



When Sacrifice Becomes a Sin: The Importance of Pastoral Self-Care Tate Cockrell, Ph.D.



Coasts and islands listen to me; distant peoples, pay attention. The Lord called me before I was born. He named me while I was in my mother's womb. He made my words like a sharp sword; he hid me in the shadow of his hand. He made me like a sharpened arrow; he hid me in his quiver. He said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified." But I myself said: I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and futility; yet my vindication is with the Lord, and my reward is with my God. Isaiah 49:1-4

STRESS IN PASTORS

- In 2009 Bill & Kristi Gaultiere started Soul Shepherding to care specifically to ministers and their families. And they began collecting statistics on pastoral health. Here's what they found: (found at soulshepherding.org)
- 75% of pastors report being "extremely stressed" or "highly stressed"
- 90% feel fatigued and worn out every week
- 70% say they're grossly underpaid
- 78% were forced to resign from their church (63% at least twice), most commonly because of church conflict
- 80% will not be in ministry ten years later and only a fraction make it a lifelong career
- 91% have experienced some form of burnout in ministry and 18% say they are "fried to a crisp right now"
- ▶ **Statistics on Pastors' Emotional Health & Family**
 - 70% constantly fight depression
 - 50% feel so discouraged that they would leave their ministry if they could, but can't find another job
 - 80% believe their pastoral ministry has negatively affected their families and 33% said it was an *outright hazard*
 - 77% feel they do not have a good marriage
 - 38% are divorced or divorcing
- ▶ **Statistics on Pastors' Lack of Soul Care and Training**
 - 53% of pastors do not feel that seminary or Bible college prepared them adequately
 - 70% do not have someone they consider a close friend
 - 50% do not meet regularly with an accountability person or group
 - 72% only study the Bible when preparing for sermons or lessons
 - 21% spend less than 15 minutes a day in prayer — the average is 39 minutes per day
 - 44% of pastors do not take a regular day off
 - 85% have never taken a Sabbatical
- ▶ **Some Positive News from Pastors (2016)**
 - 78% if they had to do it over again would still chose to be a pastor
 - 57% are happy and fulfilled as a pastor (43% are not)
 - 65% do not battle depression (35% do)
 - 74% are not overly fatigued (26% are)
 - 97% have never engaged in sex outside of their marriage
 - 77% pray more than a half hour a day and 50% pray *more than one hour a day!*
 - 56% of pastors' families feel their church is in sync with their family need

Stress, stress-related illnesses, burnout, and compassion fatigue are real issues facing the church today. Unfortunately, most ministers don't realize the symptoms until it is too late, and the price to correct the issues is too great.

UNIQUE CHALLENGES OF COVID-19

- COVID-19 presents certain unique challenges for pastors and other caregivers
- The nature of the quarantine and social distancing guidelines creates added stress to the population at large
 - ▶ 55% increase in alcohol sales
 - ▶ Increased prevalence of anxiety and depression
- The primary means of ministering to congregations has been prohibited (worship gatherings)
- The convergence of multiple stressors in a short amount of time have increased the demand for counseling and support (finance, relationship difficulties, anxiety, depression, addiction)
- The pastor's own emotional reactions to these same realities complicate the helping process

WHAT IS COMPASSION FATIGUE?

- Compassion fatigue is also called “vicarious traumatization” or “secondary traumatization”
- Refers to PTSD-related symptoms due to working with individuals experiencing trauma, grief, loss, or crises
- Can occur due to exposure to one case or can be due to a “cumulative” level of trauma
- Results in the inability to react sympathetically to a crisis, trauma or disaster
- Compassion fatigue is a combination of secondary traumatization and burnout precipitated specifically by the overexposure of crisis and trauma to “helpers” who are routinely in contact with the suffering

DIFFERENTIATING COMPASSION FATIGUE & BURNOUT

- Burnout---is a term that describes low job satisfaction, feeling powerless, overwhelmed, depleted and frustrated by work environment and those consequences extending beyond the work environment.
- Many persons in ‘non-helping’ jobs may experience burnout, who are not particularly in a traumatic environment
- So – you can have burnout without compassion fatigue, but rarely will you have compassion fatigue without burnout.
- In essence – compassion fatigue is burnout for the helping professions, brought on by trauma exposure

SYMPTOMS OF COMPASSION FATIGUE & BURNOUT

Sleep disturbance	Emotional volatility and unpredictability	Cognitive ability decreases
Judgment impaired	Isolation and loss of morale	Anxiety
Numbness	Lowered frustration tolerance / irritability	Depression
Headaches	GI symptoms	Decreased immune response
Lethargy	Carelessness	Difficulty detaching from work
Loss of hope	Exhaustion	

PHASES OF COMPASSION FATIGUE

CRISIS – An event that results in a dramatic emotional or circumstantial upheaval in a person's life

LACK OF SELF-CARE – The caregiver fails to set appropriate boundaries and takes on more emotional burden than they are equipped to maintain

EXHAUSTION – Physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual depletion leading to despair for the caregiver

SHAME/DOUBT – Questioning one's ability and equating behavioral realities as aspects of identity

CYNICISM – An inherent distrust of others coupled with a fatalistic and pessimistic outlook on the caregiver's circumstances and on others

FAILURE – Inability to meet the demands of a caring or expectations of others

COMPENSATION – Failure leads to a caregiver's desire to “bounce back” or “do better,” so he overextends himself to prove he is capable

THE ABC'S OF PREVENTION AND REPAIR

AWARENESS - What types of issues contribute to your stress level, thus increasing your vulnerability to compassion fatigue?

BOUNDARIES – Learning when to say yes and how to say no. Practicing excellent self-care by nurturing yourself and putting activities in your schedule that are sources of pleasure, joy and diversion

CONNECTIONS - Talk out your stress. Process your thoughts and reactions with someone else (coworker, counselor, friend, family member, mentor). Build a positive support system that supports you, not fuels your stress

THINGS YOU CAN DO

1. Spiritual refreshment & worship
2. Renewed confidence in your calling
3. Learn to ask for help and build community w/other pastors
4. Accept your limitations
5. Try to establish some routines that promote normalcy
6. Take “time out” during the day
7. Try to change little things that gnaw at you and accommodate those you can't change
8. Organize your time – calendar so you can concentrate on vital tasks
9. Set realistic expectations
10. Exercise & healthy nutrition