

Here's the challenge though: our resolve will never last if our motivation is external.

It's so easy to pick on the early disciples for their external ambitions. They thought that Jesus had come to militarily usher in an earthly kingdom. They wanted to sit at his left and his right. They literally argued about who was the greatest. More than once, they drew the comment, "Are you so dull?" from their Savior. That's basically a first century facepalm from the Lord of Lords. And we're dull, too.

At least, we are naturally given to thinking in earthly ways. We love to build stuff that we can see, and that is a recipe for burnout. Jesus came to build a largely unseen spiritual kingdom, but his followers struggled to see past the physical.

At one point, after being sent out on a practice mission with virtually nothing to sustain them, the disciples returned feeling victorious. And Jesus shared in their rejoicing. It was a victory! But he also warned them, "...Do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:20). The disciples were all wrapped up in their outer accomplishments. They were charged up by their new-found invincibility. Yet Jesus knew that couldn't sustain them. He knew they would face some discouraging lows and wanted to arm them with something that would get them through to the end — the knowledge of their relationship with God and gracious standing before him.

Where does your hope live? Is it in your ability to serve, contribute, and sacrifice? Do your dreams depend on winning the world in one generation? Does your faith require external

goal attainment to fuel it? Consider that true faith is based on what cannot be seen. That's the point Hebrews 11 makes abundantly clear. When we place our hope on what we can see and do and accomplish, we are on shaky ground indeed.

God deeply impressed this lesson on Paul by taking him to the brink of death. In 2 Corinthians 1, the abnormally-born apostle faced an unbelievable amount of pressure. He said that his stress was so extreme, in fact, that at one point he literally wanted to die. Scholars differ on what precisely was happening to Paul and his crew that was so agonizing, but one thing is clear: the externals were pretty rough, and they were suffering badly. Their capacities had been completely overwhelmed. There was nothing they could do to fix this problem by their own power, but that was just the point.

Many of us have to contend with the fact that no matter how hard we work, we can't fix the state of the church. We cannot solve the problems of the world. These are God-sized problems and that is by design. The amazing thing about this? It's where Paul's secret really comes to life. 2 Corinthians 1:9-10.

When we set our hope on ourselves or on the attainment of earthly goals (even ones that sound spiritual!), we set ourselves up for disappointment, burnout, or worse. When Christ fuels us and when our hope in the resurrection moves us and when the knowledge that our names are written in the Book of Life inspires us, we become unstoppable. Not us, but God living in us.

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Healing Spiritual Burnout: Putting Paul's Biblical Secret Into Action

December 12, 2025 • Dr. Sean St. Jean – Vancouver, Canada

I remember the day I crashed. After years of working in the child protective system, something finally broke inside me. I asked myself, "Why am I working for CPS? All of my effort doesn't even put a dent in the problems I see." At that time, I had a caseload above 50 clients, I was conducting countless risk assessments for child abuse and neglect, and I was working with an endless stream of children who had been traumatized in their homes. I would lie awake at night and on weekends dwelling on the kids. Will they be safe this week? Will all of my working and planning and checking spare them from the worst possible thing? And then it hit me — the fundamental truth that led to my eventual exit from the field. In a moment of clarity, I realized that while I might be able to protect a child's body, there was nothing I could do to protect their hearts from being decimated by trauma. And at that moment, I was done.

You might be asking, "What does this guy's work have to do with spiritual burnout?" Let's back up a bit. In my doctoral research, I explored the meaning of occupational burnout and its effects on helping professionals. What I learned was that burnout isn't just exhaustion from overwork. What really fuels it is a profound sense of futility and pointlessness. Burnout comes when a person begins to suspect that their work is for nothing.

Do you see the parallels with church life? Historically, we had big dreams as a family of churches. If the phrases "one suitcase challenge" or "go anywhere, do anything, give up everything for God" strike a chord within you, then you likely come from an era when as a church we thought we were taking over the world! Mission teams were going out weekly. Young faith was contagious. I remember watching the growth charts and thinking, "This is really happening!"

But then the growth charts started to level off. The exponential growth promised in the discipleship study began to stall out. And since then, it's been a bit of a rocky road. In my therapy practice, many clients within our family of churches have expressed that they are mourning the loss of a dream. Many are disillusioned. And many are still putting in a valiant effort of service, contribution, and sacrifice in the name of helping the church to grow.



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Broward Church Singles NYE Party
December 31, 2025
Plantation, FL, USA

Teleios Conference
February 26-28, 2026
San Antonio, TX, USA

Marriage Retreat Cruise
April 4-11, 2026
San Diego, CA, USA

Church Builders Conference
April 23-26, 2026
Boston, MA, USA

Marriage Retreat Cruise
May 2-9, 2026
Fort Lauderdale, FL, USA

DT Travel in Bali 2026
May 2–10, 2026

DT Travel 2026 Mediterranean Cruise: Footsteps of Paul
September 12–22, 2026

Conferencia de Las Americas
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
Oct 15-18, 2026

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