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A Pastor's Ministry During a Crisis

Four Scriptures to help pastors combat depression and burnout

Greg Strand (/blog/authors/greg-strand) | April 7, 2020



(<https://twitter.com/efca>)

On April 6, Tim Keller live-streamed a message on "Resilience & Burnout," (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PRoHSa9G88Q>) ministry during a crisis, that was excellent. Rather than addressing what pastoral ministry to others looks like in a crisis, Keller gives this message to pastors, and the need to focus on their own well-being. This is a message from a pastor to pastors.

ministry goes, so goes one's own spiritual and emotional well-being. That burnout, states Keller, is more one's own fault.

However, in times of crisis, burnout is different. To return to the flying metaphor, you must get your own oxygen mask on before you can help anyone else. If you do not, you will not be able to help others, you will experience burnout, and it will be widespread.

Four Scriptures with principles

Keller suggests four texts of Scripture with four accompanying principles to help pastors prevent burnout during a crisis:

The greater internal dependency we have on the Lord, the greater external strength we will experience.

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1. Extraordinary prayer (Jesus in Mark 1:35-39)

We must seek the Lord in a special way. We must do what Jesus did. In this text, at the beginning of his three-year ministry, He departed early in the morning to pray. This was the pattern of His life and ministry. He took time to commune with His Father. We must do what Jesus did. We must give ourselves to the spiritual disciplines, especially those of Bible reading and prayer. The greater internal dependency we have on the Lord, the greater external strength we will experience. This also means other daily disciplines, that of getting sufficient rest, getting to bed on time, exercising. During these days, meditation and prayer ought to be enhanced.

2. Resilience without stoicism (Paul in 2 Cor 4:8-18)

Paul is not saying keep a stiff upper lip. Don't let it get to you. Don't express emotion. He says we are pressed, perplexed and struck down. But we are not destroyed. Hebrews 12:5-6 quotes Proverbs 3:11-12. The point: when troubles come, don't make light of

them and don't lose heart. There is permission to lament, to cry, to grieve. And yet, not to stay there. I am going to keep my perspective. Extraordinary prayer is necessary for this, we fix our eyes on what is not seen. This eternal perspective is what enables you to get up off the ground. It is a response different from the world that is either stoic or broken with no hope. At times like this, we especially need to read the Psalms. It brings Scripture reading and prayer together. Psalms generally are prayers, or reading them leads to prayer. Theology and prayer are brought together in the Psalms. And remember, approximately one-third of the Psalms are laments. Stoicism and brokenness.

3. Radical refocusing (the men of Issachar in 1 Chron 12:32)

The men of Issachar threw in their lot with David. They followed after him because "they understood the times." They understood the times, or seasons, like a good farmer knowing the time to plant or harvest. During times like this, you have to break free, for the sake of brainstorming, be free from traditions and other things of ministry. We must be willing to question everything and be open to change. We must not be tied to the ways we have always done things. We absolutely must be committed to the things that God absolutely prescribes. We must be clear about what the Bible mandates, and those mandates are what we do. Extraordinary times call for extraordinary measures. Realize the times (seasons) you are living in.

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4. Gospel resolve (Esther in Esth 4:12-16)

This fourth principle, Keller notes, does not work apart from the other three. If you don't do the first three, this will lead to burnout. With the other three in place, you can trust in the Lord and "just do it." If you are a ministry leader, you have been brought to your position in ministry for such a time as this. It is God's will that you be in this position in such a time as this. You should have Esther's resolve. The gospel resolve is that I am going to do it. Be faithful to the Lord and to the people. We have been placed in a position of ministry responsibility, so by God's grace, having done the first three things above, simply resolve before God to do what he has called you to do. When that

is done, you will not perish. Ultimately, what ensures you will not perish is that you have your eye on the one who is the true Esther, the Lord Jesus. Jesus did not say He will identify with His people and "if I perish." He said, "when I perish." He made atonement for his people. He stands before the throne and the favor He procured is ours. That is the reason why taking a look at what He did for us we can have gospel resolve for Him.

A few concluding questions

As we ponder Keller's message, there are a few thoughts for us to ponder, followed by some important questions.

We must remain centered in the Lord and connected to the vine, so that we have strength for the day, and have gospel resolve for the long-term, the marathon, not a sprint.

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There are no exceptions to this general rule of those living in and through a crisis. Most crises are localized or regionalized. This pandemic is global, which means all of us are living in a crisis. All of us are and will be affected.

It is times like this that reveal much about us: our hearts, our identity, our idols. It also reveals much about life: our weakness, our dependency, our lack of control. It also reveals much about God: His sovereign providence, His faithfulness, His goodness.

Thankfully, "God is for us" (Rom 8:31), and we know "in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Rom 8:28). I do not want to miss that or to work against what God is working for good in my life. That means we must remain centered in the Lord and connected to the vine, so that we have strength for the day, and that we will have gospel resolve for the long-term, the marathon, not a sprint.

1. What are you doing to ensure you engage faithfully in the spiritual disciplines? How have these disciplines been enhanced these days? Does that fundamental discipline lead to living a disciplined life in other areas during these days when the normal structures and orders of our lives have been altered?
2. Are you able identify and express what is on the inside, and to do so without, on the one hand, making light of them or denying them, or, on the other hand, allowing them to control or destroy us? Are you able to acknowledge that you are pressed, perplexed, and struck down, but that you are not destroyed and you do not lose hope? Are you engaging in life and ministry in the here and now with an eternal perspective? Are you spending time in the Psalms?
3. Are you able to consider the ministry to which you have been entrusted, and give it back to God with an open hand? Are you able to discern the times and recommit to the clear and explicit mandate of God for the church and ministry? In this season, are you able and willing to radically refocus your life and ministry, grounded on the mandates of God in his Word?
4. Are you engaging in the other three before you attempt to engage in ministry, or doing the next thing? If so, that is fleshly resolve, and it will result in despair and burnout. Gospel resolve is not done in the flesh but only in the Spirit. What does gospel resolve mean for you today?

“Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word” (2 Thess 2:16-17).



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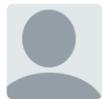
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Thanks so much, Greg. This really ministered to me

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Greg Strand Pastor Eric Hoehn · 3 months ago

Thanks be to God. As I listened to this message from Keller, it was helpful to me, so I thought it would also be helpful to others. What you share about how it was used in your life is an answer to prayer. May the Lord bless you and keep you during these shelter at home days, remembering the Lord is both "with us" and "for us."

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