's because we tend to think that 'doing lots of stuff' and 'attending lots of events' is a requirement of any conscientious church member. We dutifully fill our calendars with copious church events, often to the exclusion of personal time, family time or, most importantly, time *with* God.

We curate an 'all-or-nothing' mentality in relation to church service; and any spare time we *do* find ourselves with is spent wracked with guilt, thinking about all the things we "should be doing". Frankly, if we're not *dying* from exhaustion, we conclude that we lack any kind of serious commitment.

After all, church life is supposed to be all-encompassing, exhausting, limiting (of our 'own time') and (between you and me) somewhat boring, right?

**Wrong!**

A church is like the human body, a living thing – made up of real people (1 Corinthians 12:12). Real people have their

limits, emotionally, spiritually and physically. Not only that, our levels of limitation will fluctuate during different stages of our lives.

We cannot be the same person once we have a partner or children as we were when we were single.

We don't have the same strength or 'spring-in-our-step' in our older years as we did when we were younger.

Our capabilities and energies ebb and flow, along with the ups and downs of our lives, and **we can only give what we can give** in the very moment of **right now**.

And church life should be rewarding, fulfilling, energising and motivating! Being at church should feel like being part of the family – comfortable, welcoming and with a real sense of belonging. The minute we stop seeing the value in what we're doing is the minute we need to stop and rethink the **why** of what we're doing!

*“Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household” – Ephesians 2:19, NIV*

## **A Church Is Only As Healthy As Its Members**

It's important to remember a church will only be as healthy and balanced and energised as the sum of all its members – those real people who make up the congregation.

If, individually, the members are exhausted and overloaded, the church will display signs of exhaustion too. It will become unbalanced, unhealthy and stunted in growth. It's also important to remember that **we** don't grow our church – God does the growing. Sure, we all have our part to play but no single person is responsible for, or indispensable to, God's plan for

the growth of a church or community.

*“The key issue for churches in the twenty-first century will be church health, not church growth.” – Rick Warren*

## **What Does Church Burnout Look Like?**

Have you heard yourself saying this recently?: “I’m so exhausted”, or “I just *can’t* go to another thing this week”. Maybe you’ve found yourself thinking, “I’m *never* at home” or “Why can’t *someone else* do this for once?”. If you have, you may be suffering from church burnout.

Here’s what church burnout looks like, in real life:

1. You’re always busy, at everything, constantly in motion. You find yourself overcommitting and double booking.
2. You have idealistic standards about what a ‘real church’ should look like.
3. Your day always seems to arrive with constant low-grade stress and periodic crisis.
4. You often decline offers of help and assistance.
5. You feel a strong sense of responsibility, even when others don’t.
6. You feel extremely guilty about not attending church events or activities, even if you’ve already attended several that week.
7. You feel a strong sense of expectation from other church members.
8. You have an inability to say no and if you do, it’s with reluctance and guilt.
9. When you think about church, you feel suffocated, resentful, despondent and angry.

*“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” –*

Church life – life with Jesus – is for those who are weary and burdened – because in Jesus we find rest.

Church life becomes a natural extension of the peace and fulfilment that we've found in Jesus. It's designed to enrich our lives, ease our burdens, and provide supportive relationships for hard times. It develops character growth and maturity so that we can support others, when needed. And service within our church should be something that fills us with joy and deep personal fulfillment.

**Church life is the natural outworking of a life based on *being* a certain kind of person, not *doing* certain kinds of things.**

## Tips For Preventing Church Burnout

- Emphasise grace over works in your personal life. Concentrate on who you're ***being*** rather than what you're ***doing***. Remind yourself that we don't earn God's blessings by the amount of work we do. He wants us to lead healthy, balanced lives where ministry service is a joy, where giving becomes as simple as *doing because it has been done for us*.
- Make time for regular recreation. These are the times when you can pause, reset and renew. Without recreation, burnout is inevitable.
- Know your limits and set reasonable, achievable boundaries for the work you take on. Giving of yourself is a valuable and worthy service, but sometimes giving isn't always possible or profitable. If you need to say "no", then do so, with **no guilt attached**.
- Remember that the work is God's, not your own. Seek His guidance and help when you consider your responsibilities and commitments within your church.
- Learn to put [first things first](#). Being involved within

your church community is a valuable part of a fulfilling spiritual life – but never at the expense of your time with God or your family. Set priorities and look for ways to involve your partner or family in church activities. Be willing to occasionally say no to low priority church activities when they conflict with quality family time.

- Listen to your body's warning signs, such as headaches, backaches, dizziness, insomnia, and unexplainable fatigue. Learn to slow down and be less anxious. **You can only do what you can do, right now** – nothing more.

Ultimately, you are in control of you – your decisions, your motivations, your attitude and your abilities. You, alone, can gauge whether a task or event is too great for you to take on or attend, or whether it's something that you can fit into your life.

The most important part of church life is focusing on **who you are being**, not what you are doing. Focusing on your 'being', rather than your 'doing' will bring things into perspective and make it easier to see what's important and what's not so important. When **being** becomes your focus, rather than **doing**, you will go a long way towards avoiding church burnout.