

Stop Becoming an Overworked Pastor by Becoming an Essential One

I run into overworked pastors every week. In this second post of a [series](#) reflecting on the book, [Essentialism, by Greg McKeown](#) for the benefit of church leaders, I want to explore the reality that you are bombarded with the “trivial many” every day in ministry. In fact, you are probably an overworked pastor:

Now let me ask you this: Have you ever found yourself stretched too thin? Have you ever felt both overworked and underutilized? Have you ever found yourself majoring in minor activities? Do you ever feel busy but not productive? Like you're always in motion, but never getting anywhere?

Of course you have. We all have, especially working in the church. What are you going to do about it? Allow me to recommend, in the words of Greg McKeown, that it starts by **discerning the trivial many from the vital few! The key to being an “essential pastor” is knowing precisely what you are called to do.** As you focus on the essential things God wants you to focus on you will **accomplish more with less energy.** And most likely, you will have **more joy doing it.** But you must find the “vital few.” **More ministry and more joy without the burden of more work on your back.** Sounds too good to be true doesn't it? I can assure you that its not. So, how do you get there? Three actions are the first steps of freeing yourself from the burden of “too much” and flood of the “trivial many:” **You must start by escaping, exploring and evaluating.**

The way of the Essentialist is to explore and evaluate a broad set of options before committing to any. Because Essentialists will commit and “go big” on only the vital few ideas or activities, they explore more options at first to ensure they pick the right one later.

ESCAPE: Enjoy the perks of being unavailable Whether you can invest two hours a day, two weeks a year, or even just five minutes every morning, it is important to make space to escape in your busy life. When was your last episode of deep reflection? Pablo Picasso said, “*Without great solitude, no serious work is possible.*”

- The overworked pastor is too busy doing ministry to think about life
- The essential pastor creates space to escape and explore life

EXPLORE: Observe what really matters Essentialists are powerful observers and listeners. Knowing that the reality of trade-offs means they can't possibly pay attention to everything, they listen deliberately for what is not being explicitly stated. What have others been saying that you haven't wanted to listen to? What has God been saying to you? What are people talking about everyday about the ministry?

- The overworked pastor pays attention to the loudest voice
- The essential pastor pays attention to the signal in the noise

EVALUATE: Decide what matters most Through process of escaping and exploring the goal is to evaluate. What ministry is most important? Where is God a work? What relationships require the most energy? What is the most important thing I must today to advance the mission? **Of course these questions can be asked for seasons in ministry or your task list this week. In my work with churches we try answer this first on the broadest level, “What can your church do better than 10,000 others?”** We call it the Kingdom Concept. Only then do we move further in the process of planning.

- The overworked pastor is overwhelmed by all the information
- The essential pastor scans to find the essence of the information

ESSENTIAL LIVING: You can do it As you decide what matters most, you will run into things that wage war with your decision—the trivial many will want to push there way through! Specifically I struggle with three- the momentum of yesterday, the emotion of the moment, and the interruptions of the day. **It’s natural to struggle, but the more you practice the more you’ll progress.** The single greatest tool I use in general to be an “essential pastor” is the [Vision Frame](#) that guides my ministry, my family and my life. The single greatest tool I use to practice essentialism each day, is to identify the two most important things I can accomplish by 11:00am.

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