

# RESILIENCE:

FINDING WHOLENESS IN MINISTRY  
BY WAY OF THE CROSS

**STUDY:**

Burnout and Resilience

*Small Group Facilitator's Guide*

@2020 by Grand Rapids Theological Seminary of Cornerstone University

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**Grand Rapids**  
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

*Cornerstone University*

# Burnout and Resilience

## OVERVIEW

The goal of this study is to equip pastors and ministry leaders to identify symptoms of burnout in themselves and their colleagues and to avoid burnout by pursuing resilience.

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this course, participants will be able to

- + Identify symptoms of burnout;
- + Describe factors contributing to burnout;
- + Articulate strategies for avoiding burnout;
- + Define resilience in ministry; and
- + Make a plan for pursuing resilience in ministry.

### LESSONS

- + Experiencing Burnout
- + Defining Burnout
- + Avoiding Burnout
- + Defining Resilience
- + Resilient Ministry

### MATERIALS NEEDED

- + Internet access for videos
- + Computer, projector, and/or speakers to show videos
- + Whiteboard, poster board, or large sticky notes
- + Dry erase or bold markers



# Experiencing Burnout

## LESSON OVERVIEW

In this lesson, you will reflect on the three pastors' stories about burnout.

Activity	Time (minutes)	Materials
Scripture Meditation	5:00	Bible
Small Group Discussion	10:00	
Video	5:00	Computer, internet access, screen/projection equipment
Small Group Discussion	10:00	
Learning Log	10:00	
<b>Total</b>	<b>40:00</b>	



# Experiencing Burnout

### SCRIPTURE MEDITATION: PSALM 46

*NOTE: Invite a participant to read aloud Psalm 46. Consider concluding the scripture reading with a prayer for the participants.*

### SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

*NOTE: Ask participants to divide into small groups of three to four individuals. Encourage them to read the statistics below and then discuss them using the questions provided.*

Divide into small groups of 3-4 individuals. Consider the following statistics about pastors:

- + Most pastors rate their stress level at moderately high or higher.<sup>1</sup>
- + Nearly one-third of pastors are at risk of burnout.<sup>2</sup>
- + Many pastors have experienced depression, have struggled with addiction, or feel they cannot be authentic in their work.<sup>3</sup>

Discuss these statistics using the following questions as a guide.

- + As you read these statistics, what surprises you?

<sup>1</sup> The Flourishing in Ministry Project. (2013). "Flourishing in ministry: Emerging research insights on the well-being of pastors." Mendoza College of Business: University of Notre Dame, p. 20.

[https://wellbeing.nd.edu/assets/198819/emerging\\_insights\\_2\\_1\\_.pdf](https://wellbeing.nd.edu/assets/198819/emerging_insights_2_1_.pdf). Accessed December 17, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Barna Group. (2017). "The state of pastors: How today's faith leaders are navigating life and leadership in an age of complexity," p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Barna, "State of pastors," p. 47.



# Burnout and Resilience

- + To what extent do you see yourself reflected in these statistics?
- + To what extent do you think these statistics changed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?
- + What factors do you think contributed to changes since the COVID-19 pandemic?

## VIDEO

*NOTE: Invite participants to watch the video. Encourage them to take notes using the table on the following page.*

Watch the “Burnout Stories” video in which Ben, Mike, and Mark share their experiences of burnout. As you watch, take notes using the table on the following page. Try to identify what contributed to their burnout, the symptoms they experienced, and their pathway to recovery.



# Burnout and Resilience

	Mike	Ben	Mark
What contributed to his burnout?			
What symptoms did he experience?			
What was his pathway to recovery?			



# Burnout and Resilience

## SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

*NOTE: Ask participants to divide into small groups of three to four individuals to discuss the video.*

Divide into small groups of 3-4 people. Discuss the video using the following questions as a guide:

- + What most resonated with you as you watch the video?
- + What surprised you in what you heard?
- + What common themes among the three stories did you notice?
- + In what ways was each story unique?





# Defining Burnout

## LESSON OVERVIEW

In this lesson, you will learn about burnout and consider why it is so prevalent among pastors.

Activity	Time (minutes)	Materials
Scripture Meditation	5:00	Bible
Video	2:00	Computer, internet access, screen/projection equipment
Large Group Discussion	13:00	
Article	10:00	
Small Group Discussion	10:00	
Learning Log	10:00	
<b>Total</b>	<b>50:00</b>	



# Defining Burnout

### SCRIPTURE MEDITATION: PSALM 54

### VIDEO

*NOTE: Invite participants to watch the video.*

Watch the video, “One-Legged Stool,” in which Rev. Dr. Bob Burns describes what he and his colleagues heard from a pastor during their research on resilient ministry.

### LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION

*NOTE: Facilitate a discussion on the video using the following questions.*

Discuss the video using the following questions as a guide.

- + What resonated for you as you watched this video?
- + In what ways has ministry felt like a one-legged stool for you?
- + How might the one-legged stool relate to burnout?

### ARTICLE

*NOTE: Ask participants to read the article. They could read it silently to themselves, or a few volunteers could alternate reading it aloud. Encourage participants to underline or highlight ideas that seem important.*

Read the following excerpt on burnout.<sup>4</sup> As you read, underline or highlight ideas that seem important and/or resonate with you.

Burnout. It happens because I work too much or don't exercise good boundaries. I don't have friends with whom I can process the joys and challenges of work. I neglect my health and my relationships. I don't know how to manage conflict. I have a personality that predisposes me to burnout. Burnout is my fault. Or is it?

Many of us believe that burnout comes as a result of something a person did or didn't do. But a recent Harvard Business Review article suggested that burnout has less to do with the person and more to do with the place they work.<sup>5</sup> The article points to the World Health Organization's recent designation of burnout as "an occupational phenomenon" and cites recent research by Gallup that the top five reasons for burnout were workplace factors.

## DEFINING BURNOUT

Burnout is real. Christina Maslach, a longtime burnout researcher, and her colleagues have defined burnout as "a psychological syndrome emerging as a prolonged response to chronic interpersonal stressors on the job."<sup>6</sup> They have identified three dimensions of burnout: "overwhelming exhaustion, feelings of cynicism and detachment from the job, and a sense of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment."<sup>7</sup>

Even as Maslach and her colleagues have sought to define and measure burnout, they have not shied away from understanding what causes it. Over twenty years ago, Maslach and her colleagues began exploring the workplace to understand the organizational context in which burnout occurs. At that time, they contended that workload, control over one's work, rewards, community, fairness and values could each be a determining factor in whether or not an individual experienced burnout. They concluded, "Burnout arises from

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<sup>4</sup> This excerpt was taken from "Person, place or thing: A closer look at burnout in ministry" by Meryl Herr. The article first appeared on the Talking Points blog on September 1, 2020. <https://www.cornerstone.edu/blog-post/person-place-or-thing-a-closer-look-at-burnout-in-ministry/>.

<sup>5</sup> Moss, J. (2019). "Burnout is about your workplace, not your people." *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2019/12/burnout-is-about-your-workplace-not-your-people>.

<sup>6</sup> Maslach, C. and Leiter, M. (2016). "Understanding the burnout experience: Recent research and its implications for psychiatry." *World Psychiatry* (15:2), p. 103.

<sup>7</sup> Maslach and Leiter, "Burnout," p. 103.

chronic mismatches between people and their work setting in terms of some or all of these six areas.”<sup>8</sup>

## BURNOUT AMONG CLERGY

In their State of Pastors research, Barna found that nearly one-third of pastors are at risk of burnout.<sup>9</sup> But what contributes to that? In a review of studies on clergy burnout, Elizabeth Ann Jackson-Jordan listed the following predictors of clergy burnout: 1) compassion fatigue, 2) relational conflict, 3) high role expectations and a low sense of control and 4) vulnerability to the needs of parishioners. The factors that seemed to help mediate burnout were having a strong relational network such as peers, mentors or a support team and maintaining good boundaries. Among that list of positive and negative predictors of burnout, we find both personal and workplace issues.

William N. Grosch and David C. Olsen observed both of these issues—person and place—in the scholarly research on burnout. They summarized the difference this way:

One body of research insists that the problem is systemic. That is, people burn out because they work in systems that burn them out. The problem is external: too much work, too little support, rigid work schedules, difficult parishioners, being ‘on call’ twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, excessive bureaucracy, unhelpful and often irrelevant denominational struggles....The other body of literature suggests that the problem is within the person. Freudenberger (1974, 1984), who originally developed this idea, found that those most likely to burn out were idealists, perfectionists, and compulsives.<sup>10</sup>

Instead of keeping person and place factors separate when looking at burnout, Grosch and Olsen have advocated for bringing them together: “burnout is understood best when the interplay between self and system is understood. It is the interplay of systemic factors with individual factors that together produce burnout.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Leiter, M. P. and Maslach, C. (1999). “Six areas of worklife: A model of the organizational context of burnout.” *Journal of Health and Human Services Administration* (21:4), p. 473.

<sup>9</sup> Barna, “State of pastors,” p. 47.

<sup>10</sup> Grosch, W. N. and Olsen, D. C. (2000). “Clergy burnout: An integrative approach.” *Journal of Clinical Psychology* (56:5), p. 620.

<sup>11</sup> Grosch and Olsen, “Clergy burnout,” p. 620.



# Burnout and Resilience

## BURNOUT AND THE CHURCH

Burnout is a thing. It is real. We can observe its devastating effects in our lives and in the lives of others. Additionally, research indicates that burnout can be attributed to both the person and the place in which they work.

### SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

*NOTE: Ask participants to divide into small groups of three to four individuals to discuss the article.*

Divide into small groups of 3-4 individuals. Then, discuss the article using the following conversations as a guide.

- + What are the three dimensions of burnout?
- + What are some of the predictors of clergy burnout?
- + In what ways could a pastor or ministry leader contribute to their own burnout?
- + In what ways could a pastor or ministry leader's work environment contribute to their burnout?



# Burnout and Resilience

## LEARNING LOG

*NOTE: Inform participants that the Learning Log will help them to process and apply what they have learned in the lesson. If you do not have time for participants to complete the learning log in class, consider assigning it as homework.*

Reflect on your wellbeing using the three dimensions of burnout. This self-assessment does not measure or diagnose burnout.<sup>12</sup> However, this self-assessment could serve as a conversation-starter with a trusted friend, coach, counselor, or mentor.

- + I regularly feel a sense of overwhelming exhaustion.  

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
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- + I am regularly cynical about my work.  

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
-------------------	----------	-------	----------------
- + I feel emotionally detached from my work.  

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
-------------------	----------	-------	----------------
- + I feel completely ineffective in my work.  

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
-------------------	----------	-------	----------------
- + I have not accomplished anything of value in my work lately.  

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
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Review your responses to the previous items. Then, answer the questions that follow.

- + To what extent could you be experiencing burnout right now?
- + If you think you could be experiencing burnout, who is a trusted friend, counselor, coach, or mentor with who you could share what you are feeling?

<sup>12</sup> For more information about the Maslach Burnout Inventory, a scientifically developed scale for measuring burnout, go to [www.mindgarden.com](http://www.mindgarden.com). A trained consultant or therapist could administer, score, and interpret the inventory for you.



# Avoiding Burnout

## LESSON OVERVIEW

In this lesson, you will learn more about burnout as well as some strategies for avoiding it.

Activity	Time (minutes)	Materials
Scripture Meditation	5:00	Bible
Large Group Discussion	5:00	Whiteboard, poster board, or large sticky notes; markers
Article	10:00	
Large Group Discussion	10:00	
Learning Log	10:00	
<b>Total</b>	<b>40:00</b>	



# Avoiding Burnout

### SCRIPTURE MEDITATION: PSALM 55

### LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION

*NOTE: Facilitate a brainstorming session by asking participants to come up with a list of strategies for avoiding burnout. List the strategies on a whiteboard, poster board, or large sticky note.*

As a group, brainstorm strategies for avoiding burnout. List those strategies on a whiteboard, poster board, or large sticky note.

### ARTICLE

*NOTE: Ask participants to read the article. They could read it silently to themselves, or a few volunteers could alternate reading it aloud. Encourage participants to underline or highlight ideas that seem important.*

Read the following excerpt on burnout.<sup>13</sup> As you read, underline or highlight ideas that seem important and/or resonate with you.

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<sup>13</sup> This excerpt was taken from “On the line: How the burnout epidemic is affecting your pastor” by Meryl Herr. The article first appeared at Made to Flourish on June 4, 2019 and is used here with permission. <https://www.madetoflourish.org/resources/on-the-line-how-the-burnout-epidemic-is-affecting-your-pastor/>

## BURNOUT AND FLOURISHING

What is burnout? According to the Wellbeing at Work project at Notre Dame, “Burnout occurs when people experience chronic emotional and physical exhaustion plus a growing sense of depersonalization in work. Burnout is accompanied by reduced work effectiveness, difficulty in making decisions, decreased creativity, and increasing difficulty in adjusting to changes.”<sup>14</sup>

According to Barna, “more than one-third of pastors are at high or medium risk of burnout, and three-quarters know at least one fellow pastor whose ministry ended due to stress.”<sup>15</sup>

Notre Dame professor Matt Bloom and his colleagues looked intently at the wellbeing of pastors. They asked pastors to rate their happiness and measured pastors’ satisfaction with life. They measured pastors’ subjective well-being, satisfaction with family life, and sense of work-family balance.

Bloom and his team also looked at burnout. What were the levels of burnout among pastors? How exhausted were they? How effective were spiritual disciplines at contributing to a pastors’ wellbeing?

While their research showed that pastors experience, on average, only a moderate level of burnout and exhaustion, most pastors experience a “moderately high” level of stress in their jobs.<sup>16</sup> The researchers cautioned that “it is hard for most people to detect burnout in themselves.” And, as if burnout in and of itself is not bad enough, it can have further negative consequences: “For pastors with higher scores, burnout is one of the most detrimental factors to their overall level of flourishing. Burnout seems to be an insidious factor: it sneaks up on us, quietly tearing away at our well-being.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> The Flourishing in Ministry Project, “Flourishing,” p. 19.

<sup>15</sup> Barna, “State of pastors,” p. 11.

<sup>16</sup> The Flourishing in Ministry Project, “Flourishing,” p. 19-20.

<sup>17</sup> The Flourishing in Ministry Project, “Flourishing,” p. 20.



# Burnout and Resilience

## AVOIDING BURNOUT

Avoiding burnout may not be as easy as it seems. The factors leading to burnout can be myriad, and some cannot be controlled by the pastor. For example, a pastor's burnout may result from poor job fit or a personal conflict with a co-worker. It may result from workaholism or unchecked compassion fatigue. But church culture can also contribute to pastoral burnout. Bloom and his team noted that churches that do not actively welcome their pastors, do not invest in their pastors' lives, or expect too much of their pastors can erode the wellbeing of their pastors.

Still, pastors can take an active role in avoiding burnout.

In their work on what it takes for pastors to thrive in ministry, Bob Burns, Tasha Chapman, and Donald Guthrie found five themes among what pastors told them about thriving in ministry.<sup>18</sup> Pastors who thrive attend to their own spiritual formation; practice self-care; develop their emotional and cultural intelligence; maintain healthy relationships with their spouse and children; and grow in leadership and management competence. These pastors not only thrive but have a resilient ministry. Barna president David Kinnaman also affirms the need for resilient ministers. In Barna's *State of Pastors* report, Kinnaman concluded, "Christian ministers are as likely to be ignored and insulted as they are to be admired and revered. It's not a job for the thin-skinned or the weak of heart. It's a job for the resilient."<sup>19</sup>

## LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION

*NOTE: Facilitate a discussion on the article using the following questions.*

Discuss the article using the following questions as a guide.

- + What new information did you learn about burnout in this article?

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<sup>18</sup> Burns, B. Chapman, T. D. and Guthrie, D. C. (2013). *Resilient ministry: What pastors told us about surviving and thriving*. Downers Grove: IVP.

<sup>19</sup> Barna, "State of pastors," p. 21.



## Burnout and Resilience

- + Why might a pastor's strategies for avoiding burnout not be enough to keep them from experiencing it?
- + What are some ways pastors can take an active role in avoiding burnout?
- + In what ways do the strategies in the article align with those we listed earlier?





# Defining Resilience

## LESSON OVERVIEW

In this lesson, participants will discover what resilience is, why it's important to ministry, and how to pursue it.

Activity	Time (minutes)	Materials
Scripture Meditation	5:00	Bible
Individual Reflection	2:00	
Discussion in Pairs	3:00	
Video	4:00	Computer, internet access, screen/projection equipment
Discussion in Pairs	5:00	
Scripture Meditation	5:00	
Discussion in Pairs	6:00	
Learning Log	10:00	
<b>Total</b>	<b>40:00</b>	



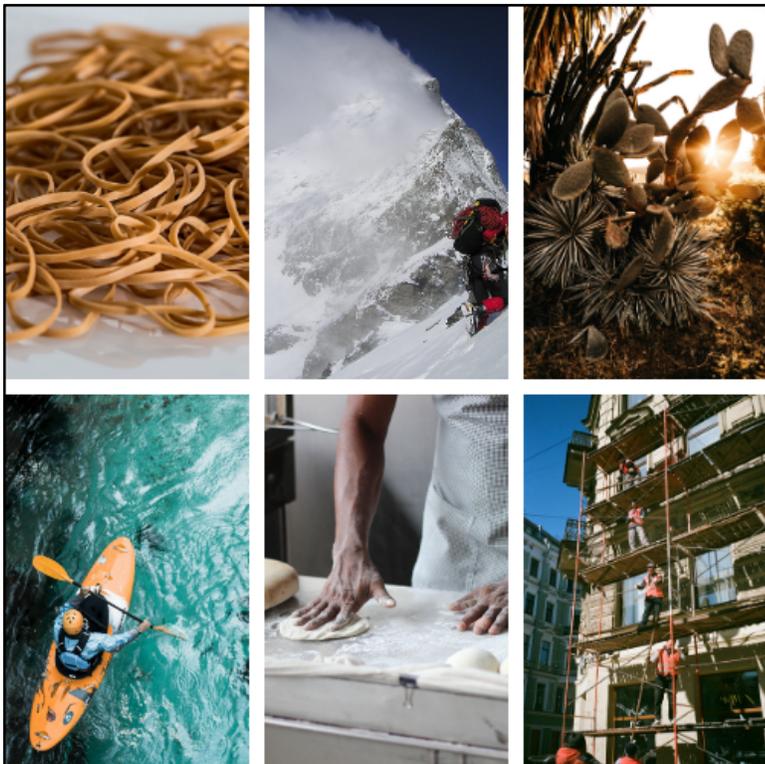
# Defining Resilience

## SCRIPTURE MEDITATION: PSALM 18

### INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION

*NOTE: Invite participants to study the following images and select one that makes them think of resilience. They will share their selection and reasons for choosing it with a neighbor.*

Which of the following images makes you think of resilience? Why?





# Burnout and Resilience

## DISCUSSION IN PAIRS

*NOTE: Invite participants to turn to a neighbor to share which image they chose and why. (Groups of three are acceptable if you have an odd number of participants.)*

Turn to a neighbor. Share which image you chose and why.

## VIDEO

*NOTE: Invite participants to watch the video.*

Watch the video, “How Pastors Define Resilience.”

## DISCUSSION IN PAIRS

*NOTE: Invite participants to turn to a neighbor to share what the video added to their understanding of resilience and the importance of resilience in ministry. (Groups of three are acceptable if you have an odd number of participants.)*

Turn to your neighbor and share what the video added to your understanding of resilience and the importance of resilience in ministry.

## SCRIPTURE MEDITATION

*NOTE: Facilitate a time of Scripture Meditation for participants. Read Colossians 1:11-12 (printed below). Invite participants to reflect on the words for five minutes. If you are familiar with Lectio Divina, you may lead participants through it using this same passage. However, be sure to adjust the activity time accordingly.*

When asked to describe resilience, Pastor Joy Bonnema quoted Paul’s prayer from Colossians 1:11-12. Spend a few minutes meditating on this passage. You might copy it onto a notecard and reflect on it as you take a walk. You might attempt to memorize it. Or you might use an ancient practice like *Lectio Divina* to read it slowly and prayerfully.



# Burnout and Resilience

“We pray that you’ll have the strength to stick it out over the long haul—not the grim strength of gritting your teeth but the glory-strength God gives. It is strength that endures the unendurable and spills over into joy, thanking the Father who makes us strong enough to take part in everything bright and beautiful that he has for us.” (Colossians 1:11-12, *The Message*)

## DISCUSSION IN PAIRS

*NOTE: Invite participants to turn to a neighbor to respond to the following questions. (Groups of three are acceptable if you have an odd number of participants.)*

With a partner, respond to the following questions.

- + What were some of your thoughts or impressions as you meditated on Colossians 1:11-12?
- + How do you see Colossians 1:11-12 as relating to resilient ministry?



# Burnout and Resilience

## LEARNING LOG

*NOTE: Inform participants that the Learning Log will help them to process and apply what they have learned in the lesson. If you do not have time for participants to complete the learning log in class, consider assigning it as homework.*

Complete the following activity to reflect on and apply what you learned in this lesson.

Turn your thoughts, imprecisions, and the words of Colossians 1:11-12 into a prayer for your resilience in ministry. Write your prayer in the space below.



# Resilient Ministry

### LESSON OVERVIEW

In this lesson, you will learn five strategies for pursuing resilient ministry.

Activity	Time (minutes)	Materials
Scripture Meditation	5:00	Bible
Video	18:00	Computer, internet access, screen/projection equipment
Small Group Discussion	17:00	
Learning Log	10:00	
<b>Total</b>	<b>50:00</b>	



# Resilient Ministry

## SCRIPTURE MEDITATION: PSALM 32

### VIDEO

*NOTE: Invite participants to watch the video. Encourage them to take notes on the five themes of resilient ministry in the space provided below.*

Watch the video, “Resilient Ministry,” in which Rev. Dr. Bob Burns describes what he and his colleagues learned about what helps pastors survive and thrive in ministry.<sup>20</sup> Take notes in the space provided below.

+

+

+

+

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<sup>20</sup> For more information on how they collected data and what they learned, read their book: *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us about Surviving and Thriving*.



# Burnout and Resilience

## SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

*NOTE: Ask participants to divide into small groups of three to four individuals to discuss the video.*

Divide into small groups of 3-4 people. Discuss the video using the questions provided.

- + How would you summarize the five strategies for resilient ministry in your own words?
- + Which of the strategies most resonated with you? Why do you think that is?
- + Which of the strategies, if any, do you tend to neglect? Why do you think that is?
- + What makes pursuing resilient ministry challenging for you?



# Burnout and Resilience

## LEARNING LOG

*NOTE: Inform participants that the Learning Log will help them to process and apply what they have learned in the lesson. If you do not have time for participants to complete the learning log in class, consider assigning it as homework.*

Revisit the five strategies for resilient ministry. Then, in the space below, make a plan for developing in one or two of the areas mentioned. Identify resources that you might need or people from whom you might need support or counsel.

Plan	Resources Needed	People for Support/Counsel