

# Burnout

by Joni Owens



*Burnout:* suffer exhaustion, be exhausted, be used up

Everyone suffers some degree of burnout during a lifetime. Parent, teacher, CEO, farmer, athlete—the vocation does not matter, only our reaction to burnout. For the Sunday school teacher, burnout undermines her confidence as she tries to refute its existence, knowing that yielding to burnout indicates failure as a teacher and a Christian. After all, knowing what Jesus endured for us is surely enough to compel us to make this very small sacrifice as a teacher—isn't it? Yielding to tiredness shows a lack of faith and trust, a form of disobedience by denying a calling, a betrayal of what we believe—doesn't it?

## What causes burnout?

For some, it is simply not taking proper care of the physical body. Physical tiredness can take over every aspect of life, including one's spiritual outlook. When energy levels drop, acuity and reaction drop as well. It becomes easy to blame our misbehaving students, shortage of supplies, and lack of administrative support for our short-tempered reactions.

Burnout can also be a result of a changed relationship—with God, the church, even family. When a prayer life loses its place of priority, God cannot properly infuse His power into your heart and mind. If you have

taken offense at leadership, you become obsessed with the wrongs aimed at you. Family problems outweigh every other facet of life.

Any or all of these problems can easily shove children's ministry to the back seat.

Another chief cause of burnout is a

sense of diminished value. Losing confidence in oneself leads to losing confidence in God.

## What are the signs of burnout?

Burnout is a negative emotion brought on by outside forces. Here is a list of factors to help determine if you are in a state of burnout.

- ❖ Being overwhelmed with too much to do
- ❖ Feeling ill-equipped to handle responsibilities
- ❖ Stress—at home, work, in marriage, relationships (even at church)
- ❖ Personality conflicts (with fellow teachers, students, staff, or even outside the church)
- ❖ Failure to understand personal gifts and abilities and their proper use
- ❖ The inability to say no
- ❖ Health challenges (mental and physical)
- ❖ Lack of support from supervisors

## Whose fault is it?

Burnout cannot be blamed on any one thing or especially one person. Certainly it is my responsibility to take good care of my body, and that includes proper rest for body and mind. I must maintain a focused and fervent prayer life with God. His words can only inspire and strengthen me when I listen. Only I can choose to be offended by hurtful words. So in essence, I play a major role in allowing burnout to overtake me.

However, it is unfair to place all of the blame on oneself. Sometimes life just happens, and combined with other forces, burnout happens. Add Satan's evil thrusts (mind attacks, misunderstandings, doubt, and fear) and the burnout becomes overpowering.

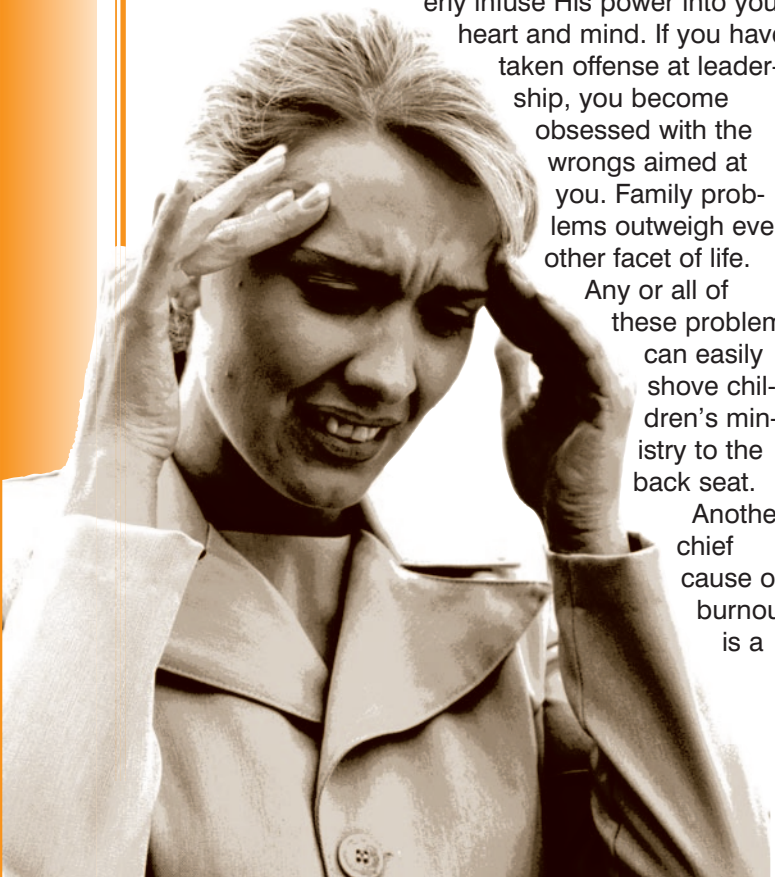
## Am I a failure?

No! Make that a loud, resounding NO! Even though you should take responsibility for your life—including your attitudes and outlook—burnout does not constitute failure. Failure interprets as a breakdown, stoppage, a crash. Burnout can slow one down, but it does not constitute failure—unless it succeeds in total misdirection.

## Am I in the wrong ministry?

Burnout causes one to rethink one's goals and reasons for certain activities. Why am I teaching kids? Am I qualified to do this? If there hadn't been a shortage appeal by the pastor, I would still be sitting in my adult class. Is guilt enough to make me a teacher?

Burnout inhibits our ability to think clearly, to maintain focus, to reason, to hear God. Our calling to teach



suddenly becomes clouded by doubts and fears. No matter how long we've been teaching or how many children's lives we have seen transformed, we are overcome with misgiving and confusion about our current status.

Satan wants you to doubt not only your own abilities but also God's call on your life so that he can misdirect you. Your power and influence in children's ministry—when guided by God—will far outweigh any good results you might achieve in another ministry that is not God's calling for you. Satan knows this, and he is willing to allow a few small victories in the "wrong" area of ministry if it means failure in the "right" ministry.

### *Is it a sign that I'm to quit?*

Again, this is Satan's desire—to get you to quit. Allowing burnout to overcome your faith and calling is not God's will. If and when God wants you in another area of ministry, He will tell you. He will not use doubt or fear or burnout. Burnout is a negative emotion that gives no glory or exaltation to Him. Why would He use such a sign?

### *Is there a cure?*

Recognizing that you are in a state of burnout is part of the cure. Several helps can rescue you from your burnout and restore you to the energetic, focused teacher God wants you to be.

**1. Don't deny it.** Burnout is not a sin. Do not feel guilty. Feel concerned, but not guilty. Admit that you need help, and seek that help.

**2. Check your circumstances.** What in your life is in your power to change? Do you need a teacher training refresher course? Does your closet need reorganizing so that you can find those last minute necessities quickly and easily? Are you happy with the age level you are teaching? Are you a procrastinator? Does your body or mind need rest? Whatever is in your life that is dragging you down (and it is most likely something outside of your ministry), face it and deal with it.

**3. Learn to say no.** You cannot do it all, nor does God expect you to. Whatever you are given to do, you are to do with all your might. However, while we strive to be like Christ and *do all things well* (Mark 7:37), God never expected us to actually *do all things*. Learn to do well the few things you can handle and say no to the things that will only get mediocre results from you.

**4. Pace yourself.** Apply moderation to your ministry. At home you must learn to clean house, make meals, care for the family, work a job, shop, attend church (and somewhere in there study your lesson). You do this by pacing yourself—delegating tasks to others, making schedules, and organizing your stuff as well as your family. Your ministry requires the same love and disciplined pacing.

**5. Take care of yourself.** The biggest cause of burnout is fatigue. Fatigue attacks all areas of life—

physical, mental, and spiritual. When a cold attacks, you start the meds and get more rest. When your mind fumbles and you feel overwhelmed, you escape into a good book. Spiritual rest is found at His feet. Burnout fatigue must be treated with the same care. When the students seem to always be out of control, the tasks become too time-consuming, the story seems too difficult to teach, it is time to rest. Get a good night's rest or go on a weekend getaway. Develop a rotation schedule to allow you time to sit in a class and be taught for a change. You might even ask for a small break from teaching. It does not mean redirecting, quitting, or feeling guilty. It just means you need to take care of yourself.

**6. Remind yourself of the whys.** Why did you say yes to teaching? Why do the students' smiles touch your heart? Why do you feel such joy when you see a child "get" what you are teaching? Why do you shout when a child receives the Holy Ghost in your class? Why are you a teacher?

**7. Laugh.** When was the last time you laughed as a teacher—at yourself, with your students, or over your mistakes? Has your well spring of joy dried up? "He that is of a merry heart hath a continual feast" (Proverbs 15:15). A merry (laughing) heart will see continual fruitful results. Your burnout must not conquer your joy and laughter. How do you get a merry heart? Get into His presence. "In thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore" (Psalm 16:11). Speak joy. "A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth: and a word spoken in due season, how good is it!" (Proverbs 15:23).

**8. Pray.** This does not suggest that prayer be the last course of action. It actually should be the first thing you check in your life. Is your prayer life where it should be? Have you communicated with God regarding your circumstances, your tiredness, your lack of joy? The reason you are in ministry is because of prayer. At some point you communicated to God your desire to be His vessel, and He communicated back by calling you into ministry—in this case, teaching Sunday school. Never, ever stop praying. When doubts assail you, life overwhelms you, relationships threaten you, and peace eludes you, pray. Ask a partner to pray with and for you. Pray the Word. Pray praises. Pray for help, for strength, for guidance, for an infusion of power. When you call, God will hear and answer you.

**B**urnout is very real, but it must not defeat us. Acknowledge it, find its source, then work on the cure. Do not allow Satan to bring doubt, misdirect you, and crush you. Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world. You can do all things through Christ who strengthens you. God will supply all your needs—physical, mental, spiritual—to help you to do well and with all your might the ministry He has called you to.

# Resources

by Joni Owens



[www.pentecostalpublishing.com](http://www.pentecostalpublishing.com)

866-819-7667

[www.upci.org/wap](http://www.upci.org/wap)

Resources to help avoid or deal with burnout can include studies on developing your ministry, managing your time, mentoring, and getting along with people. The following items are available at [www.pentecostalpublishing.com](http://www.pentecostalpublishing.com), or by calling 866-819-7667.

## **Overcoming Overload, Seven Ways To Find Rest in Your Chaotic World**

Steve & Mary Farrar

Far from "time management" strategies, Steve and Mary Farrar search through the Scriptures, showing you where to find sanctuary from the demands of modern life. The Farrars boldly encourage you to examine the beliefs that drive you to distraction and discover how to trade them for practices that restore your strength and vitality. For whatever weighs you down, you can offload the excess and prevent burnout. Leave the overwhelmed life and discover the abundant life!

Itemcode: 18607

Price: \$12.99

## **Developing the Ministry Within You (CD)**

James Holland, Sr.

Reverend Holland gives you a CD-ROM providing biblical principles to develop strong leadership. It contains PowerPoint so that you can teach these four lessons to your leaders. Also included are printable lesson outlines for the teachers and question and answer handouts for the student. You will be encouraged with these four subjects: Developing Ministry, Effective Ministry, Attitudes and Pitfalls, and Becoming Fruitful. Also available are four cassettes on these subjects.

Itemcode: 13406

Price: \$11.95

## **Mentoring for Success**

Rebecca Maracich

Rebecca gives us an excellent manual on mentoring, the act of teaching and guiding a learner.

Itemcode: 12923

Price: \$9.00

## **101 Tips for Teachers**

Gary Erickson

Just as the title says, this book contains 101 tips to help teachers hone their

skills. It covers a wide variety of topics in short concise chapters. It will motivate and educate those who teach.

Itemcode: 16925

Price: \$9.95

## **Servant, The**

James C. Hunter

In this absorbing tale, you watch the timeless principles of servant leadership unfold through the story of John Daily, a businessman whose outwardly successful life is spiraling out of control. He is failing miserably in each of his leadership roles as boss, husband, father, and coach. To get his life back on track, he reluctantly attends a weeklong leadership retreat at a remote Benedictine monastery. This book has touched readers from all walks of life because its message can be applied by anyone, anywhere at home or at work.

Itemcode: 19045

Price: \$20.00

## **Christmas**

Are you ready for Christmas? Consider these items to help you prepare.

### **It All Happened in the City (CD)**

From the creators of the best-selling children's Christmas Musical, *It All Happened in the Country*, comes a brand new, exciting, 35-minute sequel for Easter entitled, *It All Happened In The City*.

Uncle Yule, Granny, the country cousins and the city cousins are all back together again for another unforgettable combination of great fun and powerful music-- all focusing on the timeless story of Jesus' crucifixion, death and glorious resurrection. Written and arranged by Dennis and Nan Allan, this musical presents God's great Story in a way that you kids will embrace for a lifetime! (Book and CD)

Itemcode: 14599

Price: \$10.00

### **Dramas that Fit**

Barbara Westberg

Barbara Westberg gives us thirteen dramas that offer fresh takes for Easter, Mother's Day, Pentecost Sunday, Christmas, and even for a building program promotion! With tips on tailoring the dramas to your church building (be it mega or mite-sized), production tips for

each script, quick synopses, and instructions on how to use the CD, this is an essential resource. (The accompanying CD includes PowerPoint slides for one play and background slides for several others and a text file for printing each script.) Perfect for your dream of ministering through drama!

Itemcode: 19514

Price: \$18.99

### **Twelve Plays of Christmas**

Sheryl J. Anderson

Twelve humorous and insightful dramas of varying lengths for Christmas. They can be simple or elaborate as stage area, budget, and time permit.

Itemcode: 6460

Price: \$14.00

### **World's Greatest Christmas Activity Book**

The *World's Greatest Christmas Activity Book* for kids will stretch your imagination this holiday season. Packed with Bible-based puzzles, words games, mazes, and more, you'll be transported to Bethlehem, discover unique Christmas customs around the world, and experience the wonder of Christ's birth all within the pages of this book!

Itemcode: 22451

Price: \$4.97

### **Kids Christmas CD**

Go Tell It on the Mountain \* While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks \* Mary Had a Baby \* For All Eternity \* Deck the Halls \* The First Noel \* God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen \* Joy to the World \* Santa Maria \* We Three Kings \* In the Bleak Midwinter \* Silent Night \* And He Lay There Sleeping \* Unto Us is Born a Son \* Here We Come a Wassailing \* Many People Came to Jesus \* Good King Wenceslas \* O Little Town of Bethlehem \* O Come, All Ye Faithful \* The Friendly Beasts \* Let Us Make a Snowman \* Jingle Bells \* I Can hear Santa Claus \* Ho, Ho, Silly Song \* We Wish You a Merry Christmas

Itemcode: 22438

Price: \$4.97

# Seasonal Ideas

by Linda Short



## Fall in Love with Jesus (He Hung on a Tree So We Could Be Free)

Make a tree trunk loosely resembling a cross from brown construction paper. For three dimensional effects crinkle brown art paper, shape and staple to wall. Scatter colorful autumn leaves around the board with children's names written on them. If you have access to a digital camera, consider taking snapshots of each child and placing them in the center of the leaves.

Put "Fall in Love with Jesus" at the top of the bulletin board in large black letters. Place the rest of the caption along the bottom border using the same letter style.

## We're Tied in to Missions

Emphasize the cooperation of your church with partners in missions using this fun, interactive bulletin board. Send a note home to parents asking for donations of gently used men's dress ties. Approximately six are needed to begin the board and more can be added as they are brought to class.

Use brown art paper to create a basic turkey body. Add the men's ties as tail feathers, affixing the thin part closest to the body. (The ties can be folded in half if space is an issue.) Be sure to carefully pin the ties on the board to keep from damaging them. After the Fall season is over, let students decide which missionaries they wish to bless with the ties. Students may enjoy writing letters of encouragement to include in the package you will mail.

## A Wave of Thanks (Veteran's Day)

Provide students with white watercolor paper, red and blue watercolors, brushes, water cups, and paper towels.

Ask students to create a depiction of the American flag. Allow creativity with the boundaries only being the colors used and a few stars need to be included.

While flags are drying, give students lined writing paper and markers. Ask them to write a thank-you letter or note to the veterans in your church.

Post the flags side-by-side in a long rolling wave across a hallway bulletin board or wall. Under each student's flag display his letter to create a wave of thanks for the men and women who gave service to our country.

## Be Outstanding in the Harvest Field

Encourage your students to witness and invite others to the house of God with this bulletin board. Crumple and then stuff three brown paper bags for scarecrow heads. Draw faces on these with marker; or use beads, buttons and other art supplies for a three dimensional effect. Cut straw hats from construction paper or purchase some from the hobby store and attach to head. For straw, shred yellow, brown, and orange construction paper into  $\frac{3}{4}$ " strips and stuff around edge of hats. Tie red or blue bandana scarves and drape around the base of the head.

After securing the scarecrow heads and caption on to the bulletin board, write or display witnessing tips in autumn colored paper squares.

- Give someone a smile.
- Share the love of Jesus.
- Pray for your friends.
- Invite someone to class.
- Help someone in need.
- Be friendly to visitors.



The Word Aflame staff is here to serve you. If you have questions, dilemmas, or suggestions, please do not hesitate to contact us. We will listen and do our best to help you. You may reach us Monday through Friday, 8-4:30 CST at 314-837-7300, or via e-mail at [wap@upci.org](mailto:wap@upci.org).

