

Harvest Time Burnout

From the Field to the Farmhouse

In the fall of each year, by God's faithfulness, as the leaves begin to change, so do the lives of our farming families. Harvest time is a time of excitement and appreciation as the fruits of much labor are gathered in. This is also a time of increased work and stress. Farm life is so closely interwoven with family life, and the difficult decisions that must be made have an effect on everyone. For example, a sudden need to repair or purchase a piece of equipment can mean there will be no new refrigerator in the home. As the harvest goes on, these continued stressors can build, and if unchecked, can lead to harvest time burnout.

There are many factors that can affect how smoothly the harvest season goes. Fluctuating weather conditions, market prices and volatility, machinery breakdown, combined with long work hours, can lead to burnout. Although working together can be a blessing, being with family and co-workers for an extended harvest season can also cause tension. Similarly, back at home, a wife and mother can feel increased pressure to maintain family and home life, while balancing the needs of supporting her children, husband and the workers in the field. Those spouses that have not been in farming families prior to marriage may have an especially difficult time adjusting to this way of life. This strain on marriages and relationships can often make each person involved feel like they are going through it alone. Individuals may suffer from loneliness, anxiety, uncertainty, and feeling neglected or underappreciated.

Burnout is a state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion due to excessive and prolonged stress. Burnout is seen in many occupations and situations, when people are exposed to constant demands for too long of a period of time. It often can manifest with physical symptoms such as headaches, muscle aches, difficulty sleeping, poor eating habits and extreme fatigue. Mental strain is also seen, such as increased frustration, irritability, impatience, forgetfulness, and withdrawing from others. It is important to recognize these physical and mental signs in ourselves and others so that we can identify burnout, and seek appropriate help.

Admitting you are suffering, and then seeking and accepting help can be difficult to do. Yet, we are instructed in 1 Peter 5:7 to first turn to God in trying times, "*Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you.*" We are also given support people in our lives to turn to when the burden is too heavy to carry alone. Your spouse, family members and friends can often be a listening ear and a helping hand to get you through. With God's help, the support of others, and by intentionally changing our mindset and behaviors, burnout can be lessened and healthy conditions can be maintained or restored.



Continued on next page.



Take-Away Tips for Preventing and Treating Burnout

- Focus on listening to others and seek to understand them
- Think and speak positively while avoiding accusatory words or tone of voice
- Appreciate other's role and responsibilities, and see the positive intent in their actions
- Intentionally look for opportunities to be grateful each day, and share this gratitude with others
- Stay in close communication with your spouse
- Set clear and realistic expectations
- Be present in the moment when you do have time with loved ones
- Focus on what you can control, and accept what stressors that are out of your control
- Live healthy: eat a balanced diet, drink plenty of fluids, and avoid excessive amounts of caffeine

