

pastor pain

steve bagi



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my journey in burnout

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pastor pain

1 | Welcome to the book

What went wrong?

I used to be a successful guy who had his act together. I had a good academic background and was a part of great ministries both at home and overseas for over two decades. I had worked hard and generally got on with most people. I felt good about myself and what God had been able to do through me. So, why am I sitting here unhinged, sad, anxious and lost?

It's called burnout. It's a world of pain that you wouldn't wish on anyone or anything, except perhaps your neighbour's cat. It hurts and has been hurting for a long time. The good news is that one day I will hopefully push through all of this and survive, but there are no guarantees. There is a chance that I may never be quite the same again. Regardless of the outcome of my journey, I would like to share some stuff with you about burnout in pastoral ministry.

The fact that you are reading this book means that you may be a pastor in pain, or someone who really cares about their pastor or you may be someone hoping to get some tips on how to make your pastor's life more difficult than it already is. Whatever your reasons for reading, I hope that my observations and thoughts will help you to come into my world just for a while and in doing so you will understand your pastor and the struggles that church leaders face in the 21st century just a little bit better.

Most people that I have met in churches would say that they would never want to do my job as a pastor. They somehow realise that, while

extremely rewarding, it is a stressful line of work. But what are the demands and aspects of the job that make it so stressful? In this book I would like to share with you a collection of concepts that, when put together, will hopefully give you a clear picture of the demands of pastoral ministry.

I will mainly be drawing upon my experiences and the many conversations that I have had with pastors over my time in ministry. Although I believe completely in the value of empirical research and statistics, this book is not a research project. It's just my stuff that I hope is on the money. As you read through you may find huge areas that I have not touched upon. No worries, just send the info through to me and I will include it in the sequel, "pastorpain 2 : still hurting". Or perhaps I should write a prequel, "Before the pain". Anyway, it will make for a good movie.

I believe that the church is the most important organisation in the world. It is a worldwide family of people who have said "yes" to the greatest offer ever, the gift of purpose, forgiveness and eternal life through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. This grouping of people takes many shapes and forms in its expression but at the end of the day it is an integrated holistic body of disciples forming the "body of Christ"(1 Corinthians 12:27). In this body, all are equal and gifted to serve in the higher purpose of telling people about Jesus and living in a way that reflects well on God. Each disciple is called to be obedient to the leading of their Saviour and be His product placement in the world.

Although no better than anyone else, some are called to be leaders in this huge project. They are called to lead God's people and to mobilise the church for action. If we flick through the pages of the Bible we will soon see that it has never been an easy thing to be a leader in God's family. No significant leader mentioned in the Bible ever had a smooth run. Sometimes they stuffed it up themselves, but for the most part throughout history, God's leaders have struggled with the apathy, disobedience, sin, resistance to change and the lack of openness to His Spirit from His beloved little children.

It's not surprising to find today's leaders struggling with the same barriers to growth. The church's mission of sharing a message that can save someone from spending eternity in hell still has to rate as the most urgent and vital mission of all. Everything must be done to strengthen leaders in their calling

and understand and remove barriers to this message being lived out and shared in our lost world.

“Houston, we have a problem!”

The church is losing good leaders through burnout and disillusionment. Whatever the rate is, it's too high. I believe that there are enough pastors in pain to justify writing a book like this. There are enough ex-pastors who once devoted themselves to “the church” who now feel weak and gasp for air at the mention of it. If any secular organisation had the fall out rate of its leaders that we do, they would be spending big bucks trying to fix the situation.

Somehow, we all know that pastors and church leaders can burn out. It's sad to see them go and we pity them. What a shame that things didn't work out. But, life goes on and replacements have to be found and victory songs have to be sung so that the machine doesn't miss a beat. Often the former leaders wonder why the machine seems to run so well without them as they wander in the desert staggering about looking for living water and some answers. Sadly, many leaders and pastors have dropped away or become nervously dormant. I can't help thinking that this phenomenon is not God's plan. How could it be His plan to see good leaders drop out and sometimes become bitter and fallen people? No commander in chief would run a military campaign like this, so how can we imagine that Jesus wants to run His spiritual campaign this way.

I am not writing this book as a strategy to discourage anyone from accepting the call to leadership or paid ministry. I wouldn't swap my life in service to Jesus for anything. Even though I would gladly give away the pain that I am now experiencing, I would not swap the life that I have led for one which was smooth and cheesy but with no significant impact. Serving Jesus is the best thing anyone can do.

Please note this positive bit.

Although burnout is a depressing topic, I don't want anyone to get the impression that I haven't enjoyed many great experiences and blessings over the years as a pastor. Nothing can compare to the joy of helping someone come into a relationship with Jesus and to see them grow as His disciples. I believe that I have been able to significantly help many people in troubled times and I have been built up by the love, concern and encouragements that I have received from others. I have met and worked

with many inspirational people. There have been amazing adventures and experiences that I will treasure for the rest of my life. I have thoroughly enjoyed the privilege of teaching from my all time favourite book.

I also know that many churches have done amazing things to reach into their communities and impact lives. As disciples of Jesus, people have shown His love in great and sacrificial ways. Throughout the ages the church has often made a significant impact in the world around it. I do want you to note and remember these two paragraphs as I don't want this book to sound like sour grapes from a crabby, confused, middle-aged man.

When people sign on to follow Jesus they should realise that their life as a disciple will be a mixture of sweet times of great blessings and other times of sacrifice and difficulties. Just read the bold print in your call to discipleship (Luke 9:23). Jesus was upfront about the costs of following Him. That's ok. It's what we want to do for Jesus and His magnificent cause. It's more the unnecessary and avoidable pain that I want to highlight in this book, the stuff that happens in churches that could be done better, and hence reduce the stress level. You know what I mean as you either have seen it or been a part of it yourself. The human factor.

Let me also say very clearly that at the end of the day each person is responsible for their own personal wellbeing. I must, and do take responsibility for ending up in the forest of self pity. I could have responded to pressures in a healthier way. I could have resigned any time and moved to an island for a lifetime of silent contemplation. But I didn't. I pushed on and on and on until, finally, the wheels came off. Once the wheels come off, the car is not going to go anywhere for a long time.

So, come with me on this journey. Although burnout is a depressing topic, I hope that I can lighten the journey so that this book doesn't become a burden, but a help. I hope that you will better understand your pastor and ways in which you can ease the burdens that he carries. In the book, I will be referring to pastors using the male gender. There is no theological point that I want to make in doing this; it's just that I am not a good enough writer to write in a more inclusive way and at least it keeps it simple.

Some of the material may also be a help to those of you work in various other fields regarding the pressures that you face day to day. Burnout is a problem in many professions. If your work has anything to do with people then you will be able to relate to at least some of the material in this book.

2 | Ouch! It hurts

What does “pastorpain” or “burnout” feel like? I believe that it is important for you to know what I am feeling. This is not an invitation to a pastorpain pity party but a glimpse into an experience that you might have heard about. Like most things in life, it’s not until you go through certain things that you appreciate what they feel like. When I shared with people that I was burnt out they were sad, but somehow had no idea of what I was going through. I hope that, by me explaining my experiences, you can better understand and care for those who are struggling with burnout and maybe even avoid it yourself.

I think that burnout is more of an ongoing state of being rather than a specific experience. There are no simple, crisp statements to describe how I am feeling, as it’s more like a stew of emotions and sensations. The pain stew. The stew contains many emotions and recurring thoughts which surface and disappear almost randomly. Burnout is a condition in which the person is not just tired, stressed or disillusioned but rather is in a zone of pain. Although burnout will be a different experience for each person, there are some common factors and feelings.

Perpetual anxiousness

I feel anxious most of the time. I don’t mind being anxious when there is something to worry about, but I feel cheated feeling really anxious for no apparent reason. I look out and see the sun shining and hear the birds chirping and I can’t connect to it. I have a feeling that there is some

mysterious thing that I should be dreading, but I don't know what it is. I know that this is a cumulative effect of years of stress. It's like for decades I have been borrowing from the stress bank. Each day and each incident that I have experienced and not processed in the best way is like taking out a loan. It gives me just enough resources to survive the day, but it takes me further into stress debt.

It wasn't just being a pastor, but the years spent on the overseas mission field. Being a missionary in post-Communist Eastern Europe was an amazing experience, although extremely stressful. Each year that passed in ministry brought wonderful adventures, but at the same time the debt at the stress bank was creeping up to the limit. Burnout is the stress bank foreclosing on the loan. You have accumulated so much that it moves in and puts a "For Sale" sign on the property. You don't have the resources to pay them out, so you pay by watching the things that you do well and value being taken away.

I don't understand why I feel so anxious, but the longer I feel this way, the more things I seem to have to really worry about. Sure I trust God, but somehow I don't have the strength for that faith to feel real. New disturbing questions start to surface. Will I make it through this? Will I ever feel well again? Will this tight feeling in my chest ever go away? Will this pressure on my body lead to something serious like a heart attack or a stroke? How will I get strong enough to get back into some work which will support my family? How will my family cope with me out of action? They love and support me, but things have always been tight, and now there is a prospect of financial disaster. I worry about the ongoing effect of all of this on my wife who, although being a rock and a legend, is bruised and battered as well. "The two shall become one." Whoever thought that that would apply to burnout as well?

What about the kids? How is all of this helping them to find a deeper faith in God and His church? Our kids are MKs (missionary's kids), as well as PKs (pastor's kids). Why are there such titles and what are the costs that have to be paid by them for living a life that they didn't choose? If I take medication will there be unpleasant side effects? One person said that medication would probably negatively influence my sex drive and enjoyment. Great! That was still one positive that I had left. Why are there so many questions?

Depression

There is also a great “blah” that envelopes my life and steals my rightful joy. Whether this depression is caused by chemical imbalances or just the result of a million sadnesses that I have witnessed and heard about, I don’t know. Sadness is also the price of caring and seeking wisdom. Just ask King Solomon. As a pastor I have also worn a sign on my head for many years. It reads “tell me your struggles and the struggles of everyone you have ever met or heard about - and their pets”.

Some days seem to be a non-stop barrage of legitimate prayer points. I wish that I could be a shallow person just riding on the wave but I have seen too much and know too much about the world to just smile for the camera. I pray earnestly for the Spirit’s joy and sometimes I feel it, but there is still an overriding sense that all is not well.

It feels like I have been taken out in a rip in the surf and lost my footings and I am struggling just to stay afloat. I lift my hand in the air but there is no one coming. The ones that seem to respond still seem too far away to actually take hold of my arm and help me out. This depression is deep and I can relate to others who suffer with it a lot better now that I have experienced it myself. I now know why some don’t want to get out of bed. I now understand a little bit better why some cut or hurt themselves in their depression. It never made sense to me for someone to hurt themselves but in my pit of pits I have understood them. Sometimes the pain hurts so much that you wish that there was a way to express it; not to get rid of it but just to give it a name. I didn’t and won’t do anything harmful like that as my logic and chicken nature are still working, but I understand the feeling. It’s the pits being in the pit.

Frustration and anger

I have never considered myself to be an angry sort of person. I have tended to roll with the punches. Perhaps, in retrospect, I should have punched more and not just taken on the diplomatic church employee punching bag role. I am angry but I have no real enemy. My frustration and anger is more about me ending up like this than anything in particular. I mean I signed on, fought hard, won victories, but now sit on the sidelines unable to get back in.

I am angry with myself for not being stronger and wiser. I am angry with Christians who have either deliberately or inadvertently contributed.

My real faith in God and my world view keeps me from really being angry with God. If I was a Christian who believes that only sweet things happen to believers then I would be totally derailed. My faith is in God who I continue to believe loves me and has a plan. I know that He allows things to happen that will help me to grow.

Please don't quote me a passage like James 1:2-4. I know the theory; pain producing quality. I know all this but somehow if I could barter with God I would gladly be content with a little less quality at the price of less pain. This passage is great when the person actually feels like they have grown, but as I look around and see the pit that I am in, this concept hasn't kicked in just yet. I am angry and I wish that I knew who to punch to make it better, but there is no one.

Tired of being tired

Physical, mental and emotional exhaustion can creep up on anyone. Burnout goes beyond tiredness – it's one step up. Tiredness is the battery wearing out. Burnout is the battery that has worn out and gives no light. This is not the tiredness that will fade with a good night's sleep or a holiday. It's a deep fatigue in which I feel that the last of my reserves have been sapped out. I guess that it's natural to feel tired in a job where you are giving out all the time. If the transfer of energy is always in output then, of course, the batteries will die. I know that I should have attached myself to the Ultimate Recharger more and not revved the engine all the time. I know that I should have slept more, and more soundly, but at the time it seemed so difficult to do.

All work can be tiring. I am not sure why pastoral work is so tiring. Perhaps it's because it uses mental, physical, emotional and spiritual energy. Why are pastors usually so washed out on Mondays? This is not a modern phenomenon as the famous pastor Charles Spurgeon, over 100 years ago, wrote about the fatigue that comes from preaching. "How often, on the Lord's-day evening do we feel as if life were completely washed out of us! After pouring out our souls over our congregations, we feel like empty earthen pitchers which a child might break".¹ Or is it the Sunday barrage of countless conversations and micro counseling sessions? Whatever the reasons, pastoral work can be very draining. Many pastors experience an ongoing weariness in their lives. This tiredness can be pushed through for a while, but one day the car just won't start. The battery is dead. Unlike the simplicity of replacing a car battery, human batteries take a lot more time and care.

Confused, useless and hopeless

I used to know the way ahead and what to do. I now feel lost in the forest and have trouble making any real decisions. I have somehow stepped out of the cabin and left the plane on autopilot. Instead of being the director I feel like the spectator to my own life. There, but not completely involved. Wanting to work and contribute but not being able to. For a person that has always sought to be productive, uselessness is a living curse. I know that there is a lesson to be learnt from simply being, but it's killing me. It's so hard to go from overbusy to nothing. I miss being useful. Some moments I am very confident and feel ready to take on the world again. Sadly, these moments are short-lived as I once again face the reality of who I am. I still have my eternal hope and the belief that one day things will be better. Hopefully better. I am not so sure. I am not being the husband, parent or participant in life on planet earth that I want to be. I am ... "lost man".

Loneliness

I hate this feeling of being alone. Sure there are heaps of people that I could spend my time with, but somehow my condition pushes me away from them. In some way I want to avoid people from my church family as spending time with them will only remind me of why I am here. Also, I feel that people don't really understand where I am at and I don't want to keep trying to explain it. When someone is depressed the thing they need, but avoid like the plague, are happy people. I feel that I have no place with them and that my presence would only serve to take away from their happiness as well. I don't want to be alone and yet I don't want to be with people. Go figure!

Guilt

There is often a pervading sense of guilt that comes with pastor pain. It's not like the guilt when you are busted for doing the wrong thing. It goes deeper than that. Somehow, even though I don't need to be, I do feel guilty. I feel guilty that I am in an emotional pit. My heart breaks to see my wife trying to put on her brave face and go through another day with me off in "la la" land. She has enough pressures on her life with her own burdens and the burdens of our family. Then on top of all this, the head of the home has lost the plot and is groaning incessantly with pain.

I am thankful that in my life I have only been in hospital for a couple of minor ops when I was young. Hospitals in those days weren't the Hiltons that we can now enjoy, but I still remember as a young teen being placed in a large room with a bunch of old men. They weren't probably all that old, but at the time they seemed like pensioners groaning and snoring throughout the night. That ongoing noise nearly sent me around the twist. I feel guilty that I have become the old man in the bed and my spiritual groaning has been a burden to others. For this I am sorry and pray that one day I might again be the leader of our family.

There is another level of guilt that comes from being a Christian and a leader in the church. There can be a real guilt associated with admitting our struggles to unbelieving health professionals. Somehow it rips at my core to admit that they won't see the abundant victorious life in me. My passion is to help people come to know Jesus. I want to shout from the rooftops how great it is to know Him personally and the incredible benefits that He brings into life. My sorrow is that somehow I have ceased to be a good advertisement for Him. How can I speak of abundant joy when it seems like a vague memory or a dim hope to me?

The deepest guilt for me is that I feel that I have let the team down. My eyes well up with tears just thinking about the lack of witness in my life. Maybe perseverance under long term ongoing stress is a witness of sorts, but I want it to be more. It is not an easy thing for me to talk to my doctor about such things but I will have to just to stay afloat. For this, Jesus, I am sorry and I pray that you can still use me as your witness even in this state.

Disillusionment

As I finished up in my pastoral role I couldn't help wondering if all the time and energy that I had poured into it was really worthwhile. Of course, so many great things have happened, but at the end of the day I still felt that I and my corner of churchworld had not made the impact that I would have hoped for. I guess that I spent too much time running the program and not enough time evaluating it. Now looking at the whole church scene from the outside, I cannot help noticing the disparity between input in terms of man hours and money, compared to the output . . . which, in many places, is very few people becoming Christians. Also, it is discouraging to feel that I may have been taken for granted by people. Although I did enjoy a good level of support and encouragement, so often I felt that my services were just taken as a given, like our trusty, favourite old tea towel.

Surprise

In many ways I am not surprised that I have broken down, but I am surprised at just how unpleasant and long lasting this experience has been. I have always struggled with anxiety and an overactive mind that just keeps ticking away like a taxi meter that doesn't get shut off, although the fare has reached an outrageous amount. I had sensed for years that I was heading down a path towards burnout, but it wasn't until I stopped that I realised that what I was facing was so much more powerful than I had ever thought. I guess that in some ways I was fortunate enough to see warning signs and pulled out before it was too late. For some, burnout comes as a great surprise. They seem to be cruising along well and then come to a moment of breakdown where all of sudden they are incapacitated and can't go on. This must be a scary thing to be totally surprised by burnout, but it can happen and we have all heard the stories of people who just, through some small trigger, fall into a heap. The warning signs were probably all there but not taken seriously.

Burnout is a pain that comes from emotional, psychological, physical and spiritual sources. Some books have explored the biochemical aspect of burnout and there is no doubt that it has a physical basis. There is also the emotional side and let's not forget the spiritual forces at work (Ephesians 6:10-20). I can't help feeling like I and my family have been struck by a semi-trailer sent from the evil one. Not that me being knocked out of the race is any great victory for the evil one, but pastoral burnout does knock the church back from its onward assault.

There have been times of late when I have sensed the enemy trying to knock me down for good. He is not content with me being on the floor for the count, He wants me to never get up again. It's so hard to know what is real or imagined in the spiritual war, but let's never make the mistake of thinking that it's not happening in some way around us when we try to serve Jesus.

So, at the end of the day burnout hurts. It's a sore that is not healing. It's a pain deep in my soul and a pressure on my heart in which I fear that something will burst. You know the old submarine movies when the captain takes the sub down to the bottom to escape the enemy. At first, everyone is delighted in the captain's plan and bravery and have hope that the enemy will just cruise past.

Then as the depth increases past the red and the gauge cracks, the crew realise that although the captain's plan will elude the enemy they might still die as the sub breaks up under the pressure. They have terrified looks in their eyes as they see rivets pop out and pipes burst. Will they make it? Will I make it as I see the rivets popping and fear that some major pipe in my body will burst? I don't want to die, I just want this pain to end. I trust that my captain knows what He is doing but I can't help feeling terrified at how deep we are going.

3 | Secret battles

In any war it is crucial for the commander to know where the front line is. Where is the point of contact and where is the battle raging? The battles that a pastor faces are not just out in the community or in the church scene. The front line is in his soul, mind and in his home. These are the battles that are unseen and rarely talked about. When our kids were young I used to call my home “my oasis”. It was a pleasant place of recovery and happiness. Over the years, I felt the front line shift tactically into my home and into my mind. The enemy wants the pastor to either drop out or stuff up. Either option will work. The sniper wants to take out the officers first. Not that they are any better than the troops but their injury will cause more temporary and perhaps long term damage. The burnt out pastor and the discredited pastor are both campaign victories that the enemy craves.

Everyone has issues

Most of my waking life I have worked with, or thought about, the issues that people face. The struggles that people face might be triggered by things happening in the present but reflect the tainted fruit of unresolved issues from the past. As well as helping people to overcome these things, pastors often have to grapple with their own issues which may haunt or shape their lives. During burnout these issues come out to play. Maybe these buried things may be a catalyst in the person heading towards burnout, or they might come to the surface as a person’s defenses are weakened in burnout.

Whatever role they play, these deep things can often surface during such difficult times. The range of issues is endless; from self esteem, finding purpose in life, guilt and family of origin stuff. There can be personality or relationship issues that have been on the back burner for years just waiting for the right time to show up in all their glory.

Sometimes pastors are so busy hosing down other people's issues that they forget to deal with their own. Issues have a way of revealing themselves, not always in the best ways or at the appropriate time. However, this can be a good thing - if they are fought and defeated there can be a better tomorrow. We all know that pastors are real people too, but somehow we still refuse to think about the fact that they are just like anyone else. We still want and need them to be more than the average. After all, if they aren't, what hope is there for the rest? However, they are just like everyone else and we must accept that pastors have issues too.

Sometimes people duck for cover or just stay away from this topic. There can be a real inability and clumsiness by churches in knowing what to do. It seems to go against the natural order of things when their caregiver needs care or the leader needs to be led.

Pastors are real people with real issues. They may be little ones or giant dark morasses. For some pastors their game was over when they started. They entered ministry with issues, which through their personality, relational or leadership style, would almost guarantee an unhappy ending. Their hearts are right and motives are pure but they just shouldn't have taken or been offered the job. Usually pastors with serious issues end up leaving with a lot of pain and destruction. It's easy to be critical of them but the question still needs to be asked, "Could we have done more to help them?"

I just wanted to be me

In any job that involves a public component, there are always some struggles with people's perceptions and expectations. Expectations on pastors and their families can impose another level of stress that can, over time, really mess with their minds. Thankfully in my years of ministry people have become more realistic about what they expect and how they view the pastor and his family. Dealing with expectations of others is a battle that is fought in the mind and heart of the pastor. It is a secret battle between "who am I?" and "who am I expected to be?"

One example of such a battle in my life is that I have never been able to go to the bottle shop without feeling guilty. In reading this statement, I believe that you had one of two possible reactions. One response would be “why on earth would you feel guilty about this? Jesus made wine (really good stuff, too) and the Bible is ok with drinking in moderation. What’s the problem?” The other response is thinking that because I want to go to the bottle there is a problem. Pastors are supposed to be above all that and to be shining lights and never a stumbling block to anyone.

Whereas I can understand this view, I believe that these expectations which were drilled into me in my early ministry can actually have a reverse effect. It created false guilt for something that wasn’t wrong and made me unable to just walk into a place and feel ok. I wonder who made this and other such legalistic rules up and would be really curious to know where Jesus’ disciples went to buy their wine. How did I resolve this dilemma of expectations? How did I defeat the sense of false guilt of what so-and-so would say if they saw me in there? The solution was simple. I just sent my wife. You might think “how gutless and confusing”. You would be right in thinking this way ... welcome to pastorpain.

The pastor’s mind is the rope in a tug of war between those who have a wide tolerance to things like drinking and the ones who would gladly recommend at a public meeting that the pastor be boiled in oil. We should have expectations of the pastor and his behaviour. After all, he is a leader. But let’s be careful that we don’t impose our own set of rules on them as, after all, the pastor is only called to follow the Master. Some pastors just learn to not care about what others think. Whereas this is a good coping mechanism, it can lead to the person being perceived as arrogant. Others live with the burden of what people think of them and feel like they are the dancing monkey on stage performing to placate the masses.

Secret sins

All leaders take comfort from King David’s stuff-ups. His sins, particularly his immorality, show that leaders are just people, too. It shows that leaders can, and do, fall into sin. The story also clearly sends the message that sin is not worth it. Sin hurts and the consequences can really be devastating. The encouraging bit about King David’s story is that God saw the real heart of the man and continued to be involved in his life (Psalm 51). We all sin. We all have patterns of behaviour or thought that aren’t top of the line.

There is never any justification or excuse for sin. Pastors, like everyone else, have to take ownership of all their decisions and actions. However, as the pastor's emotional, mental and physical resources are ground down in the months and years leading to burnout, they may be leaving themselves open to making some big mistakes.

Sometimes immorality is just selfish sexual satisfaction. Other times it can be the actions of a desperate person seeking a little pleasure and escape in difficult times. It's really hard for people whose immune systems are down. The tiniest virus shrugged off by everyone else is a life threatening disease to them. In burnout all the immune systems are shot. It doesn't take much for the tiniest sin virus to get in and take over.

Who is the pastor going to talk to about it, anyway? If a pastor was struggling with issues like drinking, pornography or whatever, they couldn't put it in the weekly bulletin. This week's entry would be "let's pray for Pastor X as he is struggling with sin Y". There would be an outpouring of love, prayer and compassion. This would be followed by an entry into next week's bulletin which would be calling for prayer for the hastily convened pastoral search committee to have good luck in finding someone that really will be a good leader. We know that they are just like us but we don't really want to believe this. For the pastor to share these things with even one soul is to risk a breach in credibility. It's so hard to be human in a job where you are expected to be more.

Life transitions

Is it coincidental that I am going through this turmoil now at the age of 45? Could my aches and pains be a symptom of something else like a "mid-life crisis"? Yes, my age has probably got something to do with it, although middle-aged men don't have the monopoly on burnout. The changes and transitions that we go through in life do sometimes stop us in our tracks and make us sit down and think. When we reach the halfway point it is important to think through the bigger picture. How have I played the first half of the game? Has it been worthwhile? What have I achieved? Will I be remembered for anything? Have I become the person that God wanted me to be? Where am I going?

Many people struggle in the "mid-life" season. Many questions and self doubts come to the surface. It is quite sobering to be halfway there. It's great on planes when you can see on the screen where you are in the

journey with the little plane moving so slowly across the map. How exciting when it gets to the halfway mark, especially if you are headed to a fantastic, exotic and exciting destination seated next to a hot babe (who had better be your wife). But as we look at the little plane travelling across the timeline of our lives, being half-way isn't as exciting.

Of course, theologically we are heading for an exciting destination, but for most of us that will only come after reaching the place of deterioration, pain and a daily increasing list of ailments. So, when we look at the plane it is normal to panic a little and think of how we are going to use whatever time that we have, as our journey projection is based on the average journey of others around us. Only God knows, but I might have gone past halfway years ago. Mid-life issues as well as any life transitions do add extra stress. In our middle years, parenting teenagers coupled with the demands of aging parents and a host of other pressures and issues can lead to quite a lot of stress. Many people have real struggles in this period of their lives. Couple mid-life stuff with all the other demands of ministry and it can lead to a juggling act where the pastor can't keep all the balls in the air.

Financial struggles

Some pastors are living a sweet life through the generosity of their people, their business entrepreneurial skills or teachings which end up prospering those who teach it. However, most pastors live average financial lives and in many places in the world live under very difficult conditions. Once, whilst living overseas, I visited a pastor in his home. On arriving, I was struck by a mouldy, stale smell which came from the bedrooms. The mould on the walls was a problem but the real issue was that no one in the church would have been prepared to put up with that in their own homes. Yet, for this character and his small children, it was alright, even though one child suffered from chronic asthma.

Many churches have moved on from this old, "used tea bag" mindset but still do not realise the impact of making the pastor live in a way that is disproportional to the church family that they pastor. It would be better for everyone to stop sending postcards from exotic locations that the pastor knows he will never see.

I have a friend that was approached by a small group of 10-15 families in the U.S. who wanted to start a new church. They had committed to tithe their incomes and pass this on to the pastor who then could live at the same

level that they were enjoying. What a radical concept. It is never money that is the problem. It's the attitudes towards it. We are vigilant of the way church money is spent as it's the "Lord's money", although sometimes you have to wonder whether it is spent in the way that He desires. God wants to use finances to empower and bless others. Most pastors have seen a lot of the Lord's money go on acquisitions and projects with questionable, long term spiritual value.

Grieving for the normal life

I never fully realised the impact of not having a normal weekend until I stopped being a pastor. Wow! Nights at home and not having to come home early on Saturday night. There is a sense of grief that through all the nights out, Saturday weddings, other functions and Sundays on deck, in some ways it seems like we have lived on another planet and really missed out on the kind of life that most people enjoy. Sure, churches these days encourage pastors to have more time off and hold back on the nights out, but the effort needed in maintaining the system and the endless needs of the world make this hard to actually do. Having come out of this ministry haze the burnt out pastor cannot help battling over the question of whether it was worth it. My kids have struggles from the consequences of me being in ministry both here and overseas. Has it been worth it?

Although I feel great about the things that I have been able to do for God, I still grieve the loss of a normal family life. There is no going back for a second chance. It's gone. Despite our struggles as a paid ministry family, we have developed a great depth and quality to our relationships. My marriage, thankfully, has been the second rock that has kept me from being completely defeated. I know that serving Jesus is always worth it despite the costs, but I am not sure that serving the church has been. Some may wonder why I separate the two; others will know exactly what I mean.

Struggles with the Boss

Let's face it; pastors do have some struggles with our Great God. In some ways it would have been easier if His book was clearer on some subjects. You know, the ones that Christians can be poles apart on. As a pastor you are dedicated to staying on track with the book and the author, but sometimes it's just blurry.

Someone asked me the other day whether, in this unhappiness, I feared losing my faith. I know some guys do, but my belief in God and the salvation story are not founded on my experiences. Life has taught me to always believe through the hard times and trust that somehow God has a plan in all of this. I also know that my problems are tough for me to handle but there would be many in the world who would gladly kill and eat me to have my problems. Somehow our materialistic lifestyle has made us weak and susceptible to complaining. Nevertheless, pastors still struggle with their Maker to understand the puzzles of life and the necessity of the pain that they face.

I have no doubt that if I could have maintained a stronger spiritual devotional life, I might not have ended up sinking so low. I do regret letting my personality and the busyness of life crowd in on the fountain of life. There is no doubt to me that unwittingly I was relying on my strength and wisdom to get me through and not plugging into the Ultimate Recharger. No excuses, I stuffed up. But it just goes to show that the guy up the front may not actually be having “that special time with God” that he advertises and recommends to you.

So, next time you see your pastor up there, going for it like he was invincible, say a prayer for him that he will win the battles that you will never see or get to hear about.

4 | Who reads the small print? What they didn't tell me

When you sign on for any job it is wise to read through the job description and expectations. Sometimes people are surprised at exactly what their job entails after they have been doing it for a while. It can be a case of the employer not being totally up front. Sometimes the job description is written in an over simplistic or nebulous way. The people who write job descriptions may not actually know what the job entails as they haven't done the job. Even great church leaders may not really understand the complexity of the roles that they are employing someone to do.

Even when the pastoral ministry description is clear, we can rush in with our "save the world at whatever cost" attitude. Our desire to please God and serve others or serve God and please others propels us into the work, often not completely realising what we are signing on for. Just a little tip for the next time you are applying for a job: do your research, find out about it from people who have done the job, talk to the employers and arrange a session where you can ask a lot of questions. Read the small print, and if there is no small print ask someone who knows.

Items of small print are those little extras that you didn't quite weigh up when you signed the contract. They are little surprises that weren't in your dreams. They are the extra costs and penalties that no one told you about. Some of them are inconsequential while others can seriously derail your life. These are things that I was never told as I was being trained to be a pastor. Things may be better now, but in my day no one really talked about such things. These things are the small print of being a pastor in today's western world.

A higher insurance premium

It was a sobering day when I sat down with my insurance agent to get things in order. He informed me that I was in a professional bracket that had a higher premium. What this says is that, by being a pastor or anyone else in the same bracket, statistically you have a higher chance of developing serious physical or psychological problems and early retirement ...the sort that gets you straight to Jesus. I am not talking about martyrdom, but the grind down and residual effects of pastorpain. Sure, as a young spud I would not be burdened by such statistics, but as I sit here now, incapacitated, I know that the insurance companies did their research, unlike my employers. This might sound too harsh, but I wonder whether at some deep level churches know this but hope that their guy is still in his productive stage and doesn't reach endgame in his time with them, so they don't have to be the ones who have to pick up the pieces and pay the bills.

Problems with the gold fish in the bowl

I started as a pastor a month after getting married. In those days, it was not even relevant to ask what possible damage might be done to the eggs that hadn't even hatched yet. I was more concerned with saving the world and getting through my Hebrew exam. As the little ankle biters came along, it didn't seem that I had chosen a profession that could seriously affect their little lives. Then, answering the call to overseas mission work, once again I never weighed up the fact that our kids could end up confused, unsettled and experience difficulty in totally relating to the culture from which they originally came.

As the years rolled on, while on the overseas mission field, I could see the extra pressures taking a toll on the kids. Our eldest son, when he was about 8, told me the sad tale of his weekly experience of meeting new kids and thinking that they could become good friends but realising that he probably would never see them again as we were involved in an itinerant ministry. Ouch, that hurt. I don't regret the ministry; I just wish that someone had told me that my kids were at risk being MKs, PKs and TCKs. Third culture kids (TCKs), are kids who have spent a significant period of their childhood in another culture. Whilst there are some great advantages to these cross cultural experiences, TCKs can have their own set of struggles once back in the homeland. They can be displaced citizens of the world.

Thankfully, things are better for pastor's kids today as most people now have more realistic expectations of them. Our kids would only occasionally get comments relating back to their dad being the pastor. Just a tip, never ever, and I mean never ever, make comments which indicate that you expect them to behave in a certain way because their father is a pastor. If they get a lot of comments like that, it may push them to react badly or develop negative feelings towards the church.

Our kids are great. They have had their struggles, but they didn't choose the life that we have lived. God will bless them in His way but somehow I didn't realise that my career path would create so many issues for us as a family. I also didn't realise that, through some of their deep and prolonged struggles, I would be so emotionally worn down. I guess that I could have coped with pastor pain being "out there", but when it came from some family issues of depression and lostness it really bowled me over as I had no place to retreat and recharge. The battle was raging on all fronts.

The saddest bunch of all is the pastors who have watched their kids stray far from God. There is a deep sense of pain and regret as they look back on what more they could have done to prevent this. Sometimes there is truth in their regrets, as they did spend too much time trying to save the world and serve churchworld at the expense of their homeworld. In other cases, it just doesn't make sense to see how far the kids have gone and the only hope is that one day something might happen to bring them back. How desperately sad to devote your life to the gospel but fear that your very own will not be there to enjoy it with you. This is a crushing weight that many Christian parents carry, but especially pastors.

All families experience pressures of all varieties. There are some pressures which are unique to those who take on a public leadership role. It's the old "gold fish bowl" experience where the leader and his family can feel like they are "on show" and subject to the interest and discussion of many. I never really felt like I was a gold fish looking out at everyone's staring and judging eyes, but at some level I always felt that I was being watched and scrutinised by some. It was usually just little things that would influence and annoy. My wife would buy some great tops to wear, but on Sunday morning realise that although I would be happy with them, some might have something to say about the amount of God given assets that were showing. My wife would never have dressed provocatively, but just as a

normal modern, woman, belly button ring and all. I am happy that wasn't put into the church bulletin.

In our experience, most people from our church family respected our privacy and didn't see us as fish. I guess it's just the feeling that pastors can get that everything you or your family do is being watched and evaluated. This feeling often is fuelled by harsh comments which usually come from legalistic "party pooper" types. It is usually these negative defenders of the laws and traditions of man that see it as their ministry to observe and comment in order to keep the faith pure. It is a shame that just a small number of this type create the feeling of the fish tank, where most people today are more relaxed about what the pastor should be like and wear.

These pressures on public families just add to the normal stress of kids growing up. Couple these added expectations with the lifestyle of the pastor's family and it is no wonder that many pastor's wives start to resent the impact of the job and many pastor's kids struggle with personal and faith issues. Pastors want to live normal lives but this can only happen if they are treated normally.

Loneliness

Wow, that's another one that somehow went under the radar. No one told me just how lonely it can be being a pastor. It's not like I am not surrounded by people. It's not even that I don't have friends, but somehow it's different. Maybe it's different as people don't see you as regular folks. Maybe it's because we couldn't just pack up and go away with the crowd on weekends. Maybe it's because everyone assumes that you have a lot of friends and so they don't make the move. It could be because it's hard to have friends who are also under your pastoral care. I try to wear two hats with my friends but it has been hard. With one hat I laugh and dance with them, but at the same time I know that sometimes their apathy and lack of commitment to the machine that I drive is also wearing me down.

Sometimes it has just been that I have been so tired at the end of the week that I haven't had the emotional strength to put into friendships. I know that it's partly me, but it also comes with the job, as senior leaders of anything are often lonely people. I have been encouraged to hear other pastors and senior leaders share about their loneliness and to know that it's not just me, but no one told me to expect loneliness.

Trapped in churchworld

One of my greatest frustrations in being a pastor was the difficulty that I had in making relationships with those outside of the church. Many pastors find ways of overcoming this frustration but many others still feel trapped in churchworld. Churchworld is a world that we have created. It is filled with activities, programs and “promoted to be” exciting events. It is a man made system of busyness which creates a never ending list of things to do.

I found that by the end of the week I was weak and needed time to recover rather than pursue new relationships. Sometimes it is hard to make friends, as telling people that you are a pastor in my experience has been quite a conversation stopper. I always hoped that by telling people what I did a wonderful opportunity to share my faith would open up. Sadly, most times it only led to an uncomfortable pause and then more about the weather.

Now maybe it's me, but I have struggled to find a balance between spending time with those who are already saved and those who aren't. I used to bolster myself up with the notion that if I dedicated myself to churchworld I would be multiplying my passion for the lost and vicariously, through the ones that I pastored, would share in evangelistic victories. How sad then to only see a small trickle of conversions and to find so many Christians living so contentedly in churchworld. I became tired of saying bring your friends, as so many were already sitting with them. After all, at the end of the day, who would I bring?

Feeder of the sacred cows

It never mentioned anything about sacred cows in the contract. Sacred cows are the traditions, thought patterns and values that groups hold sacred. They may have no foundation in any scriptural teaching or biblical practice, but because the holders consider them sacred they are to be defended at all costs. The mind bending dilemma is between being encouraged to lead and at the same time being paid to maintain things the “way they should be”.

I pity the guys who end up in churches where traditions and churchways rule. I have seen guys crushed by the enforcement of the most unnecessary and ridiculous man made rules. Guys blasted over haircuts, the way they stand to deliver the message and much more. By the way, what would you get if you asked your hairdresser for a New Testament haircut? I could write a book about the ridiculous sacred cows that I have encountered and heard about.

We like it this way. Many churches say that they want innovation and change, but at the end of the day they still prefer cows and comfort. The pastor soon realises that church life, and particularly the overrated service on Sunday, is supposed to reflect the desires of those who gather rather than ask the One being worshipped what He would prefer it to be like. Thankfully, there are fewer sacred cows than there used to be. It has been a healthy change but one that has come at the cost of those who dared to get the gun out and shoot the stupid things. I fear that the greatest sacred cow of all that I was paid to feed was the whole way we “do church”.

Niceness will hurt

Maybe it's just my nature, but one of the reasons that I am here in this pit is that over the years I have just been too nice. I never wanted to be one of those pastors who are like a bull in an arena, but at least they get it out of their systems or find themselves very quickly out of the system. No, I am Mr. Nice, Mr. Friendly, the diplomat, the negotiator trying to be the perfect gentleman. Not even Jesus was nice to everyone and what about Paul? They just said it how it was and accepted the consequences for their tones. I am nice.

There is an inbuilt thing in pastors to be nice and understanding. After all, shepherds care. However, as society has become increasingly litigious I believe that this has encouraged the age of niceness and “no comment”. The pastor cannot let fly and speak out what everyone is thinking for fear of legal implications.

Also, often in disciplinary matters now, he is bound to just smile and share nothing of the battles that he has had to fight behind the scenes. There is nothing more infuriating and spiritually challenging than having to be nice to those who have forfeited their right to it. Where can the righteous anger that “ye old prophets of old” had be expressed today? Maybe a punching bag or maybe it just sits there slowly poisoning the dough. No, they never told me that it would be this hard being nice.

There would be no cracker nights

For those of my vintage, don't you just miss cracker night? Even my over-anxious mum would take me down to the shops and let me choose from the huge array of things that could blow up or look beautiful. Yes, we were

reckless and sadly some were hurt. Somehow, our society has become more dangerous despite its attempt to become ultra safe. No, there are no cracker nights anymore, in fact, lots of the fun has gone, falling victim to compliance. As we have become more litigious we have also become more regulated by a plethora of rules and regulations. Don't get me wrong, these laws and duties of care are designed to protect and they do. They must be in place and guarded diligently. What I don't think that people realise is the enormous extra pressure in emotional angst, administration time and expense that these laws have created for leaders.

In the old days, people piled into a person's car and off they went to happier times. Now, there are policies about policies in reference to other policies that govern such a simple action. In larger organisations such as schools there may be the finances to release people for such administrative tasks, but the church and its small staff struggle at times to make sure that all bases are covered. Maybe it's just my worrying nature but I felt the weight of this "duty of care" over a large organisation which, at the end of the day, I had little direct control of. Instead of just sitting back and chewing on the sausage, I often wondered if the preparation of that little sausage had complied with regulation 63942.c.

As the church machine grew in size there were more issues to be concerned about. I longed to do what I was called to do; I just wanted to be a pastor, not a CEO. I longed for the good old days when life seemed so much more straightforward. I don't know about you. I sure do miss cracker nights.

The cost of never getting used to it

I remember clearly one disturbing day, as I sat on the porch of a dear old member of our church family. His wife, who was the personification of love, had passed away about a year before and his life had been filled with intense pain from a thousand ailments and grief. His suffering that particular day had ended, but in an unexpected way. He had accidentally pressed the accelerator in his car and somehow had been dragged backwards across the street and then run over. He had wished to join his beloved wife, but not like that. There he was, covered over on the side of the road.

As I sat with some neighbours, shell-shocked and quiet, a person that I didn't know walked up to us to ask what had happened. Then she made a comment that I will never forget. She said something like, "I see this

sort of thing all the time, you get used to it". A part of me understood her comment. I think that she was a nurse and, like many who work with trauma, had developed a thick skin.

Whether she meant it or whether her bottled grief and horror were just festering in secret, I do not know. One thing I know is that I never want to say those words. This wasn't just a dead man; it was a friend and a part of my family. Sure, I never would have met him if I had not been the pastor of the church, but he was in my church and in my life. As I sat there in shock and grief I was thankful that I had not become used to it, but also realised that there was a cost to not getting used to it. The dilemma for the pastor is that he is called to care and usually cares by nature. This is a good thing for others but not necessarily for him. You see, to care, to really care, means that you hurt if others hurt. You grieve with them.

Everyone has to experience grief. Even our Saviour was not immune to this pain. But for the pastor he has to experience a thousand griefs. There is a cycle of grieving which hopefully ends in the person being able to respectfully move on to new things. This grief cycle takes time to work through. Caring and relationally connected pastors need to work through the same cycle. Sadly at times he does not have the opportunity to do this. I thought that that day was bad enough, but I woke the next day to hear of the passing of another member of our church family. The trap of a larger church in which the pastor is still emotionally connected to its people is that he will not be able to completely work through the grief cycle.

There is also the added pressure of not being able to just sit back and grieve. When someone dies the pastor is expected and wants to be a part of the counselling, care and preparation for the celebration service. It would be nice to just relax and grieve, but so many things have to be done for the family and to prepare for the funeral. The pastor at the funeral also has to bring a delicate balance between creating a service where real grief can be expressed and one in which there is hope, encouragement and a genuine celebration of the person's life. This can be quite challenging and emotionally draining.

If the pastor is in the initial stages of burnout, as I was, and has to cope with the deaths of a number of people in a considerably short space of time, then this will just further serve to wear him out. Even though I grieve and hurt I never want to be someone that gets "used to it". In many ways, it would have

been great to be more detached, relaxed and professional, but somehow at the core it would mean that I would have had to leave my pastorheart behind. There is no way out, pastorheart often leads to pastorpain.

Memories

Memories can be a blessing or a source of great distress. I found at times of real stress that my mind would replay scenes of suffering and horror that I had witnessed throughout my ministry. For example, having been a pastor in one area for a long time, I found myself starting to dread visiting people in hospital. It wasn't the person that I dreaded seeing but it was the walk down the corridor of a thousand memories. I wish that my memory system wasn't so accurate and complete; I wish that I could walk down the corridor without being bombarded with a number of memories of things that I have witnessed. I wish that I could move somewhere else where the memories wouldn't come as I walked down new corridors, but maybe they would still be there. I wish that as I drove or walked around my mind wouldn't remind me of tragic and sad days. One of the reasons that I couldn't continue is that I needed to form new memories and have a break from old ones.

No one told me about the haunting memories. One classic tale was one of the last times in my life that I actually felt really relaxed. There we were holidaying locally and I remember clearly, although it was quite a few years ago, coming up from the pool and laying on the bed and saying to my wife, "I am feeling really relaxed". Having enjoyed being in this beautiful relaxed state for at least 3 seconds the phone rang. Now, this is the disadvantage of holidaying less than a million kilometres from your church. The call was from our church with many apologies but they had received a request from someone on his death bed whom I had known through our church years ago. He wanted to make things right with God before he died. I was also told to prepare myself as he had some extensive and disturbing surgery to his face and the experience would be traumatic. Great, that was exactly what I needed on my holiday!

Despite my anger and resentment at the time, I never regretted going. I was able to share, pray and help this person find peace with God. Nothing could be more worthwhile. I will never forget it. That's the problem; I have never forgotten it, as it is stored in my horror files to be remembered at future times. You can't have it both ways. People who accept the role of helping will face these battles. But nobody told me that I would have so many.

Never-ending story

If I ever take on another role as a pastor I will definitely want to be paid by the hour. I would gladly take the hourly rate of the lowest award whatever that might be. I don't care what salary package they are offering. I am sure that I would still come out ahead if paid by the hour, working and having to think about work. Although some pastors are accused of being in it for the money, I wonder if any really are. Even the entrepreneurial ones who actually seem to do well would do much better financially if they simply channelled their energies into business ventures.

No, I actually believe that most are in it for the right reasons. I also believe that most never really understood the true never-ending nature of the job. There is an endless sea of human need and a limited pool of people willing to do something about it. It is very hard to keep boundaries around time for people in ministry. Even when I did take time off I always struggled to have mental time off. I can't count how many "days off" were spent burdened by some tragedy, someone's problems or a church issue that was about to go off.

The job is never finished and after 21 years of full effort I wonder if it was ever started. Being a pastor is not just a job, it's your life. The little pad of paper next to my bed in which I incessantly jotted down notes of people to ring and follow up or new ideas to try to spark up the old faithful has always been there. I guess if revival had come and the multitudes sang the name of Jesus I would say it was worth every minute. But where are the masses of the grateful? It's not just a never-ending job but one in which a lot of pastors don't see the fruits that should be there.

What about the hoards that I have counselled over the years? So much time spent trying to listen and help and then so often to be shaken off at giving even the smallest hint that the person should take responsibility and actually do something about their problems. Thankfully, I have seen many changes in people but there have been so many that have just extracted my soul juice and walked away looking for another altruistic listening ear to chew on.

It's no wonder that so many people shut their eyes to the suffering around them. This is an effective coping mechanism. It's better not to know. Maybe people like this just don't care or maybe they know that once you step out of the boat you will be pulled down by the masses of drowning people.

It's so hard to take a middle road. I, by nature, cannot not care. I care because of who I am and who Jesus has made me. I like to care, I want to help, but I fear that it is this very burden that causes my downfall. I don't want to change who I am but I want to be a stronger swimmer so that I can bring some more lost souls into shore.

It's the never ending story that keeps some away from churchworld. They have the scars to show of days when they, too, cared and wanted to make a difference. They also remember being swallowed by the church and the needs of people only to drown and be swept up on some distant shore. Let's not think that those who don't join the program don't care. They care and they help but they are just trying to not fall victim to the never-ending story.

Too much time hosing

So many issues, so many personality clashes, so many fires to put out. Although I knew that working with people meant working with conflict, I never dreamt that I would spend so much time on this. Whether over major decisions or some obscure issue of no consequence, I ended up spending too much time and spiritual, emotional energy over the conflicts generated by spiritually limited people. I can't imagine just how frustrated Jesus must be to hear our conflicts and whiny dronings. It must be like the parent at the dinner table when all the kids are "going at each other" for trivial things. It would be so nice to just talk, laugh, plan and have dinner, but no, they just have to fight about something. I did spend too much time hosing down fires and I should have sent a lot more kids to their rooms.

How long weekends and the weather in Mongolia would influence momentum

To lead a group of people towards growth and victory it is vital to have ongoing momentum. The excitement of things happening and continuing to happen means that the group is actually on the move. In reality, as a pastor, I found this incredibly hard to achieve in an ongoing way. There always seemed to be things popping up that would dilute momentum. I think it's great that in our culture we get long weekends, although having a Sunday job did take the fun out of it. We all need a break, but what I found is that long weekends, sporting events, increasing involvement in family activities, the flu season and a million other things all had a detrimental impact on maintaining momentum.

Many also do not regard attendance at church services as a priority. In older days people would still turn up to things if someone was unwell in their family, but I found that so often now people will stay away because their auntie's poodle didn't get enough sleep. So, old church growth / health indicators, like regular attendance at church services, does not always get the same priority as in the past. Whether this is good or bad is another topic which really does need to be worked through. Certainly our emphasis on attendance at church events as the indicator of church health is flawed as just sitting there does not really reflect the believer's relationship with God and their effectiveness as a disciple. However, the net consequence for me, who was someone paid to grow the system, was that all of these factors made it fairly difficult to pick up and maintain speed.

Carrying more than burdens

Although the Christian life is one that gives us great joy and hope, we are also called to carry burdens. As a community of faith we share in each others lives and try to help carry heavy burdens (Galatians 6:2). The greatest burden of all is to carry the burden of people's eternal destinies. As a pastor I found this a heavy one to carry. It's not that I felt responsible for people accepting Christ; it's that I felt responsible for leading and modelling the sharing of the message without which, we believe, there is no salvation. Not only was this a heavy burden, but the apathy that I often encountered in fellow believers added only to my feelings that we were very far away indeed from fulfilling the great commission. These are real burdens but they are the ones that pastors have chosen to carry, although at times they seem too heavy to bear. As Spurgeon wrote, "Who can bear the weight of souls without sometimes sinking to the dust."²

There were many other things that were also added to the backpack of burdens. What I didn't realise was that in some way I was accumulating other people's pain in my life. It's like carrying the bag of crap for your dog/s. In the good old days, Fido just did it and we moved on. No one seemed to care and there wasn't a sense of community guilt for leaving it there.

Now we have evolved and we carefully place the stuff into little bags to be carried to the nearest rubbish bin, which coincidentally can never seem to be found on the walks that I take our dogs on. After a while, I can't help feeling a little ripped off. The dogs are happy and they are ready to do it again and yet instead of enjoying my walk I find myself carrying around

their droppings. That's one of the things that has weighed me down as a pastor. I feel that I have ended up carrying other people's crap while they have scampered away feeling relieved and lighter. Some of these bags I feel I can't just leave behind. They contain privileged confidential information that I need to know but cannot tell a soul.

Conditional leadership

Oh, yeah. There was one other little item in the small print. It concerned the extent to which I could actually lead the organisation that I was called to lead. I have never lived on a farm or met a real shepherd but I believe that they lead the flock. That's why they are the shepherd. Imagine if the shepherd was placed in a system of decision making where his opinions in major matters would not necessarily lead to action. There must be systems and safeguards. This is true, but it is still an interesting phenomenon to lead without the authority to lead. All leadership should be conditional otherwise there is no accountability. But in so many of our churches major decisions are made at meetings that might not adequately represent the whole church family. I have never been power hungry or have sought authority, but I can't help feeling worn down by a system that asked me to lead but never really freed me up to do my best.

The privilege of pain

Let's just stop a moment. If you are still reading this book you might be getting a bit anxious to get to the positive stuff or you might be ready to get out your cheque book and make a generous contribution. Although I have been talking about the stresses and dilemmas, I want to stress that I chose to accept the call and challenges of being a pastor. I knew that there would be blessings and costs in devoting my life to help people go against the sin-tide of their souls and society to find and serve God. I always knew that to care deeply for people in need would take a toll on my emotional bank account.

Anyone who works in a caring profession will tell you these things. I also knew that the call was more than empathic active listening to troubled clients; that I would be called to "mourn with those who mourn" (Romans 12:15) and help carry their burdens. The people that I tried to help were not my clients whom I could just shut out at the end of the day. They were my spiritual family whom I was destined to spend each week with and ultimately eternity.

Don't pity me. I should have coped better or found ways to disengage, but I have always struggled with our call to love at every level and our need to close the door on the office at the end of the day. As a pastor, I have seen more than my share of suffering. I have witnessed events and heard stories that have left deep emotional scars and memories that cannot be shaken. I don't regret it as I have been privileged to have been there. I have felt sick to the core many times as I approached a painful encounter but I have strangely never regretted going.

There is something beautiful and mystical about those times in hospital rooms where you see life's full tragedy but somehow encounter the God who does care and is there. At those times when grief and terror choke any word before it's spoken, there seems to be a presence of God that speaks into our hearts. Although my distressing times have wounded me, I would not have swapped them for anything; nor would I accept a memory wash from the memory erasing machine that the guys had in the "Men in Black" movie. I want to remember being there but I just don't want it to hurt so much.

It has been my privilege to offer care to many fine heroes of the faith. Pain can bring out the best and worst in people. I have been humbled many times by the way that ordinary people have coped with extraordinary suffering. Sometimes I think that I am just a big whinger when I see what others are going through. There are so many untold stories of courage and faith. One that I would like to tell is the story about a guy called Mark. Mark was a tall healthy country lad until he was paralysed in a motor bike accident. He became a quadriplegic.

I used to think that being paralysed was the main problem, but didn't realise that such serious injury could lead to so many complications and excruciating never-ending pain. Mark was a guy in pain. He once likened his pain to having barbed wire strung throughout his veins and this wire being pulled back and forth. Despite his never ending complications and hospitalisations, Mark had an unshakable faith in Jesus and never complained. You could have heard a pin drop as he shared in his testimony that he gladly accepted his painstate rather than having lived a healthy life without knowing Jesus. It is people like Mark who inspire the pastor to new heights.

I did know that it would cost. It always has; the weight of people's problems and burdens; the pressure to have joy and yet somehow live with the knowledge and heaviness that those who do not find salvation are doomed

to eternal suffering. I think that I will always struggle with this conundrum to have joy and peace while knowing what is in store for people who do not find salvation. The call of ministry has always carried with it a price tag. I consider it a privilege that I have shared pain with so many people. They are horror filled special moments that I treasure and dread at the same time.

So there ended up being a lot of fine print stuff. At the end of the day, it wasn't the job description that I couldn't fulfill, but the fine print; the unsaid conditions of employment. So, should we tell prospective pastors all of this or let them find out over time? I believe that the right way is to alert people to the small print and help them to create a ministry and lifestyle that minimises the impact of these pressures. I still would have signed the contract but would have done some things very differently if I had known then what I know today.

5 Saboteurs and friendly fire

Saboteurs

Now this is the section that will really make me reach for the medication or a good strong drink. It is about those people that pastors meet during their tours of duty who sabotage the work that the pastor is desperately trying to build up. Some do it deliberately, others inadvertently as a byproduct of their serious dysfunctional life as a “Christian”. Someone once tried to encourage me about saboteurs by getting me to imagine what they would be like if they didn’t know Jesus.

Whether they know Jesus or not is not the question. They wreck lives and they can wreck churches. They are the ones who continue to write slamming letters. They are the ones who get the floor at meetings while the righteous get floored. They are the ones who hurt with words and actions. They rob sleep, steal peace and leave not even the vaguest scent of joy in places where they have been. These are the ones that bring so much unnecessary pain to the pastor.

Most saboteurs in their hearts believe that they are serving Jesus, defending the pillars of faith and decency and yet do not realise the cloud of stress that follows them daily. They have always been in churches; just ask Paul when you see him. They are not a new phenomenon but how they are handled may be. In our political niceness they are often not put into place. If any consequence comes from their actions they are given a \$20 fine and allowed to continue their special ministry. Often when pressure is

placed upon them or they are exposed, they leave to go to another branch of the company to be welcomed with the open, happy arms of the next unsuspecting victims.

Often nothing is said to or done with the saboteur. No one speaks up because it's not the nice thing to do. Leaders sometimes carry not only the pain caused by saboteurs but also the disappointment of the inaction of their church family to stand with them in the fight. Sometimes pastors get so weighed down and exhausted by the bitterness and conflict that come from just a small group. Even though the pastor may experience overall support from the majority, these saboteurs can really get into his mind and life and bring an emotional heaviness and fatigue.

Some churches are dysfunctional in that they do not attempt to deal with saboteurs. Some churches have a pastoral departure cycle of only 2-3 years. Does anyone ever ask why? Do these churches ever stop to try and correct some obvious deficiency? Is the new pastor being worn down by the same people? A small tip for pastors: please proceed with caution when signing up with a church that has a history of regular farewell dinners for the respected reverend and his family. How sad to see that just a small band of saboteurs can cause so much damage.

I know how my loving gracious Saviour would deal with destructive Christians. I know what Paul would say or write to them. I know what the early church leaders would have said to the person who was being divisive, abusive and a festering pain in the pastor's butt. They would have responded by trying to minimise the damage. Dysfunctional people cause damage. They don't need Satan to use them in some cosmic plot; they just cause damage by their very natures. Probably Satan does use them at times to maximise the damage. The end results are often that pastors and leaders are wiped out or at least distracted from the work. How many hours have I spent trying to mop up the work of saboteurs? The time talking in visits, phone calls, emails, letters and meetings. If it is a strategy of the "evil one", it is very effective.

Some churches never seem to get past these blockages to growth. They continue to allow saboteurs to work and have their well thought out divisive say at meetings. In our attempt to be fair and democratic we have sometimes allowed people to take the floor who shouldn't have even been allowed in to the meeting. There is cost to confrontation, but sadly there is

a greater cost to chickening out. If by some chance you are a saboteur and have caused your pastor unnecessary pain and stress please do yourself and the kingdom a favour, say you are sorry, pull your head in and get some help. You may not realise it but you are hurting the cause that you love so much.

Friendly fire

You know, I can actually understand saboteurs. They have rocked and floored me and pastors throughout time. Their sting hurts but at least I can understand them. They are dysfunctional people acting dysfunctionally. For pastors and leaders sometimes it's more the wounds and pressures caused by friendly fire that hurts the most. Friendly fire happens in wartime. It is the damage caused by troops on their friends and fellow allies by accident. I always feel sad for the troops who get injured or killed by friendly fire. They did know the risks but it was so unnecessary and avoidable. It must be a crushing feeling to be accidentally shot by your buddies in arms.

I believe that one of the greatest sources of stress for pastors does not actually come from the enemy or saboteurs. It comes from nice, generally well-meaning, caring brothers and sisters who unwittingly with their comments, actions or inactions accidentally wound the pastor who they actually care about and hinder the forward motion of the church. Friendly fire is unexpected and hard to understand. It's easy to see why enemies fire at us but harder to process the wounds caused by friends. Let me outline some examples of friendly fire and see how they can cause pressure on the life of pastors and church leaders.

Apathy

Deep frustrations and wounds don't always come from the bullet of an enemy rifle but from the inaction of our fellow troops. We live in a busy age. People are frantically trying to stay in the game and survive their time on this flying rock. This busyness coupled with the materialism of our western societies often leads to a real spiritual apathy. There is no denying it as many in our churches would agree that they are in this state. They would love to be more passionate and plan to be next week but somehow that week never comes. I have seen young pastors fresh and bursting with energy and enthusiasm being worn down by resistance to change and general malaise. After a while they stop trying to think up new and exciting steps of faith as they realise that the exercise often ends in frustration and disappointment.

Apathy drains the leader and the church. It becomes harder to do anything and the success of even the best prepared event becomes subject to the weather, what sport is on and who is having a party that night. It's not just a problem of lack of involvement in the church program; it's a lack of involvement in the call to discipleship. In an attempt to counter this, many pastors get caught in the trap of always trying to create the "next exciting thing". Each week an even better worship program with even more dynamic speakers and even greater anointing is sought and promised. It does create forward movement but it also creates a new problem for the pastor; the pressure to be more each week. Even with a better show, apathy slowly wears the pastor down.

Extremes of the faith continuum

As a pastor we want to have, and encourage others to have, a real faith in God. He is the Creator and capable of doing anything. Sometimes pastors struggle for years trying to work out what a real and healthy faith is. They see people with extremes of faith and wonder where the balance is. You might say, "how could anyone have too much faith?" It's not having too much faith but a faith that doesn't seem to relate to the scriptures or reality. It's a faith that everything will go well for the faithful. It sounds so good to listen to those who believe this and yet the seasoned pastor will know that it's not quite that easy.

The pastor, at times, has to mop up the damage caused by "everything will be fine" faith people. He has to walk a fine line between supernatural faith and the reality of ongoing suffering despite the person having enough faith to fix it. He is accused of not having enough of the right type of faith if he acknowledges that things might not work out in the way that the person in need is praying and hoping for. At the same time, he tries to encourage the person to have faith and believe that "all things are possible".

Although I don't agree with some of the teaching of the "faith movement", I would rather hang out with people who believe in the ongoing, miraculous, supernatural nature of God than people who don't. The other end of the faith spectrum is very debilitating. As a reaction to those who may go too far, many Christians slump into the sin of the natural life. Their Christian life and what they expect from churchworld is achievable simply by human effort.

They settle into a faith-complacency and only step out when the conditions are right or the finances are there. They have lost contact with the God

who is supernatural. They doubt, deliberate and only cautiously step out to do minimum risk projects. They mean well and want to protect the church from “being silly and getting carried away” but they become an anchor that holds the church back from all that Jesus wants it to be. Each conservative, doubting, opposing comment is like a little bullet that wounds the pastor’s heart.

The pastor’s faith can easily be eroded by the lack of faith of those around him. Once an army doubts victory or their ability to do the impossible, they will stagnate. At best they will hold their ground but in reality they will be forced to retreat. The enemy has a lot of faith. Satan is waging a war against his Creator. Simple logic shows that he doesn’t stand a chance. How could a created being ever match the Creator? Jesus showed that He has won the victory and yet Satan still ploughs into battle and often we retreat. Sometimes churchworld has forgotten that we are in a battle and that we have the unlimited resources of the Creator at our disposal. The friendly fire of disbelief can wear anyone down.

Unhealthy preoccupations

The call of the church is clear. It is to share the love of God and the message of salvation. Whatever organisational structure it takes, it is the family of God composed of those who know Him journeying through life together. Sadly, often friendly fire comes from people who have lost the focus of what the church is all about. They have started to see it as their little place which should be run their way. They have started to see the peripheral issues as being the core ones.

As I have spoken to pastors over the years, it is clear that one of our main distractions has been the conflicts and debates over worship styles and music. There is so much that happens through a church’s ministry throughout the week, but it is the views regarding what happens in the corporate 90 minute get together that at times has distracted or derailed churches and pastors. Things like music, which hardly rate a mention in the New Testament, become hot spots of stress for the pastor. Music, while being a beautiful gift from God, has been a source of conflict in the church for many centuries.

Sure, we all have our own tastes in music, but the amount of time that Christians have spent talking and arguing about it is a sin. We have fallen

short of the mark. So the pastor and his worship leaders take the shots of friendly fire from those who want to guard the things of the past and those who would make music the object of worship. I once organised a Sunday worship service with no music. It was great and God was worshipped. Somehow I believe that Jesus will hold us accountable for the distractions that have occupied and tired us out.

It is a healthy thing for people to express their concerns in a constructive way. But the thing that wearies the pastor is that the concerns that he hears of simply show that the church has lost its focus. Where are the lines of people at the pastor's office ready to share their concerns about how few people are coming to know Christ or the seemingly declining emphasis on prayer in many places? Where are the people complaining that the church is apathetic when it comes to standing against evil or social issues and that the church has lost much of its credibility in our society? It is this type of complaining that builds the pastor up and encourages him to fight on, but to argue about trivial things can only lead to the demise of deep people.

Nice people leading badly

One of the sources of the pastor's renewal and invigoration should be found in his leadership. They should be a fountain of innovation, encouragement, care and challenge for the pastor and the congregation. Sadly, some pastors realise that they are doomed from their first real meeting with their leadership. They see in a moment that the team that is supposed to surround him with love and care is only going to surround him with objections, restrictions and criticism. If a pastor has a dysfunctional leadership, his days are darkened and numbered. Unless there is a change of guard he, or them, will have to go. You see, pastors need the support of their leaders.

Other pastors find themselves surrounded by nice, well-meaning leaders who simply don't know how to lead or have not had the experience or preparation to tackle the complicated issues of leading a church. They are sacrificial people giving up their time and efforts to honour the role that the church has asked them to do. The big question is whether they are real leaders or positional ones. Positional leaders have been elected into a role but may not actually be leading in that role.

If the selection and training processes aren't right, then leaders may be asked to do what they aren't capable of, ultimately resulting in bad decisions

being made or the stagnation of the church. Poor leadership will eventually discourage the pastor and the church will be led to fields of second grade grass or worse. Although many take the choosing of leaders seriously, so many don't think through the consequences of the boxes that they tick.

Many churches have worked through issues regarding the selecting of leaders and many now are more thoughtful and wise in their approach. There are also differences in the procedures by which different churches and denominations approach the area of leadership selection. I first started to think seriously about this issue a number of years ago as a response to something that my dear mother had said. Sometimes you have a flash of insight where something that has been bothering you for some time becomes crystal clear in an instant. I had a moment like this during the lead up to our annual church leadership elections in our church which was based on the congregational governance model. As usual, there were a number of people nominated at the last minute by those who usually do the nominating and most people in the church seemed to not be connected into the whole process at all. There were more nominations than were needed and all seemed healthy.

One day, I was speaking with my elderly mother and I asked her, out of curiosity, who she would be voting for in the Annual General Meeting. She mentioned some people and I asked why she was voting for them. I will never forget her answer as she said about a particular candidate, "I will vote for him because he is a nice man". It was like a bolt of lightning. This simple, kind response helped me to realise that our system, at the time, was indeed flawed at many levels.

She would vote on the basis of whether she perceived someone to be "nice". There are a number of problems with this. Niceness does not necessarily mean good leadership. Mary Poppins was nice, but should she be leading a large community? I believe that in our churches we have a lot of nice people in leadership who aren't necessarily great leaders.

Was the person, indeed, nice? How would she really know? She also seemed to be prepared to vote without prayer and consideration. Sure, the official line is that through such members' meetings we prayerfully find God's will. For those who have been around the block a few times we know that often prayer does not have the priority that it should and the meeting can become just a reflection of what people think.

I also pondered on the wisdom of her having as much say in the voting as I did. Now, this is not being egotistical, but as the Senior pastor my future effectiveness would be strongly influenced by the leaders she played a part in electing. In some systems the pastor has very little involvement in the process of electing leaders. Her vote was not going to be based on an accurate assessment of all the candidates but rather her personal experiences of that person. It is a natural thing to tend to vote for people that you know personally, but in larger churches many people do not know the range of candidates adequately enough to make an informed decision.

The election would be based on the gathered members who may not adequately represent the whole church. It is not just apathy that keeps people away from members' meetings. Some choose to not go because of previous painful experiences in which church people didn't act like disciples of Jesus towards each other, so they choose to stay away. Although many are interested in the overall vision and tone of the church, many choose to not become a part of the membership structure and decision making process.

So, what can happen as a result is that churches are led by people who aren't necessarily good leaders. While everything may seem fine on the surface, chinks in the armour will inevitably come to surface in the form of bad decisions or inaction. Some pastors try to minimise the stress of having leaders picked for them by doing it themselves. There are great advantages to this but there are still pressures to face as the pastor may realise that he has not chosen wisely. Pastors are made or broken by their leadership team so it is vital that their selection be done well.

Trying a new restaurant

We always used to get takeaway from the same Chinese restaurant until a couple of years ago, when we made the switch over to another one. We changed for two reasons. Firstly, we weren't as happy with the quality of what we were getting as back in the good old days when we first stumbled upon our special oriental paradise. The second was that we had tried another place and the food was better. Now we go there and will continue until we face the same situation again. It's the way it goes in this competitive world. I don't feel any remorse or lack of loyalty. It doesn't bother me to think that I may have made my choices based on too few samples or that new things usually do taste better, at least initially.

I also would have never dreamed of sharing my legitimate concerns with the previous restaurant owners and assured them of my continued loyalty as they tried to act on my comments. I don't care about the impact of them losing my business and have no problems in telling my friends that I have made the switch and that they, too, should try our new place, unless of course they have the location of any even better one. This is the way it goes in the world of Chinese takeaway.

Sadly and all too often, that is the way it goes in the takeaway land of churchworld. Many people want to have a loose connection with their church so that, if they want, they can look around at other churches or just leave without any dramas. There are busloads of people sampling from many restaurants, maybe settling on one or choosing to do more rounds in the hope that one day their choice will be obvious to them.

There are times to move and change from one part of God's family to another, but it happens all too easily today. Some people are genuinely called by God to put their efforts in somewhere else. Others just want to change restaurants and justify it with a postscript call from God. Others just drift in and out thinking that no one will notice or care. Ah, but the pastor does notice and he suffers with each drift. For some pastors it represents a loss to the forward momentum. They thought that they needed you to make their plans come true. How could you leaving be a part of God's plan? It has left the team down on players. Often, pastors struggle with the reality that their lives just got harder. You see, you need people to make churchworld work, and the more the merrier. It should be growing. You want to make it grow with all that you have.

As a pastor you know that things could always be better and that it's impossible to please everyone, but as you listen to the plethora of reasons why the new restaurant is better, you wonder, what are the real issues here? There can seem to be many disconnected reasons for people moving on. This makes it more difficult for the pastor to bring real changes, and even if he was able to, would people be more loyal? For the pastors, the ones who really connect and notice you, your departure is a mini-grieving process. You are a part of their family and they will genuinely miss you being around. Leaving can be easier than rebuilding. If we are indeed called to a particular group of disciples, we should be faithful and true until the Master calls us elsewhere. If we leave without His call let's be big enough to just say it. I like the Szechuan beef better at the new place so I will be eating there.

At a deeper level, some of this transience is simply a reflection of our consumer mentality. The Chinese restaurant is a place to get a product; a place to buy and consume. If this branch of churchworld does not give me the product at the right price I will eat somewhere else. So the consumer moves his place of consumption. Business is better at the new place. The pressure mounts on the old place as business drops and the managers are really getting stressed as the bills have to be paid. They think that by advertising and improving the menu with some specials people will come back. Maybe they can attract some key customers to replace the ones that were lured away from them. So the cycle continues, but at the end of the day nothing has really changed except the number I call to make my order.

So these are some of the things that contribute to stress and frustration in the life of the pastor and church leader. Some are just the smell of bad eggs, but so many other frustrations are caused by decent, nice church people just not being the radical disciples that they were called to be. The long term result can be the wearing down of the pastor into burnout, a journey to the end of the tether.

6 | What's at the end of the tether?

It's only natural to wonder what lies at the end of the tether. What is at the end of the road? What happens when we reach the limit of what we can bear? It is a fear that can grip anyone who is sliding downwards. Each moment they feel that they can't take anymore, but they do. They know that everything has its limits and fear what will greet them at the end of the tether. In my pastorpain, I have at times felt that I had reached the end of the tether. They have been times of being stripped down to the bare bones, a bit like Job who was a man visiting the end of his tether.

My pain cannot be compared to Job's in any way. I mean, that guy paid hard for being good. It almost makes you want to be a bit off perfection so that you never get picked for such a cosmic showdown. As we read through the first few chapters we see Job step by step being stripped of the things that defined him and gave him purpose. His status as a well respected, healthy, wealthy family man of integrity was painfully taken away.

His wealth was perhaps the easiest bit to go. The loss of his family for whom he had a special burden must have crushed his soul. Then to lose his health by becoming a painful, oozing, living scab must have been excruciating. Although it doesn't mention it specifically, his sex life must have gone out the window, too. Grief and depression alone can rob us of the enjoyment of the most precious things. Job was a sexual man. In Job 31:1 he shared that to protect his righteousness he wouldn't even perve at the chicks. In his suffering time he probably didn't even feel like doing this. He was a man becoming nothing. I mean, I am sure that his wife wouldn't

want to have sex with a living scab. Not that she was much help to him as she had allowed the bitterness to take hold and encouraged him to just abuse God.

The absolutely crushing thing for Job, which must have been the last straw, was the line that his so-called mates took to understand his suffering. They were convinced that Job's sins had caused this calamity. How ironic in that it was actually the opposite, his righteousness and faith, that had led him down the path of destruction. Job is a case study of the naked soul; a person that has all sources of value, status, identity and joy taken away. Sometimes God allows us to be stripped naked.

It's painful and humiliating when, one by one, the things that we treasure and reflect our identity are stripped away from us. This assault leaves us gasping for air and wondering what will happen next. Job is left with nothing except his being and his relationship with God. "Though He slay me, yet I will hope in Him" just had to be written (Job 13:15). It talks about the point just before you reach the limit where you realise that it's all about your response to God. For whatever reason, you feel that you are about to perish or die and you stand there with nothing except your faith.

How low could a man go? Job was at the end of his tether. Some of his comments reflect that he had asked the ultimate pity party question, "Why was I born at all?" He was not bouncing back; instead he was slipping deeper and deeper into despair. The sad thing is that the people around him added to his burden. That can happen in pastorpain when your church family or leaders, meaning well, say and do things that push you further and further away. Maybe this is a necessary part of helping us to get to that place.

No one wants to be in that place, but there is something very sacred and special about being at the end of your tether. Having arrived, you realise that Jesus is there, waiting for you. He won't let you go any further and He has things to say and do in your life that at any other time you would not have taken on board. Often we are so busy doing things for Jesus that we don't really hear what He has to say. It is in this brokenness that a new work can start. I have been there a few times in my life and I have always found Jesus there. Either through a scripture or an experience or some words, He has always been there at the end of my tether. In fact, it has been at these times that God has revealed Himself to me in wonderful ways and given

words or images which have given me great encouragement and hope. It's good to know that and to remind myself of that fact.

The problem about being naked is that we want to put the clothes back on very quickly. Firstly, it's cold. Secondly, unless you are an exhibitionist with a perfect body, we don't want anyone to see us like this. I suspect that there are a lot of naked people in our churches who are hiding in cupboards. I mean, to be broken and vulnerable is not a pretty sight.

Pastors, in particular, can find it hard to be naked like this as there is a fear that it might damage their credibility as a leader of men. We want people to be themselves, but we don't quite know what to do with them when they are. In a sexist way, we can cope with women being vulnerable but not men. I think of a number of men in the Bible who were burdened to tears. Where can the pastor go to cry? Who can he really share with? Maybe like the others he just puts on whatever clothes he can find so that no one sees his nakedness.

After the crisis comes the healing. It's like the rain after the drought. Whether there was a point to the drought or it was just a case of no rain falling, the rain is the beginning of healing. Job had to suffer for a season then came the voice of God. After some time God gave Job a great message which basically said that Job was just a small dot in the cosmos. God is Sovereign and, although we suffer in the drought, He is the Lord of weather. Just because our lives are out of control doesn't mean that He is. One of the purposes of pain is to teach us to be utterly dependent on God. Paul reflects a number of times on his journeys to the edge. In his second letter to the church at Corinth he shared that through trials he had been to the end of his tether.

Paul faced many stresses, burdens and trials but he also knew what it was like to be comforted by God, the "Father of compassion" (2 Corinthians 1:3-11, 2:4, 6:3-10, 12:7-8). God is the ultimate "there, there" person. He wants to step into our pain and soothe our souls with His words and presence. Sometimes it's difficult for Him to comfort us as we are like the teenage girl who has been dumped by a boy for the first time. In the outpouring of grief, pain and anger it is hard for anyone to comfort us. He waits patiently for the sobbing to ease and for us to open ourselves to His comfort. Comfort is not a solution to our problems but a response to them.

Sometimes we want to be delivered instead of being comforted. We pin all our hopes on Jesus riding through as the brave knight and rescuing us from all foes, real or imagined. The problem is that if we just want to be rescued we can begin to resent God and others for not rescuing us. Job may have felt great about not cursing God and may have hoped that saying those inspiring words would lead to instant deliverance and victory. Instead, he suffered more. In our great needs, God wants two things from us; an openness to His comfort and help and a complete trust that He is with us.

Paul was also fuelled along by his previous experiences and his future hope of deliverance. God not only gives us strength but He can also deliver us from any dark time that we might be facing (2 Corinthians 12:7-12, 2 Timothy 4:17). However, our faith should be an unconditional one. Like the three guys about to be thrown into the furnace, their faith did not depend on deliverance; it was a pure and unshaking faith in God. (Daniel 3:17-18). Whether burnt to a crisp or not, we love and trust God. The story of their deliverance is miraculously wonderful, but faith doesn't always lead to earthly deliverance. We must be careful not to forget that many thousands of believers throughout the centuries have said the same words and have died in excruciating pain. Their deliverance was to be freed from this world and its pain.

Deliverance from our troubles is ultimately guaranteed by the gospel. We are to enjoy a place with no troubles for eternity. However, no such promises are made for us in this fallen world. Troubles and hardships come and through them we will hopefully experience God's comfort, come closer to Him and grow in our characters and attitudes. Deliverance from the pit then is an extra blessing.

I would much rather be pulled out of the pit but if that is not to be, at least today, I am comforted and fed by my Saviour who has jumped in with me to keep me company. Deliver me, my strong Saviour, from the pain that I have. You can do it, I believe it. But if not today, I will still love and trust you. The world, Satan and people have not succeeded in taking that away from me. I just pray that if my time in the pit is to continue, may it not be too long as I am a wimp and I don't like pain.

At the end of the book of Job, God brings blessings and rewards in abundance. Sometimes people forget the happy ending of this famous case study in suffering. Other times people forget that, although happy, Job

would always carry some of the pain of those terrible days. Just because he ended up with a replacement family doesn't mean that throughout his life he didn't carry the pain of losing the first one. Happy endings don't mean that all is forgotten and dealt with. There will be blessings but we will be different, hopefully stronger, hopefully better.

I wish that we could just learn the biggest lessons straight from the book, but it's not like that. Sometimes we need the pain to tell us that there is something wrong or to teach us new things about our relationship with God. We have someone in Jesus who knows a thing or two about pain. He is the only one who went to the end of His tether alone. He did it all and He did it for us. We can't be happy that Jesus endured so much physical and spiritual pain, but aren't you glad He did!

Most of us will travel to the end of our tether perhaps even more than once. The experience will be scary and painful. The good thing about the trip is that Jesus will be there to comfort, strengthen and save.

7 | Just get over it! Heck, why didn't I think of that?

Some things take longer to get over. Burnout is a serious condition that has resulted from a grinding down process which has taken years, perhaps decades. Those of us who are unfit and overweight dream of a quick fix to our problems. The truth is that we cannot undo 100,000 greasy pizzas with a few well-meaning dry crackers and a walk around the block. It is a process of change. We do realise this and know that it is pointless to ask the one on the diet if they are feeling slimmer at the end of each day. For those on the recovery path from serious pastorpain, the road will be long. For some it will be months, others years, others longer.

How do the damaged take such time out to recover? For me, I was fortunate to have some accumulated long service leave up my sleeve. It was a great blessing to have some months to be in the forest and not have the pressure to have to work, although it was never my dream to use this time to wallow in a pit. Days blur into weeks and months and sometimes there is no real improvement to show for it. I just thought that a bit of time off would do the trick, but the bite of burnout has been much more vicious than I would ever have dreamed. It takes time but sometimes we don't have enough. The opportunity to rest is spoiled by the pressure that soon I will need to be the provider again. Soon I will have to be an ex-burnt out guy.

Sometimes people try to start back too soon. Whether it's in their old role or a new one, they have to, or choose to, get back in the race. There is a lot of fear that comes with this as our confidence in our abilities has been shaken to the core. What if we really aren't better? What if we crash again,

will it be worse? A leader that keeps wearing out and falling behind could never really lead well again. Could they? I hope so. It would be good to have more time but our world cannot give us this time.

Just get over it!

Those words sound so right and yet are so hard. It is hard to get over pastorpain. It's not a simple formula as we who are in it don't know exactly what we are supposed to be getting over. Is it bitterness or unforgiveness? If so, then that's something to work on. Pastorpain goes well beyond these two and so to say "get over it" shows that you don't even understand where I am and how I got here. That's one of the reasons for these writings; to show that it's not just a case of getting over it, otherwise I could have worked that out and done that a long time ago.

It's also hard to get over something that is an ongoing pain in your life. In life, sad and difficult times come and go and we are left to work through minimising the residual effects. Pastorpain is ongoing. There are issues of confidence for the future and present status that makes moving ahead more difficult. Time spent wondering what went wrong and all those doctors and psychologist appointments. Then there are issues of future career choices.

Sometimes people choose to give it another go and sometimes pastors realise that it's time to go back to being a teenager and wonder what they are going to do with the rest of their lives. I have never been a person who gets hung up on titles and positions, but it is a sobering thing to lose descriptions like "effective leader", "good pastor" and be left with titles like "burnt out", "sick", "lost" or "a mess".

During my burnout period I had a chance to go to a leadership conference. The big dilemma was what to have printed on my nametag. Everyone there would be a leader of some organisation. Their names and positions would quickly define them. But what should I put? I could have listed a number of great and wonderful roles, but they were all in the past. I could just put ex-so-and-so. Who was I now? What place did I play in the cosmos? I toyed with putting the truth, "burnt out pastor", but wondered what reaction that would get. I could describe myself by my qualifications or as a husband, lover and great father.

A blank seems so empty, just like me. Guys in particular often define themselves by the roles that they play. I started to think, “what am I doing hanging out with people who are exceptional leaders?” Then I remembered that until a few months ago I could fill out the blanks and that I could have worn a name tag that made me feel good. I started to realise that some of the guys who would be there weren’t so different to me. I am a good leader; it’s just that I have grown weary. Maybe the tag should just read “Someone to talk to if you are feeling that you are on the way out”.

My burnout will take a while to come back from. As I see the costs of our ministry choices being played out in my whole family I know that it will be a long road for all of us. There are things that we just have to get over but there are so many other things that will require the touch of God and a gentle restoration of confidence in ourselves and our fellow believers. This restoration of confidence will take time, I believe that it will happen but I have seen guys who haven’t made it through. Sometimes the wounds caused by Christ’s followers and life in churchworld have been faith-fatal.

I am thankful that I have never been gutted and left for the birds to prey on, but some pastors have. Some have been treated so badly by churches and leaders that it makes you wonder whether Jesus has already taken away His lamp stand from their churches. Some of these guys are hurt almost beyond healing. They are bitter and angry and leave ministry with a distorted view of everything. Unless someone bothers to seek to bring healing and restoration, their chances of surviving are slim.

We all get hurt and are disappointed by people around us. When abused, used or unappreciated by those who do not know God, we can take those blows on the chin. They hurt but we can still keep fighting. However, hard blows from those in whom the Spirit of God allegedly dwells hurt more.

It is easy to say “get over it”, “move on”, but for me to really be able to get over it there needs to be a deep, inner healing and the mending of relationships. We don’t want to just get over it as this would just gloss over the real problem. The real problem is that churchworld doesn’t always see its connection and responsibility to pastorpain. Somehow in the collective sense “the church” is responsible, but often the individuals who make up the collective don’t realise their responsibility in contributing to, or failing to prevent pastorpain.

Maybe this book is about “not getting over it”. Maybe it’s about forcing the issue and not backing down until it gets on the agenda. Overall, people love their pastors and want the best for them. To say “just get over it” to pastors who are burnt out will mean that they may never be able to get over it. It is Jesus’ plan that our relationships be bathed in love, forgiveness, healing and commitment. While leaders and pastors are hurting, churchworld needs to realise that repairs have to be made. It’s a combination of every person’s relationship to the pastor that creates the cumulative church/pastor effect.

Some churches will not get it at all. They will march on and wonder what that guy was on about. They will never understand pastorpain and hope that he gets a “real job” and sees what it’s like “in the real world”. Other churches will throw some money and goodwill at the problem. Nice, bring it on, but there needs to be more. There needs to be healing and restoration and a commitment to ongoing care. There needs to be a commitment to rescue. Believe me, I want to get over it, but I will only be able to if you help and bring pain relief.

pain relief

8 | Self care; is there a tablet?

Pain killers are great. How did anyone get by in the days before these great tablets? It's so good to pop it down with some water and soon the pain eases away. These tablets, while bringing relief, don't solve major underlying problems and the packet does say that we should see a doctor if pain persists. To deal with pastorpain there are tablets that can be taken to relieve the pain, but it's more important to look at some underlying problems that have caused, or are maintaining, this condition and some things that will help in recovery.

Ultimately, it's up to my self-care strategies. There is no use in blaming fast food outlets. I went and I chose. I ate and I enjoyed all those unhealthy treats. My problems are not necessarily my fault but I am responsible for my own life. So the road out of the forest is up to me. Many times in these foggy days I have waited to hear the sound of the chopper with my troops ready to drop down to rescue me. You can only wait so long before you realise that you are on your own.

You have to get yourself out of this mess. Maybe that's why God doesn't send the chopper as He wants us to realise that nobody is coming. He wants us to use all of the skills that He has taught us and the little strength we have, with the great strength that He has, to get out. What can the pastor do to start to find his bearings in the wilderness? There are a number of things that can help a pastor begin to come out of this dark time. Just as it didn't take one or two events to get me here, it won't be removed by one or two things. Recovery is a process. So here are some things to do while in pastorpain to aid the recovery process.

Staying true to the big two; loving God and others

In life there are so many things that we are meant to do and need to do. In emergency situations these fade away and we find that just a couple of basic instincts kick into place and get us through. In a panic situation, who reflects on anything except the couple of things that need to be done? Jesus summarised the Bible into two main concepts. To love God and others was His way of letting us know what it's all about (Mark 12:29-31). Instead of seeing these as commandments which must be kept to prevent His wrath from descending on us, it is important to see them as survival tips for life on earth. God's commandments aren't supposed to be our chores, but our way through the forest. In burnout, if the pastor can maintain these two, his chances of survival are significantly better.

Sadly, some pastors slip away from both God and others. Their pain and disillusionment in God and His people drive them further into the forest. Although people may have caused the pain, people can also ease it. I can relate to pastors who choose to go into isolation. I am not sure about churchworld and how I fit in anymore and I could easily see a life develop where I avoid contact because of the risk of further disappointment. This is understandable thinking, but wrong. In isolation and avoidance the pastor is cutting himself off from the wonderful blessings that can come from God's people. In this isolation, if bitterness against God and people takes hold, it will be a hard road back.

There is a real difference between being disappointed, frustrated and angry and being bitter. Jesus feels all of these when He looks at the world except for bitterness. Bitterness makes it impossible to smile. Just try it. Be a bitter mongrel for a while and try to have a happy life. It's a choice to not become, or stay, bitter.

There may be some ongoing conflicts with other Christians or leaders which the pastor should try to resolve. Being in such a dark emotional state, the chances are that these issues contain much more bite than they would if the pastor was feeling well, rested and enjoying a luxury cruise in the Bahamas with \$20,000 spending money. Sometimes conflict and tensions just need to be endured as their resolution falls outside of our control. The pastor should try to resolve issues without escalating them. There is no point in taking everyone down with us as; after all, the ship is more important than my disappointments and beefs. The most important thing

is to try as much as possible to stay close to God and others. If this can be maintained, then recovery from burnout will be easier.

We all know that it is vital to have a good devotional life. To be close to the source of comfort and power has to be a good thing. Sadly, so often we give this privilege away as we rush about doing stuff in our own strength. I know that if Jesus had some words to say to me He would wonder at why I thought that serving Him was more important than spending time with Him. I guess that the ‘things to do’ list is more demanding than our Saviour. He doesn’t push in or interrupt, but we ignore Him at our own peril. In pastorpain great comfort can come from spending time with Jesus. For me, I know that I still have a long way to go as I still look for tasks rather than my Master but I am learning, the hard way. Having a strong prayer life has to be one of the most important sources of the pastor’s strength, enthusiasm and direction. Prayer keeps us close to the One whom we are serving and allows Him to renew us with His unlimited supernatural power. God doesn’t want us to “do life” just on the basis of our own abilities, but through the enabling of His Holy Spirit (Zechariah 4:6). Through prayer problems are either solved or put in their rightful place. Every pastor knows this but still we can fall victim to the demands and the perpetual busyness which churchworld creates.

Hang on to hope

While a person is stuck in the deep pit it is easy for them to begin to lose hope. When you first fall in there is a confidence that with a bit of time, effort and help you will be able to get out and continue your journey. As the days and months roll on, a deep sense of panic can set in. You are still there and you start to fear that you will never be able to get out. Fading hope is a scary thing. Hope in recovery, hope in the ability to work effectively again, hope in financial security and good health all start to be eroded away. I always had faith in God and hope in Him but the faith in the “myself” department was taking a dive.

A turning point for me came one night as I felt that things were coming to some dark climax. I really felt that the TV monitor of my life was starting to flash the message “game over”. If you remember the old arcade games and early computer games, these words would indicate that your time was up. Even if you were just getting the hang of it, that game was over. So, there I was feeling like my life was never going to get better.

Then, in a moment of inspiration, I started to think and believe that God was there with me and that He knew the full extent and longevity of my pain and knew that I would end up this way. If so, then He was not surprised at what I was going through. Then I reasoned that if He had allowed me to stay in the pit for so long, would He want me to perish down there? Then, a great peace came upon me as I thought that it couldn't be His will for me to perish in this pit and that He would help me out in His way, in His timing, if I believed and had hope.

Now when you are feeling lost and hopeless, hope is a hard product to come by. It is hope in God and not ourselves which is one of the main ingredients to turning situations like this around. Sure as a pastor you have hope, but sometimes your hope level gets so beaten down that you have to start again. These thoughts and revelations were not all that original or brilliant but when you are perishing, the hope of survival is a powerful force. Achieving this hope for me in my situation was the first step out.

Travelling light

While in burnout it is good to minimise your responsibilities. This may happen anyway as you find that you cannot even do the most basic things without intense stress. Burnout immobilizes. It is a time of reduced expectations. The good thing about being "sick" is that we are excused from many things. Make the most of it. Keep it simple and light and only add to it when you are ready. This is a temporary state and it doesn't matter if things don't get done. Take the pressure off yourself and lighten up on your expectations of yourself and others. Eventually, you will be able to take on more responsibilities but hopefully in a wiser way. The main goal in burnout is survival and healing.

Strengthening your marriage

One of the things that has kept me going through many hard times is the quality of our marriage. Hardship can either push you apart or draw you together. I am thankful that, through it all, my wife has been a part of the solution and not the problem. This has placed a weight on her which she is now paying for in her own burnout. How sweet, we are burnt out together. It's been great to hang on to each other and I know that I wouldn't have made it without her. It's a different story for others. Many spouses resent and suffer pastorpain so much that it pushes them apart.

Some pastors may even be experiencing burnout partially as a consequence of relationship difficulties.

Regardless of what state our marriages are in we need to treasure and grow them. This is not the sort of pain that you can leave at work, for our lives become our work and so if the marriage is not strong enough there is a real danger of it being the greatest victim of all. Whatever has to be done must be done to keep even the smallest of flames from being snuffed out.

You need your best friend in pastorpain. Our wives are the ones that we can tell everything to. We can cry together with them, get angry with the world together, process what's happening together and hope together. I didn't include laugh together as in my experience there isn't an abundance of laughter in the depths of pastorpain. They are the ones with whom we can experience all the amazing pleasures that God's gift of sex can give both physically and emotionally. Speaking of sex, there has been one humorous side to burnout. One of the possible side-effects of some medications is an interference with sex drive and experience. I think it was the combination of the medication I was on and the effects of the dark time that I was having which led to the experience of temporarily losing my sex drive. Instead of being depressed about it I actually found it to be an interesting and liberating experience. For guys, the sex drive is something that is a prominent aspect of our lives.

So often over the years I have talked with couples and the comment has emerged that the woman hasn't shared the same type of sex drive as the man. This is not to say that women don't treasure and look forward to this expression of intimacy and pleasure, but it's not always at the top of the "things to do" list, especially after a day filled with meeting the requests and expectations of everyone else in the family and the general demands of life. Well, I finally got the point as for a short time it went off my "things to do" list completely.

Desire for sex... nothing... and although as a male I worried whether this would be permanent, it had a good side to it as my wife and I enjoyed times together as best friends; laughing, talking and not having the pressure to include sex in the formula. In some strange, bizarre way this experience added another aspect and depth to our relationship. What I experienced is different from having desire and not being able to do anything about it. It was just refreshing not having the desires for a while so we could just

“hang out” together. We have shared this experience with some couples with the wives often joking about where they could get some of this medication for their husbands, at least for a while.

Letting some people in

People can cause a lot of pastor pain but it is also people that can ease it. The pastor is in a dilemma here. In some ways he needs to be surrounded by people who care. In other ways he needs to be away from people and the associations that they bring to him mentally. If a pastor has been in an area for quite some time, distancing himself from people may be quite difficult. As I have been in ministry in one area for over two decades, I found it very difficult to find my own space. It became our family joke that even if I went off to the most remote place in our city for some moments of quiet reflection I would still bump into people that often would cause me to think of stressful or sad times.

The pastor needs to stay close to a small group of people. Whether they are good friends, a mentor or just people who care, he needs their support, phone calls and encouragement. He does want to have a few people who he can talk to. It's painful enough to tell just a couple how you are feeling without going over the story repetitively with the multitudes. Every person who asks reminds you of what you are trying to forget. Maybe it would be easier to wear a t-shirt with some message on it; “don't ask...I am still stuffed”. The few who can stay close to the pastor can make a huge difference in his life. They give care and a frame of reference. When someone is burnt out and isolated they begin to wonder if they are seeing things clearly. Close ones can give love, support and guidance to help the pastor find the path and stay on it.

Seeking the help of health care professionals

Doctors, psychologists and psychiatrists have experience in helping. The pastor needs to work through fears and possible embarrassment about sharing and also of the possible side-effects of medication. If they are health care professionals they will be understanding and experienced and the chances are they too are trying to stay on top of the same problem. Yes, it's your turn to be the patient; the one sitting there seeking help. It was quite a weird feeling for me to go back to my old office and ask the interim senior pastor to listen to me and pray with me. What a classic role reversal.

In burnout lots of things need to be looked at. Through counselling, the main problems and issues can be identified. It is important to explore the person's background and how they have been functioning in the time leading up to burnout and to explore whether they have suffered with depression or anxiety in the past. Although there are many common symptoms to burnout, each person will go through it differently and need to have people to talk with about their own journey. Medical professionals can also assist with advice on medication. Although there can be some minor side-effects of medication, for me it was a step that I needed to take.

Early in my burnout I had a call from a caring pastor who encouraged me to look at taking medication. I resisted this for a while but as my anxiety and mental state grew worse it became something that I felt I needed to do. Medication rebalances things in the brain which helps to settle the person down so that they can begin to rebuild their lives. Medication is not the solution to burnout but it can play an important role in recovery, especially when it goes together with good counselling and processing.

Staying connected with believers

Most pastors will need some time out from attending their church, or any church for that matter. It is their workplace and they need to be away. For some, sadly they may find it hard to return. While in pastor pain it is good to link up with other Christians, but there should be no pressure to do this. Let's face it, when it comes to church attendance, the pastor is in credit. But there is something encouraging and challenging about meeting with God's family in whatever form that takes. Drifting off the radar means that the pastor and his family are starting to do it alone. That's never been the plan.

My church experiences during the hardest times were just a blur. I saw the enthusiasm and passion of those around me, but I couldn't relate to it. Gradually, I felt more like going to church worship services and felt that being with enthusiastic believers was not only inspiring, but brought healing and hope to my heart and mind. Becoming involved in a vibrant and growing church family was a real help in the process of recovery.

Letting people know how you are going

In my experience people don't easily understand what you are going through. For most, they only see the pastor for a couple of hours at the

Sunday worship service which by nature is upbeat and challenging. How would it be if instead of getting up to preach the pastor just stays in his seat with a lost and confused expression on his face. It would be an interesting experiment. Most people judge situations on what they see or want to see.

One of my disadvantages has always been that even when I am at the end of either the depression or anxiety tether, people comment on just how healthy and relaxed I look. It's not something that I put on, it's just how I come across. It's amazing how many people form their evaluations on external appearances rather than ask probing questions. In retrospect, I should have gone to church unshaven with greasy hair and wearing a ripped t-shirt with baked bean stains on it. People may have gotten the hint earlier.

I have also learned that by sharing that you are exhausted and burnt out, people will mostly not tune in to what's happening. They will be somewhat concerned and identify with you as they are feeling pretty stressed out and tired as well, but they still won't get it. Terms like "burnout" seem academic until you are in it. One of the reasons for writing this book is to let people know what it is like so when they hear it again they will stop and take it seriously. Without the melodramatics, it is important to paint a picture of how you are feeling. Often people don't take burnout seriously until the person is in a state where they cannot go on. While you are still working people assume that things are still working.

Keeping occupied

If a person is burnt out then there is a high chance that they have been a task oriented person, a hard worker, a perfectionist. If so, having time off in pastorpain is not necessarily going to be easy. I used to dream of having extended time off but as the months blur past I realise that this time off has been a nightmare. Instead of a relaxing worthwhile time, it has been more pain than ever. To lessen the impact of this pain the pastor needs to keep busy. To go from a highly effective leader of leaders to sitting around in a dressing gown watching daytime TV is a big jump. If TV is going to help then watch it, but we were created to do more worthwhile things.

While the pursuit of meaningful activities has led us to this point, their absence is excruciating. For me, reading and writing have been a way to stay occupied. Even if no one reads or likes this book, it's ok. It made me

feel that I was still able to do something productive. So the advice is; stay occupied but not busy. The time off for recovery is a great opportunity to do those things that we would not normally ever get a chance to do. For me it was putting all our family videos onto DVD, scanning all our family photos, compiling a list of my all-time favourite songs and cataloging all my sermons. These activities kept me from going even more mental than I was already.

Stop ruminating

Cows chew their cud. They just keep chewing and grinding down the food in their mouths over and over again. To ruminate is to keep going over something in our minds. During pastor pain two factors can combine that can make rumination a real problem. Firstly, the pastor has time to chew over things that have happened either in recent times or over the course of their ministry. As they are temporarily out of action, they are stuck in the paddock with lots of time to chew their cud. Secondly, there might be plenty to chew on as the pastor thinks over hurts and disappointments which seem to drown out memories of happier days and victories made by the team.

Although unavoidable to some extent, ruminating is counterproductive unless it leads to positive actions for problems to be resolved. It's like a scab which just keeps getting picked so that it doesn't heal. This is why staying busy is so important although it is possible to ruminate while busy doing anything. The pastor needs to consciously decide to not keep going over and over things and to fill his mind with new and encouraging thoughts. The pastor and his spouse may need to decide on some restrictions to discussing problematic issues. These issues need to be aired and chewed, but not to the point of headaches and nausea.

Looking after your body

Wow, I am really out my depths on this one. Seriously, we have a friend who is a nutritionist / health person who just shakes her head when I talk about my lifestyle and how I love greasy cheesy pepperoni pizzas, but I am trying to take better care of my body. The years of stress, inadequate sleep and rest, not enough vegies and exercise have taken a toll. Stress relievers, like comfort foods and drinking, actually cause more stress and damage in the long run. It is vital to exercise often and to work towards a healthier lifestyle,

especially if you are not working for an extended period. We all know how easy it is to put on a couple of kilos on holidays so a long time off with reduced physical activity must be counterbalanced with exercise.

It is also important to rest and recharge. For some the sleep comes easily as the body shuts down to recharge or gets used to being on medication. For others the sleep and rest that they desperately need still eludes them. Having adequate sleep and rest must be a priority in the recovery from burnout and then hopefully becoming a healthy pattern which will continue throughout life.

Guarding against sin

It is also important to guard the soul against sin. It is precisely at our weakest moments that sin can creep in. The pastor's guard is down and he has time to entertain thoughts which aren't going to help. Time off can become our worst enemy. The mind, if it has too much free time, will tend to go to its default setting of sin. One of the best and worst things for a guy is to have heaps of time off.

We would hope that this time off would lead to spiritual revival but in a burnt out unhappy state, this time off can actually lead the pastor into deeper waters. This is an area where self-discipline must kick in or we must set up some outside accountability. The road to recovery must include growing in spiritual health as well. Sin is sin and will never lead to contentment and enduring joy. It is important that when we find ourselves in a dark forest we look for ways out and not for paths that will lead us into greater lostness.

Reflecting on things that should have been done differently

I don't see myself as a failure or a loser. I am not ashamed to talk about my pastorpain as I know that it has been a hard road at times and even the toughest can crack. However, I must take on board responsibility for things that I could have done differently and learn from these mistakes. One of my regrets is that I should have spent more time with other pastors.

I think back to where this pattern might have come from and remember my early years as a fresh, enthusiastic, skinny young pastor (and I have photos to prove it). I attended a number of pastors get-togethers and prayer times but, to be truthful, I found them to be depressing and frustrating. As we would share our burdens I felt totally discouraged to hear how hard

everything was for everyone. Pastors do need to share and who better to share with than other pastors, but I started to stay away. I hadn't experienced those things and was still happy to be of service. I didn't want to become like them but here we are.

I should have prayed more and let God strengthen me and let others help. In retrospect, I should have gone into counselling years ago and sought medical help. I should have not been so conscientious. While this attribute is admirable it can also take us down into the pit as we take on too much of the responsibility for the ministry that we are leading.

Not being surprised by pastorpain

If we scroll through the Bible we see the pain in almost every leader that shares their thoughts. Characters like Moses, Elijah, Jonah, David, Solomon and Paul all went through dark times, and not just once. Some of David's best work was written in some dark damp cave. These people were successful giants of faith and service. Sometimes their downtimes came after great victories. I always find it interesting to see how Elijah's mood changed after his amazing victory on Mt Carmel. This is the text book case of leadership and faith and what is often not mentioned in rousing sermons is that just a few verses after His victory over the prophets of Baal he is totally exhausted, confused and has instant death as his prayer point (1 Kings 19:1-5).

Pastorpain should be no surprise. Disciplepain should also be no surprise as Jesus went to great lengths to let us know that it would hurt and cost. Maybe the person giving the appeal didn't tell you that but Jesus never hid the fact (Luke 9:23). If we think that our pain is bad there will be a thousand million in heaven with stories that will make our struggles sound like fairy floss.

Understanding the bigger problems

Certainly pastorpain is a part of the greater issue of the health, vitality and relevance of churchworld today. It is no wonder that many are leaving to look for other ways to live out their Christian faith and life as disciples. Somehow, despite the money and effort being poured into it, churchworld is not really making the great headway that we would hope for and it's draining the energy of those paid to maintain it.

How should we respond to this? Should we cry out “Stuff the system” and leave, or realise that the system that we have been working with needs to change through correction and new vision. Just how much change the system needs is hard to quantify but so many disciples know in their hearts that things need to change although the road ahead is not always clear. At least questions need to be asked about just how effective the way that most churches operate is in really making a difference in the community and leading people to salvation in Jesus.

Burnout is not just an indicator of the lack of churchworld health. It is also a reflection on the stresses of today’s living. Thankfully we don’t have the same stresses that people from the past have had to endure. I am sure that I wouldn’t have wanted to live in a village in the dark ages with the constant fear of some marauding tribe coming to rape and pillage. Somehow, in the easy life, we have become more stressed. Anxiety and depression are huge problems and superficially hard to understand in a “lucky” country such as ours.

People are busy, stressed and often heading for overload. Work expectations and financial demands are causing many to struggle. The pace of technology and change has created an ongoing state of flux. People are writing emails at unearthly hours when, years ago, they would have been fast asleep. Stress and depression are becoming epidemics. Life may not necessarily be more difficult than the old days but it is much more intricate and fast paced. Many, if not most, people live in a state of busyness, tiredness and a life of imbalance. There is a vicious cycle created by this as the increased number of people in society with serious issues then creates more stress and weariness in the under-resourced groups of people who are trying to make a difference and help.

Not feeling like a loser

It’s easy to fall into this trap as you look around and see others living life to the full. You know that everyone has their struggles but you can feel like you are a loser because you have not been able to stay afloat. Firstly, in Christ, no one is a loser. As a disciple, any losership that we might claim disappears. We are followers of Jesus and no matter what we are or are not, our relationship with Him makes us winners. Now, we might not look like or feel like winners but we are. In the bigger scheme of things we cannot lose; our inheritance is guaranteed and God is with us (Ephesians 1:13-14).

Sure, we might be down for the count, but that doesn't mean that we have lost. Even if we were to lose our battle here on earth that's nothing compared to an eternity in which we will win. There might even be a few rewards for the pain, although I am sure that any rewards I might have been eligible for have been reduced by my years of whinging to God. It is vital to see the "wins" that we already have achieved with God's help. Our service has not been in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58). There will be people in heaven who will thank us and many on earth who are deeply grateful. We are not losers.

Believing that God has still got plans for our lives

We know the theory but we really have to believe that God has allowed us to go through these dark times for a purpose. He could have sent me a ticket for a cruise around the world with a million dollars to spend on whatever, but He didn't. So I trust that growth has occurred or will occur as a result of these difficult times. There are heaps of bible verses which talk about the good and growth that can come (the classic: Romans 8:28). It's also vital to believe that He still has a plan for the future even though it's scary to think about how long it's taking to get back up.

Trying to have fun

Pastorpain is a real fun buster. Even those things which we used to look forward to have somehow lost their appeal. Even though our marriage has been a rock I have noticed that pastorpain has robbed us of some joy and fun. We used to enjoy having a spa. When we did our renovations we put in a good sized spa. It was great when we were in it as the kids would run for their lives and spend their time at the other end of the house. I guess the concept of us being in there together was quite disturbing for them but it worked for us; a glass or two of vino and the relaxation of that special place. However, as the months of turbulence rolled on I found that even this special place had pain in it. Although we wanted to avoid talking about what was going on in our lives we couldn't help it, after all, it was our lives at stake. It became impossible just to relax and enjoy the bubbles.

Fun things put the sparkle into life. The chances are that fun things have dropped away during burnout or maybe they weren't there to begin with. Work may have taken over everything. We all need to find what fun is for us and do it. One person's fun is another's torture. My wife likes doing

jigsaw puzzles. She likes it and finds it relaxing, but when I see a table covered in a million little, untidy, displaced pieces, I feel like taking extra medication. It's pretty depressing to have time off to have fun when you don't feel like it. The depression that comes with pastorpain is a cloud that robs us of joy and must be fought. It is important to put some good fun things in the plan and make sure that they happen.

Staying in the fight

To get through there needs to be a determination to not quit. Sometimes we say that we quit, that we have had enough, but we need to bounce back and say, "I didn't mean it". I want to keep fighting and hoping for better days. If hope fades then the road will be much longer and harder. The pastor must fight against the darkness of pastorpain. He must stand against negativity and bitterness as they will consume even what little is left. He must keep fighting. It's like the lyrics in the classic song from the past "I get knocked down but I get up again, you're not ever gonna keep me down".

I used to get back up a lot quicker than I do today. I sometimes worry that I won't be able to keep getting up. I am down for the count but in my mind I still want to fight. In the words of the great philosopher, Rocky Balboa, in the latest "Rocky" movie, "It's not how hard you punch, it's how many times you can get hit and keep going". It's a battle and the dark forces of this world want to win over God's children (Ephesians 6:10-20). We have the victory, although sometimes it's hard to see it. We must get up even if it is slowly. We must fight on. It's not over.

Taking appropriate action

It is hard to know what to do when the wheels are falling off. For some, time off will help them to eventually get back into the role. For others, it's time for a career change. It can be a real dilemma to know what to do. It may help the pastor to go on extended leave, but it can create uncertainties and pressures for the church and its leaders. Instead of accepting this well-earned care, sometimes pastors just choose to go. It is important to look at all the options, discuss them and then decide. It won't be easy no matter which path you take but you will need to make some decisions about where you are going.

Reprogramming the mind

If the pastor is to come out of pastorpain and stay out then he will have to learn to live and think differently. How I think about myself and how I respond to stressors will need to change otherwise I won't be able to crawl out of this hole. I need a makeover so that the new model will hopefully be able to handle life on this planet a lot better. Changing thinking, acting and responding patterns can be very difficult but the alternative is more of the same. If the pastor has struggled with trying to please others as a result of personal issues and needs, then this underlying motivation should be worked through. This is where counselling can help.

Through the counselling process, unhealthy patterns of thinking and acting can be identified and improved so that when the pastor gets back in the ring, his fighting style will be much improved. Also, the person in burnout needs to be careful that their depression doesn't lead them to an overly negative outlook of the world and fellow human beings. If they have had a track record of hurts and disappointments, these need to be worked through so that they don't permanently taint the way they see things. If there is to be significant recovery, then a whole new way of living life must be started. Boundaries must be maintained and practical ways of living a balanced life must be created. This will not be easy but the "old dog" must learn new tricks.

At the end of the day, the pastor is the one who has to change, recover and go on. With the resources that God brings and the support of friends it can be done. There is a lot that pastors can do to start coming out of the pit and there is a lot that fellow leaders, believers and friends can do as well.

9 | Pastorcare from other leaders

Whatever structure your church operates under there should be a team of people who are responsible for the overall work of the church and the care of the pastor. These teams are generally made up of well meaning, caring, but usually busy people. As their leadership of the church takes place outside working hours these are people who, in themselves, make great sacrifices and must also be aware of the risk of burnout. Although some church leadership teams are dysfunctional and destructive, seeking to powerplay and maintain control, many are reasonably healthy, although at times not quite as effective or perceptive as they should be.

Often people are elected into positions but, just like the pastor, aren't quite aware of what they are getting themselves into. They are given very little training and preparation and don't have much time to devote to leadership development. Their responsibilities are big but the payoffs are sometimes small. Unlike the pastor they are not receiving any remuneration for their time and their leadership of the church occupies only one part of their lives.

To be an effective leader in churchworld today is not an easy thing. There are hard balances between other church leaders, staff and the church family which the leadership is called to represent. It is hard to find a balance between representing the membership and releasing the pastoral staff to blaze their trails.

So often there is so little quality time to discuss vital issues. Setting curfews on night meetings is great but it means more another day. Late night meetings

can be ineffective and sometimes counterproductive. It is almost an unnatural act to have worked all day and then to sit through 5 hours of meetings after dinner. So many meetings and so much talking, but is it effective? Many teams are bogged down on dry agendas and spend little time on the most important issues such as the overall health of the church family, its staff and prayer.

As the landscape changes for churchworld so do the demands placed on leaders. Some who are new might wonder what they have signed on for while seasoned hands struggle to absorb change and pine for the “good old days”. Despite the challenges, leadership teams must have as a priority the care and support of their pastors and staff. There are many things that leadership teams can do to ease the pressures faced by pastors.

Pray and encourage prayer

One of the main roles of church leaders is to pray and bring the needs of those that they are responsible for to God. Leaders need to have an active faith and a belief that prayer makes a difference. They need to understand the spiritual war that they are in and be prepared to stand united with the pastoral team in the battle. Although we all say “amen” to this we know that often prayer is not given its rightful place. Leaders can become managers and organisers rather than warriors. There seems to be so many items on the agenda and all seem so important. It’s hard to juggle so many things, the pastor’s opinions, other staff and leaders and at the end of the day what will the members say? There is little quality time left to hear what Jesus has to say.

Prayer is vital not only in the leadership but as the leadership actively encourages and models the centrality of prayer to the wider church family. If the leaders aren’t people of prayer then how can they expect anyone else to be or to believe in the importance of prayer? Praying for the pastor and his family needs to be constant and specific. The leadership needs to be in touch with the difficulties, dilemmas and victories that the pastor and his family are facing and pray accordingly. As the old hymn says, “ O what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer”. How true, but think of how much “needless pain” your pastor has carried all because those whom He leads with did not carry his needs to the Lord in prayer.

Lead well

Just because someone is called a leader, doesn't mean that they are one. Your pastor is not the only leader in town. Leadership teams can sometimes become management committees involved with keeping things on an even keel. Administration and sound management are vital to the functioning of a healthy church. However, the spirit and energy of the church comes from passionate, connected, committed people inspiring others to follow them into battle and from people hearing from God and obeying His game plan.

The role of a leader is to lead. Leading implies movement, change and risk. Leading involves watching out over the flock and being sensitive to the needs and issues that are there. Leading means getting into the match and playing on the field with the team, scoring magnificent tries, doing battle with the enemy, and being prepared to take a hit for your team mates.

Pastors need other good leaders around them to stir them on to greater things. Even if they are passionate motivated people they need to be fed by the passion and motivation of the people that they lead with. If leaderships don't lead well, this can create a leadership vacuum. The conscientious pastor will then need to expand his output to fill this vacuum so that the work of the church continues. This can work for a while but eventually the pastor will feel the added, unnecessary burden and workload created by this vacuum and become weary and annoyed.

It's like a home in which the family members aren't fulfilling their responsibilities as they just leave mess everywhere and not tidy up or help. One of the parents may take on the role of picking up after everyone and doing the chores that the others are supposed to do. It won't take long before this parent is tired and cranky as they watch their family eating chips and watching TV while they are doing most of the work. Leaders need to lead well to inspire the pastor and help carry the load of ministry.

Bring out the best in him

No doubt, more than any other aspect of churchworld, the leadership that the pastor has to work with will either empower or frustrate him. It is the role of the leadership to help bring out the best in the pastor but sometimes the worst is brought out instead. Pastors need to be able to lead. If they feel muzzled then they will pull harder and may cause unnecessary stress for themselves and everyone else. If they are a good leader and continually

feel disempowered their leadership spark will die out. This does not mean that they can have carte blanche on everything but it does mean that good leaders should be given lots of space to move.

So often we are afraid of dynamic leaders. Where are they taking us? How much will it cost? What if we fail? These are all fair questions but sometimes churches err on the cautious side, setting up so many hurdles to effective leadership that the leader starts to give up trying. The research concerning the training of fleas is often quoted to show how barriers can stop us from reaching our potential.³

Pet owners will know already that fleas can jump. Anyway, some fleas were put into a jar and of course they could jump out. So a lid was placed on the jar. After a while of banging their tiny little flea heads on the lid as they jumped, the fleas started to not jump as high. This is a sensible self preservation technique. However, when the lid was eventually taken off the fleas still didn't jump any higher. How many pastors have had the jump knocked out of them by overly cautious or negative leaderships? They may mean well, but they effectively take the jump out of the pastor by the lid that they have placed over him.

For him to do his best he needs full support. If he senses that there is a lack of confidence in him or there are simmering issues of conflict, his effectiveness will be seriously affected. Any lack of enthusiastic encouragement and empowerment for him to follow his passion will inevitably wear him down. Pastors, like any staff, can be difficult to work with. Some are easily threatened and take criticism badly. However, it is the leaders' role to bring out his best and try to resolve the rest.

It is also important to make sure that he is growing and learning. This will take time and money but it's worth it. If he stops growing then he will start to stagnate and go backwards.

Accept responsibility for the care of pastoral staff and their families

It is the responsibility of the church leadership to care for their staff, particularly the senior pastor or team leader. This is probably written in role descriptions but it needs to be written on hearts. Let's be honest, pastors

can be both inspiring and draining. If they are passionate people they will require patience and understanding but the leadership must consciously take on this responsibility. When a pastor burns out, the leadership must accept some degree of responsibility as something in the system has gone wrong. It is hard for leaders to talk about burnout, particularly when they feel that they have done everything that they could do. But it's a problem that has to be owned by more than the pastor and his family.

It is important for leaderships to try to understand the pressures that pastors face and try to minimise unnecessary burdens. Sometimes there is a subtle message to the pastor that everyone has burdens and that he should see what it's like to have a real job. Sure, every job has its burdens, but I hope that as you read this book you will see that it's more than a real job. Leaders should read widely on leadership, church growth and health. They should try to understand pastor pain and try to help.

It is also vital that this care extends to the pastor's family. This is different to most employment situations as the pastor's family is a part of the deal, whether we like it or not. By virtue of the position they will have challenges and pressures placed on them. They, too, have to live in the pastor pain. Even if he tries to shield them from it, they will know, see and feel the pain. The health of his family will ultimately influence his effectiveness. If the work is stressful and there are difficult ongoing issues at home he will have nowhere to go to have the batteries charged up. The way that the pastor's wife and children see the church and the leadership responding to their struggles will leave an impression of church life that will encourage or potentially derail them in their faith journey.

Appoint someone to watch out for the guy and his family

Often in groups, whether large or small, there is an assumption made that someone is "on the job". Someone is calling, communicating and caring. Hopefully there is, but quite often there isn't. Care needs to be planned. Someone or a couple of people should be asked to take on some pastoral care of the pastor. There needs to be regular calls and get-togethers allowing the pastor to share how he is travelling and a point person to whom the pastor can take concerns.

This person needs to be committed to act on those concerns as I am sure we have all been down that track before of sharing our souls but it going

nowhere and changing nothing. If that cycle continues the pastor will shut down and that is a recipe for worse times. The person who is appointed needs to have a degree of perceptiveness and someone who is not fooled by smokescreens. There needs to be a specific person/s and they need to be the right one/s that the pastor can relate to, open up to and trust.

This person should then feed back relevant observations to the overall leadership team for prayer and action. The person needs to pick up on the issues that the pastor is facing, whether they are personal or brought about by the work that he is doing. There needs to be an awareness of any issues within the staffing or leadership of the church as this can bring daily stress into the pastor's life.

To guard confidentiality, the person or couple needs to be able to make some decisions to help the pastor and his family through some difficulties that they may not wish to elaborate on to the wider leadership or church. It is vitally important that the person who is watching out for the pastor is strong enough to see that recommendations are acted on and not lost in the stew of agenda items or just lost in the wind. Warning signs can often be noted and then forgotten in the busyness of leadership. The leadership needs to take these signs seriously otherwise they will probably lead to even bigger problems in the future.

This contact care person should also be perceptive enough to see if the pastor is starting to head towards deep waters. Whether the pastor shares things or not, they should pick up on clues and warning signs that a problem is developing. It can be a tricky thing to share concerns with pastors. Some pastors don't handle these observations well and they are interpreted as criticisms. The best way to share with someone is to give them specific examples of their behaviour or lifestyle that are a concern and any observations that have been made rather than general statements.

At the end of the day, the pastor will have to take responsibility for his own wellbeing, but it is the role of the leadership to do as much as possible to protect him from the demands of ministry and sometimes himself. Most of the best pastors that I have worked with or seen around the traps have been passionate, zealous hard workers. These are our best but they can also be the biggest candidates for burnout and require sensitive but firm care from the leadership of the church.

Make sure that the pastor is taking time off and that he is managing stress

Sometimes this will be obvious and other times not. Pastors need to be accountable for taking time off and managing stress. Many pastors, while being very good at looking after others, are not so good at looking after themselves. All the altruistic excuses under the sun should not prevent him from doing so. If he isn't, through gentle discussion, the issues which are preventing him from doing so need to be looked at. Maybe there is too much work to do. Maybe it's just his nature.

Whatever the barriers are they need to be fixed. It is not enough to encourage someone to have time off if practical steps aren't taken to help him to actually do this. If he is not having consistent and satisfying time off then trouble awaits. Also, watch that the pastor's holidays and little breaks away are achieving their purpose. Some families find it difficult to get away both time wise and financially.

Treat your staff well

Treating staff well involves money and so much more. In many churches money does become a major issue. Leaderships are in a difficult position as they must find a way to pay well, realising that they can only give what they have. Although some churches have taken on a more business-like approach and have income coming in from various sources, most still operate under the classic "money in the bag" system. It is not a business and there are no projected sales. The whole financial basis is on people choosing to place money in the bag or transfer it in.

I have always been amazed at God's provision through His people but also have had to work under the pressures that uncertainties create. Treating staff well does involve money. It involves being as generous as possible with salaries, extras and rewards for faithful service. It is not just God's role to reward, it is the leadership's.

Any effective management structure will understand the role of rewards. Salaries are not rewards. Rewards should not be based solely on numbers in the church service but for faithful and effective service. You might say that pastors don't need extra incentives, but what makes them different from anyone else? Rewards validate and encourage work. Frugal leadership will produce frustrated and weary staff.

Rewards don't have to be cash. They can be paying for staff and families to have a dinner or paying for their accommodation at a retreat or whatever. Wage structures need to be flexible and open to modification. Productivity should be a part of it otherwise productive leaders will be discouraged, while unproductive ones will not feel a consequence for their average effort and effectiveness and not be motivated to make any improvements.

Thankfully, much ground has been gained over the past few decades in the area of pastoral salaries. We all say that pastors are everyday people and not superheroes. We must be careful to honour that and not require them to live in conditions which would require superhero strength to endure.

Money is only a small part of the art of treating staff well. Leaderships have a dilemma as they need to treat the pastor as their leader but also as their staff member. They should become smarter employers as they look at the dynamics and payoffs of creating a team of happy and united staff.

Creating a team of happy staff is not always an easy road as it may mean that underperforming staff or ones that destabilise the team may eventually need to be asked to move on. Although the leadership sees the staff in limited situations, other staff members work with each other day to day. Frustrations and conflict need to be worked through to ensure the overall happiness and effectiveness of the ministry staff. This can be an awkward and stressful process as the overall congregation, who are the ultimate employers, base their assessment, either positive or negative, on their limited contact with the staff member. The mid-week work atmosphere may be totally different.

It is hard to ask pastoral staff to leave. It's almost inevitable that they need to change churches, or even move out of the area, if they are to continue as pastors. It's not like other jobs where the person can stay put and look for a similar job with the competition across the road. There are also spiritualised questions that have to be asked of God's will concerning staff appointments that don't work out, but ultimately the right decisions have to be acted on despite how difficult this may be.

The whole area of managing staff is a big one and lots of books have been written about it. Much can be learnt from the results of research which has attempted to highlight core conditions that can lead to staff contentment

and effectiveness. For example, extensive research has been carried out through the Gallop organisation. Twelve questions emerged as being ones which gauge employee satisfaction and retention. These were:

1. Do I know what is expected of me at work?
2. Do I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right?
3. At work, do I have the opportunity to do what I do best everyday?
4. In the last seven days, have I received recognition or praise for good work?
5. Does my supervisor, or someone at work, seem to care about me as a person?
6. Is there someone at work who encourages my development?
7. At work, do my opinions seem to count?
8. Does the mission/purpose of my company make me feel like my work is important?
9. Are my co-workers committed to doing quality work?
10. Do I have a best friend at work?
11. In the past 6 months, have I talked with someone about my progress?
12. At work, have I had opportunities to learn and grow?"⁴

The research showed that the employer would be wise to look at these components and work towards their key staff being able to rate a high level of satisfaction on all of them with an emphasis on the first six questions. Let's take a moment to look at how these six components of staff satisfaction relate to pastoral ministry.

1. Do I know what is expected of me at work?

There need to be clear guidelines of expectations of roles and outcomes. In spiritual work sometimes it is difficult to define outcomes fairly, but the absence of goals can lead to a general malaise and stagnation. Role descriptions and specific targets which are assessable need to be agreed on and rewarded when reached.

2. Do I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right?

Not only do pastors need to know what they have to do but they have to have the raw material and manpower to reach those goals. Leadership teams need to be constantly looking for ways that they can better resource the pastor to do his job well. If finances are a struggle

then other ways of financing need to be sought. If the pastor doesn't feel confident that everything is there to make the dream possible then he will eventually stop dreaming.

3. At work, do I have the opportunity to do what I do best everyday?

As churches grow larger the role of the pastor, particularly the senior pastor, changes. They will end up spending more time in administration, staff management and keeping the machine running smoothly. Some pastors will enjoy this while others will miss using the main gifts and talents that have given them so much rewarding enjoyment over the years. The role of the leadership is to help identify the pastor's greatest skills and release him to develop and utilise these skills maximally.

4. In the last seven days, have I received recognition or praise for my good work?

Yes, pastors need constant affirmation. They are only human and they hear a lot of criticisms. They need specific encouragement about all areas of their ministry and not just the public stuff.

5. Does my supervisor or someone at work seem to care about me as a person?

It is rare to see church leadership teams not value and care about their pastor. What is important is that the pastor has someone that they can unload their cares to, someone who is more interested in them as a person and not just as the employee or pastor.

6. Is there someone at work who encourages my development?

Although most denominations encourage their pastors to develop both spiritually and professionally, this message needs to be reinforced and funded by the local church. The leadership should take the development of the pastor seriously as it will benefit both the pastor and the church if he keeps growing and learning. The leadership should not just communicate this because of suggested guidelines but as a reflection of their passionate commitment to the process of pastoral development.

If these components of staff satisfaction have been missing or neglected, then it is no wonder that the pastor is down in the dumps. There is so

much more to working effectively with staff. Churches tend to spiritualise things but when it comes down to it, he is just an average Joe working for the company. Guidelines and care policies should be created. At the end of the day, if leadership teams lead better in these areas, life for the pastors and staff will be sweeter.

Communicate, communicate, communicate, communicate

One of the classic causes of tensions and frustrations in any human relationship is the lack of clear and open communication. Even in our information society, people are often not “spot on” with their communication skills. Leadership teams should be in constant communication with their pastor.

Sometimes people wait for the monthly meeting to discuss things that the pastor is working through, and is burdened with, 24/7, instead of communicating this straight away. Leaders need to remember that even the smallest issues which are lost in the busyness of their own lives can be big ones in the pastor’s life. It can really torture him not to be in the communication loop. When issues are discussed and decisions made the communication of this info should be immediate and clear. Communicate both in the good times and when things couldn’t be any harder. It doesn’t take much to communicate but the price is high for not. Busyness may be the cause but the damage will still be done.

Keep people in the loop

It is important for the leadership to somehow communicate to the church that the pastor, and perhaps his family, are in deep waters. The openness of this communication should reflect the pastor’s degree of comfort. Some may have serious issues about people knowing how they are doing and are very sensitive about it. For me, I really wanted everyone to know as one more prayer is one more prayer. I know that by being open I might jeopardise future employment, as employers are wise to be a little cautious with those who have suffered burnout. But I am not embarrassed or ashamed as I know the pressures that I have faced and know that many would be in my shoes if they had walked my path. Communication to the church should be clear, prompt, fair, well-worded and sensitive.

Leaderships may at times also be a little reluctant to share this information because it may raise the questions of the way in which they have handled

the process. In most cases, more could have been done and in a better way. Leaders must realise that respect for them rises when they admit that they could have done better instead of taking on a “business as usual” stance. The church should know and take time out to think of ways of helping and reducing the likelihood of this happening again. If a church has had a number of staff burn out or leave unhappily over the years, they need to take a good hard look at themselves to understand what factors are influencing this.

Make wise decisions

Leaderships have to balance the ongoing health of the church work that they are responsible for as well as fulfilling their care responsibilities to the pastor. The pastor needs a lot of time to recover from burnout but the church ministries need to move on and grow. How much time off should he be given? Will he want to or be able to return to leadership in the same capacity after this time? How will his progress in recovery be assessed?

Sometimes tough decisions have to be made and the consequences may lead to more pain or relief. Leaders have to have the wisdom, courage and heart to make right decisions.

As leaders of churchworld there are a lot of pressures. As well as being constantly required to adapt and change, adequate time and effort needs to be given to the nurture of those in your care. The aim is to be fighting buddies with the pastor and not buddies fighting. Leaders are in leadership to protect and encourage the pastor and his family and to fail in this mission will impact the health and growth of God’s kingdom. External advice may need to be sought if the water is getting too deep.

Seek help from above

If your pastor is heading for pastorpain then brace yourself, it will probably be messy. Depending on what phase of burnout your pastor is in, it will not be easy to navigate through these waters. There will be confusion, emotions and possibly strains or breaks in relationships. The best thing is to get advice from people who understand pastorpain. Whether through the denominational leaders or through health care professionals, try to get an understanding of what you are dealing with and how best to go forward. You will need to be patient, sensitive and committed to the process.

Just remember that your actions or inactions will significantly influence the outcome and the impact of pastorpain on the pastor's whole family.

What a shame if your pastor was lost to the cause and dropped out of the race all together. Even if his time with you is coming to an end, look at the bigger picture and your investment into his life and ministry in the future. Err on the generous side and not be constrained by policies. We have all heard the saying "we shape the buildings and then the buildings shape us". The same can be said about organisational policies. We make rules of governance and then these rules shape us. Usually, church policies aren't written with these difficult times in mind, so be flexible.

Encourage and support him in any professional help that may be required. Don't feel constrained by finances as, for the most part, church people love their pastors and want to help them find their way out of the forest. At one level because they care about a brother in need and at another level some of them realise that they have perhaps inadvertently contributed to his state. The process might be messy and hard, but hang in there.

Leaders of local churches should access help from above. I am not talking about heavenly beings but those who have responsibilities looking after your denomination or grouping of churches. For those who have a broader responsibility, they hopefully will have access to material, people and resources to help work with the pastor through this difficult time. As the costs to the forward momentum of the denomination are affected by burnout, leaders of such organisations would be very wise in investing time and money to develop strategies to reduce this problem.

It would be good for denominations to regularly review the training and preparation for ministry which they offer as well as their systems of pastoral care. More is done now with psychometric testing of pastoral candidates. Through such tests, potential problematic issues can be highlighted which may prevent the development of problems in the future. It's not an easy task to say who will make it and who won't.

Even the person whose test results raise warning bells may, by the grace of God, have an incredible longevity in ministry, while the one who cruises through may be on the scrap heap within years. It is in the best interests of denominational leaders to take pastorpain seriously. At the end of the day, the pastor is a leader but he needs the support, care and visionary leadership of other leaders to keep him on the field and inspire him to greater things.

10 | Pastorcare from everyone - yes, I mean you!

This book is not written primarily for pastors or leaders, it's written for you, "the church". Sometimes we lose the real meaning of the church to the building or the collective. We say that things are done well or badly by the church but fail to realise that the church is only a collection of people like you. Sometimes we think that it doesn't depend on us, but it does. You can be a contributor or a soother of pastorpain. It is inevitable that you will cause your pastor some sadness and stress as you let him into your life and struggles. That's fine, that's what he signed up for, but be careful that by your attitudes, actions or inaction, you aren't adding to his already pressurised life.

Surveys done in churches can be a blessing or a source of conflict. So many people's opinions about so many things can drive you batty. I have seen a lot of comments on surveys but there is one that I will never forget. The question was concerned with assessing the weaknesses or problem areas of the church. Amidst the usual and expected comments came this pearl. The person wrote "the biggest problem in this church is me". What insight and clarity. This is the beginning of the solution when we stop blaming others and look at how we are travelling and see that our contribution really does count.

So what can you do? The short answer is to do the opposite of all the things that this book has outlined that cause unnecessary stress to the pastor's life. Chances are that you like, and perhaps love, your pastor. If you don't, you really need to pray through your attitudes to see if they are based on

real things or other issues in your life. Even if you don't have his photo on your desk, it is important to show love and respect.

Chances are, he is a good guy trying his best. Whatever he has done or said to dim your judgement of him, try to look past it to his heart and motives. Sometimes pastors are in the wrong and need to be challenged about their personalities and actions. However, even these hard things should be done with love and respect. At the end of the day, you wouldn't want his job but hopefully you would like him to be happy in it. So here are some tips, not just to fill up some more pages, but to hopefully help by listing out some things that you could do if you aren't already doing them.

Be a disciple of Jesus

There is nothing more powerful for your development and the health of your pastor than for you to be the disciple that Jesus has called you to be. Imagine the frustration that Jesus feels when He sees the apathy and selfishness that we can often fall into as His children. He loves us as His children but He longs for us to be His disciples. Your pastor, too, has dedicated his life to helping people find Jesus and to grow to their full disciple potential. We can easily get lulled into complacency by the predictability of churchworld. We settle into the normal series of religious events and think that by this we are really following the Master. We can think that being a churchgoer equals being a disciple.

While there is great value in worship services, small groups and ministry programs, the disciple must always be looking to find Jesus and go wherever He leads. Spiritual growth is the best thing that you can do for yourself, your family, your church, your pastor and the universe. Also, don't be dependent on the pastor to provide your spiritual needs. He can help but it is your responsibility to be right with God and to grow. If you are spiritually empty you will project this inner frustration onto him and blame his lack of support, teaching, shirt or whatever on your spiritual stagnation. Come to God to be filled and see the role of the pastor as just an assistant in the process.

Pray heaps

As a pastor I have always deeply appreciated people who pray for me and my family. I can only imagine how much worse pastorpain would have been without these prayers. To pray effectively for pastors and their families

you will need to really tune into their needs and the nature of their work. Standing against evil forces and upholding the family in their everyday needs is a time consuming commitment. To some extent his effectiveness and survival will depend on it.

Accept some responsibility

You might think that your actions have little effect on the pastor's wellbeing, however, you do have a responsibility to show care to your pastor. As he is the visible care giver to the flock, often people don't think of their responsibility to put something back into the equation. So often, people assume that someone is looking out for them. That may be true but your help would be appreciated as well. If you pick up on some warning signs then it is your responsibility to share these with the leadership and to follow up whether they have taken your concerns on board. Sadly, concerns are often raised but end up going nowhere. If he isn't cared for adequately then he might not be there much longer. Be persistent and make sure that legitimate concerns are acted on.

Stay focused on the gospel

Stop focusing on secondary issues. It is so easy to use up our time and emotions on things which have no eternal consequence. Put away the worship service scorecard and commentary and see that the one who should be holding up the scorecard is Jesus. Issues, like worship styles and music, are important to us but not to the bigger picture. We tend to project our own tastes and preferences and believe that God agrees. To help your pastor stay focused on the main tasks that you and the church have, don't get sidetracked into arguments about little things. Some people have the ability to convince you that big issues are at stake but you need to have the discernment to see what issues are crucial and what are secondary.

Be focused and stay focused. I believe that a lot of crucial time has been, and continues to be, wasted on non-essentials while the priority task of sharing the gospel gets put somewhere lower in the agenda. At the end of the day, people being saved is the only thing that counts. A focus on temporary earthly issues at the expense of the eternal perspective is a sign of our times. There is so much talk and teaching about the "now" which is in contrast with the overall theme of the bible which teaches us to make the long term picture our priority.

In so many churches there is also an attempt made to “keep things positive”. This is great, but it can be a selfish sidetrack. Sure, the gospel is the ultimate positive message, but only in contrast to the infinitely scary reality of God’s judgement and, ultimately, hell. It would be interesting to take a survey of how much Christians talk about, really believe in and hear teaching on topics like hell. From my experience, I think that it is a worrying trend that some of the foundational concepts of our faith can be so neglected in today’s church. As a result of this, Christians can get sidetracked into secondary issues of no eternal consequence. Let’s all stay true to our calling and see that the job gets done.

Be a man (unless of course, you are a woman)

I must confess that I am a wimp at times. Instead of taking the lead I hide and get my wife to complain, for example, when our burgers aren’t up to scratch. However, I know that I’m not the only one. Why is it that sometimes as guys we wimp out of things? The excuse is usually “I have enough stress and conflict at work” or something to that effect. There is an underlying problem in churchworld in that so many guys aren’t stepping up to take on responsibilities.

A couple of years ago we had a program to encourage a greater commitment to spiritual growth. A number of ladies were sad and frustrated in that when it came to spiritual growth and development, their husbands were lagging far behind. Although the main visible leadership roles in churchworld are usually occupied by men, if it weren’t for the ladies the whole thing would collapse. Men are struggling with a range of issues at home and at work and are consequently opting out of being who they should be in the spiritual area. I have seen it so often that while men have ducked for cover, women have carried the work through. So, be a man and do what you know you should be doing.

Take up the slack

You can help your pastor by helping your pastor. Yes, that means stepping up and serving, leading and taking responsibility. Not only the work of your church, but his well-being, will be ground down if you are not in it. You might be thinking that I am joking asking you to be involved after sharing how hard it can be, but it wouldn’t be so hard if everyone did their part. The whole “church as His body” concept is built on the premise that the body will be

healthy if each part of that body fulfills its special role. So, whatever your role is supposed to be, if you are not doing it the plan won't work as well.

Maybe your life is already out of control. The cup is already full and it's not blessings that it's full of, but demands and pressures. For most of us today this is sadly true. The weeks fly past and we still haven't sat down for that cuppa. Life is busy but the only thing that can change that is you. You have to try and it won't be easy to bring balance into life; a balance that encompasses the most important areas of our lives and says goodbye to those areas which are not priorities.

Show care

Why do women like receiving flowers? You would have to ask one to find out the whole story, but in my limited understanding it has to do with the tangible expression of love. Words are great but they need to be backed up with action. If you want to care for your pastor then show this care in tangible ways. Be tuned in to his needs and the needs of his family and try to help out as much as you can. If the needs are greater than you can respond to, then enlist the help of others. For the most part, people are usually receptive to such projects. Expressions of thanks don't have to be large. What about something for the family? In that way they, too, feel valued.

Words are great but actions validate the words. I was particularly encouraged by a guy in recent months who asked me if there was any particular book that I wanted to read. I shared with him that I had wanted to get a copy of an old book that was out of print. He made the effort of going through some second hand book stores and found it for me. Thank you. It's nice to get flowers.

Follow, but not blindly

Your pastor doesn't want your blind allegiance but he needs your support. He is not helped by the allegiance of mindless drones but is boosted to new heights by the willing support and trust of his co-workers on the field. It is wise to question and probe, but ultimately you will have to choose a path. We live in a day and age of democracy and consensus but we need to be careful that our freedoms don't lead us to forget old encouragements like "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you". (Hebrews 13:17)

Modern pastors are reluctant to use such terms as “obey” as they don’t want to be regarded as being power hungry despots. However, the concept is biblical as Paul and his Lord knew what they were talking about when they wrote it. When lines of authority and command are diminished, the forward motion of the force is weakened. This verse in the book of Hebrews clearly gives the outcome of your non co-operation in that his work will become “a burden”. How will he feel like the team is winning the war if he can’t even feel that he is winning with you?

Don’t treat him like your slave, he is your servant

There is a difference between seeing him as the one who has chosen to serve you rather than your personal servant. The Biblical concept of servant leadership, as far as I understand, has more to do with meeting needs and helping rather than carrying out the desires and wishes of the one being served. Churchworld people have two things up on the pastor. He is both called to serve and paid to serve. Where most do not cross these lines some do as they try to manipulate the show.

It is also important to cut the guy some slack as it is excruciatingly difficult to be the servant of the multitudes. In most churches, the smallgroup leader has the delegated role of pastoral care but still people often expect big things from the guy up front. For those who mourn the days when the pastor sat around with a cuppa and scones, you have to realise that those days are gone. He is probably not on his way to visit you and it’s not important for him to do this as long as there is some structure in which you can find encouragement and care. Make sure that the expectations that you place on him are realistic and achievable.

Don’t make him be like you and smash the fish bowl

The pastor and his family are individuals. The worst thing you can do is want them to be like you, to like your favourite style of music, to dress the way you dress and to be an extension of what you think a pastor and his family should be like. So what if the pastor’s daughter is dressing like someone her age and you are offended. Don’t play the stumbling block card as a way of manipulating people to reflect your standards. Praise God that she is at church. God is not interested in peripheral issues. It is important to never take on the fish bowl mentality. They are not your pets; they are a family trying to get through life on planet earth.

Get right with him

What's the point of being a part of churchworld when you are out of sorts with its leaders? If you have serious issues with your pastor then it will somehow weaken his ministry. Firstly, no matter what he does or says you might still be in defence or attack mode. Secondly, your attitude, whether you like it or not, will infect others. As a pastor I have received too few apologies. Although I have tried to apologise for everything that I have done and even for vague things that have somehow hurt people, why is it that so few have shown me the same courtesy?

There is healing and power in actually doing the things that Jesus has asked us to do. Ongoing, simmering conflict and dislike will not build anyone up. Instead, both yours and his emotional resources will be drained by this. In other words, there is no point to it and ongoing conflict weakens the strength of Christ's body. Do we really want to do that? Do you need to apologise for things that you may have done or maybe for the lack of support and presence that you have had as you have left him to fight the war understaffed and poorly resourced?

Encourage

The power of encouragement cannot be overemphasised. As a pastor, it has been encouragement that has kept me going through difficult times. There will always be someone who will find fault in all the pastor does, but why don't you be the one that gives him strength and hope by your pat on the back or encouraging note. Encouragement won't take away the pain but it will give strength and remind him that it's worth it. Encouragement builds.

Share good news

It is a natural thing to share our concerns and problems with our pastors. However, we all have a responsibility to share the blessings and joys as well. Sometimes pastors feel like magnets for bad news. If we are not careful then the pastor's day is a continual flow of sad and discouraging information and disturbing prayer points. So often the answers to prayer and great victories go unmentioned. They are absolutely crucial as they bring a healthy balance back into life.

Be a defender

Sometimes it is hard for the pastor to defend himself against harsh and critical comments, but you can. We are not usually surprised when we hear such things, as the person making the comments usually has something unhappy to say about a plethora of issues. It is unfair and sad to hear these stinging comments but there is one thing that is worse; when you don't respond and challenge the person for being out of line.

If you say or do nothing you are at best seeming to agree and at worst allowing the negative person to continue a pattern of behaviour that is destructive to everyone. It takes courage to be a defender. The pastor that is not defended feels hurt, vulnerable and let down. So, next time someone is having a go at your pastor, see it as your role to bring the conversation back to a constructive discussion and not just a bitch-fest. This won't be easy, especially if it is your wife or husband who is going for it.

Say what you mean and mean what you say

Many times, conflicts come from misunderstandings, when people aren't listening or saying things clearly. The best way to communicate is to be straight and clear. Beating around the bush or giving cryptic clues will usually end in frustration. The other thing is to honour our words. How often in my pastoral life have I been caught up in the excitement of what a person says that they are going to do or change, only to be disappointed to be the only one who seems to remember the pledges just a few weeks later. We all do it. We get caught up in the excitement of the moment and want to sign up for bigger and better things.

However, if the pastor witnesses empty promises year after year it will gradually make him skeptical. As your promises mean help for the work, your non-delivery will also weigh down your pastor's heart. We should weigh up our promises and words before we say them, then we should follow through. We should also be up front about our commitment or inability to commit to the work of the local church family. In this way your pastor will know where he stands as he knows where you stand.

Don't do it in a mean way

Many Christians need to have some lessons in etiquette and diplomacy. They actually may have a valid point but it is lost in their insensitive, harsh delivery. They come out, both barrels blazing, and leave a trail of destruction.

Sometimes difficult things need to be said and they will cause some hurt. But if they have to be said, make sure of it and say it in a way that communicates the issue but without the attitude. Much conflict in churchworld could be avoided if basic rules of engagement and respect were followed. So often church conflicts end with win / lose or lose / lose results, but if people entered into these times with a win / win philosophy issues might actually be solved in a constructive way.

It is usually better to talk one on one rather than write. I have seen so much unnecessary hurt and time wasting by harsh emails or letters. Written complaints raise the emotional stakes and are often not really what the person feels after they have had some time to cool off and re-evaluate. As I was clearing out my office when I finished in my pastoral role, I did stumble upon a few of these letters. Most I have thrown away in the past but they all still carry feelings of hurt. I know that I shouldn't have taken them so seriously and maybe have been tougher on the writers. What a waste of paper.

It is your role to minimise conflict in the church family. If you contribute to or simply passively watch smoldering embers then you are going to have to accept some responsibility for the fire that it will cause. Sometimes we avoid trying to resolve conflicts. We skirt around it and the people who cause it, however, denial and avoidance are not good allies of resolution as they can ultimately lead to even more conflict.

Be loyal

Be loyal and faithful to your part of churchworld. One of the pressures on pastors is that at times the group they are responsible for seems to be in constant flux. This is not just a church problem but a societal shift into the mobile and consumer mode. It is hard enough to lead a group that is defined and consistent, but if people start to drift in and out or walk away the task is even harder.

There is a time to move on but remember that it will probably hurt. Despite your assurances that it's not personal the pastor will feel both grief and disappointment that the place he is leading has not delivered something that was important to you. He will feel frustrated that he will have even less people to fight the battle with. Often a pastor will see the bigger picture and know that you have just gone to fight in another unit but still it will hurt and play on his mind.

There are heaps of things that you could do to make your pastor's stay more enjoyable and, ultimately, more fruitful. So, don't put it off another day. Start now by praying and seeking ways that you can help win the war.

Pastor Sam needs you!

11 | MIAs: we left without them

There is no doubt that we are in a spiritual war. The fact that it is largely unseen means that we can easily forget its existence. Unlike the graphic images of human injury caused by the physical wars that are waged, the spiritual war leaves injury of a different type. There are casualties of this war but sometimes we see them just as casualties of life. Whereas some are called to lay down their lives in this battle, many others are seriously wounded in their efforts for the cause. Somehow in the thick of the battle they lost their way. Often wounded, shell-shocked and disoriented they have wandered off and away from the camp. They are not dead but neither do they live. They are our MIAs, those who are Missing In Action.

In my journey I have met many MIAs. In the mist of the battle, I have brushed past them and spoken with them. Some have found the strength to rejoin the battle and are on their way to a new posting. For many others they are ghosts who seem to find no peace. To look into their eyes and to hear their battle stories it is clear that their injuries go deep. Some are sent back to the safety of the main base to peel potatoes so that they still feel that they are making a contribution to the cause. Many carry their grief as a wound that never heals. Their wounds are so deep at times that they can't even turn up to be treated by those who care. They are lost in no man's land. They will never surrender to the enemy but neither will they return to base camp.

I don't know how many pastors and church leaders are missing in action. I just know, based on how many I have met, that there must be a lot of them out there. There are two aspects of MIAs that concern me. Firstly, our team

“the church”, has left some of them behind. The battle rages on and we are busy trying to stay in it ourselves. We have moved on, leaving them to fend for themselves. Some caring souls still send out rescue missions but overall they have been left behind. Doesn't this break one of the ultimate values of a healthy fighting force in that no one should be left behind? What noble army would do that?

The other sad aspect is that these people used to be our generals, our leaders and our friends; the ones who led the campaign and inspired us to fight. What army would leave their leaders on the field? Just imagine if MIAs were brought home and healed. They don't want a ticker tape parade, but just to be brought home and given the opportunity to recover. Sure, some of them are seriously injured and it will take a lot of time and resources to get them on their feet again, but wouldn't it be the right thing to do? Wouldn't those who are preparing to lead into battle in the future be comforted to know that if they take a bullet and fall they won't be left behind either?

Bring them home!

12 | Who is in charge here?

In one of the all time classic, but disturbing, movies, “Apocalypse Now”, there is a scene where the guy leading the secret mission approaches a place where the battle is raging. To the heavy sounds of war he asks some ‘strung out’ soldiers the question, “Who is in charge here?” This is a vital question in a battle. Despite his efforts he was unsuccessful, as it turned out that no one was actually in charge. Somehow the command structure had fallen apart and the troops were in the war but disconnected and about to lose in a big way. If the church is in a battle it is a legitimate question to ask, “Who is in charge here?”

We all know that the answer is Jesus. He is in charge because He is the Head and Lord of His body, the church. That is great and encouraging but I wonder whether this is actually the case on the front line. There is no doubt that Satan is organised and structured (Ephesians 6:10-12). I am sure that he has strategies and is, as we speak, organising something to do with the ongoing war. However, as we look at churchworld we often find Jesus only being given lip service in His role as commander.

A commander of a military force should have the control to run the battle as He sees fit. He needs to be able to mobilise His troops whenever and in whatever way the situation calls for. As the front line is constantly moving, his army needs to move. Have we dug our trenches in the form of buildings, programs, services and rituals and now wonder why there is so little action? Perhaps the front line has moved on but the commander has not been successful in mobilising His troops.

I believe that often we still write our own game plans and agendas. We sort of pray and seek some guidance and then reinterpret the command to fight in the way that we have always fought. Churchworld becomes our world. It is not clear even in churchworld who is in command. Is it the paid officers or the volunteers or everyone? Is the direction really coming from clear orders from the commander or our human attempts to fight the battle? Many churches do spend considerable time with the commander and obey His orders directly while others create their own military units which run independently to others.

Even if Jesus issued an order, it could not happen until it went through the maze of bureaucracy that we have created to protect the church from making mistakes. Then these independent units try to fight the battle alone and sometimes, even without realising it, try to take the same hill as other units. Sometimes stronger units recruit choice soldiers from their struggling counterparts. It is all justified as they are making more strategic advances. Great, but the other unit takes more hits as they have lost some of their finest. All units say that they are on the same team but sometimes it's nothing more than wearing the same uniform.

Some of pastorpain comes from the pastor's inability to really hand over the control of his unit to Jesus. He is paid to be in charge but in reality is limited in his ability to lead. He wants to receive and act on orders straight from HQ (not human ones) and to lead his unit into victory. If you are struggling with some of these thoughts let me come from another angle.

Just imagine you were given the command of an army of hundreds of millions of people. You have great confidence in the sheer size of your army and the power that it has to make a difference in the world. You have a great mission which is clear and an enemy that has made good ground but is ultimately defeated. There is little time left to use your troops to save as many as you can from the enemy forces who are just shooting indiscriminately. Take a few moments to think about what you would do on day one of this new assignment. Think of how you would unite and organise your army into a tight, keen fighting machine. Then think about churchworld in the western world. Would you run your campaign like this?

Either Jesus has a strategy that is different or we have not come on board with His strategy. Our differences in churchworld have served only to separate units, leading them to run independently and inefficiently.

Would any CEO manage their organisation like the church is managed? At both the micro and macro level I believe that the church is one of the most poorly managed organisations on earth. I don't believe for a moment that our CEO doesn't know what He is doing. The problem is that sometimes we, His church don't know what He is doing.

Imagine what it would be like if all units started functioning as an integrated whole. How encouraging would it be to really feel a part of something so big and wonderful that is powerfully moving forward to complete the mission? Imagine the power of the message to our world of one group of people who are united as disciples of Jesus rather than always asking "what church are you from?" and being divided by denominations, music preferences, traditions and inconsequential theological points of divergence. Imagine what Jesus could do with the manpower released from units trying to run themselves and having the financial resources that would be released as churches sacrificed more instead of acquiring more. The real assets of the church are its people and its God. I don't know if that's anything to do with how Jesus wants to run the campaign. All I know is that sometimes I wonder whether we are really doing things His way.

For any great change to occur it must occur in the hearts of those who call themselves disciples. It must come from the surrendering of our wills and the ownership of our little part of churchworld to Him. This will not be easy as many of us have spent our lives building churchworld. It hasn't been in vain as He has blessed it and used our units to continue the fight. He has brought us up to a point in churchworld history where real change is possible.

There is a lot of discontentment in the camp. Many have left to fight alone or in smaller units. Many who have stayed are weary and disillusioned. Many commanders have been wounded or have grown tired in their roles. Maybe the time is right for something really wonderful to happen; a buzz of excitement that we are all together and on the move. It's time to get ready and go over the top when we get the orders. If we are in the end times, instead of a tired army maybe it's time to pull out all stops in this final phase of the epic. It's time to ask, "Who is in charge here?"

I couldn't lead anymore. It's not just because I was burnt out, it was that I no longer believed in the show. My faith and love for Jesus is stronger than ever but somehow I fear that we have veered off the path. In my ministry,

I have tried to help the church to grow and to improve. I probably have been successful in some part. I did my job. I maintained and developed the system but the system has to change. Many are seeking new paths which build on what we have and transition it to the future. It's a job for new leaders, new people. I feel old inside and have fed the machine for too long to see the path clearly. I need new leaders to inspire me.

My burnout may be as inevitable as the eventual burnout of the system. Most of the sacred cows are dead but we refuse to bury them. I don't know the way ahead but I do want to be a part of it; a part of something that will be real, authentic and fruitful; a movement that really impacts the world we live in with God's love and His message of salvation. I only have misty inklings of what this movement might be like. All I know is that Jesus knows the way ahead. He has a plan. He has a campaign strategy. Although He has won the greatest battle, He is still out there wanting to take every block inch by inch and save as many as He can. He hasn't changed; He is still the same as when the first disciples had to make a choice to follow Him or not.

One day soon I hope to be back on the front line in the trenches with my Saviour. I have to get better and stronger. I have to find where He is and then get back into the action. You see, I am not dead, I am just wounded. While I am still kicking I want to be kicking for Him.

I hope that this book has helped you understand a little deeper the life of a pastor. There is nothing much you can do to stop the inevitable things from happening except prayer and support. My prayer is that in some small way this book has helped you to see that a lot of the things that happen can be avoided. Systems can be set in place so that more stay on the field. Jesus wants us all to be at our posts and fighting the real enemy. Let's power on with new health and vitality until the commander says stop. Wow! One day our struggles will be over, but it's not today.

Keep fighting!

13 | Better or not, here I come

Well, here we are at the end of the book. I hope that it hasn't been too depressing or vague, although if it has, then maybe it does accurately represent the road of pastorpain. Many dark months have passed and thankfully I am coming out of the forest. It has been a tough journey, alright. This has been my journey in pastorpain. Although most things that I have experienced are common to all those who go through burnout, we are all individuals and our paths will be influenced by many unique things.

I haven't made it, but I am getting there. My awesome friend Jesus has helped me with His power and love. Through His Spirit He has given me a peace and has helped me fight off the attacks of the evil one and finally I am starting to experience His joy again.

My wonderful wife has been my earthly rock. Her acceptance, patience and willingness to carry a heavy load have been amazing.

Thanks to my family who never made me feel like a loser or guilty that I have been away on another planet. I am thankful to those who rang and prayed and to those who stayed away to give me a break. Thanks also to enthusiastic praying Christians who have inspired me to go on. At first, I was like an emotionless zombie when I was around them and I did not relate to their joy and passion. Slowly, but surely, they have brought healing to my soul.

I am thankful to those who continue to counsel and care for me and to the pharmaceutical company that makes the little tablets that I swallow.

Also, a word of thanks to the passage of time which, in its own slow way, has brought healing. It has been a team effort but I am feeling better.

I am on the journey of recovery and I never want to go back to that dark place, but if I do I know that there is always hope. I am different to when I started this journey. Prayer is something that I appreciate more and I feel closer to Jesus and that's a good thing. Jesus has lifted me out of the pit, but it takes some time to recover from the experience as I am still weak and pale from being down there so long. As days and weeks fly past I do feel stronger and soon I hope to be able to walk upright again and continue on the journey. The journey has changed and I will walk a different path. I have changed and I will hopefully be a stronger walker.

I have to go now. I don't feel completely ready, but I can't keep sitting around waiting until I am. Reality hits, bills have to be paid and life must go on. So world, here I come. I want to make a difference and continue to help people find God. I want to be more than I have ever been. I want the adventure. All I ask is that you be careful with me as I am still a bit brittle. We may meet someday and I hope that if we do and you ask me how I am, I will be able to say with total honesty, "Well thanks, how about you?"

There are many battles still to come, but somehow most of the time, deep in my soul, I have a feeling that things will be alright.

Wish me well, wish me luck.

Cheers

Steve

End notes

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About the author

Steve has spent 21 years involved in pastoral and missionary work. After the fall of the Berlin wall Steve lived in Eastern Europe with his family and worked with churches there. Prior to writing this book he spent 8 years in a senior pastor role.

He is married with three teenaged children and is currently working as a consulting psychologist helping to support and develop people in their leadership roles.

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the show doesn't always go on...

After 21 years in pastoral and missionary work... the wheels came off. I was burnt out. I couldn't go on.

This book is the story of my journey in burnout. I have written it to paint a picture of what burnout can be like and to give some tips on how to get through it.

I hope that, by reading this book, you will develop a greater insight into the stresses that your pastor and his family may face in ministry and discover some ways that you can make a positive impact in their lives.

pastor**ain**

my journey in burnout

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