

How to Prevent Stress As A Pastor



FREE EXCERPT

VERNON L WILLIAMS

Author of The Power to Rejoice: 21 Days to Victory Over Your Problems

How to Prevent Stress As A Pastor

Premium Course

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CHAPTER 1

HOW I CAME TO DEVELOP THIS COURSE

There is a lot of information available on stress management. For example, a Google search lists more than a billion results for stress management.

Despite all of this information, pastor stress levels continue to rise. In fact, 63 percent of pastors say they are facing stress in ministry.*

A. REASONS FOR PASTOR STRESS INCLUDE:**

1. The disparity between idealistic expectations and reality.
2. Lack of clearly defined boundaries, tasks never get done, workaholic, "I have to do everything" mentality.
3. Feeling inadequate to lead an army of volunteers.
4. Trying to please everyone.
5. Trying to be a "servant" to everyone.
6. Time management problems.
7. Problems with self-esteem.
8. Multiplicity of roles.
9. Inability to produce a "win-win" conflict resolution.
10. Clergy being basically insecure, lonely and too serious.

*Lifeway Research

**Pastorcare.com

B. SIGNS OF STRESS:

1. **Physical:** Tight shoulders, insomnia, elevated heart rate, high blood pressure, grinding teeth, constricted breathing, clammy palms, fatigue, nausea, headaches, gastrointestinal problems (constipation, diarrhea and upset stomach), frequent colds and infections.
2. **Emotional:** Anxiety, irritability, inability to focus, social withdrawal, avoiding making decisions, lower productivity, job dissatisfaction, lack of motivation, difficulty engaging in new ideas, difficulty engaging in relationships.
3. **Spiritual:** Joylessness, lack of direction, loss of purpose, decrease in faith, disparity among values, beliefs and behaviors.

C. IMPACT OF STRESS:

1. 38% of pastors have considered quitting full-time ministry in the last year (up 9 percentage points since the beginning of 2021)*
2. Only 35% of pastors are considered “healthy” in terms of well-being.*

With these things in mind, I created this course to help pastors live stress-free, joyful lives.

*Barnas Pastor Poll

CHAPTER 2

COMMON METHODS FOR DEALING WITH PASTOR STRESS AND WHY THOSE METHODS FAIL

1. BAND AID METHOD. (BAM)

Examples of this method include smoking, alcohol abuse, drug abuse, infidelity, and watching pornography.

The advantage: Short term relief. The disadvantage: Long term problems.

2. STRESS MANAGEMENT METHOD. (SMM)

Examples of this method include reading, hiking, working out, playing or watching sports, playing board games, watching a movie.

The advantage: Temporary relief. The disadvantage: May lead to additional stress due to trying to find time to fit these activities into your schedule.

WHY THOSE METHODS FAIL

They address the symptoms of stress, not the cause.

CHAPTER 3

MY METHOD FOR DEALING WITH PASTOR STRESS AND WHY MY METHOD WORKS

My method for dealing with pastor stress is called the Prevent Pastor Stress Program.

WHY MY METHOD WORKS

- A. It addresses the underlying cause of pastor stress – pastors' thoughts.
- B. It dispels common myths about stress.

MYTH NUMBER 1: STRESS IS A NORMAL PART OF BEING A PASTOR. EVERYONE EXPERIENCES IT.

Truth: According to the latest Lifeway Survey, 63% of pastors say they are stressed. If stress were a normal part of being a pastor, then 100% of pastors would say they are stressed.

MYTH NUMBER 2: STRESS IS CAUSED BY PASTORS' CIRCUMSTANCES.

Truth: This is the classic case of misdiagnosis. The first step to finding a cure for any problem is making a correct diagnosis. If stress were caused by pastors' circumstances, then every pastor who experienced the circumstance would be stressed. However, everyone who experiences the same circumstance does not have the same reaction to the circumstance.

Let me give you an example of how two pastors who experienced the same circumstance but reacted entirely differently. Marvin and Fred are pastors at churches of approximately two hundred members.

Each was called in to counsel two long-time members who were engaged in a conflict. Both sought to help bring about a win-win for the members. Neither was successful in doing so.

Marvin became very stressed and viewed himself as having failed to bring about a win-win that would have restored the relationship between the two members.

On the other hand, Fred did not become stressed at all. How? He resisted the urge to resolve the conflict in his own strength and wisdom. Instead, he spoke the truth in love to the two members and left the resolution of the conflict up to God.

So, the circumstance did not cause Marvin's stress. Instead, what he thought about the circumstance caused his stress. This illustrates that there is only one cause of stress - one's thoughts about circumstances, not the circumstances themselves. As Proverbs 4:23 says: *Be careful what you think because your thoughts control your life.* Notice that it does not say circumstances control your life.

The logical conclusion is that our thoughts, not our circumstances, create our stress.

“MEN ARE NOT DISTURBED BY THINGS, BUT BY THE VIEW THEY TAKE OF THEM. --EPICTETUS

Changing how you think about your circumstances, like changing any habit, takes effort. However, doing so will empower you to prevent pastor stress. Indeed, I have many clients who had been experiencing high levels of stress, but are now living stress-free and joyfully as a result of applying the strategies outlined in this course.

MYTH NUMBER 3: THERE IS “GOOD” STRESS.

Truth: This notion was created by Dr. Hans Selye, the founder of the modern stress concept. Selye found that activities like sports and sex also produced a surge in stress hormones, so he promoted the idea of good stress. But research has demonstrated that:

- 75% to 90% of all physician visits are for stress-related ailments and complaints.
- Stress is linked to the six leading causes of death.

Does that sound like something that could ever be good for you? I think you would answer “No” Whereas stimulation is good for you (see #5 below). stress is never “Good.”

In more than 25 years of coaching, I have never had a client say, “You have to help me. I am experiencing too much good stress.” However, I have had thousands ask for help in overcoming stress. The bottom line is, stress is never “good.”

MYTH NUMBER 4: STRESS IS A MOTIVATOR.

Truth: Some mistakenly believe that if people did not have stress, they would lack motivation and would sit around all day and do nothing. My response is that, although young children have no stress, they do not lack motivation. You can prove it by driving by a school playground or park. (See #5 below)

MYTH NUMBER 5: STRESS IMPROVES PERFORMANCE.

Truth: You may have noticed that when you have a goal or a deadline, you can see an improvement in your focus and performance. However, you should be mindful of two things about the performance improvement:

- A. It is temporary.
- B. It is due to *stimulation*, not stress.

You may have seen football players gathering for a “pep” talk just before kickoff. They are seeking stimulation for a specific period of time, i.e. the 60 minute duration of the game.

“IF YOU’RE SUCCESSFUL AND STRESSED, YOU’RE SUCCEEDING IN SPITE OF YOUR STRESS, NOT BECAUSE OF IT.” -ANDREW BERNSTEIN

MYTH NUMBER 6: THE BEST WAY TO DEAL WITH STRESS IS TO MANAGE IT.

When stressed, many people attempt to “manage” it through various techniques, some of which are healthy, some of which are unhealthy.

Healthy techniques include:

- Going for a walk
- Spending time in nature
- Sweating out tension with a good workout
- Getting a massage
- Gardening
- Spending time with loved ones, including a pet
- Listening to music
- Watching a funny movie
- Playing board games
- Meditating
- Deep breathing exercises
- Tai chi
- Taking a vacation

Unhealthy techniques include:

- Smoking
- Alcohol abuse
- Drug abuse
- Overeating
- Watching pornography
- Having an extramarital affair

Truth: If you have used any of these tactics, whether healthy or unhealthy, you may have found them to be helpful in the short term. Ultimately, however, the stress returns when you come face-to-face with the circumstance that you experienced as stressful.

That is because both healthy and unhealthy techniques only help you manage the symptoms of stress. They do not address the cause of stress.

If your car's "check engine" light came on you would not "manage" the symptom of the problem by covering it with masking tape so that the light is no longer visible. You would take your car to a mechanic to: 1) determine what is causing the "check engine" light to come on and, 2) take the appropriate steps to remove the cause.

Since we know that your thoughts are the cause of your stress (your "check engine" light coming on), the appropriate step to remove the cause is to think differently about your circumstances.

**"STRESS DOES NOT COME FROM WHAT'S GOING ON
IN YOUR LIFE, IT COMES FROM WHAT YOU THINK
ABOUT WHAT'S GOING ON IN YOUR LIFE."
- ANDREW BERNSTEIN**

CHAPTER 4

PREREQUISITES FOR MAKING THE PREVENT PASTOR STRESS PROGRAM WORK

There are five prerequisites for preventing pastor stress:

1. ADMIT THAT YOU ARE STRESSED.

Some pastors refuse to admit (even to themselves) that they are stressed for fear of showing a weakness. But in order to prevent stress, you must begin by admitting that you are stressed.

“YOU CAN’T CHANGE WHAT YOU DON’T ACKNOWLEDGE.” - DR. PHILLIP MCGAW

2. DISPEL THE COMMON MYTHS ABOUT STRESS.

- Myth Number 1: Stress is a normal part of being a pastor. Everyone experiences it.
- Myth Number 2: Stress is caused by circumstances.
- Myth Number 3: There is “Good” stress.
- Myth Number 4: Stress is a motivator.
- Myth Number 5: Stress improves performance.
- Myth Number 6: The best way to deal with stress is to manage it.

3. ACKNOWLEDGE THAT YOU CREATE YOUR STRESS.

There is only one cause of stress - one's thoughts about the circumstances, not the circumstances themselves. With that being the cause, all stress is self-inflicted.

“IF YOU ARE DISTRESSED BY ANYTHING EXTERNAL,
THE PAIN IS NOT DUE TO THE THING ITSELF BUT TO
YOUR OWN ESTIMATE OF IT; AND THIS YOU HAVE THE
POWER TO REVOKE AT ANY MOMENT.”
- MARCUS AURELIUS

4. BELIEVE IT IS POSSIBLE TO PREVENT STRESS.

“YOU CAN BELIEVE THAT YOU CAN OR BELIEVE THAT
YOU CAN'T. EITHER WAY YOU WILL BE RIGHT.”
- HENRY FORD

If you do not believe it is possible to prevent stress, you will not take the steps to do so and the result is that you will not prevent stress. This is what is known as a self-fulfilling prophecy.

5. DECIDE TO TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR THOUGHTS.

The word decide means “To make up one's mind.”

“DECISIONS, NOT CIRCUMSTANCES, DETERMINE
DESTINY.” -TONY ROBBINS

Our thoughts shape our lives in three significant ways:

1. Our feelings - Whether we are happy or sad, confident or doubtful, at peace or stressed, content or frustrated, pleased or angry.
2. Our actions - Whether they are self-defeating or self-promoting.
3. Our results - Whether they are what we want or what we don't want.

It works this way: Circumstance⇒Thought⇒Feeling⇒Action⇒Result

AS KING SOLOMON SAID, "BE CAREFUL HOW YOU THINK; YOUR LIFE IS SHAPED BY YOUR THOUGHTS."

(PROVERBS 4:23 GNT)

Studies show that the typical person has as many as 60,000 thoughts per day, with 80 percent of them being negative. That means you could have as many as 48,000 negative thoughts per day. Dr. Aaron Beck, one of the founders of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, developed an acronym for negative thoughts. He called them ANTS - for Automatic Negative Thoughts. The concept was further developed by Dr. Daniel Amen.

They determined that ANTS:

1. Show up uninvited.
2. Can be about yourself, others or life in general.
3. Are repetitive. (95% are the same as yesterday).
4. Are believable.
5. Are irrational.
6. Make you feel bad about yourself, others and life in general.
7. Lead to harmful feelings and actions.
8. Wreck your health.
9. Prevent you from achieving your goals.

Despite their impact, we give negative thoughts free rein to come into our mind and determine our feelings, actions and results. It's like we are sitting in the back seat and our thoughts have the steering wheel and taking us wherever they like. This process is the result of a habit - something you learned to do, and then practiced until it seems like a natural way to behave.

When you decide to take control of your thoughts, you are saying that you are going to monitor your thoughts and only allow helpful, positive ones to enter your mind.

WITH THAT IN MIND, THIS COURSE HAS TWO GOALS:

1. To identify the 12 types of negative thoughts (ANTS) that cause pastors stress.
2. To show you how to take control and eliminate those types of thoughts.

CHAPTER 5

HOW TO IMPLEMENT THE PREVENT PASTOR STRESS PROGRAM

In order to prevent pastor stress, you must use the **C-A-R** process.

The **C-A-R** process is based on 2 Corinthians 10:5 (NIV) which says *We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*

HERE IS HOW THE C-A-R PROCESS WORKS:

Circumstance: You have been counseling a church member and the member abruptly quits the counseling process.

C Capture your ANT. Example: I am a failure because I could not get the member to remain in the counseling process and make the necessary behavior changes.

A Ask a question to challenge your ANT. Example: What is another way I can think about this circumstance?

R Replace your ANT with a positive, Bible-supported thought. Example: I perform my counseling duties to the best of my ability. I refuse to take responsibility for what members decide to do with the counseling. (Supporting Bible verse: For we are each responsible for our own conduct. Galatians 6:5 NLT)

Replacing your ANTS with positive thoughts is critical. As Joel Osteen said, “When negative thoughts come - and they come to all of us - it’s not enough to just not dwell on it. You’ve got to replace it with a positive thought.”

6 TIPS FOR CREATING POSITIVE THOUGHTS TO REPLACE YOUR ANTS:

1. Use the present tense.

Instead of saying “I will”, “I am going to”, “I need to,” “I would like to,” etc., keep the replacement thought in the NOW. This establishes in your mind that the desired change is true today, not some day in the future. This replaces fears and doubts with confidence. Use “I am.” According to Jack Canfield, the words “I am” are the two most powerful words in the language. Joel Osteen says, “Whatever follows the “I am” will eventually find you.” Instead of saying: “I am going to become a successful pastor.” Say: “I am a successful pastor.” Other examples of present tense include “It is,” “I take,” “I set”, and “I work.”

2. Keep it simple (K.I.S.)

“The ability to simplify means to eliminate the unnecessary so that the necessary can speak.” - Hans Hofmann Use short, powerful sentences. This makes the thoughts easy to recall throughout the day when you need a boost of motivation or confidence.

Example: “I am responsible for choosing when, where and how I spend my time. And I choose to spend my time in a way that helps me accomplish my goals.”

3. Put it in writing.

By copying the replacement thought word for word, the brain absorbs the message through the act of writing. An alternative method is recording yourself reading your positive thoughts and listening to them throughout the day.

4. Support the replacement thought with a relevant Bible verse.

Quoting God’s word reminds you of his never-ending love and power, which gives you confidence, peace and joy.

5. Repeat the replacement thought.

Regular repetition of positive statements conditions your brain to not only accept them as fact, but to look for ways to make them happen. Set aside five minutes three times per day - in the morning (while shaving or putting on makeup), midday, and evening (perhaps at bedtime) - to repeat the positive thought. If you have recorded the replacement thought, play your recording in the background on the commute to work, during a jog, as you go about your day, and just before bedtime.

6. Visualize yourself being exactly the way your replacement thought says you are.

A word of caution: The C-A-R process is not a quick fix, band-aid solution for taking control of your thoughts. Instead, it takes time and effort. As Dr. Caroline Leaf says, it takes 21 days to break down a core habit and build up a replacement one. Then it takes 42 days to practice the new way of thinking in order to avoid falling back into the habit. But remember, we are not talking about a temporary solution. Instead, this is a change that lasts and determines how you feel, the actions you take and the results that you get.

With that being said, let's dive right in. I have identified the 12 types of ANTS that cause pastors stress.

Read the definition and example(s).

Complete the ANT Prevention Worksheet in order to overcome each type of ANT.

CHAPTER 6

THE ALL-OR-NOTHING ANT

Also known as “Black-and-White Thinking,” this ANT is characterized by an unwillingness to see shades of gray. In other words, you see things in terms of extremes – something is either fantastic or awful, you believe you are either perfect or a total failure.

This type of ANT is dangerous because it fails to recognize progress you have made, creates low self-esteem, derails attempts to change your behavior and keeps you stuck in a destructive rut.

Complete the All-or-Nothing ANT Worksheet to overcome this type of ANT.

ALL-OR-NOTHING ANT WORKSHEET

1. Identify a circumstance that you experience as stressful.

Use the present tense in answering the following questions: Where are you? What happens?

Example: I am in my office preparing my sermon. I am looking ahead.

2. Write your ANT about the circumstance in step 1.

Example: If I don't preach a perfect sermon every week, I am a failure.

3. How do you feel when you have the ANT in Step 2?

Circle words that apply. Feel free to add words. Frustrated, discouraged, angry, afraid, overwhelmed, defeated, hopeless, depressed, disappointed, powerless, downhearted

4. Rate your stress level when you have the ANT in Step 2.

Circle one of the the two categories. Low (1, 2, 3) or High (8, 9, 10) Note: It should be High.

5. How do you act when you have the ANT in Step 2?

Circle words that apply. Feel free to add words. Complain, cry, hold a pity party, smoke, drink, use drugs, withdraw, worry, eat more/eat less, sleep more/sleep less, shop, attack others, blame others

6. Capture your ANT from Step 2.

Example: If I don't preach a perfect sermon every week, I am a failure.

7. Ask a question to challenge the ANT.

Example: What is another way I can think about the circumstance in Step 1?

8. Replace your ANT from Step 2 with a positive, Bible-supported thought.

Example: I am a successful pastor. I never demand perfection of myself, but I expect the very best of what I have to give - and that's what I get. (Supporting Bible verse: No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

Romans 8:37 ESV)

9. How do you feel when you have the new thought in Step 8?

Circle words that apply. Feel free to add words.

Encouraged, peaceful, positive, worry-free, relaxed, relieved, optimistic, grateful, uplifted, assured, inspired, invigorated, heartened, confident, revitalized, hopeful

10. Rate your stress level when you have the new thought in Step 8.

Circle one of the two categories. Low (1, 2, 3) or High (8, 9, 10) Note: It should be Low.

11. How do you act when you have the new thought in Step 8?

I block out fifteen hours of uninterrupted time each week for sermon preparation. I use the appropriate reference material (commentaries, Bible dictionary, books that I have read, etc.) I include anecdotes from real life to make my sermons relevant to my members.

Discover 12 Additional Types of ANTS That Cause Stress and How to Replace Them.

DOWNLOAD NOW!

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