

“Navigating Pastoral Burnout and Compassion Fatigue”

1 Kings 19

INTRODUCTION

- **Good morning!** It’s great to see you.
- Let me invite you take your Bible and turn to 1 Kings 19.
- Very familiar story in the Bible to you probably. The story of Elijah defeating the prophets of Ba’al at Mt Carmel.
- Chapter 19 is immediately following the defeat and slaughter of the prophets. Elijah has just won the contest as a mighty testimony for the Lord.
- As we think about Pastoral Burnout and Compassion Fatigue this morning this is just a wonderful example of what it looks like.

READ

1 Kings 19:1-10 - ¹ Ahab told Jezebel everything that Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. ² So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, “May the gods punish me and do so severely if I don’t make your life like the life of one of them by this time tomorrow!”

³ Then Elijah became afraid and immediately ran for his life. When he came to Beer-sheba that belonged to Judah, he left his servant there, ⁴ but he went on a day’s journey into the wilderness. He sat down under a broom tree and prayed that he might die. He said, “I have had enough! Lord, take my life, for I’m no better than my ancestors.”

⁵ Then he lay down and slept under the broom tree. Suddenly, an angel touched him. The angel told him, “Get up and eat.” ⁶ Then he looked, and there at his head was a loaf of bread baked over hot stones, and a jug of water. So he ate and drank and lay down again. ⁷ Then the angel of the Lord returned for a second time and touched him. He said, “Get up and eat, or the journey will be too much for you.” ⁸ So he got up, ate, and drank. Then on the strength from that food, he walked forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mountain of God.

⁹ He entered a cave there and spent the night. Suddenly, the word of the Lord came to him, and he said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” ¹⁰ He replied, “I have been very zealous for the Lord God of Armies, but the Israelites have abandoned your covenant, torn down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are looking for me to take my life.”

TRANSITION

- So . . . in the life of Elijah we see many of the signs and symptoms of burnout.
- So . . . Four Questions I Want to Guide Our Time Together Today . . .

I. What Is Burnout or Compassion Fatigue?

II. What Causes Burnout or Compassion Fatigue?

III. What Is a Healthy Ministry Leader?

IV. How Do I Develop Healthy Ministry Leaders

1. WHAT IS BURNOUT or COMPASSION FATIGUE?

- Burnout is a state of physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual exhaustion leading to diminished health, social withdrawal, depression, vocational discontent and a feeling of powerlessness or despair.
- Burn out is when someone is . . .
 - Worn down **physically**
 - Used up **emotionally**
 - Isolated **relationally**
 - Emptied out **spiritually**
- Compassion fatigue is also called “vicarious traumatization” or “secondary traumatization”
- Refers to PTSD-related symptoms due to working with individuals who have 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
- **Compassion Fatigue is basically burnout for the helping professions**
 - Elijah – *afraid, running for his life, praying to die, fed up, loss of perspective*

- The burnout spiral
 - **EXHAUSTION** – Physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual depletion leading to despair
 - **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 our circumstances and on others
 - **FAILURE** – Inability to meet the demands of a job or expectations of others
 - **CRISIS** – An event that results in a dramatic emotional or circumstantial upheaval in a person's life

- Burnout Symptoms
 - Sleep disturbance, Emotional Volatility and Unpredictability, Cognitive Decline
 - Inability to Concentrate, Impaired Judgment
 - Isolation, Anxiety, Depression
 - Headaches, stomach issues, Decreased Immune Response
 - Lethargy, Carelessness
 - Difficulty Detaching from Work, Loss of Hope

- The symptoms are vast and varied and can be debilitating. I taught with a pastor once who when he resigned from ministry was so physically exhausted he had to read his resignation from a stool bc he could barely stand..

So.... Notice not only what is burnout, but what causes burnout?

2. WHAT CAUSES BURNOUT?

- Like the effects of burnout, the causes of burnout can be many. But all the causes tend to fall into three categories. Intrapersonal, interpersonal, and vocational.

1. INTRAPERSONAL CAUSES

- Failure to see the importance of self-care
- Lack of healthy Biblical self-identity
- Savior complex
- Unresolved baggage
- Perfectionism
- Lack of spiritual/emotional maturity

2. INTERPERSONAL CAUSES

- Lack of social support/true friends
- Marriage/family stress
- Working with different/difficult people
- Frequent/unresolved relational conflict

3. VOCATIONAL CAUSES

- Unclear/unrealistic job expectations
 - Lack of partnership
 - Failing to take time away
 - Lack of reward/praise/compensation for work well done
 - Fear of failure/high stakes consequences
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- So what is burnout, what causes burnout, and now what is a healthy leader.
 - If we want to avoid burnout how do we become healthy?
 - We're going to look at four categories of health this morning. Spiritual, Emotional, Relational, and Physical.

3. WHAT IS A HEALTHY LEADER?

We want to look at four areas of health for leaders

1. SPIRITUAL HEALTH

- Christ centered joy
- Hunger for God's Word and God's presence
- Intimate personal & corporate worship
- Grow as a disciple through consistent surrender
- Easily extend grace to others
- Have a concern for the lost
- Schedule regular periods of rest and meditation

2. EMOTIONAL HEALTH

- Experience the full spectrum of emotions
 - Process/evaluate emotions in a healthy way
 - Free emotional baggage of the past
 - Respond instead of react to others' emotions
 - Walk with others in their hurting and suffering
 - Schedule regular periods of rest and meditation
- Schezzero - We cannot claim to be spiritually mature if we are *emotionally* immature. Our understanding of ourselves and our treatment of others flows from a right understanding of our *whole* person – body, soul/spirit.

3. RELATIONAL HEALTH

- Pursue knowing with your spouse
- Build healthy friendships
- Demonstrate the “one anothers” in Scripture
- Communicate well in quantity, quality, and depth
- Be congruent across all of your relationships
- Schedule regular periods of rest and meditation

4. PHYSICAL HEALTH

- Recognize the link between physical health and ministry effectiveness/longevity
 - Eat to fuel your body, not feed your emotions
 - Exercise consistently
 - Get at least seven hours of good sleep
 - Monitor stress levels
 - Schedule regular periods of rest and meditation
- **So what is burnout, what causes burnout, what is a healthy leader, and now – How do I develop healthy leaders?**

4. HOW DO I DEVELOP HEALTHY LEADERS

1. SEE THE BENEFITS OF HEALTHY LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

- ¹¹ *And he himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers,* ¹² *to equip the saints for the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ,* ¹³ *until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God's Son, growing into maturity with a stature measured by Christ's fullness.* **Ephesians 4:11-13**

- Fulfill Unique Ministry Calling
- Broader Areas of Shared Ministry
- Increased Reach of Shared Ministry
- Joyful Service through Fulfilling Passion

2. INVEST IN BUILDING LEADERS

- Identify potential leaders
- Disciple prospective leaders
- Meet regularly with leaders for training
- Build a resource center for church ministries

3. ALLOW OTHERS TO LEAD

- Allow other perspectives and methodologies of ministry
- Avoid micromanagement
- Step in and help when needed
- Praise leaders for their faithfulness

CONCLUSION

So what is burnout, what causes burnout, what is a healthy leader, How do I develop healthy leaders?

- The calling to ministry is a weighty and worthwhile call. The minister and his family have placed their lives and their future at the disposal of Christ for the sake of the gospel.
- Most ministers have advanced training in subjects such as biblical studies, theology, leadership, and discipleship. However, few of them ever receive training in personal *emotional* and *relational* health that leads to maturity. Or how to protect themselves from burning out.

When people have authentic spiritual experiences—such as worship, prayer, Bible studies, and fellowship—they mistakenly believe they are doing fine, even if their relational life is fractured and their interior world is disordered. Their apparent “progress” then provides a spiritual reason for not doing the hard work of maturing. -- Scazzero, Peter. Emotionally Healthy Spirituality

- We cannot claim to be spiritually mature if we are *emotionally* immature. Our understanding of ourselves and our treatment of others flows from a right understanding of our *whole* person – body, soul/spirit.