

STRESS AND MINISTRY

Presentation to Dr. Lowe's Class.
Peter Foxwell. April 10 & 15, 2024.

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THANK YOU

WE'RE ALL VULNERABLE TO STRESS

- We're all vulnerable to stress.
- Pastors and church leaders are not immune.
- I can illustrate this from my own experience:

HOW I GOT BLINDSIDED BY STRESS

- Let me share how I got blindsided by stress in my first ministry.
- These are my vulnerabilities. As I share, think what your vulnerabilities might be:
- So ... add all those factors together and you can see my vulnerabilities:
 - Culture shock.
 - Awful people skills.

- Introverted personality.
 - Inexperience and lacking skills
 - Interpersonal conflict.
 - No understanding of stress and coping.
- There are many positive aspects of pastoral ministry, but ...
 - My point is: There's a good chance you will hit the wall just as I did unless you learn to recognize your vulnerabilities and figure out some healthy ways to cope.

EVERY PASTOR FACES STRESSORS

Every pastor faces potential stress events. Research studies report:

1. Social isolation. Friendless and alone.
2. Financial insecurity: low pay and benefits
3. Boundary issues: Late night phone calls, contact on days off and vacations. Interrupted home life. Work-life balance
4. High expectations, heavy work loads, long work hours
5. Role ambiguity: Caused by uncertain expectations and responsibilities. Who is my supervisor?
6. Interpersonal conflict.
7. Secondary "trauma." We're impacted by the suffering of others. Paul experienced something like this - see 2 Corinthians 11:28-29

THE DANGERS OF A SACRED CALLING

- The pitfalls of the sacred calling to pastoral ministry ...
- We may feel super-human, like we can do it all.
- So, we neglect our welfare, and crash and burn.
- Pastors report higher levels of stress than people in most other professions.
- So we must find ways to identify and cope with ministry stressors.

HOW STRESS WORKS

- The Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping.
- Stress is a subjective experience.
- Perceived threat to my wellbeing or resources leads to stress response.
- Our perceptions depend on our age, experiences, personality, and preparation.

WHAT STRESS SYMPTOMS LOOK LIKE

The symptoms of stress show up in our bodies and brains.

Chronic stress leads to serious health problems among church leaders.

- constant fatigue, brain fog,
- weight gain, diabetes, stomach upset,
- social withdrawal, anxiety, depression,
- substance abuse, irritability,
- burnout = the result of long-term workplace stress.

GET STRESS-READY

1. Learn where you're vulnerable.
2. Rest in the extraordinary love and goodness of God.
3. Work daily on developing godly faith, character, and conduct.
4. Practice healthy ways of coping. For example:
 - A. Don't let your church or ministry be the main thing.
 - B. Make your wife your best friend.
 - C. Take breaks.
 - D. Build positive mental habits.
 - E. Talk to fellow pastors. Listen to their insights.
 - F. Pursue friendships and hobbies outside of ministry.
 - G. Establish practical, healthy boundaries.

RESOURCES

- Start to Finish by Mark Dance.

Other recommendations:

- Ash, C. (2016) Zeal without Burnout.
- Bloom, M. (2019). Flourishing in Ministry.
- Burns, B., Chapman, T. & Guthrie, D. (2013). Resilient Ministry.
- Cloud, H. & Townsend, J. (1992). Boundaries.

- Cordeiro, W. (2009). Leading on Empty.
- Groeschel, C. (2021). Winning the War in Your Mind.
- Kraft, D. (2010). Leaders Who Last.
- Murray, D. (2017). Reset.
- Proeschold-Bell, R. J. & Byasee, J. (2018). Faithful and Fractured.

THANK YOU