

Leading Forward: Do ministers really need time off?

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The jokes have been made for years about ministers only working one day a week. Others have said, "Why does our pastor need a day off? I thought he was off every day except for Sunday." Still others have taken a more pious viewpoint saying that ministers are God's servants and are always on duty. God is always available to us, therefore, I expect my pastor to always be available to me.

WHOA THERE! We do lose perspective quickly. Ministers are men and women just like the rest of us. They require sleep, food, oxygen, good health, and chocolate, just like the rest of us. They could also use some time with family, leisure, and even an occasional Saturday or Sunday afternoon nap.

The truth is that while ministers usually have a certain amount of control over their daily schedules (sermon prep in the mornings, afternoons, or late at night – their choice), the schedule more often controls them. People alter or ignore the schedule like the person who just drops in – "I didn't think you'd be too busy this morning so I wanted to stop by and reminisce (or talk about the flower beds, your lousy sermon, the unruly children in the halls, or the wrong brand of coffee in our classroom)."

Ministers live with great stress. They are perceived as being

solely responsible for whether the church grows or not, whether the hospitalized are visited, whether everyone in the church gets their own way and stays happy. In other words, ministers are expected to do the impossible.

Here's the serious part: one study reveals that 1,000 – 1,500 ministers leave the ministry monthly in North America. Burnout is often the cause. Power takeovers, sexual misconduct,



"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly." - Matt. 11:29 (The Message)

and even money mismanagement may occur during a time when stress pushes a person to burnout. Are there ways to help ministers in the "normal routine stress" to not progress to an "out of control stress" that results in their burnout?

Consider some or all of the following:

- * Build in weekly time off for all ministers and staff. The scripture says that on the seventh day God rested.

- * Keep some evenings clear on the church calendar so that ministers and members have evening time with their families.

- * Encourage ministers to be part of a small group with other ministers or friends outside the church for Bible study, prayer, and social activity.

- * Give as much vacation time as possible but with a minimum of two weeks and three Sundays off each year. Make sure the ministers take the time and don't call them home because of someone's illness or a death.

- * For staff anniversaries, give ministers gifts of time off or time away.

- * Always feel free to talk with ministers, but call first to schedule a convenient time. Plan what you are going to say or ask.

- * Serve. Ministers are not called to "do all the work." The scripture says that they are to equip the members (saints) for the work of the ministry.

Denton Baptist Association has information on resources available in the North Texas area to work with ministers in coaching, counseling, and dealing with burnout or stress. While there are costs associated with these ministries, the cost is far less than the loss of another ministry because of burnout.

A goal for our day would be "healthy ministers serving healthy churches to help create a healthy community and world."