

5 Reasons Many Church Leaders are Workaholics – and a First Step toward Addressing the Issue

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I write this post as a confession and a request for prayer.

I'm a workaholic. I work in some capacity for three different organizations, and I preach or teach almost weekly in different places around North America. I'm busy.

At the age of 64, though, I'm evaluating my life. I want to serve well until the Lord calls me home, but I don't want to wear out early. I need the Lord's wisdom. My first step, though, is to be honest about why I—and perhaps you, too—lean toward workaholism.

I'm an idolater. Okay, so I'm getting the tough reason out of the way at the start. Separating “I'm working hard because I love God” from “I'm working hard because work is my God” isn't always easy for me. When I find my value in my work (see the next point below), I've distanced my reason for being away from simply loving and honouring God. That's idolatry.

I sometimes find my value in what I accomplish. I suspect that tendency goes all the way back to kindergarten where I learned I would get affirmation if I did well in school. Having grown up in a chaotic home where such affirmation was unintentionally scarce, I looked for it elsewhere. Today, I sometimes find it in ministry.

Ministry is about eternal matters. Frankly, the issue of workaholism has become more of an issue for me as I get older—simply because of the urgent nature of the gospel. What we do has eternal ramifications as we share the gospel with non-believers, disciple new believers, shepherd other believers, and plant healthy churches. It's tough to take a break when so much is at stake.

Ministry is itself non-ending. I admit that I could do a better job at scheduling and saying “no,” but the nature of ministry is that there is no stopping point. Always there are more people to reach, more sermons to prepare, more church members to guide, more weddings and funerals to come. To take a break seems (although it’s not the case) almost ungodly.

I’m still learning to rest in God with silence and solitude. These combined disciplines are difficult for me, even though I’m a heavy-duty introvert. I have to be intentional about scheduling these times to simply sit still and be with God. In fact, I’ve written about my personal commitment this week regarding silence and solitude, and I invite you to join me.

Here’s my first step in tackling my workaholism at this point in my life: ask prayer warriors to pray intentionally for me that I will (1) work hard out of love for God and people; (2) work hard while also letting go of my need for achievement and recognition; and (3) hear again the Lord’s clear command that I must get physical rest to best experience spiritual rest in Him. Would you whisper that prayer for me today?

And, let us know if you’d like our Church Answers family to pray for you.