

THE PASTOR'S RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEIR OWN PASTORAL CARE

The plan begins with the pastor (Acts 20:28):

Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.

Our greatest success is to finish the work God has called us to do. But every pastor has to realize his or her own vulnerability. Stress and burnout are not phantom conditions. They are very real risks that come with the rigors of pastoral ministry, and unless specific disciplines are practiced and preventative safeguards are in place, there can be serious consequences for the pastor's health, family and ministry. Here are a few suggestions that can help a pastor reduce the risk:

- **Spend adequate time alone with the Lord in prayer, meditation and personal Bible reading (not just for sermon preparation).** It is also helpful to express thoughts, feelings or prayers in a personal journal. The psalms reveal how David understood the value of releasing the distresses of his mind through the pen in his hand.
- **Avoid isolation.** Every pastor needs friends, even within the church, with whom she/he can have fun. It is also important to have at least one close friend whom he/she can share innermost struggles and feelings. This needs to be a person who understands you, who will not judge you, and especially one who will keep private matters confidential. David had Jonathan; Ruth had Naomi. Even Jesus had an inner circle of three.
- **Have a hobby.** Pastors need a diversion, an activity that removes their minds and bodies from the pressures of ministry for a time in order to relieve the mental and emotional stress.
- **Manage time well.** Pastors have the luxury of keeping a relatively fluid schedule, but they can also put undue pressure on themselves if they aren't disciplined with their time. It becomes necessary to prioritize pastoral responsibilities according to essentials. This helps avoid getting stressed out by trying to accomplish more than time allows. But be certain to reserve adequate and undisturbed hours of study and sermon preparation.
- **Set realistic life goals, and work toward them.** God does not want followers and servant leaders to become bogged down in the mundane, distracted by the petty, or worn out by mere busyness. God wants shepherds to accomplish something of kingdom significance (Acts 20:24, 1Cor, 1:1-9).