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# Pastoral Burnout and the Impact of Personal Spiritual Renewal, Rest-taking, and Support System Practices

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**Abstract** Pastors risk burnout because of inordinate ministerial demands, which may drain their emotional, cognitive, spiritual, and physical energy reserves and impair their overall effectiveness. Burnout advances across three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced accomplishment. The debilitating effects of pastoral burnout were examined through a survey of 270 pastors. Relationships between burnout and three potentially preventative or mitigating factors, spiritual renewal, rest-taking, and support system practices, were explored. The results identified spiritual dryness as the primary predictor of emotional exhaustion, the stress dimension of burnout. In the published literature, no other work to date has empirically substantiated a link between pastors' spirituality and burnout. These findings expand the burnout construct and promote leader self-care practices that foster resilience, vitality, and well-being.

**Keywords** Pastoral burnout · Spiritual renewal · Rest-taking · Leadership self-care

According to Barna (1993), London and Wiseman (2003), and Sanford (1982), pastors comprise one group of helping professionals who are especially prone to burnout. Issues that pastors face include (a) inordinate time demands (Jenkins and Wulff 2002); (b) unrealistic expectations (London & Wiseman); (c) isolation (Sanford); and (d) loneliness (Spaite 1999). As a result, pastors' personal lives may become severely imbalanced (Oswald 1991a), and their spiritual lives ironically dry (Hall 1997). These four concerns are well-established risk factors linked to pastoral work and have generated questions about practices that might mitigate pastoral burnout. Hands and Fehr (1993) identified three practices or behaviors essential for pastoral health: (a) spiritual renewal practices, (b) rest-taking practices, and (c) support system practices. Therefore, this study examined the link between these personal practices and burnout.

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Since little empirical research has been conducted on the personal practices of pastors that might mitigate this debilitating and pervasive problem, the purpose of this research was to examine the relationship between burnout with the three personal pastoral practices that have been linked to pastoral health (i.e., spiritual renewal, rest-taking, and the presence of an active support system). Immediately following is a brief review of the literature in these five areas: (a) general burnout, (b) pastoral burnout, (c) spiritual renewal practices, (d) rest-taking practices, and (e) active support system practices.

### General burnout

Maslach (1982, 1993, 2000) and Leiter and Maslach (1988) presented burnout as a multidimensional process within an interpersonal work context. Since Maslach's theoretical model is highly recognized in the burnout field, it was chosen as the framework for this exploratory study. According to Maslach, the burnout process begins with emotional exhaustion (EE), a feeling of being emotionally overextended and depleted. Emotional exhaustion then adversely impacts relationships with others through depersonalization (DP), a negative and detached reaction. Subsequently, depersonalization prompts reduced personal accomplishment (PA), which is typified by a decline in a sense of competence, productivity, and efficacy. Given that professional burnout occurs because of EE, DP, and reduced PA, it would then follow that personal replenishment, rest, and nourishing relationships should conversely renew depleted spiritual, emotional, and social reserves. Additionally, if this is true, then an inverse relationship is expected between the spiritual renewal, rest-taking, and support system practices of pastors and the three professional burnout dimensions (EE, DP, and reduced PA).

### Pastoral burnout

Ellison and Mattila (1983) identified emotional exhaustion as contributing to pastoral burnout through inordinate time demands, unrealistic expectations, sense of inadequacy, fear of failure, loneliness, and spiritual dryness. Spiritual dryness is experienced as spiritual lethargy, a lack of vibrant spiritual encounter with God and an absence of spiritual resources (Gemignani 2002; Hands and Fehr 1993; Oswald 1991a). As noted by Warner and Carter (1984) and Ostrander et al. (1994), pastors face stress and loneliness because of a multiplicity of demands, which negatively impacts them as well as their families and constituencies. Oswald (1991a) confirmed that elevated stress levels are associated with the tendency to withdraw from others, ironically during times when the need for functional support systems to provide interpersonal anchors for emotional, social, and spiritual health is most critical. Given the extent of interpersonal demands that create stress and loneliness for pastors, evaluating their personal practices, specifically spiritual renewal, rest-taking and support systems, would broaden the study of pastoral burnout.

Burnout, as characterized by energy depletion without commensurate renewal, is all too often a natural outcome of the seemingly unending complexities, demands, and expectancies commonly experienced by pastors (Hands and Fehr 1993; Hulme 1985; Minirth et al. 1986; Sanford 1982; Willimon 1989). Spaite (1999) suggested that pastors are vulnerable to developing a *Messiah complex*, or the self-denial of one's legitimate needs in favor of saving or rescuing others, which may result in emotional insulation and isolation. Similarly, Grosch and Olsen (2000) suggested that pastors' inadequacy and insecurity may

actually be the impetus for their overwork. Discovering what practices may counter these unhealthy work tendencies would contribute to pastoral health and wholeness. In the literature review of pastoral burnout, three practices have been identified as crucial for burnout prevention (a) spiritual renewal, (b) rest-taking, and (c) active support systems.

### Spiritual renewal practices

Spiritual renewal or communion with God has been identified as a cornerstone of pastoral effectiveness to prevent burnout (Gemignani 2002; Nelson 2002). However, Hall (1997) observed that no specific empirical studies exist on pastors' spirituality practices and called for further research on the processes involved in developing pastors' spiritual maturity. Several authors have suggested that spiritual renewal should be the foundation of pastors' personal and professional effectiveness (McNeal 2000; Sanders 1980).

### Pastors' spiritual renewal and development

According to Gemignani (2002), love of God is the essence of spirituality. Love of God fosters openness to God's transformative work, which is enabled through life patterns and practices. Nelson (2002) noted that submission to God's guidance and empowerment through ongoing spiritual development catalyzed by devotional prayer distinguishes Christian spiritual leaders from others. Similarly, Nouwen (2001) advanced the notion that Christian leaders must have a strong and intimate relationship with Jesus Christ in order to find their source of inner strength and guidance. Time with God appears as a recurrent theme relative to a strong and vibrant biblical spirituality for pastors. To address the lack of empirical research, this study evaluated the spiritual renewing practices of pastors in order to identify what specific practices they engaged in and how often, as well as their personal assessment of their spiritual condition. Historically, the spiritual disciplines have been regarded as practices which foster spiritual renewal.

### Spiritual disciplines

Foster (1998), Willard (1988, 1999), and Whitney (1991) presented the classical spiritual disciplines as primary spiritual practices that assist in nurturing one's communion with God in the pursuit of godliness (cf., 1 Tim. 4:8). When comparing Foster's, Willard's, and Whitney's listings of spiritual practices, the primary inward spiritual disciplines include Bible intake or study, prayer, meditation, worship, reflective solitude, and fasting. Spiritual disciplines provide venues for encountering the presence of God and receiving a refueling of spiritual reserves (Willard 1988, 1999). This present study empirically assessed relationships between burnout progression and the application and frequency patterns of engagement in spiritual renewal including the spiritual disciplines.

### Rest-taking practices

A basic premise of this paper is that rest-taking, which renews depleted spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical reserves, may serve to prevent or reduce burnout. Sanford (1982) argued that compulsive overextension contributes to burnout. In an interview reported by London and Wiseman (2003), physician Richard Swenson commented that a common presupposition among pastors seems to be that a compulsive overextension of time and

energy is an affirmation of godliness. London and Wiseman further reported that 56% of the surveyed pastors reported that they regularly take 1 day off per week, while as many as 21% reported not taking any days off. A survey conducted by the Presbyterian Church USA (Guinn 1999) revealed that 32% of the participating pastors only spent between 0–5 hours per week engaging in Sabbath-keeping activities. Without commensurate renewal, the complex, competing, and stressful tasks of ministry often create conditions of spiritual, mental, physical, and social depletion and fatigue (London & Wiseman; Sanford). As Diddams et al. (2004) stated, “Practicing rest bolsters psychological resiliency and personal agency” (p. 317), which serves as an essential element in stress management (Carver 1998). In summary, rest-taking leading to pastoral renewal has been anecdotally linked to burnout and stress resistance, resiliency, and productivity. However, little empirical research exists to verify this observation. Therefore, this study examined the relationship between rest-taking practices and the three burnout dimensions of emotional exhaustion (EE), depersonalization (DP), and reduced personal accomplishment (PA).

### Support system practices

In the professional burnout literature, Pines and Aronson (1989), Hallsten (1993), and Winnubst (1993) specifically emphasized the importance of social support systems in mitigating burnout. The pastoral literature repeatedly juxtaposes loneliness, isolation, and burnout with the lack of pastoral support systems (Ellison and Mattila 1983; Hands and Fehr 1993; Oswald 1991b). Time constraints contribute to the lack of support systems, furthering social isolation (Spaite 1999), even though peer-based support systems foster a strong sense of belonging and opportunity for genuine affirmation (Chandler 1987; Gilbert 1987). In London and Wiseman’s (2003) interview with Archibald Hart, a well-known Christian psychologist, Hart suggested that support groups for pastors can facilitate healing within a safe and supportive environment. Despite these potential benefits, Jinkins and Wulff (2002) found that 36% of surveyed pastors did not participate in any form of ministerial support group.

Regarding family support, Westman and Etzion (1995) concluded that job stress is both a work and a family problem for both genders, in that stress flows bi-directionally between work and family. Caplan (1986) found that families are crucial sources of personal support, and Ostrander et al. (1994) and Warner and Carter (1984) identified marital support as impacting pastors’ quality of life and burnout.

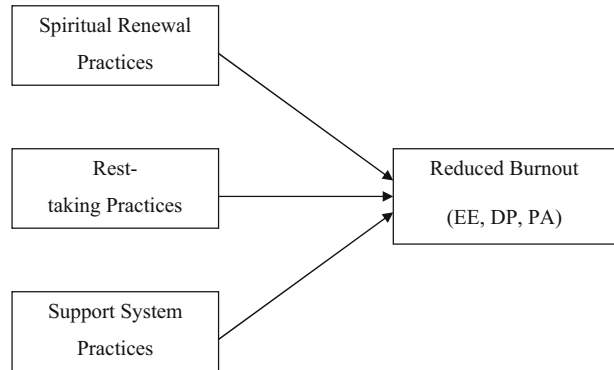
In response to a paucity of empirical research related to pastors’ personal practices and to advance the pastoral and general burnout literature, this study explored the mitigating relationship that spiritual renewal, rest-taking, and support system participation might have in regards to the three primary components of burnout. Since the pastoral burnout literature would suggest that the presence of these practices contributes to resilience, well-being and renewal, the likelihood of reduced burnout potential is maximized. The conceptual model is presented in Fig. 1.

### Method

#### Participants

Primary ministry overseers were asked to forward the online survey link to the pastors in their respective networks through e-mail. The original e-mail sent by the researcher to ministry

**Fig. 1** Conceptual model depicting the relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variable of burnout in its three dimensions



overseers contained a general introduction, purpose of the research initiative, and a request to complete the online survey by the stated deadline. Respondents ( $N=270$ ), representing approximately 20 denominational and non-denominational churches and networks, voluntarily completed the online survey. A demographic analysis of participants revealed that 88.5% were male and 11.5% were female, with an overall mean age of 46.6 years; and that 94.5% were married, 4% were single, 1% was widowed, and .5% was divorced. As for ethnicity, 86% were Caucasian, 7% were African American, 4% were Hispanic American, 2% represented other ethnicities, and 1% was Asian American. A range of education and professional levels was represented as 12% held doctoral degrees, 35% held master's degrees, 32% held bachelor degrees, 5% held associate's degrees, 10% held a Bible school certificate, and 5% had a high school diploma only. Of these, 59% were senior pastors, 14% were associate pastors, 14% were assistant pastors, 3% were executive pastors, and 10% held other pastoral positions.

## Instrumentation

### MBI-HSS

The dependent variable, burnout, was assessed using the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS) (Maslach and Jackson 1986), considered to be the most universally used burnout inventory (Schaufeli and Enzmann 1998). The MBI-HSS is a 22-item inventory which contains the three subscales of EE, DP, and PA. Maslach et al. (1996) recommended that the three burnout subscales be considered individually, as opposed to combining them into one single score. Degrees of burnout as reflected in the subscales are (a) high degree of burnout (high scores on the EE and DP subscales and low score on PA), (b) average degree of burnout (averages scores on the three subscales), and (c) low degree of burnout (low scores on EE and DP subscales and high score on PA). The number of items in each subscale includes (a) nine items in the EE subscale, (b) five items in the DP subscale, and (c) eight items on the PA subscale. The PA subscale and its component items are independent of the other two subscales and do not load negatively on them (Maslach et al. 1996). The 7-point response format progresses from 0 (*never*) to 1 (*a few times a year*) to 2 (*once a month or less*) to 3 (*a few times a month*) to 4 (*once a week*) to 5 (*a few times a week*) to 6 (*every day*).

Confirmatory factor analysis of the earliest version of the MBI-HSS using principal component analysis has been replicated across many samples (Gold et al. 1989; Lee and

Ashforth 1993). Regarding reliability of the MBI-HSS, Maslach et al. (1996) reported reliability coefficients for the subscales as being .90 for EE, .79 for DP, and .71 for PA ( $N=1,316$ ). In their analysis of 47 studies including approximately 10,000 respondents, Lee and Ashforth (1996) found reliability coefficients as being .86 for EE, .76 for DP, and .77 for PA. Regarding test-retest reliability of the MBI-HSS over a 1-year interval, Jackson et al. (1986) found the coefficients for the subscales as .82 (EE), .60 (DP), and .80 (PA). Over an 8-month time frame, Lee and Ashforth (1993) found test-retest correlations as .74 (EE), .72 (DP), and .65 (PA). In this study ( $N=270$ ), the reliability coefficients for the three MBI subscales were .91 (EE), .77 (DP), and .78 (PA), which is consistent with previously mentioned reliability data.

### Instrumentation of independent variables

In addition to the 22-item MBI-HSS questions, 57 other items were included in the survey including 43 researcher-designed survey questions and 14 demographic questions for a total of 79 items. The survey items, used as independent variables in this study, were developed following an extensive literature review of the pastoral burnout and spirituality, rest-taking and support system literature and then pilot tested by a panel of experts.

First for spiritual renewal practices, seven questions assessed the amount of weekly time spent, on average over the preceding year, in the individual spiritual renewing activities of prayer, worship, devotional Bible reading/study, meditation, journaling, and fasting. One question assessed a composite number of hours spent weekly in spiritually renewing activity. Additionally, six questions addressed the number of spiritual retreats and conferences attended over the past year. The survey asked respondents to provide numeric indices for questions such as (a) “In the past year, I got away from home for a personal spiritual retreat by myself \_\_\_\_ times,” and (b) “Over the past year, I attended a conference that was spiritually renewing \_\_\_\_ times.” Using a 0–6 Likert scale, with 0 (*no agreement*) to 6 (*maximum agreement*), three questions addressed pastors’ attitudes about current ministry demands which prevent communion with God, ministry involvement which precludes spiritual renewal, and pastors’ perceptions regarding feeling spiritually dry. In Tables 1, 2, 3, and 5 as well as in the results section, the independent variable for feeling spiritually dry is indicated as “Spiritual Dryness.”

To assess rest-taking practices, 20 questions were posed. Participants were asked to provide a numeric estimate of the amount of time they personally spent in rest-taking and non-work related leisure activities such as physical exercise, outdoor pastimes, television and movie watching, reading, computer usage, and hobbies. In addition, additional questions addressed the average number of hours in a week spent in church-related activity, as well as the amount of time they took off from work and ministry activities. Sample items included (a) “In average per week, I engage in leisure/recreational activities about \_\_\_\_ hours,” and (b) “In the past year, how many vacation days have you taken off?” Using a Likert scale from 0–6 similar to the spiritual renewal Likert scale, three questions assessed pastors’ agreement with statements reflecting the amount of rest they attributed to spending time with their families, friends, and God. One question assessed attitudes regarding the impact of multiple job demands and ministry duties on the ability to secure desired levels of rest and renewal. One question assessed ministry involvement that prevents rest, and a final question addressed the respondent’s current self-assessment related to feeling rested and renewed. In Tables 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6, as well as the results section, the independent variables demonstrating greatest significance are indicated as “Ministry Involvement/Prevents Rest” and “Rested and Renewed.”

**Table 1** Abbreviations in correlation table for ten independent variables (IV) of interest & three dependent variables (DV)

Variable	Variable abbreviation
1. Age (IV)	(none needed)
2. Time demands which prevent communion with God (IV)	Time/spirit
3. Spiritual dryness (IV)	Spirit/dry
4. Church activities in hours per week (IV)	Chr/hrs/wk
5. Rest with family (IV)	Rest/family
6. Time demands which prevent rest (IV)	Time/rest
7. Ministry involvement which prevents rest (IV)	Min/rest
8. Feeling rested and renewed (IV)	Rest/renew
9. Family provides tangible support (IV)	Fam/support
10. Other pastors support in ministry (IV)	Past/support
11. Emotional Exhaustion (DV)	EE
12. Depersonalization (DV)	DP
13. Personal Accomplishment (DV)	PA

The above 10 independent variables of interest were selected from the overall correlation matrix as reflecting  $p < .001$ .

To evaluate support system practices, a total of six questions assessed the frequency of contact with potential sources of social support such as family, a friend within and outside of one's direct ministry context, pastors within and outside of one's direct ministry context, and a mentor, coach, or spiritual advisor. The 0–6 Likert scale was the same as the one utilized by the MBI-HSS (Maslach and Jackson 1986): 0 (*never*), 1 (*a few times a year*), 2 (*once a month or less*), 3 (*a few times a month*), 4 (*once a week*), 5 (*a few times a week*), to 6 (*every day*). Sample questions included (a) "My family provides tangible support for me in ministry," and (b) "I meet with at least one friend (in ministry) with whom I can be completely honest." In Tables 1, 2, 5 and 6 as well as the results section, the independent variable related to family providing tangible support in ministry is termed "Family Support."

Demographic data were included as covariates for several reasons. First, burnout has been attributed to younger rather than older professionals and to those with more education rather than less, with gender and ethnicity being less definitive (Schaufeli and Enzmann 1998). Second, since workload is positively related to burnout, covariates reflecting the participant's position, pastoral staff support, church size, and the nature of ministry responsibility were assessed. Therefore, this study included these covariates: (a) gender, (b) age, (c) marital status, (d) number of children living in the household, (e) ethnicity, (f) education, (g) current ministry position, (h) primary area of church responsibility, (i) current ministry position held, (j) primary ministry affiliation/network, (k) number of people attending church, (l) total number of pastors serving on the pastoral staff, (m) years in current position, and (n) total years in ministry.

## Procedure

The MBI-HSS, as well as the researcher-designed and demographic questions, were combined into a single online survey questionnaire that included a total of 79 items. The online survey was administered through a secure server, as agreed upon when receiving permission to use the MBI-HSS. The online survey was sent to over 20 denominational and



**Table 2** Intercorrelations of study variables of interest ( $N=270$ )

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Age	–												
2. Time/spirit	–.09	–											
3. Spirit/dry	–.15*	.38**	–										
4. Chr/hrs/wk	–.09	.03	.16**	–									
5. Rest/family	.10	–.10	–.09	.04	–								
6. Time/rest	.17**	–.72**	–.39**	–.10	.09	–							
7. Min/rest	.14**	–.56**	–.46**	–.23**	.11	.71**	–						
8. Rest/renew	.11	–.30**	–.57**	–.11	.17**	.33**	.42	–					
9. Fam/support	.10	–.14*	–.16**	–.04	.45**	.11	.20**	.19**	–				
10. Past/support	–.11	–.05	–.12	.12*	.12*	.07	.08**	.22	.17**	–			
11. EE	–.21**	.37**	.54**	.20**	–.07	–.37**	–.49**	–.52**	–.20**	–.10	–		
12. DP	–.22**	.21**	.33**	.14**	–.13	–.23**	–.31**	–.33**	–.10	–.09	.64**	–	
13. PA	.11	–.05	–.21**	.01	.21**	.12*	.16**	.28**	.24**	.21**	–.29**	–.32**	–

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

**Table 3** Summary of stepwise regression analysis for variables predicting emotional exhaustion ( $N=270$ )

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
Step 1			
Spiritual dryness	3.17	0.30	0.54*
Step 2			
Spiritual dryness	2.33	0.32	0.40*
Ministry involvement/lack of rest	-1.66	0.29	-.31*
Step 3			
Spiritual dryness	1.61	0.36	0.27*
Ministry involvement/lack of rest	-1.38	0.29	-0.26*
Rested and renewed	-1.47	0.35	-0.25*

$R^2 = .29$  for Step 1;  $\Delta R^2 = .08$  for Step 2;  $\Delta R^2 = .04$  for Step 3.

\* $p < .001$ .

non-denominational ministry overseers who had previously agreed to electronically forward the survey to their respective constituent pastors. For analysis purposes, survey question responses in nonmetric data were converted to metric variables, or “dummy variables.” All survey question responses, which included the spiritual renewal, rest-taking, and support system practices, as well as the demographic variables, were entered into an SPSS stepwise regression procedure. An intercorrelation of all study variables was performed. However because of the number of independent variables, only those at the .001 significance level were included in the correlation table. Abbreviations for the 10 independent variables ( $p < .001$ ) identified in the correlation table are found in Table 1. The correlation table is found in Table 2.

## Results

Descriptive analyses of the data distributions of the dependent and independent variables did not indicate any marked departure from normality, linearity, or homoscedasticity. Furthermore, none of the correlation coefficients between the independent variables indicated the presence of multicollinearity, as they all were below .90 (Berry 1993; Hair et al. 2005). Therefore, the multiple regression assumptions were confirmed.

Regression analysis was performed for each of the dependent variables (i.e., EE, DP, and PA). For emotional exhaustion (EE), the regression analysis identified three independent variables as significant at the  $p < .001$  level. These three independent variables included (a)

**Table 4** Summary of stepwise regression analysis for variables predicting depersonalization ( $N=270$ )

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
Step 1			
Rested and renewed	-0.90	0.16	-.33*
Step 2			
Rested and renewed	-0.66	0.17	-.25*
Ministry involvement/lack of rest	-0.51	0.15	-.21*

$R^2 = .11$  for Step 1;  $\Delta R^2 = .04$  for Step 2.

\* $p < .001$ .

**Table 5** Summary of stepwise regression analysis for variables predicting personal accomplishment ( $N=270$ )

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
Step 1			
Rested and renewed	0.97	0.21	.28*
Step 2			
Rested and renewed	0.84	0.21	.24*
Family support	0.84	0.26	.19*

$R^2 = .07$  for Step 1;  $\Delta R^2 = .04$  for Step 2.

\* $p < .001$ .

spiritual dryness, (b) ministry involvement which prevents rest, and (c) feeling rested and renewed. In step one, spiritual dryness accounted for 29% of the variance. In step two, adding ministry involvement which prevents rest indicated a  $\Delta R^2$  of .08. In step three, the addition of feeling rested and renewed reflected a  $\Delta R^2$  of .04. These three predictors proved to be significant in the model for emotional exhaustion [ $F(3,266) = 60.99$ ;  $p = .000$ ,  $< .001$ ]. Table 3 presents the results of the regression for emotional exhaustion.

For depersonalization (DP), the regression analysis identified two independent variables as significant at the  $p < .001$  level: (a) feeling rested and renewed and (b) ministry involvement which prevents rest. In step one of this model for depersonalization, feeling rested and renewed accounted for 11% of the variance, with the second step of ministry involvement which prevents rest indicating a  $\Delta R^2$  of .04. These two predictors proved to be significant in the depersonalization model [ $F(2,267) = 22.94$ ;  $p = .000$ ,  $< .001$ ]. The results of the regression for depersonalization are presented in Table 4.

For the regression for personal accomplishment, two independent variables were identified as significant at the  $p < .001$  level: (a) feeling rested and renewed and (b) family support. In step one of this model for personal accomplishment, feeling rested and renewed accounted for seven percent (7%) of the variance. In step two, adding family support indicated a  $\Delta R^2$  of .04. There was a significant effect for these two independent variables [ $F(2,267) = 16.89$ ;  $p = .000$ ,  $< .001$ ]. Of the three regression models, the regression for PA reflected the weakest predictive value. Table 5 presents the results of the regression for

**Table 6** Summary of pastoral practices contributing to the three regression models

Dependent Variable	Spiritual renewal practices	Rest-taking practices	Support system practices
Emotional exhaustion	(1) Spiritual dryness (+)	(1) Ministry involvement that prevents rest (+) (2) Feeling rested and renewed (–)	–
Depersonalization	–	(1) Feeling rested and renewed (–) (2) Ministry involvement that prevents rest (+)	–
Personal accomplishment	–	(1) Feeling rested and renewed (+)	(1) Family support (+)

Dashes indicate an absence of these pastoral practices for respective dependent variables. Positive and negative signs enclosed in parentheses indicate the relationship between dependent and independent variables.

personal accomplishment. Additionally, a summary of the pastoral practices contributing to each of the three regression models is noted in Table 6.

## Discussion

The purpose of this exploratory study was to examine the relationships between pastors' spiritual renewal, rest-taking, and support system practices and the three dimensions of burnout: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Many of the findings reinforce real-world observations and lend greater external validity to this work.

### Pastors' personal practices and emotional exhaustion

The regression model for emotional exhaustion accounted for 41% of the variance, with three predictors reflecting greatest significance ( $p < .001$ ). Spiritual dryness accounted for the greatest amount of the variance at 29% ( $p < .000$ ), followed by ministry involvement which prevents rest at 8% ( $p < .000$ ), and the feeling of being rested and renewed at 4% of the variance ( $p < .000$ ). These results were consistent with Hall's (1997) assertion that spiritual dryness is an unfortunate consequence of constant time demands and Gemignani's (2002) argument that pastors often lack a strong spiritual vision for their own formation amidst conflicting priorities. As spiritual dryness emerged as a primary predictor of emotional exhaustion, the need for ongoing spiritual renewal, not only to replenish spiritual reserves but also to reenergize emotional energy, is strategic in the prevention of pastoral burnout. As such, spiritual dryness may indicate a depletion of spiritual vitality but not necessarily indicate a lack of spirituality.

The second predictor of emotional exhaustion was ministry involvement which prevents rest. The positive relationship between ministry involvement preventing rest and emotional exhaustion empirically reinforces the prevailing literature. The less time pastors are able to rest because of ministry involvement, the more they are apt to be emotionally exhausted. The third predictor of emotional exhaustion was feeling rested and renewed. Empirically validated in this study, feeling rested and renewed minimizes emotional exhaustion and contributes to vitality, as Swenson (1992, 2002) verified.

Of the three predictors for emotional exhaustion, one predictor, spiritual dryness, was reliably and significantly linked to the spiritual dimension; whereas two predictors related to rest-taking practices, and none related to support system practices. When compared to the other two regressions performed in this study, this one relating to emotional exhaustion accounted for the greatest percentage of the variance at 41%.

### Pastors' personal practices and depersonalization

The regression model for depersonalization accounted for 15% of the variance, with two predictors reflecting the greatest significance ( $p < .001$ ). The variable for the sense of being rested and renewed ( $p = .000$ ) accounted for the greatest amount of the variance at 11% and reflected a negative relationship. Pastors who indicated feeling rested and renewed depersonalized others less than those who did not indicate feeling rested. These findings confirm the observations of Diddams et al. (2004) who argued that rest and renewal are

imperative for personal and organizational effectiveness. Additionally, these findings lend support to Maslach and Leiter's (1997) assertion that one unfortunate outcome of burnout is the fragmentation of personal relationships. When burned out, people tend to withdraw from others in a psychologically protective posture to insulate against further emotional and social demands.

### **Pastors' personal practices and personal accomplishment**

The regression model for personal accomplishment accounted for 11% of the variance, with two predictors reflecting the greatest significance ( $p < .001$ ) including (a) feeling rested and renewed and (b) family support. Feeling rested and renewed accounted for the greatest amount of the variance for the personal accomplishment model at 7% ( $p < .000$ ). Feeling rested and renewed is a function of taking time off for renewal. These findings support Lee's (2003) research, which found a negative correlation between ceasing from work and emotional exhaustion and Diddams et al.'s (2004) assertion that biblical patterns of rest contribute to personal and organizational effectiveness. Furthermore, the pastoral and support system literature (Caplan 1986; London and Wiseman 2003; Ostrander et al. 1994) verifies the importance of family support as a critical component of personal and professional integration and well-being.

### **Limitations of study**

This study has several limitations. First, the study did not measure causality. Rather, the study evaluated the relationship between the independent variables and covariates in accounting for the variance of the dependent measure of burnout in its three dimensions. Second, the survey questions relating to the spiritual, rest-taking, and support system practices of pastors were custom-designed following an in-depth survey of the respective literature. Although the researcher-designed questions did not provide a validated instrument, they set the stage for further research relative to pastoral practices and burnout. The third limitation was the inability to control for any number of confounding and unknown variables, which might have included unidentified personal, interpersonal, and church issues or crises. Fourth, since this research was predicated on a convenience sample and employed an online survey, the results may not be generalized to the overall population of all pastors but rather reflected the self-report of participants. Participants were asked to assess their personal practices over the preceding 12 months. Potentially, participants may not have accurately conveyed their actual practices but may have responded according to social desirability criteria.

### **Implications of the research**

Several implications of this research are noteworthy. First, spiritual dryness emerged as the primary predictor of emotional exhaustion, the stress dimension of burnout. Rather than any specific spiritual, rest-taking, or support system practice (i.e., praying, fasting, taking retreats, or meeting with a close friend), this finding reinforces the premise that pastors, by virtue of their calling, need to nurture an ongoing and renewing relationship with God to maintain life balance, reduce stress, and avoid burnout. According to the data analysis, no

specific single spiritual renewing practice emerged as a deterrent to burnout. Therefore, further research is suggested relative to the nature and dynamic of spiritual renewal including specific spiritual practices, their impact on individual pastors, and their short and long-term effects.

Second, feeling rested and renewed emerged as a primary predictor of depersonalization and personal accomplishment and the third predictor of emotional exhaustion. The importance of balancing pastoral activity with adequate amounts of rest and renewal cannot be overstated. However in the future, assessing the quality of rest-taking experiences, rather than their frequency and duration, could provide valuable information for pastoral burnout prevention. Third, ministry involvement which prevents rest ranked as the second predictor for emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. With the stresses of ministry, the need to keep pastors' schedules flexible enough to prevent overload, to make room for personal renewal, and to allow for unexpected crises is understandably challenging. However, this finding confirms the importance of providing healthy boundaries within the context of ministry activity in order to promote positive self-care and ample opportunity for rest and renewal (London and Wiseman 2003). Fourth, with the exception of family support, none of the support system items emerged as predictors in any of the three regression models. This unexpected finding begs the question as to the presence and quality of participants' support system practices. Further research into the presence, quality, and impact of support systems is recommended.

Fifth, since pastors are traditionally trained in Bible schools and seminaries, how pastoral training centers can assist their candidates to develop healthy personal practices is a crucial curricular consideration. Greater emphasis on holistic self-care within educational and training contexts will contribute to personal self-care, foster positive engagement with self, church, family and others, and proactively minimize burnout (Wuellner 1998). With estimates of pastors in the U.S. exiting ministry at a rate of 1,500 per month (London and Wiseman 2003), further research addressing causes of premature departure from ministry leadership and effective interventions contributing to life balance, well-being, and overall health would not only further the research but also contribute to the organizational stability of the churches, which pastors oversee.

In conclusion, burnout is a progressively debilitating problem and continues to be a pastoral liability. Despite its profound implications for pastoral effectiveness, job satisfaction, longevity, and training curricula, research on the relationships between pastoral practices and dispositions toward job engagement and burnout remains in its infancy. Further empirical inquiry is imperative to expand the theoretical foundations for pastoral health and vitality. With the pastoral role so integrally pivotal to the well-being of congregations and the community as a whole, it is hoped that this and future studies will contribute to the identification and development of practices of positive self-care to assist pastors remain in their spiritual and leadership roles throughout the full duration of their vocational calling.

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