



Satan attacks a pastor in various ways. Sometimes he tempts him to gross and scandalous sins. However, sometimes the devil sneaks in quietly. He distracts us from what is most important. He twists one good activity into an excuse to neglect another duty. He subtly appeals to our pride to make us act as if we have no needs or limitations. Al Martin's book exposes these dangers, and is eminently helpful to preserve a pastor for long-term service to the glory of God. I heartily recommend it for men aspiring to ministry, for men in ministry, and for all those who love them.

—Joel R. Beeke, President, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary,
Grand Rapids, Michigan

I have never met Al Martin in the flesh. Yet, if I were to name ten men whose lives and ministries have been anchors for me in the midst of the tumultuous spiritual storms of pastoral ministry in Africa, his name would certainly feature prominently on that list. Partly, this is because at a formative stage in my ministry I came across his messages on "Ministerial Backsliding and Burnout". So, I am delighted to know that these messages are being given a fresh lease of life through this book and being made available to a new generation of ministers. For sure, I owe an incalculable debt to the truths contained in these pages.

—Conrad Mbewe, Pastor of Kabwata Baptist Church, Lusaka, Zambia

Pastor Martin has been lifting me up from day one of my ministry when the first thing I did was start listening to his lectures on pastoral ministry. Since then, God has repeatedly and mightily used that practical counsel in my life to prevent backsliding and credibility washout. The one time in my life I did come close to burnout was because I had briefly and stupidly ignored his tried and tested practical advice, something I quickly rectified. I'm so thankful that Pastor Martin's years of pastoral experience and wisdom are now being made available to the church in this wonderful book. I believe it will save many ministries and spare many families and churches the grief of burned-out, knocked-out, and washed-out pastors.

—David Murray, Professor of Old Testament and Practical Theology,
Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan

This is an honest, incisive, and realistic treatment of the subject of ministerial burnout. There is a most helpful mixture here of spiritual insight and commonsense, and the result should be of benefit to all pastors in Christ's flock, and ultimately to the flock itself. Ministerial burnout has reached epidemic proportions in many parts of the world, and this work could be much used to alleviate that situation. The eight specific warnings are all well-handled from Scripture, history, and pastoral experience. May it do much good!

—Peter Barnes, Author, lecturer, Revesby Presbyterian Church, Revesby,
New South Wales, Australia





We are thankful to have in these pages the wisdom and experience of a preacher to whom so many of us are indebted.

—Iain Murray, Co-founder of Banner of Truth, Edinburgh, Scotland

How thrilling was Albert Martin's arrival on the scene in England in the late 60s. He seemed to have taken all that was the very best of evangelical preaching from the Puritans, and the preachers of the Evangelical Awakening, from M'Cheyne in Scotland and from Princeton in New Jersey, from Ryle and Spurgeon, from reading of John Murray's book *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied*, and he mined all this rich seam of experiential Calvinism and he brought out jewels. He preached to the mind, affections and consciences of his hearers and impacted them so that in the succeeding years as he returned to our conferences the numbers increased. God's blessing was on him and on us. What we experienced in England was also replicated in the USA. Now in retirement from the pastorate this substantial work has appeared. It is on a theme familiar enough to the Puritans, on ministerial credibility and backsliding. How discerning and searching our fathers were in analysing the marks of such declension and the means of ministerial revival. May this be the first of a number of books to come from Albert Martin to the good of the whole church, especially its servants the preachers.

—Geoff Thomas, Pastor, Alfred Place Baptist Church, Aberystwyth, Wales

Quite a few books are being written today to benefit pastors in their ministries. Not many however seem to help practically in or from times of personal failure. Such is the goal of Al Martin's *You Lift Me Up: Overcoming ministry challenges*.

The author brings to this volume a lifetime of Christian ministry, studious preparation and experience in teaching pastors. He brings warnings and solutions to such problems as when men neglect their devotional lives or family responsibilities, wander from a good conscience or from real fellowship with their people. Balanced help is offered against opposing dangers: being over-devoted to perceived pastoral needs or focusing only on sermon preparation. Ministers are not to work at hiding their real humanity from those among whom the Lord has placed them, nor, on the other hand, to allow over-eating and lack of exercise to demonstrate their undisciplined behaviour!

Al Martin has two main audiences here, from whom few pastors are excluded: men who need to correct themselves and be restored – and those who may be helped to avoid such mistakes. May this book transform and help to sustain many of us.

—Ted Donnelly, Principal, Reformed Theological College, Belfast, Northern Ireland



You Lift Me Up

Overcoming ministry challenges



ALBERT N. MARTIN

MENTOR



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INTRODUCTION

A Brief Account of This Material's Present Form



At the 1990 pastors' conference of Trinity Baptist Church in Montville, New Jersey, I was privileged to speak at six plenary sessions. My chosen theme was 'Warnings Against Ministerial Backsliding and Burnout'. During the conference many of the men testified to the unusual benefit which they received from those messages.

Since then others have indicated to me that the recordings of those messages have continued to be useful. Some of those encouragements came in the form of urgings to put the matter into print. Those urgings, along with my growing personal conviction that there is a great need for these truths, led to this book. Some of the very men who attended that 1990 conference are now shameful and tragic monuments of the wreckage which often follows ministerial backsliding and burnout.



YOU LIFT ME UP

In converting the original lectures into printed form, I have sought to maintain the ethos of direct address, a crucial element in effective preaching. While working on the manuscript I have tried to picture a group of godly pastors sitting before me, eager to recognize in themselves the signs of ministerial backsliding or burnout, and equally eager to apply the biblical and practical remedies to these twin conditions.

While reworking the material I realized that the final warning moves into a third area of concern. I have called this concern ‘credibility washout.’ When the reader comes to the last two chapters containing the eighth warning, the intended sense of the phrase ‘credibility washout’ will become clear.

These lectures were delivered under the title *Ministerial Backsliding, Burnout – Symptoms, Causes, And Cures*. In preparing the original manuscript from the transcribed lectures, I used that title as the framework for this book. My editors at Christian Focus and I found that the present title, *You Lift Me Up*, more concisely embodies the contents and encourages the pastor in ministry. Given that it would have been quite difficult to go back and rework the material to make it more consistent with the new title or to omit from the text all references to the old title, I hope that this explanation will assist the reader in answering any questions growing out of any perceived disparity between this book’s title and its contents.

Prayers offered before and after the lectures are reproduced with minor editorial changes. I trust they will in some measure echo the disposition with which the reader approaches the material and confirm the response of each reader to the things contained in the lectures. Some of the original prayers were not recorded and are therefore omitted.

For some these pages, with God’s blessing, will prove corrective and restorative. For others they may prove preventive. In either case I send them forth with the prayer that the Great Shepherd of the sheep will use them to help many of His under-shepherds.

Albert N. Martin
Jenison, Michigan 2012



ONE

What Is Ministerial Backsliding and Burnout?



My initial task will be to define the terms of our title, ‘ministerial backsliding and burnout’. First, what do I mean by the words ‘ministerial backsliding’? In using these words I am referring to several aspects of spiritual experience. First of all, I am referring to that erosion of spiritual reality, spiritual vigor and spiritual growth which can overtake a man of God, often imperceptibly, even in the midst of the most active and externally-faithful ministerial labors. I am alluding to a declension which is manifested, not immediately in the pulpit, but rather in the prayer closet. It is a declension which may not be discerned at all in the substance of a man’s teaching and preaching, but in the degree to which the fire and passion of the truths he conveys to others have lost much of their felt impression upon his own heart. In the deep chambers of his heart,



YOU LIFT ME UP

in the quiet moments of honest self-examination, the haunting awareness of his condition stabs his conscience. His ministerial backsliding becomes a gnawing irritation of the soul, constantly reminding the man that all is not now as it once was between himself and his God.

Ministerial backsliding also describes that condition which prevails when a man of God has declined in his grace-motivated, Spirit-enabled, scrupulous obedience to the revealed will of God. Jesus said, 'Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him' (John 14:21). When love burns toward the Savior a sincere passion to render obedience to all of His precepts is our desire, our delight and our holy obsession. When a man begins to pick and choose which commands he will obey so that the honest pursuit of what the old writers called 'universal obedience' is no longer his holy obsession, he has entered a backslidden state. A spiritually-healthy man can say with the psalmist, 'Therefore I consider all your precepts to be right; I hate every false way' (Ps. 119:128). He can also pray from the heart these words of the psalmist: 'Oh that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes! Then I shall not be put to shame, having my eyes fixed on all your commandments' (Ps. 119:5-6).

This backsliding may eventually come to expression in the outcropping of specific forms of carnality. Laziness, self-indulgence, peevishness and a host of other sins which, while not quite scandalous, begin to manifest themselves and deeply affect a man's usefulness as he lives and labors among his family and his flock. By ministerial backsliding I mean a condition in which we reflect the opposite of that which the apostle Paul enjoined upon his spiritual son Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:15: 'Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, *so that all may see your progress.*'

Second, what about the phrase 'ministerial burnout'? You may say, 'I have read my Bible through 40 times and have never





What is Ministerial Backsliding and Burnout?

encountered the term “ministerial burnout.” Since strictly speaking it is not a biblical term, I ought to supply a precise definition of my intended meaning. I am referring to a gradual erosion of one’s mental, emotional, psychological, and physical resiliency and buoyancy which begins to hang like an ominous dark cloud over the entirety of one’s life and ministry. Like ministerial backsliding, this condition can overtake us in the context of a very active and faithful ministry. I am not referring to the inevitable declension in physical and mental strength which may be part of the normal aging process – that which the apostle Paul designated as the ‘wasting away’ of our outer nature (2 Cor. 4:16).

Rather, ministerial burnout has overtaken us when our mental activities are not occasionally dull and sluggish, but chronically and overwhelmingly dull and sluggish. We are afflicted with this condition when serious and concentrated study becomes a crushing and galling burden. When the appointed hour comes to engage in the labor of serious exegetical spadework, instead of coming to that task with mental alacrity and spiritual excitement, we find ourselves under necessity to whip ourselves to the desk. We also find that we must whip ourselves while engaged in the task itself. When we leave our desks, we are further whipped by a condemning conscience. Even though we have the privilege of rooting around in the Word of God – and the benefit of being paid for our labors – we feel that we are miserable wretches because we have come to consider this privileged labor a wearisome burden.

Further, by ministerial burnout I am referring to that mental condition in which the particularly inventive and creative elements of sermon preparation such as organization, illustration, application, and imagery, seem to elude our powers. When we attempt to fix our minds on a mass of exegetical and homiletical material that desperately needs sorting and putting into acceptable rhetorical categories, we are powerless to discern one brick of thought from another, to decide the right pile for any given brick, and then how to build all those





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raw materials into a well-constructed sermon. At times we may even come perilously close to taking all the results of our labors, now embedded in our study notes, and sweep them off our desks and onto the floor saying to ourselves that there must be a more suitable way to serve God and to make an honest living! My dear reader, I have been in that condition more than once.

Furthermore, in identifying the nature of ministerial burnout, I am referring to that condition in which we lose most of our ability to feel deeply concerning the great realities in which we constantly traffic. The emotions which ought naturally to accompany us in the secret place and in our public and private ministries to the people of God seem almost neutered.

At another level ministerial burnout refers to our condition when physical energy and resiliency have left us, and so that even one additional or unusual demand may leave us in a heap for days. Or, from a legitimate sense of self-preservation, we may avoid opportunities to do good because we dread the subsequent weariness and weakness that will surely come on the heels of taking on that additional burden. Can you as a pastor and a preacher relate to anything I have said in describing ministerial backsliding and burnout?

Let me add a word of qualification. By these definitions and descriptions I am not in any way implying that there are not divinely-appointed seasons in our lives and ministries in which there will be a different range of spiritual, emotional, intellectual and even physical vigor as part of the ebb and flow of normal Christian experience. There are indeed sovereignly-imposed periods of spiritual desertion and sovereignly-imposed seasons of spiritual discipline that may find expression in physical and mental weakness or in emotional dullness (see Isa. 50:10-11; Ps.56-57; 88). However, what I am saying is that as an ordinary rule the servants of God ought not to be carrying on their ministries in a prevailing state of ministerial backsliding or ministerial burnout as I have described them. The norm of our lives and ministries should be a fulfillment of





What is Ministerial Backsliding and Burnout?

that which is beautifully expressed in Psalm 92:12-15 where God promises, ‘The righteous flourish like the palm tree and grow like a cedar in Lebanon. They are planted in the house of the LORD; they flourish in the courts of our God. They still bear fruit in old age; they are ever full of sap and green, to declare that the LORD is upright; he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.’

With advancing years many men become brittle and sapless. Rather than becoming the epitome of ripened godliness, spiritual vigor and ministerial energy, they become like dried trees – half dead, with autumn leaves barely hanging upon them and with very little fruitfulness. With promises like Psalm 92 to encourage us, why should we accept ministerial backsliding or burnout as a tolerable norm?

Now that I have defined and described what I mean by the terms ministerial backsliding and burnout, it is my purpose to set before you eight specific warnings relative to these two conditions. The first three focus primarily upon ministerial backsliding. The fourth is a transition concern that applies to both conditions. The last four focus primarily upon ministerial burnout. The final warning also moves into the area that I have chosen to call ‘credibility washout’. I will define that term when it is first used in connection with the final warning. While there is some overlapping and interpenetration of these things, each of the warnings is distinct enough to warrant a separate treatment.



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