



EXCERPT



Don't Blow Up Your Ministry ***Defuse the Underlying Issues That Take Pastors Down***

November 2, 2021 | \$18, 240 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-4168-4

There's a ticking time bomb in your ministry. Is it you? With vivid pictures of both self-destructive patterns and reconstructive grace, counselor Michael MacKenzie helps pastors avert moral failures and repair shipwrecked ministries. Addressing issues like shame, burnout, sexual misconduct, and more, this resource will help you become both the pastor and the person God intends you to be.

Why Does a Pastor Need Help?

Pastor Josh is a gifted leader. God gave him the gifts of wisdom, vision, and compassion, perhaps the gifting trifecta for ministry leaders. People were drawn to him and most felt like he ministered to them with great doses of grace and truth.

The problem was that Josh was becoming hollow inside. For many years Josh had this vague sense of shame. In his twenties and thirties, he would power through it by performance. If he sensed feelings of inadequacy or caught himself rehearsing negative messages, then he would take that anxious energy and refocus it on doing better. It seemed to be a great system for which he received a lot of outside affirmation, but no one knew what was fueling his drive on the inside. Everyone made the assumption that his driven-ness was Spirit led, not realizing much of it was the product of shame. Josh not only let people think this but actively presented it as his cover.

Several situations came together to set up the perfect storm for Josh's shipwreck. First, the church he was leading began to grow quickly and Josh was taking on more and more administrative and managerial roles. He struggled to delegate well and was becoming critical of staff—wanting them to do things like he would do things. Second, Josh's teenage daughter was rebelling. Not rebelling in some little way but in every way. Being the pastor of a conservative church in a medium-sized town made this embarrassing for him. Third, his marriage to Kate was growing increasingly cold and tense. Her voice said it had to do with the amount of time he spent in ministry and the lack of time with her. But those words were a distant echo compared to the sirens of shoulds pounding in his ears from the pressing needs of ministry.

Josh poured more and more into his ministry but was feeling more and more depleted and numb. He became increasingly irritated with people and found himself stewing and chewing on the slightest of criticisms, perceived or otherwise. He initially began filling his evening schedule with meetings in order to keep up with the growing demands of the church, but he partially did it to avoid going home. When he was at home it seemed like every conversation turned into an argument with his wife or kids. And while he didn't want to, he would end up lecturing them and then withdrawing.

Josh didn't know who he was anymore. This once-compassionate, patient, and wise pastor, father, and husband was quickly becoming rude, impatient, and distant from everyone who mattered to him. After a particularly difficult meeting regarding the building project where he personally accepted the lead role in raising \$1.5 million in six months, he returned to his office feeling overwhelmed and angry. Before he knew it, he was clicking on to a porn site. *What in the world am I doing?* he thought. He had not had a problem with porn use in fourteen years.

He also noticed that he was drinking more. While his theology and church context had always allowed for a social drink now and then, he noticed he was always ordering an alcoholic beverage with lunch and dinner. Josh was spiraling out of control and was very close to losing his wife and ministry. Josh was living by a doomsday clock and it read two minutes to midnight. Without an intervention, his world was going to implode.



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Michael MacKenzie is a licensed professional counselor, ordained pastor, and hospital chaplain. He has served for ten years as the clinical director of Marble Retreat, a Colorado retreat center that specializes in ministering to pastors and ministry leaders in crisis. He studied marriage and family counseling at Denver Seminary and has a DMin in pastor care from Lincoln Christian University.

A pastor is limited like everyone else, limited in gifting, in energy, limited in self-knowledge even. Wendell Berry, an astute observer of the human condition, particularly of the Christian leader, writes, "The task of healing is to respect oneself as a creature, no more and no less." Being limited, one of the needs we have is for someone in our life who speaks God's words to us, someone to whom we can confess, someone we've given authority to speak to our blind spots or to our outright rebellion. Someone we can turn to when we are confused, overwhelmed, tempted, tired, or full of grief. A pastor is like anyone else trying to make it through this life—they need help. Pastors play an important and much-needed role in people's lives yet often negate having someone play the same role in their life.

Pastor Josh's power and influence were ramping up. Sadly, and correspondingly, the vessel holding this power was breaking down under the pressure. Josh was about to implode and then explode. Lots and lots of collateral damage. Could the explosion be avoided? Yes, and even better, the exact same ingredients creating the bomb could be used for deep healing and growth in Josh.

My wife, Kari, and I are the directors and therapists at Marble Retreat, a counseling center for Christian leaders. We have spent the past twenty years specializing in caring for those who work full-time professionally for the kingdom. We've done this because we believe in the importance of roles like pastor, missionary, worship leader, or family pastor. We do this work because we know ministry is a hard road and it wears on those who do it and they need someone to care for them. We do this because we care about and admire those who are willing to wholeheartedly serve the Lord—these people of the Word.

We grew a heart to care for these folks out of experience as well. Kari was on the mission field in China for three years and saw the need for missionaries and missionary teams to have someone they could turn to for help, encouragement, and direction. And when an influential pastor in her life fell morally, she went to talk with him to try and understand what happened. In his story she heard how the church was not there for him when he needed someone—before and after his fall.

One of my closest friends when I was growing up was the son of my pastor, who was my spiritual father in many ways. My pastor died of a heart attack at age fifty-two. Being in their home and life, I saw many of the challenges of ministry and how they can affect your life and family. And my older brother went into church planting. His experience again showed me the many different potential trials of being in full-time ministry.

This book comes from the desire to spare Christian leaders, their families, and the church the loss, destruction, and grief that come when a shepherd explodes. Too often we sit with leaders who with gut-wrenching sobs lament the damage that has been done. Too often we hear the words, "I wish I would have known about or worked on these issues ten years ago."

But this book is about hope for the Christian leader. Hope that disaster can be averted and from within the struggles can come deeper meaning, peace, faith, and love. Hope that what you preach and teach others is also true for you: that God is for you and he can heal you and set you free.

—Taken from the introduction, "The Powers and the Dangers in the Lives of Pastors"



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