

## Avoiding Burnout

Try this quiz (loosely adapted from the About.com quiz "Are You at Risk for Job Burnout?"). Pick the answer that closest describes how you feel. Add up your points as you go: 2 pts if you answer (a), 1 pt. for (b), 0 pts for (c).

1. How are things going at work and home?  
(a) Really well. Relationships are being maintained or enriched. Working efficiently and productively.  
(b) Same old, same old.  
(c) Cranky, listless, slack, everyone hates me.
2. Are you valued as a Bible study leader?  
(a) Yes, I am recognized and valued for my leadership.  
(b) Sort of. I don't get a ton of accolades, but I don't feel really devalued or unrecognized.  
(c) No, I feel pretty taken for granted and undervalued much of the time.
3. Do you have the time and resources to prepare the studies and lead the group?  
(a) Yes, I'm on my toes, but I have enough time to fulfil all of my responsibilities well without having to knock myself out too much.  
(b) Sort of. I have reduce my leisure time in order to prepare properly.  
(c) No. I haven't got enough time or resources so I just follow the questions in the booklet.
4. Are you able to relax between studies and at the end of the term?  
(a) Yes, and there's always nights and weekends to relax.  
(b) Sort of. I occasionally have time where I can just relax and play.  
(c) No, I very rarely get a day off and I am busy most nights and weekends.
5. Do you feel like you're making a difference?  
(a) Yes, I feel my role is important.  
(b) Sort of. What I do isn't of paramount importance, but I do feel that what I do matters enough.  
(c) No, I really don't feel what I do makes a difference to anyone, including me.
6. Do you have anyone you can talk to about the stress you experience?  
(a) Yes, I have a supportive network of people I talk to, and at least some are people with whom I can discuss my feelings.  
(b) Sort of, I have some people I talk to, but we don't really talk about feelings and frustrations; it's more superficial.  
(c) No, I don't have anyone I can really talk to about anything significant.
7. Do you feel you have the freedom to decide what to do and how to tackle each study?  
(a) Yes, I have overall goals, but how I want to tackle the studies and the questions I ask are up to me.  
(b) Sort of. I have some wiggle room to make decisions, but most of the studies are already planned and not in my control.  
(c) No, I have little to no choice in how I lead the studies.
8. How are you handling the expectations that people have of you?  
(a) I don't feel pressured and I am easily coping with the expectations.  
(b) Sometimes I'm not sure what people expect of me.  
(c) That's the problem. People expect too much of me and I can't fulfil their expectations.
9. Do you generally feel excited about leading or do you dread it?  
(a) I always look forward to it.  
(b) I generally enjoy it at least somewhat.  
(c) Many days it is so hard to get motivated.
10. Do you feel you are growing?  
(a) Yes, I almost always feel I'm getting somewhere.  
(b) Sometimes I feel I'm going backwards but I generally feel like I'm slowly making progress.  
(c) Not really; I feel like the wheels have fallen off.

## Results:

### 14-20 pts. High Satisfaction:

You probably already know this, but you are a good Bible study leader. It keeps you stimulated, but not overwhelmed, and the payoff is worth the effort. You shouldn't be experiencing any major problems with burnout.

### 7-13 pts. Medium Satisfaction:

You experience some frustrations with leading that may put you at an increased risk for burnout. You may be able to make some changes so that others can help you bear the load.

### 0-6 pts. Very Low Satisfaction / Serious Burnout Risk:

You are in a situation that puts you at a serious risk for burnout, and you should carefully look at the areas that give you additional stress. You need to make some changes so that others can help you bear the load. All in all, you need to remember to nurture yourself so that you don't burn out.

I haven't got a definitive answer for avoiding burnout but my personal experiences below might help.

I've felt burnt out a couple of times. Not to the extent of having a nervous breakdown but I got to the stage where I could give no more and I resented the expectations people had for me. Both times I was the only leader of the Bible study group. I was preparing the study from scratch each week because the set booklet was so dumbed down. I was also expected to be the pastoral carer even though I wasn't particularly good at it. I had been doing this week after week, term after term like I was on an endless treadmill. I was in a small group and if 2 or 3 people didn't come it felt like I'd done all this work for nothing. I'd gradually lost enthusiasm and vitality and there was no longer much variety in my studies.

I could have persevered with this and tried to endure the tough times. I could have kept going and kept doing what I had been doing. No-one was complaining about my leadership but I knew I could do better and, in the past I had done better. If anything I felt I was getting worse and worse. You need the wisdom to decide whether to stick it out or stop to give yourself and the group a change.

It came to a head at the end of one term and I said I was going to take a break. The next term I didn't do anything. I didn't even go to a Bible study, let alone lead one. I stayed at home and relaxed. The other people in the group went to another group or didn't go anywhere.

Morris (Leading Better Bible Studies by Karen & Rod Morris page 190) recommends you spend 1 year in 6 as a group member without the responsibility of leadership. They warn against groups stagnating and leaders inadvertently contributing to that lethargy. They suggest groups change every 2 years and definitely not go on for more than 5 years.

Osborne (Stick Church pages 98-99) suggests taking a whole term off every year. Every Bible study group (he calls them sermon-based small groups) in his church takes the (northern hemisphere) summer break off. During that time his church does a variety of short term things like special teaching courses, special interest groups, church holidays together, social events and give-it-a-try growth groups for new people.

I've always enjoyed studying the Bible and couldn't stay away from it for long. I joined another group with the understanding that I would be a passenger, not a leader. It was such a relief to sit back and enjoy it and not have any expectations thrust upon me. I was able to comment during the study when I felt like it. The leaders of this group were very understanding and when I said I'd like to lead a study (not a whole term) they allowed me to do it as often or infrequently as I liked.

One other time a friend asked me to lead his group for a term because he was feeling drained and in need of a break. So I led his group which was fun for a change, while he had a complete break, coming back the following term to take over the leadership again (this group had only the one leader). Meanwhile, the group I left to do this favour had 3 leaders which went down to 2 while I was away. So they were able to cope with my absence.

I learnt from my experience and the experience of my friend who I took-over from. I learnt that it is a lot better if you are not the only leader of a group. I learnt that you need to talk to yourself and others about how you are coping with the pressures of leading a group. I learnt that you shouldn't feel guilty about taking a break because it will help your own health and probably be better for the health of the group as well.