

Clergy Self-Care

H.B.London, director of Pastoral Ministries, Focus of the Family, wrote a book entitled, "Pastors, An Endangered Species." Any therapist or denominational caregiver that provides professional care for pastors understands what H.B.London is trying to convey. Pastors are human with limitations and yet many are ministering beyond their limitations. The result is burnout or dropout.

The demands of ministry are endless. There are always more tasks to be done and some tasks to be done better. Sometimes, the pastor burdens himself with unreachable goals. Most of the time, it is the congregation that has unrealistic expectations on their pastor.

Consider this very descriptive role of the pastor conceived by a director of missions in Oklahoma City.

THE PASTOR

"He knows more of the personal problems of more people than does any gossip columnist, yet he tells no one but his Father.

He must generate group enthusiasm as does a cheerleader of a disappointingly slow ballgame.

He feels the pressure to produce a winning team, as does the ball coach.

He is given the responsibility of leading but always from a servant position.

He must give three or more speeches each week to the same general group.

He must not be repetitious or boring. He must have fresh, up-to-date materials and data. He must do it without a speechwriter or research team.

He must be approachable at all times regardless of his own personal desire to be left alone.

He must teach from a book studied and read by his students, yet must be fresh and informative.

He must continually sell himself, his company, his produce and, most importantly, his Boss, with the realization ever before him that to fail produces death.

He must never get behind in paying his bills; he must dress well; he must drive a clean car; he must have tools to do his job; he must be a leader in his gifts to charitable causes; he must entertain and he must do it on a salary, which is, most of the time inadequate.

He feels the responsibility of having a morally healthy family as much as the physician does to have a physically healthy one.

He must be willing to listen to people by the hour, to not know how to enjoy an uninterrupted meal with his family, yet handle his own frustrations over lack of time for his wife and children.

His work is so much a part of him that he cannot separate the two. A criticism about his company is a criticism about him. A rejection of his group is a rejection of him.

He is a walking, talking, loving man of God, man of men, man of a family who is called "Pastor."

He is trained to preach, to pastor, to administrate, but somewhere someone failed to give him the magic word, which changes him into "Captain Marvel." He is a man, a good man, but just a man. Without the grace of God his load would be too great and he would break...

Some do anyway."

Self-care is the key for pastors to stay healthy. The first step in self-care is to do self-assessments to evaluate your current status of health emotionally and spiritually.

The most popular for measuring emotional stress is the Holmes and Rahe stress test.

Life Changes for Clergy

Event	Average Value	Your Score
Death of spouse	100	_____
Divorce	73	_____
Marital separation	65	_____
Death of close family member	63	_____
Personal injury or illness	53	_____
Marriage	50	_____
Serious decline in church attendance	49	_____
Geographical relocation	49	_____
Private meetings by segment of congregation to discuss your resignation	47	_____
Beginning of heavy drinking by immediate family member	46	_____
Marital reconciliation	45	_____
Retirement	45	_____
Change in health of a family member	44	_____
Problem with children	42	_____
Pregnancy	40	_____
Sex difficulties	39	_____
Alienation from one's Board/ Council/Session/Vestry	39	_____
Gain of new family member	39	_____
New job in new line of work	38	_____
Change of financial state	38	_____
Death of close friend	37	_____
Increased arguing with spouse	35	_____
Merger of two or more congregations	35	_____
Serious parish financial difficulty	32	_____
Mortgage over \$50,000 for home	31	_____
Difficulty with member of church staff (associates, organist, choir director, secretary, janitor, etc.)	31	_____
Foreclosure of mortgage or loan	30	_____
Destruction of church by fire	30	_____
New job in same line of work	30	_____
Son or daughter leaving home	29	_____
Trouble with in-laws	29	_____
Anger of influential church member over pastor action	29	_____
Slow steady decline in church attendance	29	_____
Outstanding personal achievement	28	_____

Introduction of new hymnal to worship service	28	_____
Failure of church to make payroll	27	_____
Remodeling or building program	27	_____
Start or stop of spouse's employment	26	_____
Holiday away	26	_____
Start or finish of school	26	_____
Death of peer	26	_____
Offer of call to another parish	26	_____
Change in living conditions	25	_____
Revision of personal habits	24	_____
Negative parish activity by former pastor	24	_____
Difficulty with confirmation class	22	_____
Change in residence	20	_____
Change in schools	20	_____
Change in recreation	19	_____
Change in social activities	18	_____
Death/moving away of good church leader	18	_____
Mortgage or personal loan of less than \$50,000	17	_____
Change in sleeping habits	16	_____
Stressful continuing education experience	15	_____
Major program change	15	_____
Vacation at home	13	_____
Christmas	12	_____
Lent	12	_____
Easter	12	_____
Minor violation of the law	11	_____

Scoring the Survey

The survey you have just taken is an excellent reminder of all the life transitions you have gone through in the past twelve months. Perhaps you have been bombarded lately with a number of major life changes. No wonder you feel tired and depressed! The following will give you a sense of your score in relation to other clergy or clergy spouses:

50 or below	unusually low
51-100	stress very manageable
101-150	stress, moderately manageable
151-200	borderline – mild concern appropriate
201-250	mildly serious
251-300	moderately serious
301-350	very serious
351 and above	alarming

It is critical for pastors to take time out for weekly rest and periodical sabbaticals. Even more so, when the stress level is dangerously high. Sometimes it is necessary to get away to a secluded and quiet setting. You have already received a copy of the pastor retreat locations in California that are free or very low cost.

On a spiritual level, the maintenance of a healthy devotional life is obvious but so easily neglected. Life and ministry get so crowded with obligations and emergencies, the pastor's devotional life can get hurried, shallow and at times, non-existent.

The next self-inventory helps to measure balance and the priority of the devotional life.

How would you describe your spiritual temperature in your walk with the Lord?

____hot ____lukewarm ____cool ____cold

Evaluate your time alone with the Lord. Circle the quality that you most lean toward lately.

unhurried/hurried

satisfactory/unsatisfactory

stimulating/boring

fresh/stale

more talking/more listening

can't wait/can wait

high priority/low priority

undivided attention/distracted

systematic/haphazard

sense of awe/lackadaisical

much time in confession/little time

renewed spirit/troubled spirit

engaged/aloof

hunger to be with God/driven to do more for God

read the Bible for my edification/other's edification

The purpose of these inventories for self-care is self-accountability. The fact of the matter is that within the church system, pastors are clearly the caregivers and no one is designated to be a caregiver for the pastor.

Clergy health is best nurtured with time away from people. This may be hard for extroverts who get their energy from being with people. Or others may find it difficult because they are energized from activity or tasks. There is no substitute for taking time out for rest and solitude.

Deep and warm intimacy with God can be enjoyed in these quiet and unhurried times of solitude. Let me suggest the following spiritual exercise of listening to God and responding with appropriate confession of sin.

This prayer experience is intended to teach you the discipline of listening to the Lord in prayer. The longer you pause to listen, the more the Lord will reveal. The specific focus is on confessing the sins that God reveals to you.

PRAY THE SCRIPTURES:

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.” Psalm 139:23-24

PRAY FROM YOUR HEART:

“Lord, in Your intimate knowledge of every detail of my life, please reveal to me all the areas of sin where I need to receive cleansing. Amen.”

Confessional Prayer Work

The following questions are categorized and intended to help you identify sins of commission and omission. Every “yes” answer indicates a sin to be confessed for cleansing.

Ask the Lord each self-examining question. Listen for His response. If there is silence or peace in your spirit, proceed slowly to the next question. If there is conviction, confess it immediately to the Lord.

You may consider going through the list of questions twice.

Personal Life:

Matt. 5:8, 6:33; I Cor. 6:19-20; Gal. 15:16-24; II Tim. 2:19-22

- € *Is there anything in which you have failed to put God first?*
- € *Have your decisions been made after your own wisdom and desires, rather than seeking and following God's will?*
- € *Do any of the following interfere with your surrender and service to God: ambitions, pleasures, loved ones, friendships, desire for recognition, money, your own plans?*
- € *Are you careless with your body?*
- € *Do you fail to care for it as the temple of the Holy Spirit?*
- € *Are you guilty of overindulgence in eating or drinking?*
- € *Do you have any habits that are defiling to the body?*

- € *Do you take the slightest credit for anything good about you, rather than give all the glory to God?*
- € *Do you talk of what you have done rather than what Christ has done?*
- € *Do most of your sentences start with, contain, or reflect upon "I"?*
- € *Have you made a pretense of being something that you are not?*
- € *Are you self-conscious rather than Christ-conscious?*
- € *Do you allow feelings of inferiority to keep you from attempting things in serving God?*
- € *Do you underpay?*
- € *Do you put forth little effort in your work?*
- € *Have you been careless in the payment of your debts?*
- € *Do you waste time?*
- € *Do you waste time for others?*
- € *Do you listen to unedifying radio or music programs?*
- € *Do you read unworthy magazines?*
- € *Do you find it necessary to seek satisfaction from any questionable source?*
- € *Are you doing anything that shows you are not satisfied in the Christian walk?*
- € *Have you neglected to thank Him for all things and in all circumstances?*
- € *Have you virtually called God a liar by doubting His Word?*
- € *Do you worry?*
- € *Is your spiritual temperature based on feelings instead of God's Word?*
- € *Are you occupied with the cares of this life?*
- € *Is your conversation or joy over "things" rather than the Lord and His Word?*
- € *Does anything mean more to you than living for and pleasing God?*
- € *Do you have personal habits that are not pure?*
- € *Do you allow impure thoughts about the opposite sex to stay in your mind?*
- € *Do you read material which is impure or suggest unholy things?*
- € *Do you indulge in entertainment that is unclean?*
- € *Are you guilty of the lustful look?*
- € *Have you allowed yourself to become "spotted" by the world?*
- € *Is your manner of dress pleasing to God?*
- € *Do you neglect to pray about things before you buy them?*
- €

Christian Service:

Acts: 1:8; I Cor. 10:31; II Tim. 2:15; Heb. 13:17; I Per. 4:10

- € *Have you failed to seek the lost for Christ?*
- € *Have you failed to witness consistently?*
- € *Is your life failing to reveal Jesus to your friends and neighbors?*
- € *Have you robbed God by withholding your time, talents, and tithe?*
- € *Have you failed to support mission work either in prayer or offerings?*
- € *Are you undependable so you cannot be trusted with responsibilities in the Lord's work?*
- € *Are you allowing your emotions to be stirred for the things of the Lord, but doing little about it?*
- € *Do you stay away from the preaching of the Word?*
- € *Do you whisper or think about other things during the preaching?*

- € *Are you irregular in attending Bible study?*
- € *Do you fail to attend prayer meetings?*
- € *Have you neglected or slighted your daily private prayer time?*
- € *Have you neglected God's Word?*
- € *Have you neglected thanksgiving at meals?*
- € *Have you neglected family devotions?*
- € *Do you fail to submit to leaders in the church or elsewhere?*
- € *Do you rebel at requests given to you to help in the work of the Gospel?*
- € *Do you have a stubborn or unteachable spirit?*
- € *Are you lazy or irresponsible?*
- € *Have you dishonored Him and hindered His work by criticizing His servants?*
- € *Have you failed to pray regularly for your pastor or other spiritual leaders?*
- € *Do you find it hard to be corrected?*
- € *Is there rebellion toward one who wants to restore you?*
- € *Are you more concerned about what people will think, than what will be pleasing to God?*

RELATIONSHIPS:

John 13:34-35; Eph. 4:31-32; Col. 3:8-15; I Jn. 4:7-11

- € *Is there anyone against whom you hold a grudge?*
- € *Anyone you haven't forgiven?*
- € *Anyone you hate?*
- € *Anyone you refuse to love?*
- € *Are there any misunderstandings that you are unwilling to forget?*
- € *Is there any person against whom you are harboring bitterness, resentment, or jealousy?*
- € *Anyone you dislike to hear praised?*
- € *Do you allow anything to justify wrong attitudes toward others?*
- € *Are there any relationships that need to be reconciled?*
- € *Are you secretly pleased over the misfortune of another?*
- € *Are you secretly annoyed over the accomplishments or advancement of another?*
- € *Are you guilty of any unresolved contentions or strife?*
- € *Do you quarrel, argue or engage in heated discussions?*
- € *Are you engaged in any divisions or party spirit?*
- € *Do you complain or find fault?*
- € *Do you have a critical spirit toward any person or thing?*
- € *Are you irritable or cranky?*
- € *Do you ever carry hidden anger?*
- € *Do you have outbursts of anger?*
- € *Do you become impatient with others?*
- € *Are you harsh, unkind, or sarcastic?*
- € *Do you grumble or gossip?*
- € *Do you speak unkindly concerning people when they are not present?*

- € Are you prejudiced against other Christians because they are of some other group or because they do not see everything as you do?
- € Do you lie?
- € Do you exaggerate or stretch the truth?

If the sin is against God, confess it to God, and accept His cleansing. If the sin is against another person, confess it to God, and accept His cleansing. However, the Holy Spirit may require you to confess it to the other person before you receive a complete healing of the soul.

If the sin is against a group, confess it to God, and His cleansing. However, the Holy Spirit may require you to confess it to the group before you receive a complete healing of the soul.

If there is full confession, there will be full cleansing, and the joy of the Lord will fill one's heart. Then there can be testimony and prayer in the power of the Holy Spirit.

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.” Restore to me the joy of Thy salvation, and sustain me with a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors Thy ways, and sinners will be converted to Thee.” Psalm 51:10, 12-13

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