

T H E C O S T O F
C A R I N G

5 STRATEGIES FOR
OVERCOMING FATIGUE & STRESS



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The Cost of Caring: 5 Strategies for Overcoming Fatigue & Stress

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DEDICATION

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May God grace this tool to glorify Him while edifying others in life and service.

In His grip,
Dallas Scales

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ABBREVIATIONS

DMIN	<i>Doctor of Ministry</i>
LBTS	<i>Liberty University Baptist Theological Seminary</i>
CF	<i>Compassion Fatigue</i>
ESV	<i>English Standard Version</i>
KJV	<i>King James Version</i>
NIV	<i>New International Version</i>

INTRODUCTION

THE PURPOSE OF THIS thesis project is to provide five strategies for spiritual leaders to combat the negative affect of compassion fatigue due to trauma events. Although pastoral care and counseling is an effective instrument by which churches stay germane to changing human needs in a shifting society and churches, pastors and caregivers have grown susceptible to compassion fatigue. The researcher will gather data from a survey of 100 spiritual leaders constructed around four hypotheses related to self-care after a trauma event: psychological, emotional, physiological and theological created uniquely for this thesis process. This research will provide five strategies for protective factors to improve future self-care programs based on the research findings. Furthermore, it is anticipated that the research would provide findings that could be of significant value for other churches that intend to create and implement self-care programs.

THE COST OF CARING

The cost of caring always places a demand on life, and the price can be exhaustive and expensive. The parables¹ disclose that Jesus exhibited compassion for the multitudes;² however, Jesus knew also the physical demand of exhibiting compassion and the need to equipoise the weight of Christian service. There are clear indications in the Bible that Jesus would practice the spiritual discipline of prayer and contemplation in places like the wilderness and mountainside retreats. Other occasions, the Bible chronicles occurrences of Christ spending the whole night in prayer to God, or sending away the multitudes to travel often alone to pray.

The dilemma faced by many spiritual leaders is how to serve others while shedding the garment of weariness. Spiritual leaders and helpers encounter a plethora of challenges in attending the requests of individuals and communities that face traumatic events. Whereas trauma or the sharing of compassion in the face of suffering, distress or grief is not abnormal to compassion helpers, unfortunately, neither is burnout or fatigue.

¹ A figurative narrative that is true to life and is designed to convey through analogy some specific spiritual truth(s) usually relative to God's kingdom program.

² Mark 6:34, ESV.

According to the United States Census Bureau the world's population has exceeded more than 7.2 billion people, equating a person being born every 8 seconds, and a person dying every 13 seconds. Consequently, a growing population would imply that "more people reflect more crises."³

With a growing populace, spiritual leaders are summoned to respond to the rising conflict to administer levels of compassion, and this places a continual demand on "compassion helpers." However, the compassion helper lives between two vital callings: one, to respond to crisis in a hope of providing compassion, and the second is to respond to the crisis within those who are called to serve. The Bible is replete with caution to show compassion as a reflection of Christian duty. The Gospel of Matthew observes,

"Then Jesus went throughout all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were bewildered and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest.'"⁴

However, there is an underpinning issue in the attempt to balance leadership and servanthood. What is it? The high "cost of caring" for others while placing less emphasis on self-care. So we are faced with the question, are people more diverse or different from the first-century era?

³ Census.gov. "Us and Population Clock," United States Census Bureau, accessed October 21, 2014, <http://www.census.gov/popclock>.

⁴ Matt. 9:36–38, ESV.

The answer should be “no;” nonetheless the “musts” and crises have changed much in the known world. Currently, the headlines are saturated with celebrity suicides that are alarming to families and fans; however, should not culture be equally if not more jolted at the increased rate of suicide among clergy? Pastoral counselor Brian Dodd argued, “The pastoral profession has one of the top three suicide rates of any profession. Members of the clergy now suffer from obesity, hypertension and depression at rates higher than most Americans.” Furthermore, Dodd contends, “In the last decade, their (clergy) use of antidepressants has risen, while their life expectancy has fallen.”⁵

There are 24-hour news tickers and streaming media keeping the public informed and worried about the worst outbreak of Ebola since 1976, “at least 5,177 people have, and at least 9,936 cases of the disease had been recorded as of October nineteenth, the World Health Organization (WHO), but the true toll may be three times as much.”⁶ In addition, there are still global concerns with the millions of people who are infected with HIV.⁷ Naturally, this triggered an international public health emergency, which requires a demand on compassion helpers. In addition, there are dueling narratives of another youth shot by a police officer, spurring outrage between the races over policy against human dignity. The threat of genocide continues to exist as the world watches the Yazidis (one of Iraq’s smallest minorities), who are of Kurdish descent, and the religion is considered a pre-Islamic sect that draws from Christianity, Judaism and Zoroastrianism. One of the oldest religious communities in the world, these people have long suffered persecution,

⁵ Glen Morgan and Valarie Morgan. “Suicide in The Pulpit: The Crisis Among Clergy,” *Churches Now*, accessed December 13, 2013, <http://www.churchesnow.com>.

⁶ “Official Who Ebola Toll,” Thomson Reuters, accessed October 23, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com>.

⁷ See Appendix C.

with many Muslims referring to them as devil worshippers. More than a week ago, the group fled into the surrounding mountains when ISIS fighters stormed the town of Sinjar. Now, the people are trapped without the necessities of food, clean water or medical care in the dry desert and summer heat. Thousands of families are in desperate need of help. Moreover, the nation still debates on the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare), and the partisan bickering continues among elected and appointed officials in Washington D.C. over foreign, immigration policies, the issues of aging, Wall Street bewilderment, arguments on human rights and the redefinition of marriage, and the list appears to be endless for disputes and clashes. While the above seem to be isolated from the calling of compassion, each collectively calls on clergy, spiritual leaders or compassion helpers to interact with each event or issue, because people are integrated and bombarded with real emotions along with financial and spiritual, physical effluences from the system of this world.

Those individuals that serve and/or lead find difficulty in extricating from events and issues that are attached to people livelihood and lives. “The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk through water without getting wet.”⁸ Wimbrey commented, “religious and spiritual caregivers are often the first responders to catastrophic events including natural disasters (such as earthquakes and hurricanes) or man-made acts of wars or terrorism.”⁹ Further, he contends, “Religious caregivers and spiritual leaders must learn to take care of themselves in

⁸ Rachel Naomi Remen, *Kitchen Table Wisdom* (New York: Penguin Group, 1996), 52.

⁹ Edward P. Wimberley. “Story Telling and Managing Trauma: Health and Spirituality at Work.” *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved* 22, no. 3 (2011): 48–57. <http://muse.jhu.edu/> (accessed July 21, 2014).

the presence of trauma while managing trauma of others. This is no easy task. In fact, religious caregivers, spiritual leaders, and their families are affected greatly by catastrophic events in their own lives and in the lives of those for whom they care.”¹⁰

As a result, the new spiritual leader’s mantra is, “I love Jesus, but his church is wearing me out.” Several studies reveal that more than 1,500 pastors each month are leaving the ministry for various reasons; included in these studies are the rising divorce rate, which is between fifty percent and fifty-five percent; and the number of pastors reporting 78% are unhappy with their marriage. The burnout syndrome attacks pastors and caregivers when and where they least expect. Burnout is a vicious enemy of pastoral ministry, and people are asking for some indicators of this syndrome¹¹

As a result, the survey data is needed to record and to support the thesis project four hypotheses that correlate the necessity for self-care after a trauma event. The four hypotheses are psychological, emotional, physiological and theological. Consequently, this thesis project will provide five strategies for protective factors to improve future self-care programs based on the research findings.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Burnout is a vicious enemy of pastoral ministry, but so too is exhaustion from those who help in ministry. It has the potential to damage relationships, leave people hurting, hurt marriages, and even lead to a resignation. Job burnout is not something that should be trivialized.

¹⁰ Ibid., 48

¹¹ Paul Vitello, “Taking A Break from The Lord’s Work,” *New York Times* (New York), sec. A1, August 2, 2010.

The burnout syndrome attacks pastors when and where they least expect. It causes pastors to withdraw from the very people they love.

Exhaustion and a sense of failure are both causes and results of this withdrawal from other people. The most common question expressed by spiritual leader is, “How can I get over pastoral burnout?” Another leader will ask another leader, “How do I get back to what is normal or how I do get back my renewed passion for ministry?” However, the questions are not easily answered in one-liners nor addressed in generalities.

Additionally, each spiritual leader becomes a case study in anthropology and a theological dialogue about ecclesiology, and the inference of beliefs or philosophies as practiced within the North American church culture and the environment linking human service to distress and weariness. Miller argues stress can be a “non-specific response of the body to any demand for change.”¹² There are certain leaders that have a propensity to be over-engaged or have a lack of boundaries when leaders do for others what they can and should do for themselves. Sometimes, leaders contribute to the congregation a lack of maturity due to over compensation, which is can be dangerous, and even perilous to friendships, marriages, churches, workplaces, and families. Growing up in any area of life is challenging—whether financially, spiritually, emotionally, or relationally. To step away from what others can and should do for themselves, can cause leaders to initially appear harsh, but it is a loving act.

THE INTENT OF THE PROJECT

The introduction of this thesis project will focus on who, where, when, how, and what is compassion fatigue on pastoral personnel and

¹² Thomas W. Miller, *Handbook of Stressful Transitions Across the Lifespan* (New York: Springer Science & Media Business, 2009), 716.

caregivers. The biblical basis for compassion fatigue will complement the project. Compassion fatigue will be clearly defined on what compassion fatigue is and how it applies to pastoral personnel.

The objective of the project is to provide *five strategies* for pastors and personnel to combat the negative affect of compassion fatigue due to trauma events. The aim is to present practical and biblical tools on how churches, hospitals, and helping professions can use these strategies as a tool to glorify God but increase the quality of life by implications of this stratagem or plan. God created and established the principle of Sabbath. The writer argues, “Six days you shall labor and do all of your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it, you shall not do any work.”¹³ However, the cure for compassion fatigue is not easily resolved whether an individual exhausts their vacation days or not. The assurance of addressing fatigue or burnout is establishing a strategy of personal care not just for others but for the caregiver too. There is a steep risk of not sustaining a healthy regiment to assist with the realities or the ebb-in-flow of depleted emotional, spiritual and physical limitations of spiritual leaders and helpers, and the threats and effects of compassion fatigue.

STATEMENT OF LIMITATIONS

This project will focus about the subject of compassion fatigue and strategies on combating the effects on pastoral personnel. Included in the paper will be constructed around four hypotheses related to self-care after a trauma event: psychological, emotional, physiological and theological. There will be some practical applications and recommendations from accomplished servant-leaders who have made an influenced our subject

¹³ Exodus 20:8–9, ESV.

matter. It will not address any specific church denomination, and will be limited to North America and will not address the global affects.

Furthermore, it is anticipated that the research would provide findings that could be of significant value for other churches that intend to create and implement self-care programs.

THEORETICAL BASIS

The results of answering these questions will provide a wealth of practical and biblical information to strengthen the commentary on the topic of fatigue or burnout when addressed, reference will be made to people like Elijah.¹⁴ Other points of reference are revealing how leaders entrusted other leaders to assist in responsibilities of the church and the Lord's flock.¹⁵

STATEMENT OF METHODOLOGY

The methodology of the project will provide an outline of the major areas that relate to compassion fatigue and how to contend with its effects on helpers of comfort. This course of action will focus on key areas that will be interrelated to the topic chosen. There are specifics within each chapter that will contribute to the theme of compassion fatigue and solution to prevent it.

The first chapter will include the basic components that have helped to develop a systematic approach to the overall direction of the project.

The second chapter will include brief highlights of the early beginnings of symptoms and signs placed upon pastoral personnel.

The third chapter will be a biblical basis for the practice and the proper development of compassion or mercy and how to address it.

¹⁴ 1 Kings 18:40—19:4, ESV.

¹⁵ Acts 12:25; 1 Timothy 1:2–3, ESV.

The fourth chapter will convey impact on insufficient training and development of caregiver's neighborhood, congregations, families and individuals.

The fifth chapter will present five strategies to combat the symptoms development. The approach is not to do a comprehensive analysis but addresses many recommendations made by pastors and others in ministry who have experienced fatigue or burnout.

Finally, the sixth chapter is a summary of data, recommendations for further studies for improved maintenance of pastors and personnel who suffer from burnout, stress and fatigue.

THE REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There are broad resources for North American pastors, spiritual leaders and helpers about compassion fatigue. However, when the term is referenced as "burnout" or "stress" the phrase develops into an interminable booklist.

*Burnout: The High Cost of High Achievement*¹⁶ by Herbert Freudenberger. The author is possibly the first person to describe the syndrome known as "burnout." There is a substantial use of metaphors to denote how individuals that live in a challenging world are susceptible to burnout. Their lives are compared to a burned-out building, which is a crumbling shell with "a great emptiness inside." The book presents several case studies to early research of the growing dichotomy of achieving but paying a high cost to do so. In addition, the research defines burnout but also how to survive the defects.

¹⁶ Hebert Freudenberger, *Burnout: The High Cost of Achievement* (New York: Anchor Press, 1980), 214.

*** *End of Free Sample* ***