

Teacher Burnout: Are You a Candidate?

By Gerhard C. Bauer

[Minnesota District Teachers' Conference Friday, October 21, 1983, St. John's, Fairfax]

I. INTRODUCTION

First of all, it is very special to be addressing this convention today because you are special people in a very special role and I am happy to be here. Being here also bears a certain nostalgia because my first assignment from DMLC was to the then one room school here at St. John's. How wonderful it is to see the beautiful multi-class school that we are enjoying at this convention.

Before answering the question of whether or not you are a burn out candidate, let me attempt to set a tone by briefly describing your role as the Christian teacher. I am convinced that how we view our roles has much much to do with how we react to our roles and our reaction has much much to do with a tendency to or not to burn out.

During the past year, I asked a student teacher to give me a view of herself as a Christian teacher. Permit me to glean from her comments. Remember, she is describing your and my roles as Christian teachers. The interjected questions are mine.

She wrote: "I experienced a new warmth of Christ's love through faith expressed in my students," Do you? "The true light of Christ is brightly shining in our Christian schools through the Grace of God." Do you see that? "It is a great blessing to have a Christian Day School." Is it really? "It is quite enlightening to see children and the influence Christ has on their lives." Do you still notice that? "They proudly profess that Christ is Lord, and firmly believe that their sins are forgiven. They fear not sin, death, nor the power of the devil; for they wholeheartedly trust in Christ. They know that Christ is their best friend." Is that our believing message? WOW, how powerful. "I could feel the love and respect my pupils had for me, which directly comes from the love and respect that they feel for their Savior." Do you still sense that from your students? Finally, she said, "I praise the Lord almighty for giving me a chance to student teach in such a beautiful atmosphere, where His Word is continually taught." Can you praise God for your role and the accompanying blessings?

That young lady put her heart and soul into her work, and always will, but maintained such a contagious spirit of thanks and praise to her Lord. From a human perspective, I would say that, hard as she will work, she won't burn out because her attitude radiates such a happy, joyful, grateful faith in the Savior Jesus. Is that our mood as we go about our ministry?

Let's see! Take a pencil and paper and list the blessings for which you can give thanks and praise to God. Now, take that list and place it in a prominent place at home or in or around your desk so you are frequently reminded of God's abundant grace in your life.

II. BACKGROUND

I could have changed one word in the title of the paper. That would be the word BURNOUT to STRESS. The title could then read: Teacher Stress: Are You A Candidate?"

When looking at a Card Catalog or Reader's Guide under burnout, the reference invariably is to stress. Of the references at the end of this paper, only two have the term burnout in them. The bookstores and libraries have many titles under stress and depression and few under burnout. Thus, after a brief description of burnout, the topic will deal with the causes of stress since those are the root of the cause of burnout. Alleviating the cause, stress, will virtually eliminate the problem, burnout.

Though the term burnout and even stress are more recent, the idea has been with us always. Many people in the Bible experienced stress: Moses and the Israelites, pursued by Pharaoh's armies as they fled from Egypt; Jonah, cruising around the Mediterranean in a pitch-black belly of a huge fish; Nehemiah and his men, building the Jerusalem walls by hand while faced with the prospect of imminent attack; Paul, the apostle,

shipwrecked, beaten, and imprisoned; and Job, who finally retreated to a pit of ashes, regretting that he had ever been born.

In 1929, a Chicago physician, Edmund Jacobson, wrote a book on relaxation that he later entitled *You Must Relax*. When it was published, it was hailed as the savior of many people from the agony of stress.

Today, we say, "I've had it," or "I can't take it anymore." We are living in stress-filled times. The 80's, in which we live, can best be described as hurry, worry, and bury and summarized with the word stress. Of the ten leading causes of death, eight are attributed to stress. So much is being made of stress and depression, that I am wondering whether the few number of squeaky wheels are getting overly much attention and the contended Christian teachers are coming under the syndrome of burn-out. Don't be taken in by that. With so much supposed stress around, it is only natural that there be a marketplace for devices for dealing with the problem. Though I will talk about coping with each of the lettered causes, permit some general comments.

Several of the Christian psychologists that I read said that to provide lasting help to a non-believer, through life's stress-filled pressures, is virtually impossible. Without Christ as the base, there is no basis from which to function. In the United States there are more than three hundred stress management enterprises. This number increased by one hundred-twenty from one recent year to the next and could easily be much higher today. Industries are spending many dollars to provide stress relief for their employees. One such example is the Caspian Associates in Minneapolis, that provide fifteen minute noon hour exercise programs for stress. Industry management claim employees are more energetic, alert, productive, and absent less and that the programs more than pay for themselves.

Psychiatrist, Mardi Horowitz, of the University of California, says everyone is massaging, jogging, and hot tubbing to reduce his cumulative stress. Reflexology, the massage of the hand or foot, is becoming more prevalent in our country and some large hotels are employing reflexologists. Also, the legitimate massage. Jim Klobuchar wrote an article on that in a Minneapolis newspaper one day last spring. Not all aids to stress have the soothe of a massage or hot tub.

There are numerous paths the Americans are traveling in the search of tranquillity. In our nation, there are over 8,000 systems for "psychospiritual growth" that offer the promise of personal growth and a greater ability to cope with the stress of life. Let me use Transcendental Meditation as an example of how we are searching and easily misled. T.M. was founded by a Hindu, Maharishi, who spent two years in the Himalayas developing his idea. Maharishi's T.M. was launched in the mid-fifties and gained public attention when the Beatles went to his residence in India to find an alternative to drugs. From then on, there has been a steady T.M. stream of people. Today, there is a Maharishi International University at Fairfield, Iowa which trains T.M. students to spread the T.M. doctrine. T.M. is an example of not getting at the root of the problem--sin. Through T.M., Maharishi teaches: "Very easily a sinner comes out of the field of sin and becomes a virtuous man." On the other hand, the Bible says, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." Romans 3:23 & 24. Quite a contrast.

It is a sorry sign of the times that the three leading best selling drugs in the country are Tagamet, an ulcer medication; Inderal, a hypertension drug; and Valium, a tranquilizer. Actually, alcohol is the most widely used of all. The truth is that stress relieving drugs and alcohol may help control our anxieties temporarily, but if they prevent us from facing our stresses and simply obscure our problems, they are misused. When I was in the motel in Watertown, WI last spring, the contestants on the Family Feud program were to guess, on the basis of the people surveyed, what things were best for calming the nerves. Number one was alcohol and number four smoking. Not surprising was the fact that God's Word wasn't on the list.

A different type of device is what is called bio-feedback where you are hooked to a machine and the machine records your beta waves of anger and worry, the alpha waves that contemplate, and the delta waves that are as during sleep. By training and concentration, you can shift from the one to the other. After from six to ten sessions, you can be weaned from the machine and control yourself. Each session costs but \$150.00. For \$1000.00, you and I could buy a lot of devotional materials. God's Word is the solutional choice. I grant that there may be physiological or psychological factors that can contribute to our stress, but these are the exceptions. The waning power of religion is why life has become so stressful in the Western world.

Not all stress is bad. Austrian psychologist, Hans Selye says that without stress we would die. Stress can stretch us, motivate us, and cause us to grow. God knew what he was doing when he made profitable stress a part of our chemistry. I would be delighted to experience the stress of falling in love all over again with Mrs. Bauer, of planning our wedding, or thinking of becoming a father. The stress before playing a church service, chairing this convention, or preparing and delivering a paper are all beneficial.

III. DESCRIPTION

Burnout is described as a total breakdown of the emotional, physical, and even the spiritual qualities in a person. It can begin with the emotional and that can effect the physical. Most of us can recall how our nerves affected our appetite and eventually our entire digestive tract. Nerves have been known to make people physically bed-ridden. Burnout victims may have various aches and pains, chronic stiff neck or back problems, insomnia, depression, or bleeding ulcer. Being physically impaired or exhausted can have a similarly disruptive effect on the mind. You know how the mind reacts when the body is drained. The mind and the body can disintegrate simultaneously and that is likely how it most often works.

Can there really be a total spiritual breakdown? I recently worked with a student teacher who was often in a state of depression and would describe herself as a “basket case”. Her mind raised havoc with her whole being...mental, physical, and spiritual. When I asked her about her spiritual life she said she had given up reading the Bible. Fortunately, God’s spirit brought her to recognize her mistake and enabled her to turn around her spiritual life. When that occurred, her other phases stabilized. That spiritual base is always the key.

IV. CANDIDATE

Are you a candidate for burnout? The answer is yes. Need you be a candidate for burnout? That answer is no. Then, how is it that a Christian can burn out? Because, as sinful people, we are not perfect, we struggle with sin and don’t take care of ourselves as we ought.

The persons in the really high stress situations, who are most susceptible, are those who deal with people: teachers; persons who show compassion: teachers; persons who are willing to help others: teachers. All three categories apply to us. In fact, teachers are apparently in such stressful situations that Hans Selye says, “It is amazing that there are any teachers still on the job.” On the basis of what Selye says you are to be commended for your role and it is great to realize that our unassigned graduates are eagerly waiting for the opportunity to teach.

My earlier comments by the student teacher are the clue to why, despite the so-called hazards of our calling, we love our roles.

How prime a candidate are you? Do the Stanford Stress Level Test (Appendix A) and review the tests in Appendix B and Appendix C. In Appendix B, note that some high level stress factors are divorce and marital separation that are having serious impacts upon the students in our classrooms. Be aware of these as you look at the children from such homes and try to appreciate what must be seething within those children.

According to Charles Bukowski, in last June’s *Time*, the small things can have an impact. He wrote, “It’s not the large things that send a man to the madhouse no, it’s the continuing series of small things that send a man to the madhouse not the death of a love, but a shoelace that snaps with no time left.”

Last summer, Mrs. Bauer and I went through Glacier Park on our way to Seattle to visit our daughter and family who had recently moved to that city. When we reached the summit of the Going to the Sun Highway, we decided to spend some time doing one of our favorites, hiking the mountain trails. Naturally, I had purchased a new pair of shoes for this trip but decided that it would be wise to change to my oldies. I hurried to the car, while Mrs. Bauer patiently waited, changed and laced the left one and as I was doing the same to the right, snap went the lace. Of all times! Bukowski’s words raced through my mind. Just when I was in a hurry. How often doesn’t the shoelace snap in our classrooms? How often don’t we react overtly to some small insignificant “snap of a shoelace”.

We burn out, because, like Peter, walking on the water, we take our eyes off Christ and focus on the stressful circumstances around us. I want to emphasize that we cannot begin to cope without God. That is like trying to rid the weeds in the garden with a lawn mower. The remainder of the paper will deal with the causes of burnout and coping with those causes.

V. CAUSES

A. Selfishness-pride

I'm not planning on elaborating on selfishness and pride but want you to keep those in mind and see how selfishness and/or pride fit into each of the other causal categories, even if only in subtle ways.

B. Anemic spiritual life

The greatest factor in dealing with stress is the weak or anemic relationship with our Lord. There is the story of the rich man who had thousands and thousands of dollars in the bank but he would never withdraw any and at the same time would complain that he had no money. He did this repeatedly and his friends would always tell him to go to the bank and withdraw; but he didn't and complained and they would tell him to go to the bank and withdraw because there was plenty of money there if only he would go to the bank and withdraw.

By ourselves, we are just as poor spiritually and tend to complain and be unhappy. It is at such times that we need to be told to go to the Book and read. That is the best source of help from stress; possibly the only real one. Go to the Book and read. Go to the Book and read.

Martin Luther stated, "I'm going to work, work, work today from morning till night. I'm going to work so much, but I'm going to spend the first three hours in prayer." The three hours may not be realistic in our lives, but the every day is. Time alone with God will fortify and renew us. It is imperative in order to survive in our generation.

God charged Joshua with the importance of meditating. In Joshua 1:8 he said, "This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success." According to that passage, the casual Christian will have a difficult road because he will not be familiar with God's ways and his Book, and will probably be bound up in the stress of the world. On the other hand, those who are willing to meditate on God's Word, listen earnestly to his still small voice, seek his face, and, most important, praise and worship him, will find deliverance from the destructive forces of stress.

I emphasize listening because it has become a lost art. Somehow, it got swallowed up in the vacuum cleaner of technology. Oh, we may listen to the television, or to a baseball game, but we don't genuinely hear God or others very well. In many conversations, we're often wishing folks would finish their sentences so that we can jump in with our ideas. We even finish people's sentences for them. We're hurt when people don't really listen to us, but it doesn't hurt our consciences when we tune them out or when we do all the talking. And so it is with the Lord. We may complain, get angry, and even give him a piece of our mind. We often are not still, waiting for his direction, wisdom, or comfort. We must be reintroduced to the art of listening. This demands of us a willingness to sit quietly at the feet of God, in his personal, dynamic presence. We must be willing to shut out all the noises and the distractions of the scene about us, and in the stillness of the living faith, await the touch of God through His Word.

When we go to the Book, sit and listen, stress will be alleviated. We will be happier, more thankful (ingratitude can make us believe that our ministry is unbearable), have a more positive outlook, not become as easily angry, be more patient, not bear grudges or be envious (grudges are the main cause of depression), worry less, not be jealous (Socrates called jealousy "the soul's saw"), feel less sorry for ourselves, not gossip, have a better opinion of ourselves, and have peace.

When I deal with student teachers during stress-filled times, we pray together to God for peace. Again and again he miraculously grants this peace, How beautiful to see! If God would but grant us a peace and contentment with whoever we are, wherever we may be, and whatever our station, the stress problems would

practically vanish. Go to the Book and listen! No one will ever be a man of God unless he is man of the Book. Quality time alone with God will set us apart from the world and stresses of life.

Some people have the misconception that a “quiet time” should be only a passive meditative attitude, but that leaves out a key ingredient...PRAISE. It was at the time that David was hiding in the cave at Adullam, in Judah, that he wrote the 34th Psalm. The second half of the first verse says, “His praise shall continually be in my mouth.” When we praise God, our stress and anxiety ease, since we take our minds away from ourselves and direct them to God from whence come all our blessings.

Several years ago, while supervising, I left Zion, Illinois after school to travel to St. Joseph, Michigan to continue in my role. When you leave Zion, Illinois to go through Chicago after four p.m., you are driving into the teeth of stress. I arrived at St. Joseph about seven with a motel reservation in hand. I was tired and hungry and eager for a shower and dinner. At the desk, Ginger sadly informed me that my room had been rented and the motel was full. Normally, motels do not have to honor a reservation after six and they had experienced a no-show the night before. The irony was that I had been there during this quarter several times and did have a reservation. Ginger tried to reason with Mr. Braun, the owner, that I would come, but he said to rent the room. While Ginger persisted that I would come, Mr. Braun insisted that she rent the room, which she did. Ginger was apologetically kind and helpful and assured me I could come back the next night. I did find a place on a crossroad where neither the shower, sink, or television were in decent working order. With nothing better to do, I went to bed. I awoke numerous times, angrily thinking of how I would give Mr. Braun a piece of my mind. Morning finally came but I was in no frame of mind to go to any school or confer or give counsel to any student teacher.

Fortunately, I did not forsake my morning private time of Bible study. On this day, part of the reading was the 34th Psalm and in the first verse David wrote, “I will praise the Lord no matter what happens.” TLB God’s Word is always appropriate, but the words of the Psalm on this day left a lasting mark that has not been forgotten and for which I am ever grateful. After that encouragement, I was ready to go to my school and have tried to enter each day with that spirit. I appreciated the Best Western more than ever as Ginger welcomed me with open arms and my anger toward Mr. Braun melted. Yes, it is good to be able to praise God in all things. I went to the Book and read. There was my recovering strength.

A good illustration of praise is the story of Jehoshaphat in 2 Chronicles 20. Several countries were sending armies to fight Jehoshaphat. When he heard the news, he was frightened and “set himself to seek the Lord” (v3). He gathered the people together and they all prayed. Jehoshaphat stated the problem in that he was downright scared because they were so outnumbered. He acknowledged that he didn’t know what to do, but he said, “Our eyes are upon Thee” (v12). After they prayed, God spoke through a man name Jahaziel: “Hearken ye, all Judah and thou King Jehoshaphat. Thus saith the Lord unto you, be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours but God’s” (v15). We need to remember this principle for the situations that provide stress, tension, fear and anxiety in the decade of the 80’s. We need to pray, “Lord, the battles are not mine, they’re yours. I acknowledge this and I praise you for your power to deal with them.” The next thing that happened to Jehoshaphat and his men is most interesting. Several groups of men stood up to praise the God of Israel. They knew they were going to face the stress of battle and they praised God, already confident of the promised victory. So Jehoshaphat also appointed singers to praise the Lord for the assured victory, as they marched out to meet the enemy. And as they began to sing, the Lord set ambushes against the men who had come against Judah. So God relieved their stress and they gave praise.

Too often we say, “Lord, take away this stressful situation . . . the problem with the principal, the dissatisfied parent, the incorrigible child, or any other mountain you expect me to climb and then I will sing and praise You.” No, no, no, David said, “I will praise the Lord, no matter what happens.” Thanking God and maintaining a continual attitude of praise does not come easily. You might as well acknowledge to God that it is hard to do: but, by faith and God’s grace you can.

When David fled from his enemies (I Samuel 21-22), he found safety in a cave. Scriptures says 400 other men joined him there, and all of them were distressed and discontent. Can you picture David saying to them, “I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make its

boast in the Lord. O magnify the Lord with me and let us exalt his name together.”(Psalm 34:1-3). All 400 men could have turned on him, for they wanted to enjoy self-pity, or at very least, complain about their circumstances and the many injustices in life. David had learned how to handle stress and fear. It didn’t come naturally, but he had lots of practice. Read the Psalms, they are replete with encouragement. Go to the Book and listen.

One night, several years ago, at the motel, the phone rang. On the other end of the line was a crying, distressed, and depressed student teacher. Through her tears she poured out her heart. Long ago I learned that only God’s Word and not my wizardry could console. That is exactly what was used. I let God’s Word speak and as it did her tears dried and her spirits lifted and she began to laugh. After about a half hour, our conversation ended with our reading Psalm 150 over the phone. I think my spirits were lifted as much as hers through that soul-tingling experience. We went to the Book and read. I’m not ashamed to admit that we embraced in Christian love the next time I came to her school.

I am convinced that time alone with God is the most important part of the day. We simply cannot deal adequately with our own stress, nor can we reach out to love, forgive, and heal others if we aren’t tuned in to the ONE who makes us capable of doing that. But there isn’t enough time? This is more important than anything. Set your priorities. Several years ago a student in the curriculum course shared the poem in Appendix E. Read that at this time.

Set aside a specific time every day to meditate, worship, listen, and praise. Personally, I like the beginning of the day because that sets the tone, but that’s myself. You may have a more suitable time. Some prefer to unwind the day in devotion. The time is immaterial. Suit yourself, but set it aside. Harriet Ward Beecher did say, “The first hour of the morning is the rudder for the day.”

At first you may think you can spare only 10 minutes. If you do, I guarantee it will stretch to more and more and your day won’t be right without that time. When I suggest a time, I do not mean time for preparation of the Word of God or Catechism lessons or the reading of the Synod’s Meditations, but a personal private Bible study. I’m also not implying that none of you have your personal Bible study time, because I know many do; but my experience with student teachers and some supervisors has led me to the conclusion that there is a lot of room for improvement.

A few years ago, I worked with a student teacher in Waukegan, Illinois who was depressed on my first, second, and third visits. After each conference, she seemed encouraged but on the following stop was always back in her old state. I finally asked her what she did to get ready for the day. To that she replied that she did the usual such as get dressed, fix her hair, and put on her makeup. I said that wasn’t what I meant but rather how she was really getting herself ready for the day. She said that she did nothing. I then became prescriptive and still remember that I suggested, as a starter, that she read a Psalm a day, beginning with 150 and going backwards. I suggested that order because the latter ones are such a strong encouragement to praise the Lord. In addition, the book of Philippians was recommended because Paul, in prison chains, in those four chapters, encourages us at least 17 times to rejoice. The next time I was Waukegan, this young lady met me with a happy smile and said, “For once I come out of my bedroom smiling.”

Permit one more illustration. The semester after she taught, Jill stopped by my classroom No. 203 for a chat. Her chat was low key complaining about the faults of her fiance. He was student teaching and not writing or calling and she was lonesome. My suggestion to her was that there must be something good about this young man that had allowed her to let him slip that ring on her finger and she thus agreed to spend the rest of her days with him. She had to admit that there were some good points and felt quite sheepish about her case. After other pleasantries, she left and went her way.

I also felt badly and almost regretted that I had been so pointed. In fact, that evening, I debated about calling her to apologize. I didn’t, and the next day there was a note in my mailbox from Jill. Allow me to share a succinct section with you:

Dear Prof. Bauer,

After our talk, I went out to the park and I sat and thought about everything we talked about. It is always so easy to just go on with life, never stopping to think about all of the many blessings which God has given us. It is sad to say, but I can't really remember the last time I took the time to stop and say, "Thank you Lord."

With love in Christ,

Jill

As I get into our schools, I observe the custom of morning devotions, before the children arrive, involving the entire faculty, who take turns conducting them. I can't indicate enough how much the student teachers appreciate beginning the day in such a manner.

Hopefully, we are not like the majority of middle-class Americans who tend to worship their work, work at their play, and play at their worship.

There is no need to live spiritually like a pauper when we can live spiritually like a king. We are rich as we go to the Book and listen.

C. Ministry-aholic

This section is not an attack on work, but rather on overwork; the kind that throws our lives dangerously out of balance. God is in favor of work. It was his idea in the first place. "The Lord God took the man and put him into the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it." (Gen 2:15) We also read that "there is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good...that it is from the hand of God" (Ecc 2:24). It shouldn't be done half-heartedly, but vigorously: "What ever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might." (Ecc 9:10)

Paul concludes his treatise on work in 2Thessalonians 3 with the words: "If any will not work, he shall not eat." And in 1 Timothy 5:8 we read that those who will not work and provide for their own are "worse than infidels".

Paul was a tentmaker, David a shepherd, and Jesus a carpenter. So, if God originated the idea of working, how do we become a ministry-aholic?

When God gave man dominion over creation, He intended work to be an opportunity for man to use his creative abilities and reflect God's glory. But, after the fall, work too often became a means of exalting one's self rather than exalting God. It became an end in itself.

We are cautioned to keep the right work perspective on our ministry. First, we must recognize God in it or we become vain and view it as our accomplishment. (Ecc 2:4-11) We are to put our hearts into our work as though we were working for the Lord, for we are! "It is the Lord Christ you are serving." (Col 3:23-24)

The ministry-aholic has an obsessive compulsion to work, work, work. He is totally pre-occupied with what he does. He is out of balance as much as the perennial parasite on welfare. Can you feel the stress? The ministry-aholic may think he is "saving humanity" with his 80 hour week; but what about himself, and his family and other responsibilities. Chances are that his motive is a selfish pride borne out of a strong need for approval. He probably feels like a nobody, so works to prove that he is a somebody. He is never satisfied and is driven, driven, driven from within. What is left when you give 100% to your ministry? Nowhere does God expect that.

The compulsive minister works like a computerized robot, often as an unconscious compensation for his insecurity, and as a means of fulfilling both his strong needs for approval and his driving urge to be perfect. He is self-critical and deep within may feel inferior. Why should you feel inferior when you are God's instrument? You can be so proud and humbly confident of your role as God's servant.

If you are a ministry-aholic with a family, I feel sorry for your wife and children as they spend the lonely hours at home while you are about your business. You are not being fair to her or the children. We have come to hide behind the idea that quality time with our family is a legitimate substitute for quantity. Don't buy that Dr. Dobson, in one of his films asked whether you would be satisfied with one ounce of a super good steak compared to six ounces of an average good quality steak? An almost foolish question. You can work toward quality with quantity.

You who devote excessive hours to the “Lord’s Work” and neglect yourselves or families are really selfish and only building a bigger and better church for your own pride and selfish motives, though you are not consciously aware of that.

Are you the kind of father or person who becomes angry when your wife, children, or others place demands on you and you consider their requests selfish? One writer suggested that that is why the children of pastors and Christian teachers sometimes turn out to be rebellious.

Yes, work is both good and necessary. It should be pursued with diligence, honesty, and pride. But, it should not be worshipped and glorified as the basis of human dignity and worth. In God’s eyes, you are valuable apart from your ministry productivity. Work never saved anyone from sin, death, or evil; nor has it ever unilaterally produced faith, hope, and love. When work becomes a person’s all-consuming interest, even if the work is good and necessary, it is idolatry. Yes, idolatry. Work should never get in the way of our salvation or keep us too preoccupied to hear the voice of the Lord.

Learn to say no and learn to delegate. One of the false notions that we harbor is that if I don’t do it, it won’t get done or done correctly. That’s pride talking. The successful person learns how to delegate and you may have to learn to look at an unfinished task. (Mrs. Bauer says I have mastered the latter.)

Principals and administrators are you aware of the kind of hours your staff people are working? You know, you are their representative and spokesperson. Likewise, you staff people can speak in behalf of your principals and for one another if you see the load is getting too much.

In his book “*When I Relax, I Feel Guilty*” Tim Hansel paints a poignant picture of Jesus, our example:

I don’t understand how the Master could take time to go alone into the desert to fast and pray when the whole world was starving and in chaos, when countless individuals needed him. He had a proven track record of healing. I just don’t understand but he did!

I don’t understand how he could continue to love and give when he was rejected like He was. And how he could respond rather than react. And how he could maintain His inner poise rather than project pain, I just don’t understand but he did!

I don’t understand how he could tell us not to worry about life when times are so difficult. (Lk 12:22) I don’t know how he could tell us that some of us are working too hard that we’re too busy, and that our busyness will actually cause us to miss the kingdom of God. (Lk 14:16-24) I don’t understand how he could say that sometimes it is better to sit at his feet than to be up doing things for him. (Lk 10:38-42) I just don’t understand but he did!

Or, how He could promise rest in the midst of a world filled with turmoil and distorted with pain. (Mt 11:28-30) Or how He could ask us to be like little children, when the world needs more firm leadership and harder workers. I don’t understand how Jesus could play and celebrate and enjoy life, when the world was in the condition it was in. (Mt 11:19) I just don’t understand-- but he did!

Hard work rarely hurts anyone, but the STRESS associated with overwork in your job or ministry can be destructive. The person who works hard must be sure to play hard.

Remember, you are dealing with God’s temple.

D. Lack of leisure

Ministry-aholics know little about leisure and recreation. Words like fun, play, and amusement are foreign to them.

We ministry-aholics believe that leisure implies laziness, too much comfort, and a self-indulgent way of life that is a waste of time.

We begin to feel that everything we do must be useful. We can only read for profit, exercise so we can work better, and rest in order to be more efficient. We regress to a kind of neopuritanism that says, “You have not been born into a world for pleasure.” A curious and familiar psychological need to justify everything emerges, leaving no room for discovery or pure enjoyment.

Time becomes a tyrant instead of a friend. Joy becomes something we will do later. Play becomes something for children. Creativity becomes the unattainable quality of artists and poets. Wonder is just the name of a bread and imagination doesn't make enough money to be worthwhile.

Leisure is not a luxury; it is a necessity. It can make our days count, rather than we counting our days. Leisure activities need not be exotic, or expensive, or warrant tons of gear even though Madison Avenue tries to convince us that we must spend lots of money on leisure to enjoy it.

Often we save for a vacation, assuming that this leisure is only a once a year thing. (Some will say that they didn't even have time for that. Such a thought is inexcusable.) And then, we work at our leisure as well as our work and almost wish we were back at our desk. Rather, take some more frequent mini vacations. I know this can be an economic factor, but also know of people in our circles who go out of town to a hotel or motel for the weekend. They have no trouble justifying the expense because they return to their desks with an improved outlook. A certain principal and his pastor go out for breakfast once a week. A couple that I know recently resolved to get a baby sitter and have a dinner date once a month and are doing that.

Tips for leisure: plan leisure time and protect that time; try loafing; develop a hobby; develop a group interest. Finding people outside of our circles makes us meet and talk about things other than education. Find some sport to do. Give of yourself. Do some volunteer work. Plan times away from home. Plunge into something you have always wanted to do.

God is not a referee with a stopwatch making sure we use every second for his Kingdom. Leisure is God's time as much as the time we spend in ministry or work. Leisure gives us time to pause, to reflect, to contemplate, and to search. In all of this, our minds become less cluttered and we are better able to hear God speak to us. The truly full life is a rhythm of work and leisure. Jesus set an example when he told the disciples in Mk 6:31, "Come away by yourselves to a lonely place and rest awhile."

The peaceful quiet mind is like a clock in a thunderstorm, which moves at its own pace. Clearly, only the Prince of Peace can bestow this kind of serenity upon us. "Be still and know that I am God." (Ps 46:10)

Jesus never promised us a rose garden. But, he did promise us, that in spite of the turmoil of the times, by abiding in him, we can have an inner peace; a peace that stems also, in part, from a life that includes plenty of rest and leisure.

E. Eating habits

In 3 John v2, John spoke to his friend Gaius when he said, "I pray that you enjoy good health, and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well."

It is estimated that America's food consumption is double what it should be. Christians probably sin most often against their bodies by eating too many calories and the wrong kinds of food. The old saying is still true that we are what we eat and many people are digging their graves with their teeth.

When we eat the wrong kind or quantity of foods, we counteract much of the good we are doing to combat stress in other areas of our lives. Stress results from eating certain foods that cause bodily functions to be adversely influenced. Since stress is the response of the body to any demand made on it, certain foods cause the body to focus attention on them because they are in some way harmful.

For example, one estimate says that we Americans eat more than 120 pounds of sugar a year and there is evidence that the nations with the highest incidence of heart problems are the ones that consume the most sugar. **STRESS.**

If you're denying yourself a balanced diet, you're going to relegate yourself to a lowered intellectual level and a tired, stress-ridden state. Eating a candy bar and drinking a can of pop can lower your I.Q. 10 points for the next 10 hours.

Your body is made to be operated by food. It is made out of nutrients and must be replenished, as Jesus made so clear when he raised the young girl from the dead (Mark 5:39-43). The last thing He said to the people after he brought her back to life was "Something should be given her to eat."

While many people are becoming conscious of eating wholesome food and practicing good eating habits a lot still don't eat breakfast and eat a lot of their other meals at the fast food restaurant. Studies have shown that

the fast foods are nutritionally poor and loaded with salts, carbohydrates, and calories. The price may be right, but we are being shortchanged in other respects.

To eat well and have less stress, minimize the use of the “idols”: sugar, salt, refined foods, caffeine, and junk foods. Those tasty Triple Burgers and Big Macs are too high in salt and carbohydrates and represent an American tendency to intake an excess of fatty, salty, and chemically laden protein. The accompanying fries are loaded with grease and salt. STRESS.

Let me suggest a diet of half fruits and vegetables; as much of that raw as possible, 20%-30% grains and starches, and 10%-15% protein which includes seeds, nuts, sprouts, eggs, milk, and meat.

The increase in the number of salad bars in restaurants is also an indicator of the demand for such good foods.

Foods that contain a lot of sugar can make you depressed, fatigued, irritable, restless, anxious, or obese. Too much sugar can lead to hypoglycemia (low blood sugar) or diabetes (high blood sugar). If sugar sends the hyperactive child into orbit, why will it do less to us adults? Fresh fruits really provide all the sugar the body needs. If you want a sweetener, try some honey, molasses, or sorghum.

Another high stress producer is caffeine, which is in coffee, tea, colas, and chocolate. Caffeine may give a brief energy spurt, as sugar does, but in the end, it will create frazzled nerves and insomnia. The coffee break is still a common thing but it is good to see that people are substituting with caffeine-free, grain based, and herb type drinks, or fruit juice.

Refined manners are great, but refined and processed foods are deadly. Though temptingly packaged, these foods really harm our bodies. We thought the processed and refined products were “great innovators” and time savers, but they ushered in a nutritional disaster. They have only added to the stress.

So, after all the don'ts, what is left to eat? A good rule is, “If God made it and man hasn't tampered with it, that's the best.” Try to eat the foods that are as close to their natural state as possible and haven't been processed by man. Are you having McDonald's Days at your school when children can have that special treat? The taste and aroma are delectable, but that's where the advantage stops. Do you have cola and junk food dispensing machines for the students? They make good money for the athletic funds, but what a price. Are your students given the choice of white or chocolate milk? The sugary caffeined chocolate only tastes better.

God demanded high caliber animal sacrifices from the Israelites. As living sacrifices for him (Ro 12:1), we should be in good condition and that's impossible apart from a wholesome diet. You are feeding the temple of God and that deserves the best.

F. Smoking

The topic of smoking is a sensitive area to talk about, but it occurred so frequently in the literature on stress that I felt it important enough to include in this essay.

It is heartening to report that the number of men smokers is lessening but not the fact that the number of women who smoke is increasing. Also, that 90% of the adult smokers would like to be able to quit; that's a good statistic.

I can empathize with the smokers who want to quit and can't because I was in that circumstance many years ago myself. But it can be done and I'm most grateful. After over thirty intervening years, I still feel it is the best thing I was able to do besides get married.

There are serious physical stresses in smoking. Smoking increases heart beat, raises blood pressure, which contributes to heart attack and strokes; causes emphysema, chronic bronchitis, effects the kidneys, nervous system, and digestive tract, contributes to hardening of the arteries, hearing loss, cancer, and narrows the blood vessels of the skin. The latter, called Buerger's Disease, is found almost exclusively in smokers. STRESS.

The outside of the cigarette package has the statement that the surgeon general warns that smoking is harmful to your health. That knowledge also has to create some mental stress.

One of the smoking pamphlets that I surveyed had the results of an essay contest for seventh graders, sponsored by the United States Department of Health, on the topic “Smoking is Not Neat”. One of those

seventh graders wrote, “You spend about \$365.00 a year for cigarettes if you smoke one package a day. I can understand somebody paying for life but not for death by burring cigarettes and smoking.” If smoking disappeared entirely, so would 80% of all lung cancer.

The pipe and cigars aren’t much better and, if inhaled, are worse. Even if not inhaled, smoke can be dissolved in the saliva and absorbed by the mucous membrane and swallowed into the digestive tract.

I’ve talked about the primary smoker but want to mention that the second-hand smoker suffers just as much. The second-hand smoker is the non-smoker who inhales what is smoked by others. So, when you, other members of your family, or friends, inhale the smoke out of the air, you are just as susceptible to the same list of problems and stresses mentioned earlier. Second-hand smokers speak up, because while you don’t want to smoke, you are, when in the company of a smoker. Smokers, be considerate of those who don’t smoke.

If the effects of smoking would show on our faces as they do in the lungs and other effected areas of our bodies, I doubt that there would be a single smoker. Remember once again, in this whole matter we are dealing with the temple of God. Give it the best care.

G. Lack of exercise

Rudyard Kipling once said, “Nations have passed away and left no trace. History gives the cause of this; one single, simple reason in all cases; they fell because their people were not fit.”

Twice as many sedentary as active people have heart attacks. Most diabetes and ulcer sufferers are inactive people. Less active people are also more susceptible to emotional difficulties, Stress. Despite that, we say, “Who wants to work up a sweat in an air-conditioned society?”

A suggestion to exercise, when we are already exhausted seems absurd, but it is realistic. Happily, I can report that between 1968 and 1978 deaths from heart attacks dropped by 21%. The main change in our health habits was that we were exercising more. In 1968, there were 100,000 joggers and 10 years later 25 million. That statistic indicates a great interest in physical fitness and exercise. I’m not suggesting jogging as the way but as an illustration. Actually, jogging is no longer for me. Mrs. Bauer and I do a lot of biking and walking and recently marched in the 10K Volksmarch in New Ulm for which we got our medallion. Brisk walking may be as popular and as good as jogging. Some studies are saying that today’s joggers are creating a field day for the orthopedic doctors of the future because of the injuries to the legs from jogging.

Cooper’s aerobics exercises have revolutionized the exercise concept. Popular aerobics exercises include running, swimming, biking, tennis, cross-country skiing, racquetball, and brisk walking. All demand plenty of oxygen and there is an exercise for every age group. Aerobics exercise is not designed to build muscles or shape figures but for cardiovascular-pulmonary conditioning-building an endurance base in the heart, blood vessels, and lungs. Aerobics exercisers unanimously report quieted emotions and untroubled sleep namely, less stress. Their lungs are developed better, which gets more oxygen into the blood stream. Blood pressure is usually lowered and less acid is produced in the stomach, because pent-up aggression is released through exercise. As hospitals have added exercises for their patients, their depression, anger, and psychotic behavior have lessened.

The company sponsored fitness programs such as Caspian Associates in Minneapolis, are reducing absenteeism, accidents, and sick pay for the industries. And the employees are more alert and more productive. Why can’t these same principles apply to us, as teachers.

Get started today. If you don’t have time, make time. Exercise at least 15 minutes a day and some longer sessions several times a week. Run on your feet as you walk with the Lord. Exercise is imperative in battling stress such as depression, fatigue, irritability, and insomnia. Exercise ranks high as a stress reducer. Take care of God’s temple; involve yourself in some exercise.

VI. CONCLUSION

Look around and be distressed.

Look within and be depressed.

Look to Jesus - be at rest.

Conclude with the singing of the praise song canon "Song for Thanksgiving". (Appendix D)

STANFORD UNIVERSITY STRESS LEVEL TEST (Appendix A)

Often = 2 points
 Sometimes = 1 points
 Rarely or never = 0 points

1. I feel tense, anxious, and have nervous indigestion.
2. People at home, work, or school make me feel tense.
3. I eat, drink, and smoke in response to tension.
4. I have tension, pain in the neck or shoulders, migraine headaches, or insomnia.
5. I can't turn off my thoughts at night or on weekends long enough to feel relaxed and refreshed the next day.
6. I find it difficult to concentrate on what I'm doing because I'm worrying about other things.
7. I take tranquilizers and other types of medication to relax.
8. For the last two questions, answer yes (for one point) or no (for zero). Once I find the time, it's still hard to relax. Yes or no.
9. My work or school day is made up of many deadlines. Yes or no.

14-18 pts.	very stressful
10-13 pts.	stressful
6-9 pts.	average
3-5 pts.	relaxed
0-2 pts.	very relaxed

THE STRESS OF ADJUSTING TO CHANGE (Appendix B)

RANK	EVENT	L.C.U. POINTS
1	Death of spouse	100
2	Divorce	73
3	Marital separation	65
4	Jail term	63
5	Death of close family member	63
6	Personal injury or illness	53
7	Marriage	50
8	Fired at work	47
9	Marital reconciliation	45
10	Retirement	45
11	Change in health of family member	44
12	Pregnancy	40
13	Sex difficulties	39
14	Gain of new family member	39
15	Business readjustment	39
16	Change in financial state	38
17	Death of close friend	37
18	Change to different line of work	36
19	Change in number of arguments w/ spouse	35
20	Mortgage over \$10,000	31
21	Foreclosure of mortgage or loan	30
22	Change in responsibilities at work	29
23	Son or daughter leaving home	29
24	Trouble with in-laws	29
25	Outstanding personal achievement	28
26	Wife begins or stops work	26
27	Begin or end school	26
28	Change in living conditions	25
29	Revision of personal habits	24
30	Trouble with boss	23
31	Change in work hours or conditions	20
32	Change in residence	20
33	Change in schools	20
34	Change in recreation	19
35	Change in church activities	19
36	Change in social activities	18
37	Mortgage or loan less than \$10,000	17
38	Change in sleeping habits	16
39	Change in number of family get-togethers	15
40	Change in eating habits	15
41	Vacation	13
42	Christmas	12
43	Minor violations of the law	11

ARE YOU SITTING IN ASHES? (Appendix C)

- A. **ARE YOU WEARY WITH YOUR WORK?**
 Does it drain you emotionally?
 Do you dislike waking up in the morning because you have to go to your job again?
 Does your job frustrate you?
 Do you constantly feel at your wit's end at work?
 Do you ever think about death as a way of escape?
- B. **ARE YOU CALLOUS TOWARD OTHER PEOPLE?**
 Do you think of the people with whom you work as objects?
 Do you notice a definite hardening of your attitude toward your fellow workers?
 Do you rejoice to see a colleague endure a hardship, especially if that person has caused you stress?
 Do you blame others for your problems and failures?
- C. **ARE YOUR DREAMS GONE?**
 Do you blame others for hindering your success?
 Have you stopped making plans to do great things?
 Do you consider your career a treadmill?
 Do you consider life to be one big disappointment?
- D. **ARE YOU A LONER?**
 Do you find yourself avoiding people who make your life stressful?
 Do you feel as if other people especially your supervisors, have taken something of great value from you?
 Do you constantly blame others for your problems?
 Do you want to be "left alone"?

If your answers are "yes" to the majority of these questions, it could be that you are entering into--or already experiencing--burnout.

SONG FOR THANKSGIVING (Appendix D)



Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah!



A - men, A men.

Appendix E

I got up early one morning
And rushed right into the day.
I had so much to accomplish,
That I didn't take time to pray.

Problems just tumbling about me
And heavier came each task
"Why doesn't God help," I wondered.
He answered - "You didn't ask."

I wanted to see joy and beauty
But the day toiled on gray and bleak
I wondered why God didn't show me
He said - "But you didn't seek."

I tried to come into God's presence
I used all my keys at the locks
God gently and lovingly chided -
"My child, you didn't knock."

I woke up early this morning
And paused before entering the day
I had so much to accomplish
That I had to take time to pray.

MAJOR SOURCES

- Collins, Gary, *"You Can Profit From Stress"* (Santa Anna, California: Vision House 1977)
- Hansal, Tim, *"When I Relax I Feel Guilty"* (Elgin, Illinois: David C. Cook Co. 1980)
- Keller, Phillip. *"Taming Tension"* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House 1979)
- Markell, Jan, *"Overcoming Stress"* (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books 1982)
- Meier, Paul and Mivirith, Frank, *"Happiness Is A Choice"* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House 1978)
- Perry, Charles, *"Why Christians Burn Out"* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers 1982)
- Rediger, Lloyd, *"Coping With Clergy Burnout"* (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Judson Press 1982)
- Sehnert, Keith, *"Stress/Unstress"* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House 1981)
- Thompson, Conrad, *"Mender of Broken Hearts"* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House 1982)
- Whitman, Virginia, *"Be A Spirit Lifter"* (Denver, Colorado: Accent Publications 1978)
- Wiersbe, Warren, *"The Bumps Are What You Climb On"* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House 1980)
- Yancey, Philip, *"Where Is God When It Hurts"* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: The Yondervan Corporation 1980)
- File from WELSNET (Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod) BBS: (414)475-7514