

Pastors report struggling with time management

April 18, 2022

NASHVILLE, Tenn.—As pastors think about their greatest needs, many worry about their time management skills and how they can balance all the responsibilities they have at church and at home.

In their personal lives, half of U.S. Protestant pastors say they need to focus on time management, and more than half say avoiding over-commitment is a challenge for them, according to the latest release in the [Greatest Needs of Pastors study](#) from Lifeway Research.

“Pastors carry heavy burdens that include expectations of others as well as self-imposed demands,” said Ben Mandrell, president and CEO of Lifeway Christian Resources, “There is a correlation between trusting in God—as explored in a previous release of the Greatest Needs of Pastors study—and ability to find work-life balance.”

To determine the greatest needs facing U.S. Protestant pastors today, Lifeway Research interviewed 200 pastors who identified 44 issues they face in their roles. A thousand additional pastors were surveyed to determine which needs were most prevalent.

All the unique needs were divided into seven categories: ministry difficulties, spiritual needs, mental challenges, personal life, self-care, people dynamics and areas of skill development.

Balancing work and home

Considering all these categories, 6 percent of pastors say their personal

lives are currently the most challenging area for them or require the most attention. Six needs are classified as aspects of a pastor's personal life.

The primary needs pastors face in their personal lives focus on how they handle their time and work. Half (51 percent) say time management is an aspect that needs attention or investment today, while 43 percent specifically point to developing a balance between work and home.

Fewer U.S. Protestant pastors say they need to devote additional attention directly to their children (29 percent), marriages (26 percent), caring for aging parents (23 percent) or financial stress (18 percent). Close to 1 in 6 (17 percent) say none of these are areas in need of specific investment.

"Pastors were not being asked if these areas of personal life matter. They were asked to indicate those areas that need additional focus today," said Scott McConnell, executive director of Lifeway Research.

"Nowhere is it more likely than personal life, for a need to emerge for a pastor because they are giving attention elsewhere. There are only so many hours to split between work and home, and finding the right balance is important."

Younger pastors, those between 18 and 44, are among those most likely to say they need to give attention to time management (58 percent) and their work/home balance (52 percent). They're also among those most likely to say they need to invest specifically in their children (45 percent) and marriages (32 percent).

Pastors of more normative sized churches are among the most likely to say financial stress is an area of concern for them. Those leading churches of fewer than 50 (21 percent) and those with congregations of 50-99 (20 percent) are more likely than those at churches with attendance of 100-249 (14 percent) to say their personal financial situations require attention.

Managing time wisely

When asked to narrow down the single greatest need in their personal lives, 30 percent of U.S. Protestant pastors say time management, and 21 percent say balance between work and home.

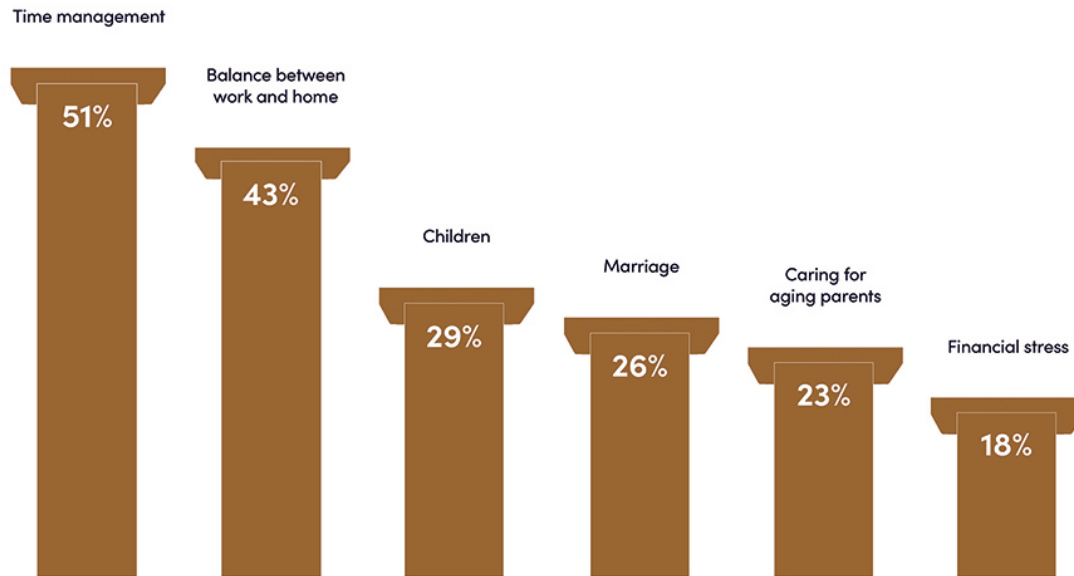
Fewer than 1 in 10 point to children (9 percent), caring for aging parents (9 percent), marriage (8 percent) or financial stress (6 percent). Another 18 percent either say none of these or they aren't sure.

Pastors of churches with fewer than 50 in attendance are the most likely to say they most need to give attention to time management (39 percent) and least likely to say balance between work and home (14 percent).

When pastors are asked to narrow down all their needs to their single greatest need, 20 needs are chosen by more than 1 percent of pastors, including time management (3 percent) and balance between work and home (2 percent).

What aspects of their personal life do pastors say need attention today?

Among U.S. Protestant pastors



Notes: Pastors were asked: "Which of the following aspects of your personal life as a pastor need attention or investment today? (Select all that apply.)" 17% say none of these.

Lifeway **research**

Source: Lifeway Research phone survey of 1,000 U.S. Protestant pastors conducted March 30-April 22, 2021

Self-care often neglected

Pastors, who make a career of caring for the needs of others, admit they often need to give attention to caring for themselves. Nine in 10 U.S. Protestant pastors point to at least one area in the self-care category as a need for them, and 14 percent say the category of self-care is the most challenging personally.

More than half of pastors say they find consistently exercising (59 percent) and avoiding over-commitment and overwork (55 percent) to be challenging in their ministry. Slightly less than half say they struggle with eating right (49 percent), taking time away from their job for hobbies or other interests (47 percent) and consistently resting (45 percent).

Far fewer say they face an ongoing illness (13 percent), while 10 percent say none of these is an area of difficulty.

“While most pastors are quick to say they have several challenges in caring for themselves, they are also quick to prioritize ministry needs ahead of their own,” McConnell said. “Among categories that need attention today, almost two-thirds of pastors put skills, people or ministry difficulties ahead of their own self-care. Constantly working from a physical deficit is not a sustainable formula for pastoral ministry.”

Pastors of churches with worship service attendance between 100-249 (57 percent) and those with 250 or more (60 percent) are more likely than pastors of churches with fewer than 50 in attendance (48 percent) to say they find avoiding over-commitment and overwork to be a challenge for them.

Those 55 and older (17 percent) are more likely than younger pastors to say they are facing an ongoing illness.

African American pastors (63 percent) are more likely than white pastors (42 percent) to say consistently resting is a self-care area of need for them. The same is true for pastors 44 and younger (50 percent), compared to pastors 65 and older (37 percent).

When asked what self-care need is the most challenging for them, a quarter of U.S. Protestant pastors point to avoiding over-commitment and overwork (24 percent) and consistently exercising (24 percent).

Fewer mention eating right (14 percent), taking time for hobbies (13 percent), consistently resting (9 percent) or facing an ongoing illness (5 percent). Around 1 in 10 pastors (11 percent) say they aren’t sure or none of these issues are the most challenging for them.

Younger pastors and those at larger churches are among the most likely to

identify avoiding over-commitment and overwork as the top self-care need they face. Those 44 and younger (30 percent) are more likely than those 65 and older (17 percent) to single out overworking.

Similarly, pastors of churches with attendance of 250 or more (35 percent) and 100-249 (28 percent) are more likely than those with congregations of 50-99 (19 percent) or those with fewer than 50 (20 percent) to say avoiding over-commitment is their greatest self-care need.

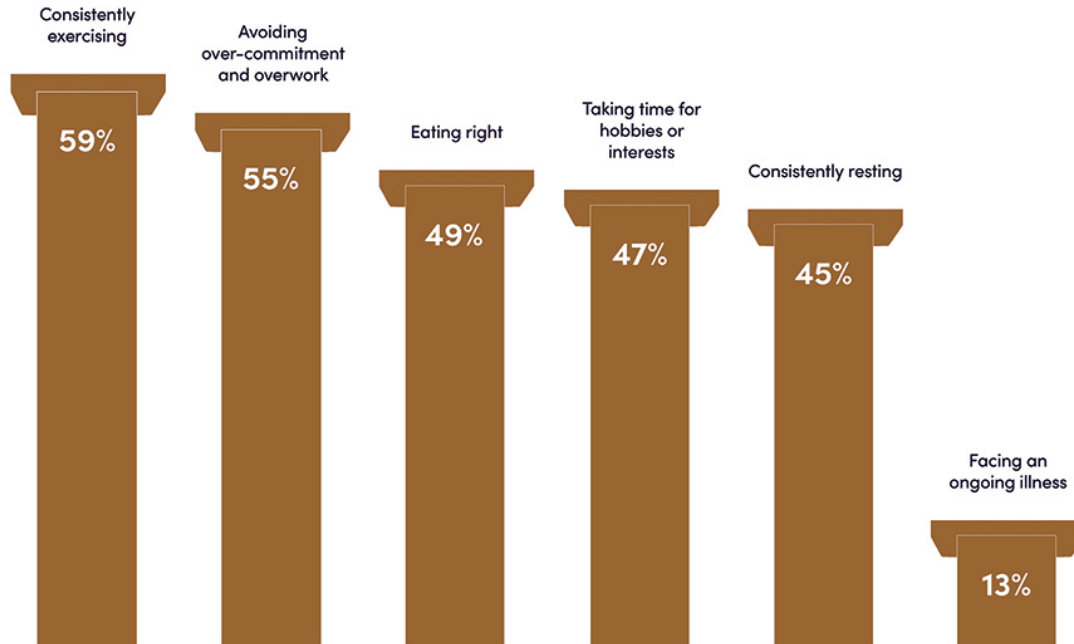
Compared to all the needs identified by pastors, consistency exercising (4 percent), avoiding over-commitment (3 percent), facing an ongoing illness (2 percent) and eating right (2 percent) are among the 20 issues more than 1 percent of pastors identified as their single greatest need to address.

When thinking about improving their personal lives and self-care, Mandrell said, pastors should focus on their own humanity and rely on God to accomplish the work of the ministry.

“We are human beings, not human doings,” he said. “By choosing to ‘be’ and let God ‘do,’ pastors can display his strength in their weakness—and be an encouragement to the people they serve.”

What aspects of self-care do pastors say they find challenging in their ministry?

Among U.S. Protestant pastors



Notes: Pastors were asked to: "Please select all the aspects of self-care that you find challenging in your ministry as a pastor. (Select all that apply.)" 10% say none of these.

Lifewayresearch

Source: Lifeway Research phone survey of 1,000 U.S. Protestant pastors conducted March 30-April 22, 2021

The phone survey of 1,000 Protestant pastors was conducted March 30 to April 22, 2021. Each survey was completed by the senior or sole pastor or a minister at the church. Responses were weighted by region and church size to reflect the population more accurately. The completed sample is 1,000 surveys, providing 95 percent confidence the sampling error does not exceed plus or minus 3.1 percent. Margins of error are higher in sub-groups.