

# **Pastors detail areas they believe most need improvement**

ASHVILLE (BP) – Many pastors worry about their time management skills and how they can balance all the responsibilities they have at church and at home. 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, a division of LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention in Nashville.

“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 and a former longtime pastor himself. “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.”

## **Pastors’ personal lives**

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.

Considering all these categories, six percent of surveyed 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 say time management is an aspect that needs attention or investment today, while 43% 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%), marriages (26%), caring for aging parents (23%) or financial stress (18%). Seventeen 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 ages 18-44, are among those most likely to say they need to give attention to time management (58%) and their work/home balance (52%). They’re also among those most likely to say they need to invest specifically in their children (45%) and marriages (32%).

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

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

percent say caring for aging parents, marriage (eight percent) or financial stress (six percent). Another 18% either say none of these or they aren't sure.

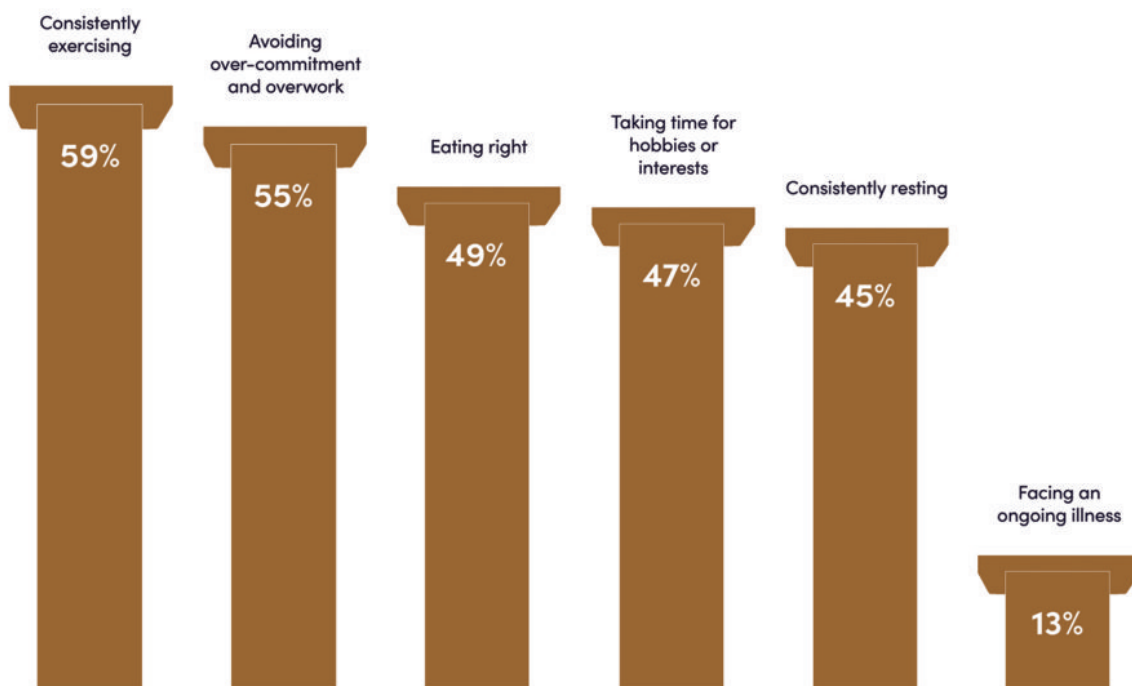
Pastors of churches with fewer than 50 in attendance are the most likely to say they most need to give attention to time management (39%) and least likely to say balance between work and home (14%).

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

The Greatest Needs of Pastors

## 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.

Lifeway research

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

## Self-care

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% say the category of self-care is the most challenging personally.

Fifty-nine percent of pastors say they find consistently exercising, and avoiding over-commitment and overwork (55%), to be challenging in their ministry. Forty-nine percent say they struggle with eating right, taking time away from their job for hobbies or other interests (47%) and consistently resting (45%). Far fewer say they face an ongoing illness (13%), while 10% 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%) and those with 250 or more (60%) are more likely than pastors of churches with fewer than 50 in attendance (48%) to say they find avoiding over-commitment and overwork to be a challenge for them.

Those age 55 and older (17%) are more likely than younger pastors to say they are facing an ongoing illness. African American pastors (63%) are more likely than white pastors (42%) to say consistently resting is a self-care area of need from them. The same is true for pastors age 44 and younger (50%) compared to pastors age 65 and older (37%).

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. Fewer mention eating right (14%), taking time for hobbies (13%), consistently resting (nine percent) or facing

an ongoing illness (five percent). Eleven 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 age 44 and younger (30%) are more likely than those age 65 and older (17%) to single out overworking. Similarly, those pastoring churches with attendance of 250 or more (35%) and 100-249 (28%) are more likely than those with congregations of 50-99 (19%) or those with fewer than 50 (20% ) to say avoiding over-commitment is their greatest self-care need.

Compared to all the needs identified by pastors, consistently exercising (four percent), avoiding over-commitment (three percent), facing an ongoing illness (two percent) and eating right (two percent) are among the 20 issues more than one percent of pastors identified as their single greatest need to address.

Mandrell said when thinking about improving their personal lives and self-care, 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."

For more information, view the complete report and visit [LifewayResearch.com/GreatestNeeds](http://LifewayResearch.com/GreatestNeeds).