

How is it with Your Soul?

AN ASSESSMENT FOR LEADERS | BY RUTH HALEY BARTON, D.D.



HOW TO USE THE ASSESSMENT

The following questions are designed to help you gently notice the state of your soul as a person in ministry. You are invited to reflect on each question quietly in God's presence, asking God to help you to see yourself as you really are and your life as it really is. Then place yourself on each continuum as honestly as you can.

These questions are not meant to produce guilt, shame or a sense of failure. Rather, they are intended to help you be honest with yourself and with God about the state of your soul. This kind of assessment is a first step towards ensuring that you gain your soul rather than lose your soul in the context of your life in ministry. If you become aware of indications that you might be losing your soul in the context of ministry, do not try to fix things or problem-solve just yet. Instead, simply ask God, "What are we going to do about that?"

LEADERSHIP ASSESSMENT

1. More and more often I notice that I am "going through the motions" of ministry—teaching things I am not currently experiencing in my own life, manufacturing emotion that I am not feeling, providing pastoral care but aware I don't really care.



2. I am aware of a nagging sense that something is not quite right but I don't seem to be able to take the time or make the effort to look into it. The truth is, I'm not even sure I know how.



3. I find myself rushing from one thing to the next without time to really pay attention to what's going on in and around me.



4. I am keeping up with what pastoral ministry requires but deep down I feel that have lost touch with who I am in God and what he has called me to do.



5. I am tired—not just physically but spiritually and emotionally. I don't really know how to get rested.



6. I am aware of an underlying irritability and restlessness just beneath the surface of my life.



7. I can't stop working even when I know I need to.



8. I have become emotionally numb—unable to experience a full range of human emotion.



9. I find myself increasingly giving in to escapist behaviors (eating, mindless television viewing, substance abuse, shopping/spending, pornography/fantasy novels etc.) or escapist fantasies—dreaming about being somewhere else or having a different life.



10. A. I do not have time for attending to my human needs—exercise, eating right, getting enough sleep, doctors appointments and medical procedures, picking up dry cleaning, getting the car washed, making home repairs.



B. My most significant relationships are getting short changed.



11. I find myself hoarding energy—avoiding people in the grocery store, holing up at home or in my office—for fear that routine social interactions will rob me of that last bit of energy.



12. My spiritual practices have slipped. Even though I know that practices such as solitude, prayer, personal reflection on Scripture, etc. are life-giving, I find I don't have time or energy for them.



13. I feel isolated with no one to fully confide in and no one who fully understands my situation.



14. My staff team/elders and I are very good at strategic planning and “thinking our way” into solutions, but we do not have a clearly articulated process for discernment at the leadership level. Aside from perfunctory prayers to book-end our meetings, we don't have a way of seeking God together.



15. It has been a long time since I have felt connected with the presence of God in my own life beyond what I am doing for others. Sometimes I suspect that my vision for ministry has become more important to me than my own relationship with God.



ASSESSMENT SCORING

If you find yourself in the Always-Often portion of the continuum for three or more of these questions, then chances are you are already becoming dangerously tired and losing your soul in ministry. If this is true for you, you may want to consider reading *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership: Seeking God in the Crucible of Ministry*, which addresses these types of depletion and also provides guidance for strengthening your soul in the context of ministry. You might also consider joining a Transforming Community to receive guidance in the spiritual practices that will strengthen your soul for the long haul of ministry. Learn more by visiting us online at www.thetransformingcenter.org.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ruth Haley Barton, is founder and president of the Transforming Center. The Transforming Center exist to strengthen the souls of clergy, ministry leaders and the congregations and ministries they serve. A spiritual director, teacher and retreat leader, she is the author of numerous books and resources on the spiritual life including *Pursuing God's Will Together*, *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership*, *Sacred Rhythms* and *Invitation to Solitude and Silence* (all InterVarsity Press).



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