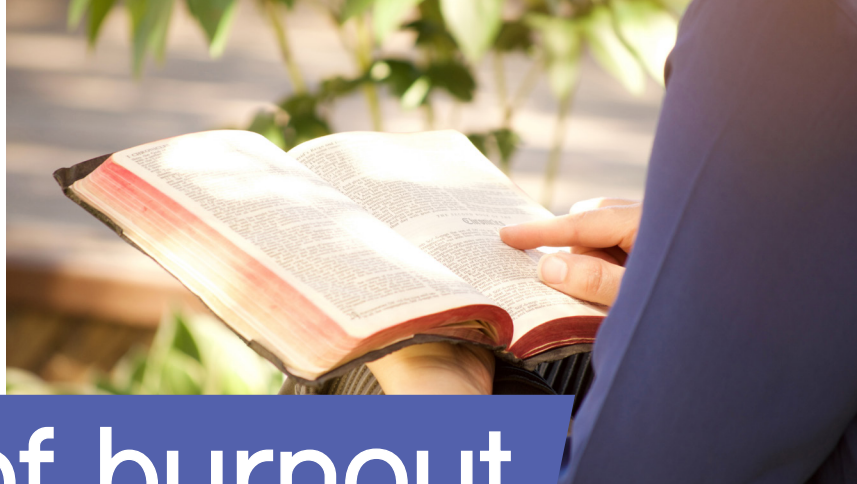


# DWELLING IN GOD'S WORD



## The perils of burnout

by Adrian Kitson

'It is better to burn out than fade away', they say. Like a lot of people, I believed this in my younger days. I believed that I was called by God to be productive for family, for church and for the world. As a pastor, I was there to 'give my life for the sheep', and if it meant being the first to arrive and the last to leave every time, then that was the 'call'.

Eventually, in my late thirties this ego-centric belief caught up with me. Being the husband of one, the father of four and the church-planting school pastor in an isolated part of the country, I did indeed burn out and began to fade away.

Thanks to the Holy Spirit working through his people, the brutal truth I learnt was that none of the abovementioned things were the main reason for my burnout. The main reason for my burnout was me – my constant choice to do things, meet expectations and fill needs.

**Read the 1st Commandment Explanation in the Small Catechism.**

**Make a list of people and things that are challenging Jesus' place as your most trusted person.**

Constant over-work and over-thinking to the denial of all other things in life – including personal health, family, friends and life in Jesus's grace – is essentially idolatry; that is, trusting in people, things and yourself more than in the promises, presence and power of God.

Painful and destructive though it be, burnout is nothing new.

**Read the account of Moses in Exodus 18:14–23.**

**Moses was overworking himself until his father-in-law Jethro showed him another way. Moses had to learn that he was not God, and that God was much bigger than him and had more people for the job than Moses alone. Where do you need to delegate not just tasks but also responsibility to others? If you are struggling to do this, why?**

It seems that we all need to learn how to balance the giving up of ourselves for others and the looking after ourselves. Both are for the sake of others. On the one hand, Jesus calls us to pick up our cross and follow him, which implies that this will cost us plenty, like it cost him. On the other hand, we hear many times that Jesus withdrew from others to be alone and with his Father.

**Read Luke 9:23,24, then Luke 5:15,16.**

**Make a list of your 'crosses' (things costing you or depleting you) and your alone or 'rebuilding/reconnecting' times in life. Which list is most influential on your wellbeing? What can you do now to ensure that the rebuilding/reconnecting list gains the upper hand this week?**

Burnout is less about your workload and more about what is at work inside you. Seek counsel to find out what is driving you to constantly over-work or over-commit.

Avoiding burnout is not merely managing the number of your tasks but also managing your energy to carry the weight of the tasks. Identify what tasks and responsibilities 'feel heaviest' and keep an eye on them.

Make a commitment to say No to one thing this week. Even saying No to a small request is a good start on the journey to saying No more often than Yes.

Practise delaying immediate responses to people's requests. When asked to do something, give yourself a day to get back to the person, or just say No. Just because someone asks does not mean you have to do it.

**To conclude, read Matthew 11:28.**

**For us burnout tragics, these words of Jesus are a daily tonic. They come to me whenever I enter the public worship space of my church community and remember to whom I still belong: God and his baptised, loved people, of whom I am one.**

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