

# Dealing With Burnout in Ministry

By Evangelist Tom Palmer

**I Cor. 15:58** – *“...be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”*

**Gal. 6:9** – *“And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.”*

**II Thess. 3:13** – *“But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing.”*

## **Burnout Defined**

- A state of physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual exhaustion and weariness.
- The depletion of all personal resources that occurs from giving out more than is taken in (when your output exceeds your input, your upkeep will be your downfall)
- A condition that develops due to an overload of stress, pressure, or tension.
- A breakdown that produces a meltdown that leads to a shutdown!

**Old Testament Example** – *“David was greatly distressed”*  
(I Sam. 30:6)

**New Testament Example** – *“(the apostles)...there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat.”* (Mark 6:31)

## Identifying Stress Factors in the Ministry of Jesus

- Conflict – Jesus claimed that God was His Father and *“the Jews sought the more to kill Him”* (John 5:18).
- Change – In response to the teaching of Jesus, *“many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him”* (John 6:66).
- Criticism – When Jesus cast out demons, the Pharisees said, *“He casteth out devils through the prince of the devils”* (Matt. 9:34, 12:24)
- Concern – Jesus *“was moved with compassion”* when He saw the desperate needs of the multitudes (Matt. 9:36).
- Crisis – *“Jesus wept”* at the grave of a good friend who had been taken ill and died (John 11:35).
- Constraints – Human limitations at times caused Jesus to experience fatigue as when He was *“wearied with His journey”* (John 4:6).

## Elijah – I Kings 19

\*Chapter 17 was about **trusting** and chapter 18 was about **triumphing** and yet as this chapter begins, Elijah is struggling to deal with personal crisis.

Key thought is in verse 1: *“all that Elijah had done”*

- Miraculous provision of needs
  - “by the brook Cherith”* (17:3-6)
  - “a widow woman”* at Zarephath (17:8-16)
- Marvelous answers to prayer
  - “the Lord heard the voice of Elijah”* (17:17-23)
  - “the fire of the Lord fell”* (18:36-38)
  - James 5:17,18 – he prayed and the rain stopped and started (fire and water from heaven)
- Monumental display of revival
  - “The Lord, He is the God”* (18:39)
- Meticulous elimination of error
  - “And they took them...and slew them there”* (18:40)
- Massive outpouring of rain
  - “there was a great rain”* (18:41-45)
- Maximized burst of energy
  - “the hand of the Lord was on Elijah”* (18:46)

Note the sequence when faith is replaced by fear:

- *"...if I make not **thy life** as the life of one of them..."* (v. 2)
- *"...he arose, and went for **his life**..."* (v 3)
- *"It is enough; now O Lord, take away **my life**..."* (v.4)

**1. Physically Exhausted**

- *"the journey is too great for thee"* (v. 7)

**2. Mentally Overloaded**

- (Jezebel) *"So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time."* (v. 2)
- *"they seek my life, to take it away"* (v. 10,14)

**3. Emotionally Drained**

- *"went for his life"* (v. 3)
- *"he requested for himself that he might die"* (v. 4)
- *"It is enough; now, O Lord"*

Men Who Made a Similar Request:

Moses (Num. 11:15)  
Job (Job 3:20-21)  
Jeremiah (Jer. 8:3)  
Jonah (Jon. 4:3)

**4. Spiritually Disillusioned**

- *"I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts"* (v.10,14)
- *"I, even I only, am left"* (v. 10,14)

## **Biblical and Practical Insights**

### 1. Don't be afraid to be alone

- *"left his servant there"* (v. 3)
- Before you can reconnect with God, you must disconnect from all other human interaction.
- Jesus was often *"alone"* (Matt. 14:23; Mark 6:47; Luke 9:18; John 6:15)

### 2. It's OK to get away

- *"he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness"* (v. 4)
- It is necessary to go to a place where you will be undistracted and undisturbed.
- Jesus *"withdrew"* (Luke 5:16)

### 3. Don't just do something – stand there!

- *"sat down under a juniper tree"* (v. 4)
- In order to *"know that He is God"* it is essential to *"be still"* (Is. 46:10).

### 4. Have a good nap and a great meal

- *"he lay and slept...arise and eat"* (v. 5)
- God made the care of Elijah's body a first priority. He desperately needed rest and refreshment (I Thess. 5:23)

## 5. Rest well and eat well

- *“laid him down again...arise and eat”* (v.6,7)
- The body is the *“vessel”* (II Tim. 2:21) with which we *“glorify”* (I Cor. 6:20), *“magnify”* (Phil. 1:20), and *“serve”* (Rom. 12:1) our Lord.

## 6. Find your Bible and get it open

- *“the word of the Lord came to him”* (v.9)
- Tune out and if need be turn off all the other voices that are speaking so loudly. Allow yourself a *“Thus saith the Lord”* moment (appears around 1900 times in Scripture)

## 7. Get to know your God again

- *“stand upon the mount before the Lord”* (v. 11)
- Sadly, many servants of God have more time for the *“work of the Lord”* than *“the Lord of the work”*.
- The disciples had developed *“hardness of heart”* (Mark 6:52) and they needed to again *“know Him”* (Mark 6:54).

When I focus on myself – I get **disheartened**.

When I focus on the world – I **get distracted**.

When I focus on others – I get **disappointed**.

When I focus on circumstances – I get **discouraged**.

When I focus on the Lord – I get **delighted**.

8. Listen well so you don't miss what God says

- *"a still small voice...there came a voice unto him"*  
(v. 12,13)
- The same God who spoke through fire on Mt. Carmel had nothing to say through fire at Horeb, the mount of God.
- God may not use a sensational or spectacular method to communicate.

9. Realize that you are not alone

- *"I have left me seven thousand in Israel"* (v. 18)
- First of all, Elijah still had God (a majority), but he also had a host of God's followers who were faithful to God just as Elijah was.

10. Be a blessing and you will be blessed

- *"Then he arose and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him."* (v. 21)
- We need God, but we also need each other (Eccl. 4:9,10)
- Serving eliminates selfishness (makes life miserable) and creates selflessness (makes life pleasurable)

## Ministry Maintenance

*“And the very God of peace sanctify you **wholly**;  
and I pray God your **whole spirit and soul and body** be preserved  
blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

-I Thess. 5:23

Maintenance is a dedicated and concentrated effort to preserve usefulness and effectiveness for as long as possible. The efficiency of brand-new vehicles, sophisticated electronic devices, and human bodies will be doomed to depreciation and deterioration unless they are properly maintained. Paul understood that when he prayed for the “preservation” of the total being until Jesus comes. In a day when God’s servants are becoming weak, weary, wounded, worn-out, and wasted, the same continues to be essential. Permanent ruination will be the result without physical revitalization, mental renewal, emotional refreshment, and spiritual revival.

In Isaiah 40, the word “*faint*” (or a form of the word) appears four times in verses 28-31. “Fainting” is a Biblical term for the total collapse that occurs during a period of overwhelming weariness. However, this passage also implies that there are three specific elements involved in addressing weariness. They include **worshipping**, **walking**, and **waiting** and together they make an effective maintenance plan for God’s servants.

Your effectiveness in “the work of the Lord” is dependent upon your relationship with “the Lord of the work”. This requires a daily encounter with God that is fresh, authentic, and progressive. Without this, you will only be surviving when in reality you want to and need to be thriving in that ministry which God has called you to.



## **Worshipping**

\***Worship of God** is an enthusiastic response to the reality of God in the life of His servant. Psalm 86:10 presents three key elements of worship which are also evidenced in Isaiah 40.

1. **Adoration** – focus on the person of God

➤ *“Thou art God alone” (who God is)*

2. **Praise** – focus on the attributes of God

➤ *“Thou art great” (what God is like)*

3. **Thanksgiving** – focus on the works of God

➤ *“(Thou)...doest wondrous things” (what God has done)*

### **Assignment**

❖ Read through Isaiah 40:25-31 and write down:

1. A **title** for God \_\_\_\_\_ (v. \_\_\_\_\_)

2. A **truth** about God \_\_\_\_\_ (v. \_\_\_\_\_)

3. A **testimony** of God \_\_\_\_\_ (v. \_\_\_\_\_)

As you focus on the reality of your God, respond with adoration, praise, and thanksgiving. Psalms 86 and 145 also work well for a similar exercise. Make it a daily practice to enter into a season of worship personally.

## **Walking**

\***Walking with God** is the journey of a lifetime – taken one step at a time. It is the moment-by-moment experience of connecting and communicating with God which enables us to “stay the course” long-term.

### **Living a “Faint-Free” Lifestyle**

1. Always dwell on God’s goodness (Ps. 27:13)
2. Be faithful in your prayer life (Luke 18:1)
3. See the significance of your ministry (II Cor. 4:1)
4. Renew the inner man day by day (II Cor. 4:16)
5. Continue on persistently (Gal. 6:9)
6. Keep looking to Jesus (Heb. 12:2,3)

### **Assignment**

❖ Read through Isaiah 40:25-31 and complete:

1. “*The Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth*  
\_\_\_\_\_ ...” (v. 28)
2. “*He giveth power to the* \_\_\_\_\_ ...” (v. 29)
3. “*Even the youths shall* \_\_\_\_\_ ...” (v.30)
4. “*...they shall walk and not* \_\_\_\_\_.” (v. 31)

❖ Take these four Scriptural statements and use them to formulate a prayer in your own words. Ask God to help you daily take these steps in maintaining a consistent walk with Him.

## **Waiting**

\***Waiting upon God** is the response of the heart toward God during times of personal need or crisis. It is not so much an action but an attitude. Waiting is the key to calmness and contentment in the will of God.

In the book of Psalms, the word “*wait*” is found in 22 verses. These verses address the need for **quietness** (37:7), **patience** (123:3), **confidence** (27:14), **expectancy** (62:5), and **hope** (39:7). This “wait list” can be found using a concordance or a Bible program on your computer.

### **Assignment**

❖ Read through Isaiah 40:25-31 and highlight verse 31 in your Bible:

1. **Mark** – highlight the verse in your Bible, circle key words like “*wait*” and “*renew*” to add emphasis.
2. **Memorize** – commit this verse to memory using review and repetition until you can quote it.
3. **Meditate** – think through this verse and the key truths it presents so that you understand it.
4. **Master** – endeavor to personalize and internalize this verse and begin to live according to its message.

## **Is It a Job or Is It Ministry?**

| <b>A Job</b>                                    | <b>A Ministry</b>                                  |
|---|--|
| No one else will do it                          | I am doing it for the Lord                         |
| Just well enough to get by                      | To the best of my ability                          |
| I'll do it as long as it doesn't interfere      | I'll do it even if I have to let go of some things |
| It bothers me if I don't get praised or thanked | I will stay with it even when it seems unnoticed   |
| Someone else said it needs to be done           | I am convinced that it needs to be done            |
| It's hard to get excited                        | It's hard not to get excited                       |
| Main concern is success                         | Main concern is faithfulness                       |
| Hope to hear people say "well done"             | Hope to hear the Lord say "well done"              |
| Focus is on the task                            | Focus is on people                                 |
| Vision is temporal                              | Vision is eternal                                  |
| My part is seen as an inconvenience             | My part is seen as an opportunity                  |
| Feel we are all alone                           | Sense we are alone with God                        |
| Often concerned about what I can get            | Always concerned about what I can give             |
| Possibly done with a selfish attitude           | Probably done with a selfless attitude             |