

9 THINGS TO HELP YOU RECOVER PEACE IN A BURNOUT CULTURE

Tim works in a frontline capacity and he finds himself being posted to a different department to cover for the shortage of a dedicated staff. Every role he works in requires a slightly different set of skills. The daily uncertainty, pressure, expectations from clients or customers, the lack of control and being moved around by senior management slowly and surely begin to create significant stress and take a toll on the wellbeing of his life. Before long, he finds himself dissatisfied and have to take time off because of stress.

According to the Office for National Statistics, following minor illnesses and musculoskeletal problems, stress related conditions were the next most common reason for sickness-related work absence. Sickness and absences at work are one of the markers to employee wellbeing and one research showed that 1 in 10 UK employees are unhappy at work, with many people finding their job stressful and dissatisfied with the lack of work-life balance.

Remember: People burnout not because they are weak but because they tried to be too strong. They carry load and burden that they are not theirs to carry.

We need to be aware of the signs of burnout before it's too late so we can do something about it. But if you are already deep in the burnout zone, what I want to share today will hopefully help you as it has helped me in my journey of recovery.

1. Practice Sabbath Rest

Sabbath is a way. Sabbath is not a day. The principle of Sabbath is one way to regain perspective on our identity and role in our work. Sabbath means not only resting but ceasing, including ceasing to try to be God.

In Exodus 16, on the day of sabbath, God wanted his people to recognise that they done enough, they have enough, there will be enough, and more importantly, they are enough. Sabbath is a practice to realise that God is in control and set your heart on things above. Sabbath is God's way of saying, "Stop. Notice your limits. Don't burn out." It is a day he gives us to remember who and what work is for as well as what matters most. Sunday generously hands us hours to look into the eyes of those we love. We have time for loving and being loved.

In his book *Sabbath*, Wayne Muller said "*Sabbath is not dependent upon our readiness to stop. We do not stop when we are finished. We do not stop when we complete our phone calls, finish our project, get through this stack of messages, or get out this report that is due tomorrow. We stop because it is time to stop.*"

Our frantic production is an addiction. An addiction to control, to finish, and to be productive. On sabbath, we recognise that, we have done enough, we have enough, there will be enough, and we are enough.

We need to define our identity in terms other than work, making sure work is part of our life, but not the essence of it. We need to realise that ultimately our identity comes from God, not our job or our external circumstances.

Set a day that you stop work and stop being productive. This may be easier said than done but be present and unplug. Try the following practice. Don't leave your phone near your bed. Leave it outside the bedroom when I go to bed. You can practice this today and you will see results in a week.

Pastor Wien Fung

2. Be Open to Receiving Help

Don't fly solo.

You can't do this alone. You've got to tell someone. This could be your first step toward wholeness and wellbeing. When we feel overwhelmed with leadership responsibility, it's often our natural inclination to isolate ourselves. However, this often causes us to make decisions that can negatively influence us, people we care about, and organisations we serve.

The solution to this is to identify a few close friends outside of your organisation whom you trust and seek out a confidential mentoring relationship. You may need to see a doctor or a counsellor. You will need a community of love and support. You will need people to pray over you.

Ask yourself this question: Who are your [stretcher-bearers](#)?

Seek community with those who have walked in your shoes and are thriving in ministry. They have most likely experienced the work-related, leadership or ministry burnout you're feeling and will have advice on ways they overcame it.

3. Practice the Examen

At the end of each day, reflect on where I was most and least present to God's love in my day. It is a vehicle that creates deeper awareness of God-given desires in your life. Ask yourself some of the examen questions:

- For what moment today am I most grateful? For what moment today am I least grateful?
- What was the most life-giving part of my day? What was the most life-draining part of my day?
- When today did I have the deepest sense of connection with God, others and myself? When today did I have the least sense of connection?

Talk to God about what it was like for you to be in those moment. Journal for gratitude to God.

4. Set Up Clear Boundaries

"You encourage what you tolerate" - *Dallas Cowboys, professional American football team.*

If you tolerate people turning up late to meetings, they will continue to come whenever they want. If you tolerate staying behind at work after your working hours have end, your boss will continue to expect you to stay behind to give more.

If you tolerate offensive comments or abusive behaviour from your boss or colleague, they will continue.

If you tolerate your children's lack of respect, you will continue to get no respect.

You end up with what you put up with. A failure to speak up about something implies that you are ok with it. Each time you tolerate a behaviour, you are unconsciously and subtly teaching others that it is ok to treat you that way.

Healthy boundaries help us resist our inclination to control others, and they protect us from those who would attempt to control us. In their book *Boundaries*, Cloud and Townsend said, "*Clear boundaries respect the dignity, limitations, and responsibilities of the giver and the receiver, helping both sides to flourish. Having right boundaries to keep and let the good in and keep the bad out. If we have bad inside, we need to be able to open up our boundaries to let the good in*

and the bad out. In other words, our fenced need gates in them. If I have some pain and sin within, I need to open up and communicate it to God and others, so that I can be healed."

Ask the "How much work is enough?" question.

Be reflective and lead yourself. Are you being a hypocrite and modelling a double standard? Do you tell those whom you lead or look after to have discipline, to look after their own wellbeing but you neglect yourself and operate like someone with the messiah-complex? Remember: I'm no one's Jesus. That role has already been taken. We often feel self-guilt or guilt-tripped by others into giving more and breaking our personal boundaries. Anxiety and faith have something in common. They both ask us to believe in something we cannot see. Anxiety is having faith, but it's placing your faith in the wrong things. **Anxiety is placing your faith in the "what ifs"** rather than in "God is."

Here's the deal: **Overcommitment** is often a direct result of the inability to say 'no,' or to create — and maintain — healthy boundaries. Leaders who value integrity, quality of work and have a strong work ethic can be particularly susceptible. But here's the thing: **An organisation, a church or a family is only as healthy as its leader.**

Leadership is the immune system of the congregation. Self-differentiated leadership is about defining yourself with clear boundaries and not being determined or controlled by other people's anxiety and emotions. It is not about dismissing or ignoring others but not compromising.

The best gift a leader can give to the system (be it family, workplace or church) is to think about how can I best function within the system without getting sucked in and be yourself. How can you be truly yourself and not get sucked in to everyone else's mess. In other words, how can I be able to offer closeness of relationship to the group at the same time as remaining distinct from any groupthink or emotional pressure.

Defend family boundaries and **resist** unrealistic work demands. Practice saying "NO" to good things. Protect your space and review your commitments.

5. Work in your Strength Zone - StrengthsFinder

It is much easier to find what is wrong with people than what is right. Many organisations look to develop their people by identifying their weaknesses and then design an improvement plan. From the cradle to the cubicle, we devote more time to our shortcomings than to our strengths. This approach does not usually excite people to focus on what they're not good at. Whereas, a strengths-based approach focuses on identifying strengths and figuring out a plan to help employees use their strengths more often in their role.

In *StrengthsFinder*, Tom Rath insightfully said "*You cannot be anything you want to be — but you can be a lot more of who you already are.*" In Ephesians 2:10, Paul declared "*For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*" Do you believe that?

We devote over 3/4 of our lives to working, producing and serving. If you are in a job or an environment that you cannot use your strengths and this happens for a sustained period of time and you have no way of using your strengths, that can lead to stress, feeling undervalued, and it is dishonouring to the skills and gifts that you have been blessed with.

Devote time to discover your strengths and honour the strengths that God has given you.

Pastor Wien Fung

6. Set Realistic Goals and Expectations

In setting goals, don't develop unrealistic expectations. Leaders can sometimes set goals and expectations for themselves and their organisation that they simply do not have the capacity or resources to achieve. If we have unrealistic expectations and we fail to live up to them, we can spiral into disappointment. In those moments, it's important to remember that God is not disappointed in us.

7. Grieve the Loss

The journey of grief requires some skilful navigation. Too often well meaning Christians, in their inability to process grief, will urge you to get over it and move on. In *Faithful and Fractured*, Proeschold-Bell lamented that *"The country called grief is well travelled. That we so rarely signal this in church is a sign that we don't trust God to be with us in the darkness."*

The reason why you might be experiencing burnout is because life is not what you desire or hope to be. Maybe an expectation has not materialised. Maybe a dream has died. There is a loss in there somewhere. It is not unlike bereavement. The truth is the only way out of grief is straight through.

In the Bible, **mourning or lament** is a cry from deep within one's being directed to God. Lament is not whining. It is not bitterness. It is not a lack of faith. It is not questioning God. Lament keeps our heart soft and keeps hope in the midst of hopelessness. Lament turns our internal anger openly to God. Otherwise, we become unjust and seek to be God to control and correct injustices in our own ways. Lament ultimately leads to hope and praise in God because he is steadfast in love and he is the one who will keep his promises.

8. Don't forget the big three: sleep, exercise, and nutrition.

A church is only as healthy as the health of its leaders. My desire is to see myself and the lives of others to live out durable leadership with longevity and sustainability.

Sleep

It is not a luxury. Sleep is not the enemy to productivity. As Jason Bourne would say **"Sleep is a weapon!"** Develop consistent and healthy sleep habits. Set limits and boundaries and don't bring your negative and overwhelming thoughts to bed. Set a time before bedtime that you don't look at your phone, email, social media and not to talk about work-related or stress triggering issues. Stick to it.

Exercise daily

Pay attention to your mental, physical and emotional responses. Look after your physical health. Practice deep breathing skills.

Eat well

Food is often an outlet of control when we don't have control over other areas of our lives. Overeating or not eating at all.

Take time to recuperate. If you feel guilty taking time out to rest well, to look after your body and eat well, then something is not right. There is some fear and anxiety that you need to look into.

9. Be Kind and Compassionate to Yourself

Be mindful of the voice of shame. You are not a failure. You will get better and your best days are yet to come. Sometimes our pain can serve as a window into God's own suffering and the suffering of others. In *Faithful and Fractured*, Proeschold-Bell reflected that "*Experiencing suffering oneself is no hindrance to serving fellow sufferers — quite the opposite in fact. In The Wounded Healer, Henri Nouwen makes the argument that being in touch with our own pain grants us gifts with which to help God heal others.*"

Free yourself from the opinions of others. Constantly remind yourself that God is in control, and spend time with the Lord daily, refreshing yourself in His Word and asking Him to lead and guide you as you serve His people. If you're experiencing burnout, pray for God's rest, renewal, and direction. We are all flawed instruments serving His Kingdom, but he made us, knows our wounds and weaknesses, and even at our lowest points, is with us.

You are not alone.

WHO ARE YOUR STRETCHER-BEARERS?

MARK 2:1-5

A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. **Some men came, bringing to him a paralysed man, carried by four of them.** Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. **When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralysed man, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”**



Who are your stretcher-bearers?

When you can't come to Jesus, when you're down, who will have faith on your behalf and bring you to Jesus?

We all have friends but who are your stretcher-bearers when you fall?

Do they know they are your stretcher-bearers?