

Beating The Burnout Trap by Gerald Rowlands



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BY GERALD ROWLANDS

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Reverend Gerald Rowlands of Queensland, Australia, has been a Minister of the Gospel for more than fifty years. During this time he has served in various roles such as a Pastor, Evangelist, Missionary, Christian Radio Teacher, Bible College Lecturer and Principal.



Gerald and his wife Elizabeth have traveled to some seventy nations of the world having lived for various periods of time in Africa, Asia and Israel.

Gerald is the founder and president of Church Planting International (CPI) and these notes form part of the CPI Training Course for prospective church planters. The CPI Course is being used effectively in some 23 nations around the world.

Gerald's CPI vision for training potential leaders in evangelism, church planting and pastoral ministry was birthed whilst Gerald and his wife were missionaries in Harare, Zimbabwe in 1980. During his first twelve months in Africa in 1975, Gerald had conducted numerous large crusades with many "conversions" recorded and he observed that it was relatively easy to draw a crowd and to see hundreds of people "make decisions" for Christ. The real challenge came after the crusade when those working with Gerald would seek to integrate the "converts" into the Body of Christ and walk in a truly Christian lifestyle. He had begun to realise how crucial it was to train local pastors in the principles of church growth and development. As a result, Gerald began to organise Pastors' Seminars in various parts of Africa to provide teaching and training. In 1979 when God led him to start a Bible College in what was then Rhodesia. At that time, Gerald was able to obtain an old guest house/motel and commenced a one year training course, the for-runner of the CPI Course.

During later visits to Zimbabwe, whilst conducting Church Growth seminars with national pastors, Gerald was able to introduce the CPI training program to many hundreds of ministers. As an ongoing result, the program has been adopted by some 27 denominations in Zimbabwe. All of these denominations and hundreds of graduates of Gerald's CPI Courses participated in a national decade long project called TARGET 2,000. Even now, despite many adverse circumstances within the nation, hundreds of new churches are started every year.

In 1992 Gerald received what he terms a "Macedonian Call" from Asia to place the CPI Course into some 30 new Bible Colleges in several parts of S.E. Asia. Gerald was based in Singapore at that time, and the colleges were in Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines. It took a few months to accomplish the necessary editing and printing. After this he began to organise pastor's conferences at which his strategy could be shared and the materials made available to all pastors that desired them. Zimbabwe became a missions' focussed nation, sending church planters into several surrounding nations. There are also many churches using the CPI Course in Lesotho, Botswana, Zambia, Swaziland, South Africa, Malawi, Nigeria and Namibia.

Gerald's CPI Course has also been adopted in colleges in India, China, Israel, and in many parts of the former USSR including the Ukraine, Kazakstan and Siberia and Russia itself.

In 2006, Gerald was awarded the Order of Australia Medal (OAM) by the Australian government for services rendered in the emerging world and today Gerald still ministers via a regular radio program focusing on God's plan for Israel and the Church in the end times.

A SURVIVAL MANUAL

Combining practical principles and spiritual truths

Chapter One

"UNCOVERING THE SECRET SICKNESS."

The accelerated tempo and increasing complexity of life in recent years is adversely affecting many people, particularly those in the various caring professions who are frequently burdened with the problems and anxieties of many other persons in addition to their own. The added pressures of modern life, which were virtually unknown in previous generations, are creating stress factors that make coping with life decidedly more difficult.

Partly because of these factors an extremely serious condition has begun to plague many clergymen, Christian workers and welfare workers in the past few years. A condition that appears to be troubling thousands of persons, particularly in the caring professions, yet relatively little seems to be known about it and few people appear willing to seriously address its reality.

Since I first discovered this unwelcome intruder I have frequently called it "The Secret Sickness." — The problem that no one wants to acknowledge. I am referring to a condition commonly known as "Burnout", which is a non-technical term for complete nervous, emotional and physical exhaustion.

My main reason for writing this article is firstly to help uncover this secret sickness — to tear away the coverings and expose it for what it is. To sound a note of warning to thousands of ministers and welfare workers concerning a condition about which they possibly know little and which may lurk around the next corner awaiting an opportunity to overtake them.

I also want to bring this problem out into the open for the sake of those people who are presently suffering from the ravages of it and have been unable to find an understanding confidant. So few people, including medical doctors and pastors, appear to have any real and empathetic understanding of this serious problem. I want to inform the general community, especially the church community, of the fearful reality of this plague and enlist their compassionate interest in order to provide some sources of realistic help for those in trouble.

"WHY IS IT A "SECRET SICKNESS?"

Burnout is often the "*secret sickness*" because so many of those unfortunate enough to experience it are frequently ashamed, embarrassed and unwilling to publicly admit their problem. They battle against it secretly and alone rather than acknowledge in some public way that they are experiencing a problem of this nature involving the mind and emotions.

This is largely because it is too often perceived as some type of "spiritual failure". A weakness which no Christian soldier should ever have. The kind of problem which may be indicative of some basic failure to live out their Faith as it was meant to be followed. The kind of malady about which some Christians all too easily conclude, "if he had more faith and really believed God's Word, this could never have happened to him."

A further reason why it is rarely spoken about and largely neglected is because relatively few people really understand much about it. Many people are now aware of something termed "Burnout" and are vaguely familiar with what it infers, but few of them really have any informed understanding or specific idea of what it is. I personally believe that every minister and Christian worker needs to have a thorough understanding of the basics of this phenomena for two main reasons. Firstly so that they personally can take all necessary precautions to avoid becoming victims. Secondly so that they can provide some effective assistance and meaningful help for fellow workers who are suffering from this problem.

I am particularly concerned for the many pastors who are struggling, consciously or sub-consciously, with severe stress factors. Many of them are not even aware of what is happening to them and what it can lead to if not properly dealt with. Some of them are trying to care for a congregation of people who have little or no comprehension of what their shepherd is going through and frequently there is a sad lack of empathy or true concern.

One of the things I want to do is to sound an alarm that may be heard by both pastor and people. A warning about a very real potential problem so that both parties can take appropriate action and can mutually help and assist each other.

Although this book may be primarily for caring professionals it is certainly not solely for them. It is also written out of concern for the many Christians who, though not caring professionals, are certainly caring persons. Many sincere Christians are constrained by their beliefs to exercise deep concern for others. In so doing they sometimes unwittingly carry their burdens and concerns personally. If the Christian has strong compassion and a tender temperament, they frequently end up carrying the burdens of numerous other persons, a combined load that becomes far too heavy for any person to bear.

One of the things I have sadly observed is that there is often a tragic lack of understanding, sympathy or empathy in some church circles for victims of such conditions as Burnout. This appears to be particularly true of many of the churches that hold a "Faith triumphant perspective" which maintains that if you have sufficient faith, then nothing can go wrong and your life will be a constant, unending success. Such a view has no place for perceived failures, for those who are sick, or suffer some tragic reversals. It has no empathy with those who are finding it difficult to cope with life's pressures. It only has time and space for winners.

Since personally experiencing Burnout I have received the confidences of many "companions in tribulation." Christians, including many ministers, who had never opened their heart until they met someone who admitted that he had experienced this problem. Many Christians have told me that it became impossible for them to continue in fellowship with their local church because of the lack of understanding there and the tendency of many of the people to judge and condemn the sufferers.

At the time that these victims needed their pastor and fellow members as never before, they had to walk away from their church community because it became too painful to cope with the uninformed conclusions of their fellow members. Some have confided that it became too painful to maintain contact with a community who were unable or unwilling to understand the nature and complexity of their suffering and insisted on offering impractical advice without supplying any loving and supportive environment

MY PERSONAL INTRODUCTION TO BURNOUT

My own personal awareness of the possible severity of Burnout came too late to save me from experiencing it. By the time I realised what my problem was, I was already in its grips and it was too late for any simple and quick solutions.

Of course I had heard about Burnout and was vaguely aware of its nature. I knew of several ministers who were said to be "suffering from Burnout." I understood from this that they were probably under considerable stress and had become uncommonly tired and severely depleted mentally, physically and emotionally. However, I had no real idea of just how severe and devastating such an experience can be. I certainly never thought that it was something that would ever affect me personally. I wrongly assumed that the victims had all been much weaker persons than myself.

Had I been more familiar with the condition I could have recognised its symptoms much earlier and taken some effective preventative actions. The two factors that influenced my situation were firstly that I did not know enough about the condition and what its symptoms were. Secondly, I never imagined that it could ever happen to me personally. As a person then in his mid-fifties, I had never experienced any conscious nervous anxieties or been aware of much stress in my life. In fact, I felt that I had a nature and disposition which would preclude any problems of that kind. I was fortunate to have a somewhat carefree attitude towards life and a faith disposition that had helped me face the future with positive anticipation and joyful expectation.

In retrospect, my first awareness that anything might be wrong did not appear to be remotely connected with Burnout. It was a Friday afternoon, the end of another busy working week. I had been conscious for some time of being uncommonly tired. A kind of permanent weariness that could not be overcome by an early night or by sleeping late the following morning. I was aware of a kind of lethargy that had developed and which seemed to make every task a far greater effort than it had ever been. Some of the routine jobs which I had previously tackled with little conscious effort, began to demand more and more concentration and far greater effort on my part. I realised that I probably needed a break and a good holiday, but my overly conscientious attitude told me that I could not spare the time for a holiday. I felt that my responsibilities were too important to take a break. I also had the feeling that if I were not there to do them nobody else could take care of them as competently as myself, though I would never have admitted this at the time.

Arriving home from the church office that Friday, I felt even more tired than usual and decided to take a rest, something that I rarely ever did. Walking into the bedroom to lie down, I began to experience excruciating pains in the chest. My wife wanted to get me to the hospital but I could not believe that it was a heart attack, primarily because I had always been physically strong and did not believe that such a thing could happen to me.

Therefore I did not want to rush to the hospital only to find that there was nothing seriously wrong and then feel foolish. The pain kept me awake most of the night but by the following morning it had eased. Nevertheless I paid a visit to my local doctor who gave me a thorough test and told me that there did not appear to be anything physically wrong with me but he would arrange some further tests. The tests eventually showed nothing organically wrong and the doctor was at a loss to know what the problem was.

In the succeeding weeks I experienced several similar bouts of chest pain but decided that there was nothing to be gained by visiting the doctor again. By this time several other strange symptoms were emerging. The first and most bewildering, was a series of experiences which I could only then describe as "out of body experiences". I began to frequently feel that I was not really present in the events of my own life. It was almost as though I was observing them from some distance, as though I was watching things transpire on a television or video screen. I later discovered that this phenomena is known as 'unreality' and is a fairly common symptom of the Burnout syndrome. This strange experience, together with the still recurring chest pains and the even more chronic weariness began to alarm me. I felt that it must be the combination of these factors which were beginning to deeply depress me. My attitude was becoming extremely negative and I was experiencing frequent bouts of depression, something that I had never previously known.

I tried to continue as normally as possible with all my commitments and responsibilities but this was becoming increasingly harder to do. Everything was becoming such an effort. Things that I had accomplished previously with scarcely any effort were now taxing my strength to the utmost. I was particularly aware that my powers of concentration and creativity were severely diminished. One example of this would be that for some years I had written a small article each week for our church newsletter. I usually wrote a topical or devotional article and always enjoyed doing it. I never seemed to be at a loss for something to write about and normally enjoyed the task which I would always complete by mid week so that my secretary could prepare it for the newsletter. I realised that this task seemed to be getting much more difficult to perform. Whereas previously I would simply sit at my computer for ten to fifteen minutes and complete the article, now my mind would be a complete blank. I would sit before the computer for hours seeking inspiration. Then I would begin to stare into space becoming increasingly more depressed.

I was also experiencing severely disturbed sleep patterns. Whereas previously I had always been a good sleeper, falling asleep as soon as my head touched the pillow, now I would lie awake through most of the night. At other times I would awaken in the early hours after a very short sleep and be unable to return to sleep. My body was physically weary to the point of exhaustion but as I lay in bed my mind would become hyper-active and I would be mentally wide awake finding it impossible to get to sleep.

ASSESSING MY WORK LOAD.

By this time I realised that I needed to take some positive action to help myself. As I began to look at my work-load I realised for the first time how overloaded it had become. Firstly I was senior pastor of a growing church of several hundred people and had several associate pastors on staff. I was also the president of our thriving primary and secondary Christian schools which were growing rapidly and presenting us with the challenge and responsibility of erecting a multi-million dollar campus facility.

I was also the Australian representative for an international Christian Organisation. In addition, I was on the boards of several other organisations, most of which were international Missionary Organisations which had assured me, "We don't want you to do anything, we simply want your name on our letterheads and to consult you once in a while." The reality was that I was constantly bombarded with questionnaires which required responsible evaluation and decisions. I sometimes felt as though I was drowning beneath a sea of paper and that my mind was being fragmented into a dozen different directions. There were frequent board meetings to attend and all of this ate into my time and increased the number of my commitments and responsibilities.

I also became aware of how deeply affected I was by the plight of a number of persons that I was endeavouring to help in pastoral capacity. I had always been a deeply caring person and tended to identify closely with persons coping with serious problems. At that time I was experiencing deep concern and empathy for a considerable number of persons facing heavy problems. I suddenly realised too that we had not taken a proper holiday for some seven years and in fact had rarely even taken a day off

The obvious solution seemed to be a holiday. It was the end of the year, the Christmas season was over, our schools were in recess and most of our members were taking their annual holidays. We were fortunate to live in a delightful part of Australia close to some of the loveliest resorts and beaches in the land. So it was a simple matter to rent an apartment overlooking the beach and take a thorough break for a month. We felt sure that this was the answer to our problems and that after the holiday we would return refreshed and our troubles would be behind us. This can often be the case. Many people on the verge of Burnout find that taking a good holiday and enjoying a complete break from their usual responsibilities will often solve the problem. Unfortunately my condition was now too deeply entrenched to be cured by such a simple solution.

The holiday turned out to be a disaster. We had everything we needed for a wonderful, recuperative and restorative remedy, but it did not work. We had a comfortable apartment, excellent weather, miles of beaches and rolling surf, but the time turned into a nightmare. I found it impossible to relax and as the weeks passed and I was not even able to relax I began to panic. My depressions became deeper and more fearful than ever and my symptoms became far more numerous. I found it impossible to go into a restaurant or any enclosed public place. I began to experience deep despair, fearing that I would never be well again. My mind and thoughts began to play all kinds of fiendish tricks. It was then that I understood that the situation was much more serious than I had realised and that I was no longer capable of continuing my various tasks and responsibilities.

I subsequently resigned from the numerous board roles and from all other responsibilities other than that of pastor. My church elders graciously released me from all duties and my senior associate temporarily stepped into my role. Several people picked up various of my responsibilities. It would be more than six months before I would be able to preach again, during which time I sat in the congregation and allowed the other pastors to minister to me.

It was a difficult time for everyone concerned, partly because neither I nor they really understood what was happening. Gradually, over the period of more than six months I recovered sufficiently to be able to assume some of my duties as senior pastor once

more. During this time I learned many things about Burnout and believe that I became a different and hopefully a better person in consequence. However, I also prayerfully re-assessed my role to discover what I was meant to be doing.

The result was a totally different ministry role, stationed in Singapore and reaching into many parts of South-East Asia. Initially it seemed that God was providing a less demanding role in order to facilitate my recovery. But as I have gradually become stronger it now seems that this period of my life, when I might normally be thinking towards retirement, may well become the most fruitful and rewarding time of our whole ministry. Such are the ways of God. He is able to take an apparent disaster and turn it into a triumph.

Chapter Two

SOME BIBLICAL EXAMPLES OF BURNOUT.

Although many Christians believe that a child of God should never suffer from such disorders as nervous exhaustion or Burnout, I believe that there is considerable evidence in the Bible to confirm that some of God's finest servants experienced such trials. Church history also confirms that some of its greatest leaders have suffered from various forms of this affliction.

WAS MOSES ON THE VERGE OF BURNOUT?

Moses is probably a clear example of a man who was rapidly heading for a case of Burnout until his wise father-in-law intervened and persuaded him to unload some of his responsibilities through the process of delegation.

(**Exodus. 18 : 13 -27.**)

Jethro observed several things about his son in law.

V.13. He was working long hours - from morning until evening.

He had the heavy responsibility of judging the people's problems.

V.14. He carried this burden alone.

V.16. He was endeavouring to solve all the people's difficulties.

V.18. Moses was wearing himself out with a task which was too much for him.

V.18. The people were not being well served either.

Jethro counselled Moses to appoint suitable leaders and to delegate much of his responsibility to them. After this nothing more is said about Moses being worn out and we may presume that the new system saved him from total exhaustion.

ELIJAH EXPERIENCED BURNOUT. 1 Kings. 19 : 1-8.

In **1 Kings. 18.** Elijah was involved in several intense spiritual dramas which left him depleted and exhausted, spiritually, mentally, and emotionally.

Vs. 20 -40. He defied and defeated the 450 prophets of Baal.

Vs. 41-45. He prayed down rain to end the drought.

V. 46. He outran a chariot for fifteen miles. Even though *"The hand of the Lord was upon him"*, he was still exhausted when he arrived at Jezreel.

James tells us that *"Elijah was a man of similar passions (emotions) to ourselves."* (**James. 5 : 18.**) The spiritual toll of recent events had left him weakened and spent. When Jezebel threatened him, he ran for his life.

In 1 Kings 19 we observe several classic symptoms of Burnout.

a: Fleeing from pressures and responsibilities.

V.4. *"But he himself went a days journey into the wilderness and sat down under a broom tree."*

The desire to dis-engage from the world and its problems and to get away from everything, is a common symptom of stress and exhaustion. So is the tendency to sit down alone somewhere and often descending into a pit of discouragement and despair.

I have personally known of people in Burnout who have refused to get out of bed, choosing to remain there for several weeks. They have refused to go to work or do to any kind of work. They have remained in their bed day and night, fearful of leaving the security they felt there. They will sometimes curl up in a foetal position as though endeavouring to return to the shelter and protection of their mother's womb, evidently trying to return to a time in their life when they had no responsibilities and no stress.

b: Getting away from people.

V.3. "He left his servant there."

Here we see the classic tendency to get away from people to seek isolation and aloneness. The victim frequently cannot even bear the presence of loved ones although they are endeavouring to understand and encourage him. He cannot even bear the presence of close and trusted friends, nor of those who are nearest and dearest to him. He is "peopled-out", and cannot cope with other people's company. He frequently finds that he cannot even enter a room where others are present. He cannot venture out into the street or any public place. He is afraid to enter a shop or eating place, afraid to be in a enclosed proximity with other people. This is often a severe reaction to the perceived responsibility of caring for the welfare and well being of many people. This reaction is particularly severe on the more caring type of worker who is deeply conscientious in the discharging of duties and responsibilities towards those who are under their care.

c: Disheartened and demoralised.

V.3. "He ran for his life and went to Beer-Sheba."

The man who had defied the 450 prophets of Baal alone now flees from the presence of one woman who threatened him. What had happened to him? He had exhausted his morale. His inner strength, fortitude and courage had deserted him. The man who had successfully challenged and defeated so many false prophets does not have the courage to stand up to one woman.

The very man who had been courageous enough to challenge the gigantic false religious system of his day was now filled with fear and running for his life. I realise that there was undoubtedly some reason to be afraid but I am also sure that many of the fears which filled his mind were imagined ones.

d: A total loss of self esteem.

V. 4b. "Lord, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!"

The Burnout victim often suffers a complete loss of self esteem and confidence. His self confidence and sense of personal worth are at rock bottom. His self perception becomes entirely negative. He no longer sees any virtue or worth in himself or his abilities. This negative estimation is so powerful that he frequently no longer sees any point in living. He is convinced that his life will never be worth anything again and he begs God, "Lord, take my life."

e: Experiencing deep, chronic depression.

His attitude, physical posture, words and expressions, all speak of a person who is deeply depressed. His outlook is totally negative. He has nothing positive to say whatsoever. He has no positive anticipation of the future. Nothing to look forward to. His mood is dark and sombre without relief. Fearful, debilitating depression is probably the most common and most frightening symptom of Burnout.

f: Deep despair and loss of hope.

Suddenly his life seems to be worthless. There is no longer any point in living. "It is enough", he cries. I can't face life any more. Despair means the complete loss or absence of hope. Elijah is dejected and despondent, as low in spirit as it is possible to be. He even despairs of life itself. He feels that life has lost all purpose and meaning and that there is no longer any reason to live. Notice his attitude and perception towards God and the work of God. *"I have been very jealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death by the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too". 1 Kings 19:14.*

He is sincerely and deeply dedicated to God and the work of God.

He is "jealous" for the Name and reputation of God. He assesses the negative circumstances around Him and feels that some people may be blaming God for the awful situation. He therefore feels jealous for the Name and reputation of God.

He surmises that things have reached a dismal level where *"he is the only one left"*. God has to reassure him that things are not nearly as bad as he fears and *"I have yet seven thousand in Israel whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him"*. (v.17)

The Burnout victim often experiences depressing fears that cloud the future. They frequently seem to occur in this fashion :-

- A negative view of your self.
- A pessimistic view of your circumstances.
- A dismal anticipation of the future

g: A pathetic death wish.

V.4. *"And he prayed that he might die, and said, It is enough! Now Lord take my life."*

Many Christians will have a hard time understanding how this great prophet, a spiritual giant of immense stature, could wish to die. They have never experienced the depth of despair which this man experienced. They have never known the darkness of a depression which can make a person feel that even death would be preferable to the kind of existence they seem to be experiencing. The "Death Wish" occurs when the prospect of death appears to be more desirable than that of life. This may well be what David referred to in **Psalm. 23:4**. when he spoke of the *"Valley of the shadow of death."*

It is important to understand the seriousness of this kind of malady for at least two reasons :-

- So that you can avoid any possibility of becoming a victim of such a condition.
- So that you can truly empathise with others who experience such darkness.

h: His ultimate restoration.

Thank God the story does not end with his death wish. God stepped in and brought about his deliverance and restoration. Please notice that God's prescription included a long sleep and a good meal! Two very natural remedies.(**1 Kings. 19:6**.) It is still very often the case that natural remedies are the simplest and best.

WAS DAVID ANOTHER VICTIM?

"Why are you cast down O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me?"
Psalm. 42:11.

Much of the powerful and dramatic imagery of David's writings can only be properly understood if we recognise that he was probably experiencing severe emotional trauma, nervous exhaustion, and its resulting bouts of depression, - classic symptoms of Burnout. We often tend to read such narratives as though they are simply allegorical, i.e. a story with a hidden truth. We tend to spiritualise them and use them as types of certain biblical truths. We frequently tend to overlook or gloss over the reality of the experience. We often forget that such people as David and many other biblical characters actually experienced great traumas and intense suffering.

At the time of his sad episode with Bathsheba he was most probably suffering from mental and emotional exhaustion. (**2 Sam. 11:1-13.**) It was *"the time when Kings go forth to battle"*, yet David, a great warrior of renown, remained at home, probably suffering from battle fatigue. He was also in his middle years, and possibly undergoing a mid-life crisis. He was suffering from insomnia and disturbed sleep patterns, another symptom common to Burnout.

None of this is offered as an excuse for what happened but it does suggest some possible background to the sad incident and could serve as a warning to others.

THE DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL.

The graphic imagery of **Psalm. 22** can be better understood if we recognise that it was a scene from David's experience of Burnout. Many of the verses only make sense when we read them with this background in mind. Otherwise they may appear to be highly emotional and exaggerated.

Whilst this psalm is obviously prophetic of the suffering Messiah, we must also realise that it is initially a record of David's experience. As such he was a type of Messiah in the darkest hours of His sufferings. There are numerous dramatic, powerful, and fearful verses, but none so frightening as the opening lines, *"My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me, and from the sound of My groaning?"* (**Psalm. 22 :1.**)

It is a sobering thought to consider that this verse tells the experience of both David and Jesus. Both of them passed through a time of darkness, depression, and despair so fearful that it seemed to them that God must have deserted them and withdrawn from the scene of their greatest suffering. So deep, and so dark is the valley of mental and emotional exhaustion that the victim may no longer sense the presence of God with him. It is also very important to remember that God had not deserted or left them. It was the depth of their experience that made them feel that He had.

Numerous men and women of God have also experienced similar traumas. Spiritual giants such as Augustine, Martin Luther, and many others have recorded their experiences of "The Dark night of the Soul." It is like a valley through which many have passed, emerging later into a new realm of light and maturity. Perhaps this was also the *"Valley of the shadow"* to which David referred. (**Psalm. 23.**)

It was probably this experience also to which he referred when he said, *"Weeping endures for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."* (**Psalm.30:5.**) Certainly this scripture and the concept it conveys can be a tremendous encouragement to the person experiencing such

a trial. The realisation that such darkness will not last forever, but like the night it will eventually give way to the dawning of a new and glorious day.

A NEW TESTAMENT EXAMPLE.

Someone will say, "This may all be true but it happened to people in the Old Testament. Had they known the advantage of a New Covenant relationship they would not have had to experience such suffering". Let us look for a moment at the experience of Epaphroditus in the New Testament. (**Phil. 2 : 25-30.**)

HIS BACKGROUND.

- a: He was an intimate friend of Paul - "My brother", said Paul.
- b: He was a fellow worker, - Paul's "companion in labour".
- c: A fellow soldier, - experienced in spiritual warfare.
- d: He was a missionary assistant to Paul.
- e: A Christian leader of some stature, experience and maturity.

THE NATURE OF HIS AFFLICTION.

- a: He had over worked, - "*For the work of the Lord.*" (**v.30.**)
- b: No other cause is mentioned.
- c: He was sick, almost unto death. (**v.27.**) "*Because for the work of Christ he came close to death, not regarding his life, to supply what was lacking in your service to me.*" (**v.30.**)

Actual physical work will make one tired but it will not usually bring you close to death. But the stress, concern, and anxiety of responsibility and of trying to do the work of several people can certainly do it. Epaphroditus was obviously trying to do the work of several persons who were "*lacking in their service to Paul.*"

HIS DELIVERANCE.

v.27. "*But God had mercy upon him*", - and upon Paul too.

Epaphroditus was able to become active again in the work of God. The Philippians rose to their responsibilities again and began to serve Paul as they ought to have done previously, sending their gifts through Epaphroditus. One of the good results of this tragedy was that many more people became involved in the ministry. This will often be a consequence of Burnout. Tasks will be delegated to others sharing the work load more equitably.

WHAT ABOUT PAUL?

Whilst considering the case of Epaphroditus we must not overlook the effect of this incident upon Paul himself. He says, "*The Lord had mercy on Epaphroditus, and on me also*" **v.27** Paul was obviously deeply affected by the sickness that had overtaken his friend and fellow worker.

We often tend to perceive Paul as some great super-human spiritual giant who sails through life oblivious of and immune to the pressures that affect we lesser mortals. We frequently imagine him to be far above ourselves in some special category of spirituality and faith that exalts him above the average Christian.

We hear him boldly declare, "*I can do all things*" so forcefully that we forget the following context, "*through Christ who strengthens me.*" We tend to perceive him as a positive, confident, self sufficient person, striding through life's varied experiences without any negative reactions whatsoever.

The context of this statement, **(Phil 4:4-13)** clearly reveals that Paul's contentment and his coping abilities are a learned and acquired art. He has learned, in whatever state he found himself, to be content. His circumstances and experiences were frequently negative and difficult to cope with, yet he learned how to do so by:-

- Constantly encouraging himself to rejoice in the Lord. **V.4.**
- Being moderate in all things. **V.5.**
- Resolving not to be anxious or worried about anything. **V.6.**
- Praying consistently with supplication and thanksgiving. **V.6.**
- Keeping his thought life positive and pure. **V.8.**
- Actually doing those things he had learned, received, heard and seen. **V.9.**
- Learning to be content whether hungry or abounding.

Obviously this is one aspect of Paul's experience but we should not overlook some of the balancing factors in which he describes himself and his companions as:-

"Troubled on every side, yet not utterly crushed, perplexed (puzzled, bewildered, confused) but not totally in despair." **(2 Cor 4:8)**

*"For when we came into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; outside were conflicts, inside were fears. Nevertheless, God, who comforts **those who are cast down**, comforted us by the coming of Titus."* **(2 Cor 7:5,6)**

It seems obvious, from these and other passages of scripture, that Paul was not utterly oblivious or impervious to the stresses and pressures of his nomadic and dramatic life style. The external pressures caused internal fears. There were times when he, and others of his companions were "cast down" —discouraged and depressed.

This realisation causes me to consider another statement of Paul's in a different light. When he speaks of being in a dilemma between the desire to "live or die" **(Phil 1: 21-24)** he is not merely indulging in a philosophical conjecture or day dream. He may actually be expressing his consternation as he finds his desires divided between a will to live, continue and conclude his ministry, and another desire to escape his trials and go to be with Christ, a prospect that he sees to be "far more enticing" than living. However we choose to interpret Paul's musings, he obviously faces a real dilemma that makes the idea of dying and going to be with Christ, an alluring prospect.

JESUS EXPERIENCED BURNOUT TOO.

I personally found it an immense comfort to realise that Jesus Himself had experienced everything that I was going through. The Bible reassures us that our Great High Priest experienced all the feelings, (pains and emotions) of our infirmities and was tempted (tried and tested) in every way that we are. **Heb 4:15.**

Isaiah tells us that Jesus was "a man acquainted with grief and sorrow, who carried and bore all our infirmities". **(Isiah 53: 3,4)** We know that He did this as our Redeemer, the suffering Saviour who bore, atoned for, and carried away all our sins and infirmities. Nevertheless, it is also true that in the human aspect of His being He actually felt and endured all the pain of our fallen humanity. Jesus personally, in His humanity, experienced every pain that man has ever known. He is truly acquainted with our grief.

We are told that in the garden of Gethsemane *“He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed and said My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.”* (**Matt 26:37,38**) Luke also tells us that *“his sweat, was as it were great drops of blood falling to the ground”.* (**Luke 22:44**) This is a picture of a person under the most extreme excruciating kind of spiritual and emotional pressure, experiencing the severest kind of “Burnout” to a degree far worse than any human has ever known. This a part of the experience that made *“a High Priest who is touched with the feelings of our infirmities”.* (**Heb 4:15**)

Of course I knew all of this theologically, yet to some degree my knowledge was theoretical. But now I was to “know” it in a new and altogether deeper dimension. The fact is that Jesus Himself has experienced every nuance of pain to which you are exposed. This is a tremendous source of comfort and inspiration to the Burnout sufferer.

It is usually extremely difficult to find a trusted confidant. Someone who so thoroughly understands what you are going through that they will patiently and persistently walk with you through the dark hours and months. A person who knows so acutely the kind of horrific torment you are enduring and can lovingly empathise with you and offer the kind of understanding that only a fellow sufferer could know.

By communing with Jesus in this type of circumstance, you may come to know Him in a deeper way than ever before. All the religious sentiment and superficiality that all too frequently encumbers our relationship is cast aside and we come to grips with the foundational reality of our relationship and fellowship with Jesus. Perhaps in some measure this is *“knowing Him in the fellowship of His sufferings”* (**Phil 3:10**) and becoming a *“brother and companion in tribulation”* as John was. (**Rev 1:9**)

We tend to feel as Job must have felt when after coming through all the troubles that befell him he said, *“I had heard of you by the hearing of the ears, but now my eyes behold you”.* (**Job 42:5**) It is almost as though our previous knowledge of Him was distant and theoretical but now we know Him in experiential reality.

Chapter Three

RECOGNISING THE SYMPTOMS

Burnout occurs when the mental and emotional faculties are completely exhausted so that the victim can no longer cope with life and its responsibilities.

Stress induced, or stress related disorders, are obviously increasing with the growing complexity of our modern world environment. "Burnout" is one of the most common of these stress induced disorders. Many of the victims of this modern plague are business executives and people in the "caring industry", i.e. nurses, doctors, welfare workers, clergy, and church workers. I know that there are many Christians and ministers who will protest that Christians should never suffer from such an affliction and that to do so means that they have been working in their own strength rather than the strength of the Lord. I certainly understand the principle they are espousing but must add that the facts indicate that many true and sincere servants of God expend enormous amounts of physical, emotional, and mental energy and unwittingly exhaust themselves.

Many Christian workers are so sincerely and totally dedicated to their work and pour themselves into it to such a degree that they expend all their vital energies. Such persons frequently spend so much of their time in serving their fellow man that they neglect their own need for rest and recuperation.

The Apostle Paul spoke of the danger of "*becoming weary in well doing,*" (Gal. 6:9) Please notice that he was not speaking about becoming weary *of* doing good, but of becoming weary, tired and exhausted, as a direct result of being involved *in* well doing. They were in danger of becoming utterly weary and of fainting through their many labours of well doing.

A SIMPLE ANALOGY.

In seeking to describe the phenomena of Burnout I have often used the analogy of a motor vehicle. The tank is empty, the tires are flat. Not only is the battery flat, but the chemical constituency that normally holds the charge is also completely depleted. It is no longer possible to simply re-charge the battery. It has now become necessary to replace the chemical which holds the charge.

"Burnout" is a widely used name for severe emotional, nervous, and physical exhaustion. It is a non-technical term which tends to cover a number of different but similar conditions. The most consistent symptom is an almost total exhaustion of the body, mind, and spirit. A chronic tiredness which affects the total being. A weariness which can no longer be remedied by an early night, or a good night's sleep. It has reached a stage where no amount of early nights will adequately overcome the fatigue. The person suffers a chronic lethargy. They lack the strength to undertake even the simplest task. Their creativity is totally exhausted, they can scarcely think straight. Their drive and application are non-existent. Even the thought of work leaves them exhausted and depleted.

The particular causes of Burnout are numerous and the symptoms may differ somewhat. The diagnosis obviously needs to be more specific if any form of medical treatment is required. For the purpose of this brief study we will not try to deal with the various disorders but will consider them together under the general designation of Burnout.

What are some of the symptoms of Burnout?

How can you know when you are in danger of succumbing to it? I will mention briefly a range of possible symptoms which is by no means exhaustive. You may identify with some or all of them. If so, you need to examine your situation and take some preventative action. If you are in the early stages of this condition some kind of short break or holiday may rectify your problem. You may also need to re-organise your life and schedule somewhat, probably delegating some of your work load to an associate.

Should the symptoms be more advanced and more deeply entrenched, you will probably need to take more serious steps. If you do take a holiday and find it impossible to relax, this could be a strong indication that you are heading for serious trouble and need to take some responsible steps. There are usually numerous warning signs which if heeded early enough can cause you to take some simple steps to defuse the problem. However, if ignored and allowed to take a stronger hold, the solution soon becomes less simple and the condition far more difficult to cure.

One analogy I sometimes use is as follows. Imagine that you are walking across an area of rough unknown ground on a night which is extremely dark. You cannot see a hand in front of you but you are determined to keep going across the field. You walk slowly and carefully, endeavouring to sense any potential obstacles and avoid them. Despite your care you still stumble over branches and rocks which lie in your path, incurring minor injuries. Instead of taking this as a warning and deciding to delay the journey until the light is better, you foolishly determine to continue on.

Eventually you fall into a deep, dark pit from which there is no easy way to escape. Now you are going to need some help to climb back out of the hole and it is going to take some time. The time required may vary to some degree and the kind of pain and despair you experience may vary from one person's experience to another's. But the fact is that you will not be able to emerge easily. You will probably experience some of the darkest days you have ever known, and so will your loved ones.

If you have never witnessed or experienced this frightening phenomena you may feel that I am exaggerating its repercussions. As a result, you may choose to ignore my warnings, but let me emphasise that this sickness is very real and quite frightening. It is certainly not a figment of the imagination. It is serious, devastating and destructive. Thousands are presently experiencing its torment and I am sure that each one of them has regretted that they did not recognise the symptoms earlier and do something effective to rescue themselves before it became such a serious problem.

It is therefore important that we know something about the common symptoms so that we are able to recognise them early and take evasive action before the problem becomes too firmly entrenched. I shall merely comment briefly on each symptom.

The symptoms may possibly occur within five categories:-

- 1. Physical. (Apparent bodily ailments)**
- 2. Mental. (Thoughts)**
- 3. Emotional. (Feelings)**
- 4. Social. (Relationships)**
- 5. Spiritual. (Our relationship with God)**

1: **PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS.**

Constant tiredness - an almost total exhaustion.

Extreme weariness is a common symptom of impending Burnout. This goes far beyond the normal experience of tiredness. It is a total exhaustion of the whole system. The mind is weary, the emotions depleted, the body heavy with weariness. Even a small task like cleaning your teeth seems too arduous to contemplate.

Apathy and indifference with a diminished sense of responsibility.

Apathy is basically a mental state of indifference and lack of interest. However part of the root of the word is "pathos", which generally refers to sadness of the emotions. So apathy is not only a mental condition, it is also an emotional state of sadness. The person is listless and unconcerned. They are also inclined to insensitivity and lack attention to detail. Overall there is a definite diminishing of the sense of responsibility. The person could not care less about anything. Nothing seems important any more.

Loss of creativity and concentration = poor productivity.

Among the earlier symptoms of Burnout is a loss of concentration. The inability to focus the thoughts properly and to bring all your thoughts together. There is usually a severe loss of creativity, of inventive and intelligent imagination. These factors severely deplete the persons' productive abilities. This can obviously cause grave despondency and despair.

Disturbed sleep patterns and insomnia

Although sleep is frequently something for which the depressed person longs, it is not always easily attainable. The depressed mind is frequently racing so quickly and filled with so many concerns that it is a most difficult thing to fall asleep. It often seems that the quietness of the evening precipitates the activities of the mind and the person may lie for hours with their mind and thoughts racing. They long for sleep, but the more they long for it the more it eludes them. They sometimes fall asleep in the day and then toss restlessly to and fro through the seemingly endless hours of the night.

In some cases the person is able to get to sleep but then awakens after some three or four hours and cannot go back to sleep. Lying wide awake in the early hours of the morning, the mind is wildly active but in a decidedly negative mode. This can often be the time that negative thoughts flood into the mind and a grave state of depression occurs. They are often too weary to get up out of bed to do something to distract their mind. They lie in a condition of weariness, apparently defenceless, unable to protect themselves from the onslaught of negative thoughts and emotions.

Change in appetite and rapid loss or gain in weight.

The disturbed emotional condition induces all kinds of chemical changes in the body that may cause rapid changes in eating habits and body weight. It is very common for the depressed person to begin to eat in order to combat their depression. This can cause a huge gain in their body weight.

The opposite is also true and the emotionally disturbed person may rapidly lose huge amounts of body weight. Either way can be very alarming but the person must try not to allow themselves to be too distressed by this. Once your mental and emotional life stabilises, you can take responsible control again and achieve your normal healthy body weight.

Psychosomatic symptoms. e.g. "Heart attack pains."

One of the realms of medical research which has yielded great insight in recent times has been the area of Psychosomatic sickness. As the word suggests it is the study of the Psycho —Mind, and the Soma —Body, and the manner in which two are related. In particular it is the study of how much sickness begins in the mind and subsequently afflicts the body. It refers to a bodily disorder which is mental not physical in origin. It also deals with the inter-action of the mind upon the body. Although much has come to light through recent research there are still great areas of mystery in this matter and many things still not understood. The fact which has been clearly and firmly established is that the mind has an immensely powerful influence on the body and that psychological disorders frequently manifest themselves in physical symptoms.

This is frequently true for sufferers of Burnout. The distressed mind and emotions may throw up all manner of bewildering symptoms. A thorough medical examination will usually reveal no organic cause, yet the symptoms persist. They are not imaginary, nor is the patient a hypochondriac imagining themselves to be ill when they are not. They are the victims of some strange psychosomatic phenomena which is a direct result of their disturbed state of mind and emotions.

Desire to stay in bed, often in a foetal position.

A fairly frequent symptom of Burnout is a strong desire and determination to stay in bed. I knew a fellow clergyman who remained in bed for almost three months. It was the first intimation that anything was wrong with him and neither he, his wife, nor his colleagues understood what was happening or why he insisted on doing this.

The desire is related to powerful fears which dominate the mind. Fear of leaving the comfort and security of bed. Fear of venturing forth into the normal workaday world because the patient feels completely unable to handle the pressures and responsibilities which may arise in that world. He retreats to the privacy and imagined security of his bedroom. It becomes a fortress or a castle when he locks the door on the outside world. The patient often curls up in bed in a foetal position, sub-consciously trying to return to the secrecy and security of his mothers' womb.

2: THE MIND. (Thought patterns)

Heightened anxiety levels, overly worried and concerned.

Anxiety is a mental condition in which the person is unnaturally and fearfully concerned about everything, particularly the future. They are frequently and unnecessarily troubled about almost everything. There is a distinct lack of ease and peace of mind. Many people experience this to some small degree, but the person entering a condition of Burnout is often chronically affected by anxious thoughts and emotions. They are often in an almost constant state of fearful apprehension. Everything seems to give them cause for alarm and concern.

Fear, — inexplicably afraid of everything.

Certain types of fear are normal and appropriate. They are part of a persons' defence mechanism. They inject a note of caution which is often a safety factor. But the kind of fear of which I am speaking is unnatural and demeaning. It is not a fear which is born of good reason. It is usually unfounded and unwarranted fear. A fear which invades the

mind and emotions making the person fearful of all manner of things which never previously troubled them.

Loss of perspective, small hills appear to be mountains.

The person in Burnout usually loses their proper perspective on life. Everything becomes out of proportion. The proverbial mole hill looms larger than a mountain. It was this kind of paranoia that caused the 10 Israelite spies to see their enemies as giants and themselves as grass-hoppers.

In Burnout every disappointment appears to be a tragedy of mammoth proportions. Every shadow assumes frightening substance and every situation appears capable of utterly destroying the Burnout victim. Even a loose tooth can seem like the end of the world is at hand.

Indecisiveness, unable to make even the smallest decision.

The inability to make even small decisions is often a sign of stress and is frequently a warning of the onset of Burnout.

Low self esteem and loss of self confidence.

Elijah lost his self esteem and inner confidence, he suddenly felt himself worthless and useless. This feeling is common to those in Burnout. They lose all sense of self worth, feeling that they are utterly useless. Elijah felt this so strongly that he pleaded with God to "take his life". He no longer felt confident about anything. He saw himself as a dismal failure and felt that life was no longer worth living.

Hyper-tension. Filled with tension and stress.

The Burnout candidate is usually extremely tense and full of stress. His nerves are on edge and he is as tight as a violin string.

3: THE EMOTIONS. (Feelings)

Sense of futility, experiencing hopelessness and despair.

Futility is the feeling that everything is meaningless and senseless. A deep conviction that life is empty, fruitless and hopeless. It frequently gives rise to deep cynicism and the feeling that all of life is really false and hollow.

Depressed, dispirited and sad.

In the mental or emotional sense, depression is a condition of heavy despondency and melancholia. The person is usually sorrowful, dejected and miserable. Their attitude is a negative one of prolonged gloom. It is usually an inner feeling which emanates from deep within the persons' thoughts and emotions. But it can also come from outside, like a huge dark cloud which settles upon the person.

The person who has never or rarely ever experienced such depression finds it difficult to imagine how persistent this can be. They imagine that the victim is simply giving in to some self induced negativity which they can mentally control if they would make the effort. Such people tend to urge the patient to "Snap out of it", "Pull yourself together", "Take control of yourself", —all of which are easier said than done. Nobody wants to remain in that kind of morbid depression. If it were possible they would gladly "snap out of it", but unfortunately it is not always possible to do that. The mental processes that would normally control such moods are temporarily beyond the persons'

power of control and all such exhortations only increase irritation causing further exasperation and despondency.

Tendency to cry like a baby.

Despondency and despair frequently seek expression in tears. It is not always a bad thing to cry, providing those tears are not allowed to continue indefinitely. Tears are often a means of release. They provide a cathartic cleansing of the despondent emotions. It is frequently good for a person to cry. For example, the person who has suffered bereavement and the loss of a loved one, or some other kind of devastating loss. It is helpful for them to release bottled up negative emotions. It is far better to release them through tears than to keep them bottled up inside.

But weeping should not be allowed to continue too long. The Bible says, "*Weeping endures for a night, but joy comes in the morning.*" (**Psalm. 30:5**). Nehemiah allowed the Israelites to weep tears of repentance for a while before he told them "*Mourn not, nor weep, neither be sorry, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.*" (**Neh. 8 : 9,10**).

Feelings of failure. Fear of the ultimate failure of your life's work.

Amongst the many and varied fears which may harass the Burnout victim, one of the most devastating is the fear of ultimate failure. The fear that your life is coming to an abrupt and ignominious end. The very powerful fear that after all you may have accomplished in life, your life will end in ultimate failure.

A morbid Desire for death. Suicidal tendencies.

My final symptom is yet another one which will be extremely difficult for many to receive. I refer to the idea that a Christian, when suffering from Burnout, may find in their thoughts and emotions a strong desire to die. Even more difficult to accept is the possibility that a Christian may entertain thoughts of self destruction through suicide. But such is the perversity, intensity and persistence of the tortured mind that sometimes death, even at one's own hand, can seem to be the only solution.

The person who has never experienced the dreadful torment of mental distress can scarcely understand that it can be so painful and distressing that death seems to represent a welcome release. Let this thought and possibility increase your compassion for the fellow Christian who experiences such pain. Endeavour to be as Jesus who was "*touched with the feelings of their infirmities.*" (**Heb. 4 : 15**)

Many strong people who have never experienced anxiety and depression find it very difficult to comprehend the severity of distress that another person experiences. The strong may tend to despise those whom they perceive to be 'weak' believing them to be miserable weaklings to allow such negative attitudes to dominate their life.

Jesus was the strongest person yet He was able to feel and understand the sufferings that we experience. He understands man better than anyone, knowing exactly how we are fashioned and what makes us tick. He never exhausts His compassion and concern. Even though a person may reach the complete end of their resources and feel that death is the only solution, Jesus still walks beside them with a complete empathy for the sufferer. Even though darkness may conceal His presence and the sufferer may have no means with which to discern His presence, still He is with them. Not to judge or censure them, but to comfort, encourage and uphold them.

4: SOCIAL. (Relationships)

Irritability with one's self and with others.

Irritability is when a person is extremely sensitive, petulant, and easily annoyed. They are very nervous, tense, quickly lose patience and become exasperated. They are constantly uptight and easily provoked.

Strained relationships especially with spouse and family.

The irritable person I have just described is extremely difficult to live with. Nothing seems to please them and it is very difficult to cope with their mood swings. It is especially difficult for loved ones in close proximity to the victim. Whilst the irritable person may make some effort to appear civil and normal to strangers, they rarely have the ability to restrain themselves with those closest to them. An old song says, "*You always hurt the one you love. The one you shouldn't hurt at all*" which is unfortunately often true. And in this case is frequently true. One thing the loved one must bear in mind is that "things are not normal and their loved one is not really responsible for what they say and how they act." They really do not mean what they say. So the spouse, or family member should not allow themselves to be hurt or offended by remarks which certainly could be hurtful. Unfortunately living with a person who is under this kind of pressure can seem to become impossible and the sad reality is that many marriages are breaking up as a result.

Social detachment. —a strong desire to be alone.

A person under stress often becomes hyper-sensitive about their inmost feelings and afraid that everyone can see that something is wrong with them. In this state of mind they frequently develop an aversion to being in the company or presence of people, preferring the privacy of their own company. The sick person will often lock themselves in a room, —away from any other person. This fear of being with people can often make it impossible for them to enter any public gathering, e.g. a shop or restaurant. Sometimes they feel they must get far away from all human contact to seek isolation.

Sense of rejection.

As the distressed mind tries to cope with all the negative thoughts which have invaded and possessed it, there is often a deadly feeling of rejection. The self image and self confidence of former days has gone completely. The victim has lost all confidence in himself and his abilities. He despises himself and dislikes himself and feels that all others feel the same about him. He feels that he is the biggest failure who has ever lived and that he is despised and rejected by all his peers.

Of course this is the very thing which the suffering Messiah experienced. Isaiah says of Him, "*He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.*" (**Isaiah. 53:3a**) Obviously his rejection was real but the sense of rejection which the patient suffers seems just as real to him as the sufferings of Messiah were to Him. These fearful feelings of rejection are coupled with the awesome fear of ultimate failure.

Inability to relax.

A Burnout patient has often completely forgotten how to relax. It is so long since he allowed himself to do it that he has long since forgotten how to relax and enjoy himself, free from the tensions and pressures of his work. This greatly undermines one's ability to freely relate to others.

When he tries to relax and discovers that he cannot, a state of panic often follows. The more he tries to relax, the more uptight he becomes. His tensions and fears are amplified intensely.

5: SPIRITUAL. (Our relationship to God)

Inability to read the Bible. Nothing makes sense.

Now I come to a point that I know many of my ministerial friends may find hard to accept. The fact that in such a time of distress the victim may find that he has temporarily lost his ability to receive comfort from the Bible. I know that many of them will insist that this is the very time when we may expect to receive the greatest comfort and inspiration from God's Word.

I would want to agree with them whole heartedly but I also know that there is a very real possibility in such circumstances that the sufferer may actually be unable to receive much comfort from any book, including the Bible. Let me hasten to assure the Burnout sufferer that the reason for this is not a spiritual one. It is certainly not, as the sufferer will sometimes be tempted to think, that God has withdrawn from him. Nor is it that the victim has lost his love for, or faith in the Bible. The plain truth of the matter is that his powers of concentration are so depleted that he is able to receive little or nothing from any book, including the Bible. What he needs to do in this situation is to try to be as relaxed as possible and quietly wait on God in his spirit. Hear the voice and words of God spoken directly into his heart.

Losing the ability to sense God's presence.

This comment will probably receive the same kind of reception as the previous one and those who feel they are ultra-spiritual will want to insist that nothing can take away from the true believer the real sense of God's presence. But again I must refer you to the experiences of both King David and the Messiah, both of whom cried, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" If you experience a time when you cannot sense or feel God's presence do not berate, despise, or belittle yourself, assuming that you are a spiritual cast off. God is with you even when you cannot feel or sense His presence. Therefore you must count on His presence even though you cannot discern it.

Chapter Four

UNDERSTANDING THE CAUSES

Once again I shall only make brief comments and restrict myself mostly to some of the causes which are most common to Christian workers.

a: Stress and tension, indicating too much pressure.

The modern pastor has been thrust into the role of a business executive in many churches. This is often a role for which he has been inadequately prepared and to which his temperament is frequently unsuited. Most pastors have a heart for people and many of them find the role of an executive one for which they are unsuited. Nevertheless circumstances often require that they fill this role but the consequent pressures are not easily borne. We are all living in a stress filled world and even the advances of modern science are tending to increase rather than diminish the tension.

Stress is the friction and wear that results from a person's inadequacy to cope with the load of responsibility and pressure that their life puts upon them. Any environment or circumstance that applies tension, pressure, friction, intimidation, fear or anxiety is a stress producing environment. Every person is under stress to some degree. Its affect on them may vary for several reasons.

- The amount of stress their environment provides.
- The type of person.
- How well, or how poorly they are able to handle the stress.

b: Overwork. Long hours, insufficient holidays or breaks.

The many tasks of a Christian worker can rarely be accomplished in a normal working week. Consequently the diligent and conscientious often find themselves working many more hours than a person in secular employment. Many Christian leaders work a 60 hour week and more and are also expected to be on 24 hour call. They often find themselves working into the small hours.

c: Under-fulfilled expectations.

The expectations which a minister holds dear are undoubtedly the highest possible. He receives his calling from God and his mandate from the Bible, the written word of God. He has a vision of the ultimate eternal goal towards which he is moving. It is a paradise in which every wrong has been righted and everyone lives in the kind of utopia which God has always desired for mankind. But the pathway to the fulfilment of this vision is walked out in this world of frail reality.

One of the things that a minister must work through is the balance between his spiritual expectations and the frailty of humanity. The young minister initially tends to see everyone through the rosy spectacles of his faith. He believes that every Christian is a saint and that the work of the ministry will be a source of constant delight.

His early dreams and expectations visualise heaven coming down to earth and he believes that the church is fashioned on that model. Spiritually this is true, but the earthly reality is somewhat different. Possibly no one tackles a job with more excited anticipation than does a pastor undertaking his first pastorate. His expectations reach to heaven, but he undertakes a task which is very definitely worked out on earth. He frequently believes that every member of his church will be brimming with enthusiasm and anxious to

volunteer his energies for every task. One of those things which he must learn is that Jesus taught that even the seed which falls into good ground and brings forth good fruit, produces at thirty fold, sixty fold and some one hundred fold. There are no congregations where every member produces one hundred fold.

So the minister needs to find a balance between heavenly ideals and earthly realities. He needs to learn how to temper his expectations with patience and forbearing. He needs to pace himself by the awareness of the realities of life.

d: Carrying other people's problems and worries.

As a shepherd the pastor is often called upon to carry various of the sheep. One of the biblical images of the shepherd is just such a one. The shepherd bringing a sheep back to the fold on his shoulders and bringing it back to safety and security.

The pastor is also a counsellor and in this role he listens to the problems, pains and heart aches of many different people. Obviously he is meant to help such people to cast their burdens on to the Lord but in the course of hearing so many problems his human empathy is touched and he feels with those sheep the pain of their suffering.

It often transpires that a pastor will gradually burden himself with some small measure of the problems of scores and possibly hundreds of people. He may not be immediately aware of how onerous and heavy this burden has become. The problems are not necessarily in his conscious thoughts all the time but they are in his sub-conscious mind continually. No one was made to carry the burden of so many people's problems and the pastor who wants to remain in good health must find workable ways in which to relieve himself of the stress that accumulates through concern for the problems of others.

e: Heavy responsibilities of leadership.

The task of leadership can be a heavy burden which not everyone finds easy to carry. There is often a certain loneliness about the leader's role. A burden reserved for the leader that he is expected to carry. Responsibilities, decisions and duties for which he alone carries ultimate responsibility.

f: Too little relaxation.

Most pastors are extremely conscientious and hard working. Their heavy work load is often self imposed but this does not make it any the less arduous. I know many pastors who work in excess of eighty hours per week on the various tasks that fall to their lot. No pastor works to a 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. schedule with evenings free for leisure activities. Many literally work day and night and most allow themselves far too little time for relaxation and rest. This is one of the primary reasons why so many ministers are encountering the Burnout syndrome.

g: Post viral depression.

Numerous people suffering from Burnout and similar conditions may discover that it is partly the result of some virus or chemical imbalance they have picked up. This can often only be detected through medical examination and blood tests. Our modern world environment has produced many chemical influences to which some people have violent allergic reactions. When this factor is involved specific treatment and procedures are

usually required in order to deal with this aspect. Two things need serious attention. Firstly the viral or chemical effect and secondly the mental and emotional result.

h: Negative emotions, disappointment, discouragement .

One of the relatively recent discoveries of medical science is that of the powerful effect of the emotions on the general condition of health. Positive emotions, known as anabolic, build up the health. Negative emotions, or catabolics, affect the health detrimentally and are powerfully destructive.

Unfortunately there are often many reasons for Christian workers to be discouraged and subjected to various negative emotions. There are also many features in the life and work of health care workers that can be extremely discouraging and depressing. Such people need to ensure that their intake of positive inspiration always far exceeds their exposure to negative influences. In the words of the old song they should always try to "accentuate the positive and eliminate the negative."

i: Lack of trusted, understanding associates in whom to confide.

Leaders should endeavour to ensure that they do not carry the burdens of leadership alone. One of the fine ideas that have emerged in recent years is that of pastoral teams in which a group of people share the burdens and tasks of leadership and no one has to carry it alone. This concept can only function at its best level when there is genuine trust and mutual loyalty. It should provide a medium in which leaders can share their deepest thoughts and concerns. A brotherhood in which every member can feel free to share their innermost thoughts and secrets knowing that their comrades will only use the information for good.

j: Emotional Trauma.

The affliction of Burnout is often preceded by some emotional trauma. Possibly the most common of these is that of bereavement particularly when the death is unexpected and the bereaved are subject to great shock as well as loss. Other common traumas are occasioned by divorce, loss of employment, bankruptcy, and a sense of failure.

Emotional trauma should not be allowed to continue too long. The Bible says "*Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning.*" (**Psalm.30:5**) Nehemiah determined to curtail the weeping of the penitents in (**Neh 8:9-12**)

He told them "*Do not mourn or weep any longer, for the joy of the Lord is your strength*". A certain amount of distress is natural in such circumstances. In fact it is frequently a safety valve. There is a legitimate time for mourning. A time when the sense of anguish and loss needs to be discharged. Such times of weeping and other expressions of grief are therapeutic. Emotional stress and distress can be released from the system through them.

But this must not be allowed to continue too long. Adequate steps must be taken to bring an end to the negative effect of depressed emotions. The chains of grieving must be broken and there must be a decisive and determined return to normality. Weeping is likened to the darkness of night, but the night must come to an end and the dawn of another day must break.

In the darkness of that night, it often seems to the victim that it will never end. They cannot visualise a return to normality and often seem to have no real desire to make it happen. But it must be made to happen. Darkness eventually kills. It is only light that promotes and sustains life.

k: Personality conflict and friction.

One of the proven causes of Burnout is that of personality conflict and the friction it creates. This is particularly true in the case of subordinates who are subjected to an environment of friction and tension for long periods of time. There are various ways in which such a situation may be resolved and it is not my purpose to go into these at this time. Let it be sufficient for me to say that such problems can be extremely harmful and injurious to health and anyone in such a situation should take serious steps to rectify it.

l: Frustration.

Frustration may come in various forms. It is basically a lack of anticipated fulfilment. Something that renders your best efforts ineffective. A situation, circumstance or factor that consistently denies you the opportunity to find fulfilment or achieve your goal. A discontentment born of a continuing inability to fulfil your perceived objective. Much of the work in which a Minister is engaged is somewhat abstract lacking dimensions that can be measured or counted.

Unfortunately there are numerous factors involved in the work of the ministry that may occasion such frustration. Over a prolonged period of time these feelings of frustration, discontent and discouragement can become extremely trying and depressing. The denial of the opportunity to find and fulfil your life's calling can be a very distressing experience. It can cause a sense of depression that can grow alarmingly over a long period and result in chronic depression that may prove extremely harmful.

m: Sickness, particularly when high levels of pain are involved.

Bearing with long periods of sickness and ill health can also be the fore-runner of Burnout, particularly when the extenuating sickness involves high levels of pain and stress. I have observed for example that many Burnout victims have suffered from chronic spinal problems and the intense pain that these frequently cause. Coping with the pain has evidently over taxed their resources to a degree that has caused an exhaustion of their emotions.

I have also observed that most Burnout victims were probably not as healthy as they might have been. Many of them had no exercise routine and were not taking any positive and practical steps to maintain a good degree of physical fitness. One of the basic things that all ministers should do is to establish some form of exercise routine. The simplest and possibly most effective kind of exercise is that of vigorous walking, a routine that anyone can maintain without too much inconvenience.

Chapter Four

PROBLEMS COMMON TO LEADERS

As I have closely studied this phenomena for the past several years I have noticed several bi-products of this condition which are particularly noticeable in the lives of some Christian Leaders. They are a few of the associated problems to which over worked leaders are especially prone and which cause special concern for them. I will briefly mention seven of them.

1: MENTAL DETACHMENT FROM REALITY.

Initially this may appear in a very mild form, simply a vague feeling of unreality or a "this is not really happening, I am not really here" feeling. There is frequently a dream like quality about your life, as though you are floating through life and your feet are not really touching the ground of reality. If this feeling persists and grows worse it can become a kind of "out of the body" experience in which you may feel that you are not really present, but are looking on as though observing your life on a T.V. screen. You will probably have a feeling that you are an observer rather than a participator in the events of your life. This is often an acknowledged symptom of Burnout known as "unreality".

2: A DIMINISHED SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY.

Largely as a result of the detachment from reality there is frequently a diminishing of the sense of personal responsibility. Your mind obviously realises that much of your current stress is a result of your many responsibilities and evidently sees those responsibilities as some kind of enemy from which it decides to retreat and escape. It also builds a resentment towards those responsibilities because of the pain which they seem to have caused you. Sub-consciously you harbour a feeling of "I don't owe you anything" towards them. This in turn causes a inner rebellion against having to service your responsibilities and a desire to ignore or avoid their requirements.

This attitude usually distorts the priorities of the victim. While some part of their mind realises that there are important things to do and usually even feels guilty about not doing them, another part of it refuses to get involved in the fulfilment of those responsibilities. One scenario which partly illustrates this tendency is of a person sitting at a desk on which there stands a pile of urgent letters that require responses. But instead of dealing with the letters the person sits at the desk for hours playing with the paper clips or tidying up the contents of the desk drawers. Anything to avoid getting down to the task of tackling the issues which really demand attention.

This diminished sense of responsibility is also very dangerous because it may intrude into the area of moral responsibility. The Christian leader also has a responsibility to be a model of moral uprightness. There is a constant pressure of requirement to appear as a model of virtue and integrity. One part of his mind recognises the validity of this requirement, but another part of it, which is under great pressure from his responsibilities, sees this requirement as simply another imposed responsibility and resents its demands. The victim therefore feels less inclination to fulfil this perceived responsibility. He thus becomes more vulnerable and more susceptible to the temptation to ignore his moral responsibilities.

3: AN OVER-ACTIVE CONSCIENCE.

It may seem strange to follow my comments on the diminished sense of responsibility with the mention of an over-active conscience, but such are the paradoxes contrived by a mind under grave pressure. The fact that the victim may not be facing up to and fulfilling responsibilities does not mean that his conscience has been deadened. Quite frequently the opposite is true and the victim is torn between a diminished sense of responsibility and a frantically over-active conscience. It is this unlikely but fearful combination which causes much of his mental turmoil and depression. He frequently inherits a constant state of near panic as he finds himself violating the rules of his heightened and sometimes exaggerated conscience.

His years of Christian living and his leadership within a Christian community have given him a very powerful awareness of what he ought to be. But his presently fragmented mind, broken by the pressures of heavy responsibilities, longs to be free from the need to perform the responsibilities that his conscience dictates. He is the victim of a fearful dilemma. Torn between two powerful forces, his conscience and a mind which is desperate for relief from pressure.

4: A STRONG SENSE OF GUILT.

Guilt is something with which most Christians are very familiar. The nature of the church's emphasis has been strongly biased towards making people aware of their guilt. The first emphasis of the Church's message is usually, "You are a guilty sinner!" Obviously this is a necessary prelude to experiencing forgiveness, salvation, restoration and a relationship with God. But unfortunately the emphasis on guilt often outweighs the emphasis on imputed righteousness, and the unfortunate result is that many people inherit a deep inner sense of guilt. This is often sublimated by belief in forgiveness and cleansing, but all too often guilt lurks beneath the conscious surface of the mind waiting for an opportunity to surface to accuse and torment its victim.

The condition of mental and emotional exhaustion occasioned by Burnout often gives that kind of opening and the victim becomes prey to a conscience which persists in crying "guilty". People who are depressed, (the most common symptom of Burnout) usually experience constant battles with feelings of guilt.

There are basically two kinds of guilt, — the real and the imagined.

The real type of guilt is a result of some sin or misdemeanour which has offended a Holy God. The Holy Spirit brings a sense of guilt to the person as the first step towards repentance, forgiveness and cleansing. This is the tried and trusted formula, the only true remedy for sin and the feeling of guilt that sin has caused. This is a fairly simple and extremely effective remedy. *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* (1 John. 1 : 9)

Imagined guilt is much more complex and therefore much more difficult to deal with. Most Burnout victims are not dealing with true guilt. They have not transgressed or offended God and He is not trying to bring them under a sense of guilt. They are suffering from "*feelings of guilt*". Most depressed Christians are overly sensitive about their perceived faults and failings. They tend to feel guilty about everything. They have an extremely negative perception of their life and they wrestle with powerful feelings of failure and consequent guilt.

Whereas real guilt can quickly be dealt with through confession, repentance, and accepting God's forgiveness according to His promise, imagined guilt cannot be dealt with in the same way. The guilt is not real in the first place, it is the creation of a disturbed mind which harbours a perverse desire to punish its victim.

So how can such feelings be alleviated? How can the victim be freed from the power of imagined guilt? By understanding that it IS imagined. That it is NOT real. That you have NOT sinned. That God is NOT determined to punish you.

You are sub-consciously punishing yourself. You are disappointed and depressed because of your sickness. You feel guilty for being unwell. Some weird thing in your mind wants to punish you for being so stupid as to allow yourself to become sick and unable to meet your obligations and responsibilities. You are the only one who can release you from this torment. God cannot forgive you because you are already forgiven. **Now you MUST FORGIVE YOURSELF in order to be set free.**

5: SPIRITUAL DARKNESS —THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW.

This is usually the most difficult thing for a Christian Leader in Burnout to cope with. The fact that when he most needs the sense of God's presence with him, he cannot sense or feel it. It is certainly not that God has deserted him or withdrawn from him, it is the fact that the victim's mental, emotional and spiritual faculties are so depleted that he sometimes cannot register the sense of God's presence with him.

I realise that many of my readers will have some good theological reasons why this cannot happen. They will probably quote many scriptures which will seem to indicate that this should not, indeed cannot happen. I would probably agree with all those scriptures and desire to receive encouragement and consolation from them. Nevertheless I know that such a thing **can** happen. I know firstly from the Bible, from the experience of both King David and later of Jesus, as recorded in (**Psalm. 22: 1**) "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, and from the words of my groaning?*" I also know from the recordings of some of God's greatest saints in Church history who mention such experiences which occurred at times in their lives. Finally, I know something about it from personal experience and from other Christians who have experienced it.

EVERYTHING SEEMS IRRELEVANT.

Not only is it difficult to sense God's presence with you at such a time, it is also very difficult to receive comfort and help from some of the previously reliable and proven sources of spiritual strength. Burnout has the ability to make everything, including the Bible, seem totally irrelevant to your situation and extremity. The Bible has not changed. What has happened is that your powers of perception have decreased and are depleted to the degree that nothing seems to make sense any more. During such times you may find it difficult, if not impossible to read or to concentrate on anything sufficiently to receive anything from it.

There may be books which could be helpful to you but having to concentrate sufficiently to extract anything from them, only plunges you into deeper despair. The thing which your system is trying to tell you is that you have done too much concentrating on various things and your mind needs some respite. What you probably need to do, instead of trying to force yourself to read the Bible, is to try to remember those encouraging scriptures which you have known and memorised in years gone by. Bring them to

remembrance and quietly think about them. I believe that this is what David may have done when he tells us in (**Psalm. 77:10**) *"And I said, this is my anguish: But I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High. I will remember the works of the Lord."*

DON'T TRY TO IMPRESS GOD.

You may also discover that it seems impossible to pray. Particularly the serious and often intense type of prayers which you are accustomed to making. Here again it is your powers of concentration which are depleted. I believe that the answer is not to allow yourself to feel guilty about not "praying", but to engage in casual and informal conversations with God. Simply talk with God as openly and informally as you would your dearest and most trusted friend. Don't try to make your communion with Him religious and spiritual. Use it as an opportunity to simply unburden your heart and to pour out your frustrations, bewilderment and fears. Don't try to impress God. Just allow your heart and mind to empty everything into His heart. Tell him your worst fears. Confess your deepest secrets. There is no way that you can shock Him. He wants you to unburden yourself and to *"cast all your care on Him because He cares for you"*.

6: WHY SOME LEADERS FALL.

It is a sad reality that from time to time, and far more frequently than we would wish, we hear of Christian leaders who have fallen morally. Men and women who are leaders of Christian communities and organisations, endeavouring to lead God's people and to demonstrate the Christian ideal, yet they themselves become victims of temptation and yield to its pressures. I am sure that all of us have thought about this deeply and wondered "Why?"

Obviously there is more than one reason and it is impossible to give one general answer to this question. For some it is simply a case of indulging in uncontrolled lust. The result of inadequate self discipline in the face of various powerful temptations which often assail persons in positions of leadership.

However, I am also persuaded that many of the people who fall prey to such temptation are under grave pressure at the time and may well be suffering to some degree from spiritual, mental and emotional exhaustion. In making this comment I am not seeking to excuse or condone misdemeanours and sins. Nor am I inferring that this is true in every case of mis-conduct. But I am trying to make the point that it is sometimes (perhaps frequently?) the background cause of such behaviour.

THE TRUTH ABOUT DEPRAVITY.

The Bible teaches that mortal man is innately depraved. The fallen nature of man is one of depravity, the most common meaning of which is "moral corruptness and wickedness". But another meaning of the word depravity is —"likely to break down at the weakest point", and this succinctly describes the condition of the basic human nature. Each person is like a chain which contains at least one weak link. If enormous pressure and strain is applied to that chain eventually it is going to break and it will break at its weakest point. It is like this with human beings too. When sustained and excessive pressure is applied to a person they are likely break down at their weakest point. That point may be their nerves, their mind, their body system, or their moral strength. In normal circumstances this person is reasonably strong in all these areas and maintains good health in all of them. But under extreme, consistent and unrelenting pressure, something breaks down. A safety valve blows.

The person will then seek some immediate relief from their pressurised situation, some kind of diversion which will give them a pleasant break from the reality of their pressured life. Something which will provide a temporary diversion from the insistent pressure of their breakdown. The diversion may be in the form of a drinking spree —an attempt to drown their depressing thoughts and morbid introspection. It could take the form of a sudden interest in pornography or some form of sexual deviance. Possibly the most common diversion is an extra-marital relationship which may eventuate for numerous reasons, the underlying one being the pressing need to find a diversion from the unbearable build up of pressure.

THE HIGHER THE PROFILE, THE GREATER THE PRESSURE.

This may be one of the reasons why so many prominent leaders fall into these kinds of problems. The higher their profile, the greater the pressure. The bigger their church, the more responsibility and work. Which is all the more reason why such leaders need to be constantly surrounded by the prayers of their associates, fellow workers and church members. This is undoubtedly one of the reasons why Christian leaders are so much more vulnerable than the average church member. The extra responsibilities of his office place so much more pressure on him. So often the leader is perceived to be beyond and immune to temptation, when in reality the very pressure of his responsibilities in the vanguard of leadership have depleted his resources of stamina making him extremely vulnerable to any temptation that may appear to promise relief from his almost unbearable pressures.

All too often the wounded warrior is perceived in retrospect to be a hypocrite. He preached one thing and practised another. It is often felt that he must have been a bad person all along but managed to cover his badness, deceiving his associates. But it is frequently not the bad person, but the good one who is overcome. The one who is pushing himself too hard and is under more pressure than he has ever realised or acknowledged. Frequently he has felt that he has no peer in whom to confide and has consequently bottled up his tensions and anxieties until eventually they explode.

MANY LEADERS ARE "WOUNDED WARRIORS."

It is essential that we recognise the very real possibility that many leaders who have fallen to temptation may well be wounded warriors who have fought a good fight for many years but eventually, when battle weary and wounded, have succumbed to the enemy's fresh tactics. Unless the church understands this they will always tend to take a solely legalistic view of his behaviour and feel that the solution is to discipline him and virtually cast him aside. Whilst some measure of discipline may well be needed, the main and immediate requirement is for healing and restoration.

This is the clear admonition of the Scriptures through St. Paul. *"Brothers, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. **Bear one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ.**" (Gal. 6 : 1,2)*

God recognises that when a brother commits a trespass, something needs to be done by his spiritual brothers. But that something is not a legalistic censoring and disciplining of the person but rather a spirit of meekness which will seek to restore the brother.

7: TRUE SPIRITUALITY ALWAYS SEEKS TO RESTORE.

"Brothers, if a man be overtaken in a fault, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of meekness considering yourself in case you also are tested. Bear one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ." (Gal 6 : 1)

Religion often appears to delight in judging and condemning, but true spirituality is concerned with restoration. Whatever steps may appear necessary and right in a given situation, the ultimate objective must be the healing and restoration of the *brother*. This purpose must be clearly recognised and acknowledged before any judgements or actions are taken in such a case. It must also be borne in mind at every juncture of whatever procedures are deemed necessary in order to faithfully and properly deal with the brother in question.

It is certainly sad to see that many Christians and churches, who profess great love for sinners and a tremendous desire to see them saved at any cost, do not appear to have the same love or concern for fallen saints. While we may go to any lengths to reach a sinner, the legalistic treatment that is often meted out to a fallen saint seems so uncaring and judgmental that many such victims do not survive the remedy. It might help enormously in our perception of such problems if we would treat the offender as a individual human being with a unique set of problems deserving a specific approach.

I remember an incident that occurred in a certain church some years ago. One of the elders was found to have committed adultery and was subsequently disciplined. Unfortunately many of the men in the church used to talk about him disparagingly. One Sunday morning many months later, as his wife was leaving the church, she passed two men in deep conversation. When they saw her they quickly terminated their conversation. It seemed obvious to her that they had been talking about her husband again. She confronted them and said, "I know that you are criticising my husband again and I just want to ask you both one question. If my husband were your brother, would you still be talking about him in this disparaging and critical manner?" The men blushed deeply but made no reply and she continued, "The sad thing is that he is your brother, yet you treat him so despicably because he has been overtaken in a fault."

Chapter Six

WALKING THROUGH THE VALLEY

"Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for You are with me. Your rod and your staff comfort me." (Psalm. 23:4)

One of the most frightening and disconcerting aspects of Burnout is the uncertainty, not knowing what is really happening or what is likely to happen next. I propose to use two simple analogies to convey some understanding of what you may experience. The first analogy is that of walking through a dark valley. The second, of learning how to float. (Chapter Seven)

The experience of Burnout can be likened to walking through a deep, dark valley. A darkness so impenetrable that you can scarcely see anything before you. You are at a loss to know where you are, where you are going, how long it might take to get out of this valley. An experience that is depressing beyond description. You seem to have lost touch completely with all the familiar features that have previously afforded you a sense of security and direction.

Deep depression is the most consistently common symptom of Burnout. Sometimes the particular symptoms may vary from one person to another but chronic depression seems to be a common denominator which affects all victims.

The word depression does not actually occur in the Bible but there are many other words and phrases that clearly indicate that many persons in the Bible knew the reality of chronic depression. This was particularly true in the life of David who said that his soul was *"cast down and disquieted within him."* He also mentions that his soul was heavy and deeply troubled. We have already seen that Moses, Elijah and Epaphroditus evidently experienced similar symptoms and it would seem that numerous others such as Ezekiel, Jeremiah and probably many others did too.

The person experiencing Burnout frequently encounters long, chronic bouts of deep depression and this particular experience is the feature that makes their condition almost unbearable. My personal observation has been that unless a person has actually experienced such depression it is very difficult for them to fully understand how distressing and debilitating it can be. It can certainly be so unbearable that death will appear to be a possible sweet release.

Yet there are many doctors who are scornful of persons such as M.E. (myalgic encephalomyelitis) sufferers, or those with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. Some doctors will even classify them as malingerers who are using their ailment as an excuse to avoid work and responsibility. This kind of ignorant attitude only serves to cruelly increase the mental suffering of the victim. There are also many medical doctors who believe that such conditions are psychologically induced and as such can be controlled or overcome by the mind if it is used correctly. The Burnout victim concludes that if qualified medical doctors cannot fully understand his suffering, what chance is there that mere lay persons would be able to do so.

One of my purposes in writing this article is to speak up for Burnout victims. To inform their families, friends and peers that this ghastly phenomena is real. That it is painful and

distressing beyond words and that one of the aspects of it which can be most demoralising is the inability of other people to recognise the severity of the sufferers' dilemma. Unless a person has an adequate concept of just how distressing this can be, there is no way that they can meaningfully help the victim.

I have mentioned that the Burnout experience is like walking through a dark valley. Let me share a few thoughts as to why this is so.

Descending into the valley.

As one normally descends into a valley, so the Burnout victim goes down into a deep depression. This is the onset of the phenomena. The victim has usually become disoriented some time prior to this. They have begun to lose their bearings and their sense of direction. They are probably vaguely aware that all is not well but are usually not fully aware of this, otherwise they would take immediate effective action to ensure they did not make this perilous descent. Often the victim was blissfully unaware of their impending danger because they have never previously had any kind of nerve troubles and never imagined that they could possibly fall prey to such an ailment. For many such people, the higher their mountain, the deeper will their valley appear to be. They will possibly spend months thinking "This cannot have happened to ME. It must be a mistake. It is a nightmare and soon I shall awaken and find that the whole experience has never happened."

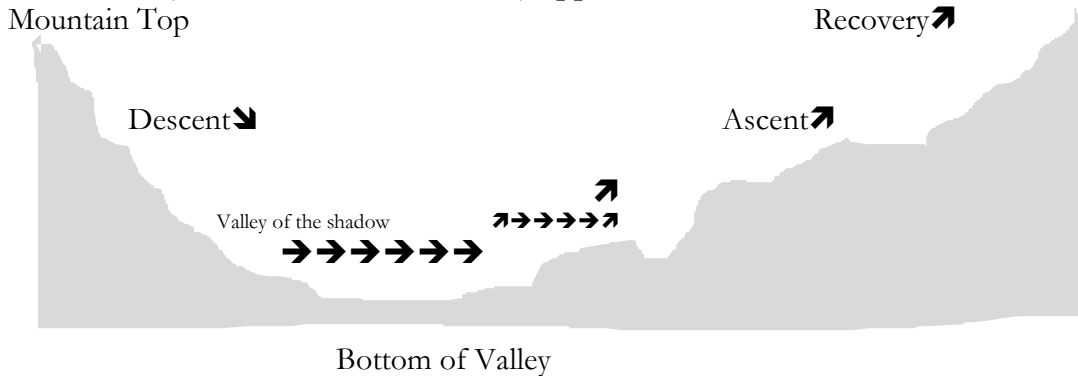
Touching rock bottom.

The bottom of the valley is the depth of depression. These are the days, weeks, months, and sometimes years, when the depression is so over-whelming. When emotional darkness seems to blot out every ray of sunshine. The period when nothing affords any pleasure. The sweetest music is a painful torment. Even the sounds of nature which normally soothe and comfort, turn their fury on you. Foods which once were a delight can no longer entice the victim to eat. Nights which used to be for peaceful sleep become torture chambers as the restless hours torment their troubled victim.

Coming up out of the valley.

The eventual emergence from the valley is the recovery stage. This is such a welcome friend but its pathway is rarely uneventful. The climb out of the dark valley rarely runs smoothly. You do not simply recover, improving a little every day. Instead you emerge in stages and between those stages are set-backs. Usually the way in which you know you are emerging is that the bad days give way to some better ones and gradually the gaps between the bad times become longer and the good days become more frequent. However, the reality is usually that there will be some reversals. Just when you thought you had recovered and were out of the valley, you find yourself going down again. Sometimes the reversal can be so severe that you may think that the whole painful process has commenced again and that you are back where you started in the beginning. But this is not true. You ARE recovering. You ARE getting better. You WILL emerge from the dark valley and the sunshine will be all the brighter because of the depth of darkness you have come through.

This is how your ascent from the valley appears:



I personally feel that it was to this kind of experience to which David referred when he spoke of the *"The valley of the shadow of death"*. Notice it is the *shadow* of death, not the real thing. A shadow is not real, it has no substance. There is nothing that you can touch or handle. If you try to grab it, it will elude your grasp. This is the valley of unreality. You appear to have lost touch with reality. All kinds of shadowy things have begun to fill your mind. Those shadows can assume all kinds of fearful shapes. Some of them unbelievably weird. The valley is also a place of awful darkness. A gloomy darkness that your senses cannot penetrate.

It was at such a time that David valued the rod and staff of the shepherd. As the shepherd walked on through the dark night, he had a rod in one hand and a staff in the other. He tapped the ground on either side of him, using the rod and staff alternately. The sheep could not see anything but it heard the rod and staff and was able to follow the shepherd safely through the black darkness.

I have already mentioned that I am not writing these words from a professional medical perspective but from the position of a lay person. If you need to know the medical perspective and terminology you will have to procure some other book that will provide those. So, from a lay person's perspective I will suggest that there may appear to be three basic dimensions of depression from which people may suffer.

1: Simple, common depression.

This is something experienced at some time by most people. Even the ones who claim they are never depressed. It is the kind of mild depression that may appear for various reasons. It may be provoked by disappointment, discouragement, or failure in some sphere. Usually the source of the depression can be readily identified. The cure is not usually difficult either. Some people can simply give themselves a good talking to. Perhaps like David who said, *"Why are you cast down within me O my soul. Hope in God for He will yet be the light of your countenance"*. (Psalm 42:11)

Unpleasant as such bouts of depression may be, they are usually short lived and do little damage. Often a good night's rest will make the whole world appear a different place in the morning. Sometimes a change of scenery and environment will bring quick relief. You may be encouraged and relieved to know that the majority of people suffer from this kind of depression from time to time. There is probably nothing seriously wrong with you but if this begins to happen more frequently or with increasing severity, it may be a timely warning to you.

2: Reactive Depression.

Reactive Depression is simply the depression of your emotions in reaction to some problem or negative feature in your environment. If you take some time to analyse what is going on in your life you will probably quickly identify the source of irritation. By taking positive steps to deal with the problem(s), you may be able to effect a fast and relatively simple solution to your depressions.

Please understand that this type of depression may be extremely distressing. I am not in any way trying to say that this is not serious or painful. It may produce numerous alarming symptoms that can make life very difficult for you. The person suffering from this phenomena may experience both psychological and physiological symptoms of considerable severity. Life may become painful, even unbearable. Many of those symptoms I have described elsewhere may occur. You should take this occurrence seriously. One of the features of depression is that like pain, it is meant to be a warning that there is something seriously wrong impending. Ignore it at your risk.

The unique feature of this type of depression may be that its cause is usually readily identifiable. It is occasioned by negative reaction to every day occurrences that cause chronic stress.

The Christian suffering this kind of depression will frequently experience spiritual symptoms too. In fact there can be a misplaced tendency to wrongly identify it as a basically spiritual phenomena. This may cause the person to ignore any treatment procedures other than "spiritual" ones. They may even identify the cause as demonic and try all kinds of radical treatments such as exorcism. If the cause is not demonic these approaches will not only prove fruitless, they may even worsen the problem. The victim may develop a "demon psychosis", i.e. a delusion that their problem is essentially a demonic one. If this is not true they may disparage and refuse other treatments to their own hurt.

Part of the spiritual symptoms may be a feeling that God has deserted you. The person may not be able to pray easily or read the Bible as they are accustomed to doing. They may take this to mean that God is displeased with them or has rejected them. The truth is simply that your mental and emotional processes are so weary that you cannot concentrate properly and you are probably not getting much satisfaction out of anything.

3: Endogenous Depression.

The final category of depression I will mention is endogenous depression, a depression which comes from within. This is the kind of depression that many persons in the ministry and caring professions experience. Recent research has revealed that exposure to prolonged stress can profoundly affect the bio-chemical balance of the system. Long term stress can seriously change the body's chemistry and produce very serious bouts of chronic depression. Once this happens, the symptoms may continue long after the problem source has been identified, dealt with or removed. Recovery is sometimes painfully delayed because the body needs to adjust certain basic chemical imbalances which have been caused through long term irritations of stress.

This type of depression often involves chemical changes in the brain and a resultant affect on the neurotransmitters. Certain chemical agents (anti-depressant medications) have the ability to restore to depressed persons the required amounts of neurotransmitters . Many people are reluctant to accept such treatment for a variety of

reasons. For some there is an unjustified fear of addiction and dependency. Other Christians have an aversion to any kind of medication, —an unreasonable position that often reveals inconsistencies in which the person will take one type of medication, (e.g. tablets for headaches) but not another. There ought not to be any shame in the need to accept anti-depressant medication just as there is no shame attached to wearing eye glasses or receiving dental help for your teeth.

The root causes of this form of depression may not be as easily identified as those in reactive depression. Ministers and Christian workers may fruitlessly search for some profound spiritual causes and reasons for their condition. This can trigger all kinds of guilt trips about things which are not really part of the problem.

Several simple tests have been discovered recently by which a diagnosis can be made through administering certain anti-depressant medication. After two or three weeks the endogenous depression victim will begin to show some definite improvement in response to relatively mild dosages of the medication. This usually confirms that the problem is in fact endogenous depression and the continuance of the treatment will afford considerable relief and pave the way for a speedier recovery.

Obviously such a test must be administered by a medically qualified practitioner. Should you choose to avail yourself of such help you should prayerfully find a Christian practitioner, or at least one who is sympathetically knowledgeable in respect of your Faith, its implications, and the kind of work in which you are involved. This is necessary because of the measure of trust and confidence you will need to have in the person who is endeavouring to help you. It is also desirable because a non Christian Psychotherapist's conclusions and advice may be directly contrary to your Faith. Since your Faith will provide the ultimate path to your successful recovery and restoration it is important that your trust should not become impaired during the period of your dis-orientation and accompanying weakness.

THE LORD IS OUR SHEPHERD

Let me present one more thought on the analogy of the valley of the shadow. In Jewish tradition this psalm is thought to represent a day and night in the life of a sheep. The words of the psalm are the reflections of a sheep concerning the faithfulness of its shepherd. It is obvious that the sheep has experienced times when it had to walk through dark valleys and dangerous places. On those occasions the only guiding factor that gave assurance and comfort was the re-assuring sound of the rod and staff with which the shepherd tapped the ground as he led the way through the darkness.

The measure of trust that the sheep has developed in its shepherd through such experiences, shines like a radiant beacon in this psalm. The experiences have built a depth of relationship and trust that could never eventuate if life were always smooth and uneventful. In a similar way the awful experience of Burnout can ultimately be the furnace of affliction in which a new and stronger relationship is forged. It can produce a positive result that could not be achieved by any other means.

Chapter Seven

LEARNING HOW TO FLOAT

In the midst of my Burnout experience I became desperate to receive some help. I felt that if I could not get some practical and effective assistance, I would not survive the experience. I frequently felt like a man who had been swept out to sea and was about to drown if I could not find someone to get a life-line to me.

I frantically searched for someone who would understand what I was experiencing and would be able to offer some practical and workable help. I approached several minister friends and a number of doctors but initially none of them were able to offer the kind of advice or help that was meaningful and effective. (I have since spoken with several ministers and doctors who have a good understanding of the problem and who have been extremely helpful to me.)

I also began to desperately search for books, both Christian and secular, that would give me a better understanding of the issues and provide some basic answers in regard to how to survive and overcome this bewildering nightmare. Some of the books helped me to a greater understanding of the problem but few of them provided much practical and relevant advice on how to survive.

The book above all others, that did give me hope, providing me with practical and pertinent help, was the one by Dr. Claire Weekes that I will talk about later in this chapter. This book was like a veritable life belt, thrown to me at the very time that I felt I could not stay afloat any longer. It gave me something to hold on to until further help came. It saved me from drowning until I learned to float, which is the real subject of this chapter and the theme in particular in Claire Weekes' book that made it the best book, (other than the Bible) that I ever invested in.

It is the vivid memory of my frantic feelings of hopelessness and how desperate I was to get help, that has persuaded me to write this book. I am not under the illusion that it will add greatly to the great library of books on this subject that already exist. It is not meant to be a medical or technical dissertation. I hopefully perceive it as a humble life belt that has no great beauty or worth yet may well prove to be the best thing you ever laid your hands on. If this book helps even one Burnout victim to feel some immediate hope and to find their way through to recovery, it will have achieved its purpose.

If you are presently suffering some degree of Burnout and desperately need some practical help, my best advice to you would be "Learn how to float". I want to share with you some guidance as to how you can do this, but first let me offer some preliminary advice. If, after reading the earlier part of this book, you have identified your problem and diagnosed your own condition, what can you do?

1: Don't persuade yourself that you have Burnout if you do not.

When people who are feeling somewhat depleted and discouraged read such a list of symptoms they may tend to imagine that they have this affliction. You should realise that anyone involved in caring activities can become tired and discouraged to some degree but this does not mean that you have, or are coming into a case of Burnout. If you are even mildly depressed there can be a tendency to be negative and in this frame of

mind to imagine that your symptoms indicate something more serious than is actually the case.

2: Confide in a trusted friend.

Share your concern with someone close to you. Ask them to help you understand what is happening to you. Having access to a good friend to whom you can open your heart and be completely honest and with whom you can share all your fears, is a tremendous blessing. Such times of sharing can be very cathartic, i.e. you get things out of your system through sharing them conversationally with someone else.

3: Talk to a fellow Christian leader to gain advice.

(You should realise however that many leaders do not really understand the problem I have described. They will possibly not be able to help you nor even understand your problem. If this is so their response may be less than helpful to you.) The ideal situation is to be part of a true ministry "team", in which all the members are trusted friends as well as work associates. Don't allow your team to function like a business executive board. Be true brothers to one another sharing your burdens and problems as well as your triumphs and victories. Have times of informal fellowship together where each is encouraged to share their heart. In this environment, *"Pray one for another that you may be healed."* (James 5:16)

4: Have some trusted minister to pray with and for you.

Ask them to anoint you with oil according to James. 5: 13 -16. Follow the advice of these verses, confessing your faults one to another and praying for each other that you may be healed. Talking to a trusted and reliable friend can be a real source of release. Don't let this deteriorate into a religious ritual. Let it be a real and meaningful activity. This experience can be a healing one for everyone involved, for those praying and for those seeking prayer.

5: Try to have a break or a holiday.

Get right away from your responsibilities for a while. If you cannot afford a real holiday, perhaps you can consider exchanging homes with a fellow Christian nearby. Ideally one who lives near the ocean. Or, if you live in a large city, try to exchange homes with a friend from a country area. This could provide a good inexpensive change for both families. If you manage to take a holiday but it does not help but rather aggravates the problem, then you must seek some informed and competent advice. The indications may be that the situation has now become too serious to solve through a mere change of scenery and environment with restful activity.

6: Seek some competent medical advice.

Particularly if you have realised that your problem is much more serious than you first thought. If you consult a General Practitioner make sure that he is knowledgeable and experienced in such matters. Not all doctors are. Ideally you should try to ensure that the doctor you consult is a Christian who is fully aware of the implications of your beliefs and of the nature of the work in which you are engaged.

TIME IS THE ESSENTIAL INGREDIENT.

My observation of this phenomena has convinced me that rest and the passing of time is the important ingredient of healing. Obviously a supernatural healing could occur instantaneously and this is a glorious possibility. But I know that this does not always happen so I want to give some help and encouragement to those who do not receive

instantaneous healing. For them the passing of time is an inevitable factor and how to "survive" that period is important. I believe there may be two reasons why it takes time for the healing to happen.

1: Because the Burnout has usually occurred over a prolonged period and such a thing is not going to disappear instantly.

2: Because when the healing process takes place over a time period the victim learns some lessons which will hopefully ensure that they do not fall prey to this affliction again. The healing experience is like finding your way out of a maze or out of a forest. Once you have discovered the way out you can do so again if necessary.

The critical factor is how to survive the intervening period and how to do so with the least possible pain and distress. It is with this thought in mind that I want to mention :-

A LIFE SAVING FORMULA.

Of all the books that I have read on this subject, one stands out above all the others. It is a small book by Dr. Claire Weekes entitled :

"SELF HELP FOR YOUR NERVES."

(Published by Angus & Robertson, -
Harper Collins Publishers, 25 Ryde Rd, Pymble, N.S.W. 2073. Australia.)

In this book, which has sold some 300,000 copies in eight languages, Dr. Weekes dispels much of the mystery surrounding nervous illness and offers a simple and practical program for its cure. The core of the book and the reason why so many have been helped by it, is a simple yet powerful formula that Dr. Weekes discovered through helping thousands of people to recover from this disorder. This simple, yet profound formula will keep you afloat while you find a way to recovery.

At the commencement of her book Dr. Weekes makes a very encouraging statement. An unemotional statement, yet one which carries great powers of encouragement for the nervous sufferer. A statement which seems to speak confidence right into the person's spirit. She says : "THE ADVICE GIVEN HERE WILL DEFINITELY CURE YOU, IF YOU FOLLOW IT". She then proceeds to explain the nature of nerve problems and how they affect people.

You should understand that Burnout does not happen over night, nor will it be cured instantly. It is something which has frequently built up through many years of overworking and being sub-consciously subjected to tension and stress. You will undoubtedly experience a period of dark despair when you may feel there is no hope for your recovery. You have heard of many others who have recovered and even emerged stronger than they were previously, but you cannot imagine how you will ever get better. You WILL recover. You WILL get better, but for a certain period you will not be able to enjoy the luxury of anticipating your recovery. So the formula will be the life belt which can keep you afloat until help arrives.

The principle of her formula is summarised as :-

- 1: FACING.**
- 2: ACCEPTING.**
- 3: FLOATING**

4: LETTING TIME PASS

I personally found this brief and simple formula immensely helpful. It was the most practical and effective advice I encountered. I have shared it with numerous others who have also found it effective. I want to share it now with you and I firmly believe that as you thoroughly grasp it and put it into use it will also pave the way for your recovery. (The four basic points are Dr. Claire Weekes', but I have taken the liberty of adding my own comments which I feel would be particularly meaningful to my readers.)

1: FACE IT.

Don't try to run away. You cannot outrun this thing. Once it has seized hold of you it is useless to try to run from it or fight against it. There has probably been a period of time when you could have taken successful evasive action but that time has now gone and you have to recognise that you have fallen victim to Burnout. There is often a strange tendency to think, "this is not really happening. It is merely a nightmare and I will soon wake up and find out that it was all a horrible dream". But it **has** happened and no amount of wishful thinking will change that. You must therefore bravely face this fact.

2: ACCEPT IT.

Don't fight it.

There is usually a temptation to ask Why?

Why has this happened?

Why has it happened to ME?

What have I done wrong that this should happen to me?

How have I displeased God, that this should happen?

An endless round of questions can commence to which there are no evident answers. In the negative state of mind which frequently exists there is often a tendency towards self condemnation. This does not help. In fact it usually makes matters much worse. There may be some things you need to recognise, acknowledge and deal with, but this is usually not the right time to do that. There is too much possibility of self recrimination which is not really justified.

Whatever the reasons and causes, it has happened, and it has happened to you. No amount of self searching, or self criticism is going to release you from your problem. However your release comes, it is going to take some time, and during that time you need to survive and maintain your mental and emotional equilibrium. You may well find that this formula will prove to be the best way to do it.

The two main subjects around which Christianity revolves are SIN and FORGIVENESS. The mission of Jesus was to purchase and offer forgiveness to every sinner who would genuinely repent. Forgiveness and Salvation are the two major themes of the Gospel, but unfortunately the church has often majored on sin rather than salvation. Many preachers emphasise the sin and judgement aspect much more than the benefits of love, grace, mercy, and forgiveness. Consequently many Christians become sub-consciously sin and failure conscious. In the negative frame of mind that Burnout induces it becomes easy to fall into a failure mentality and to drive yourself into self condemnation. You must determine not to fall into this trap. Let your thoughts major on the glorious, positive aspects of our Faith. Major on God's love, mercy, and grace. Rest in the wonder of His finished work.

One of the common effects of Burnout is a temporary inability to study the Bible or to engage in prayer. Don't allow this to bring you into a guilt trip. God understands your situation. You can fellowship with Him in an informal and simple manner. Talk to him from your heart. Unburden yourself at any time. Keep accepting His forgiveness and peace. Do not allow yourself to live in condemnation with a sense of guilt. It is Satan who condemns not God. God is FOR YOU, who (or what) can be against you?

3: FLOAT. (Learning to do this is the real life saver.)

This is the critical factor in this powerful formula. It is THE secret of the book's effectiveness. Learn to do this and it can make all the difference to your days and nights at this critical and painful period.

"Floating" is an excellent analogy for you learn to do this in a very similar manner to learning how to float on water. Someone can explain to you the theory of how to float but inevitably it is up to you to do it. No one else can do it for you.

Just as you would float if you were carried out to sea, so you must learn to relax and float on the sea of nervous symptoms which seem to threaten to destroy you. Don't fight it or force yourself, as though endeavouring to swim against a powerful tide. On many Australian beaches there is usually a very powerful surf running which can make it exciting for swimming but can also be very dangerous and cause many people to drown. One of the dangerous features are the "rips" which can develop. This happens when the huge waves of an incoming tide pound a depression into the beach. The depression fills with water until its weight exceeds that of the incoming tide and then it will form a rip and force its way out to sea. Should you ever get caught up in one of these it is useless to try to battle against it. The safest thing to do is to let the rip carry you out. Relax and float on it instead of fighting it. If you try to fight, it can exhaust and destroy you. But if you float it will carry you out for quite a way but then it will begin to come in again further down the beach, carrying you with it.

Learning to float is probably the wisest and best thing that a Burnout or depression victim can do. It is somewhat like learning to swim or to ride a bicycle. Once you master it, you can do it at any time. Floating, in the context which we are discussing, is learning how to gently float from one mood to another. From a dark, negative, pessimistic mood, into a brighter, more positive one. It is learning how to quietly divert your mind into a different thought pattern.

Your symptoms, like the threatening waves of the ocean may seem to be about to destroy you. You may feel completely at their mercy but in fact if you will relax you can float on top of those very waves that seem to threaten your existence.

Float out of the depression which threatens to destroy you. Float out of the bed in which you have taken refuge. Float to some activity that will take your mind out of the depressing thought cycle that has gripped it. Float into the shop or restaurant that you have been too frightened to enter.

An essential factor in floating is that you must not strive or struggle. You must endeavour to be as still as possible. Relax to the best of your ability. Will yourself to do it. In times of depression, the victim frequently finds themselves in a negative position

physically. Lying on the bed is one such position. In doing this the person tends to sink deeper and deeper into the depression. So you need to quietly determine to float out of that bed and begin to do something that will capture and absorb your mind. Sometimes a good book can do this. Or perhaps a cross-word or jig saw puzzle. Working at a computer for a while can sometimes be the right kind of distraction. Taking a walk, especially if there is a quiet route that you can follow. If you are able to walk in a park or some place of natural beauty and quietness, this exercise can be restorative.

The main point of this exercise is to get your mind on to something else. Something that will fully occupy your attention and distract you from the kind of thoughts and pressures that have caused your current depression.

It is often helpful to use your imagination. Suppose your stress makes it difficult for you to enter a shop and ask for some commodity. If you can stand quietly outside the shop and imagine a gentle wave coming in your direction, float on to that wave and let it carry you into the shop. Ignore everything else. Make your request and perform your transaction and then let it gently carry you out again. When you have done this a few times, it will become much easier for you.

In a sense, floating is acting in faith. Doing things by faith that your senses try to tell you cannot be done. Your thoughts and emotions may be signalling loudly that you do not have the courage and strength to do a certain thing. But you quietly and resolutely determine that with God's help you will. You do not force or push yourself. You simply give yourself to the wave and let it carry you into the situation of which you are afraid.

Dr. Weekes says, "Float past tension and fear. Float past unwelcome suggestions. Float, don't fight."

4: LET TIME PASS.

It probably took a considerable time for your system to become depleted and it will take time for you to recover. So you must not count the days, weeks and months. You should close your mind to the passage of time except to remind yourself that **YOU WILL GET WELL** with God's help, but it will usually take some time!

You will undoubtedly be desperate to be well again. You will probably experience considerable guilt that time is passing and you are not accomplishing anything. You have been so accustomed to driving yourself that it will be agony for you to realise that time is rushing by and you are virtually side-lined. But none of this anxiety is going to help your recovery. One of the lessons you must learn from all this is the necessity to relax. If you do not learn this lesson now the chances are that you never will and it is absolutely imperative that you do.

Chapter Eight

SOME WAYS TO COUNTERACT STRESS

Not all stress is negative and destructive. There is also a positive form of stress which heightens sensitivity and performance. This is the stress that athletes turn to their advantage. It is the stress of :-

- Challenge.
- Excitement.
- Positive anticipation.
- Stimulation.
- Achievement.

Certain types of positive stress can bring out the best qualities in us. But they also drain our emotional resources and we need to allow ourselves time and opportunity to unwind from emotional highs. There is an element of positive stress involved in preaching and ministering to an audience. Many preachers become emotionally involved in their work and attain a measure of emotional "high". They need to learn how to relax after such experiences and how to responsibly discharge the emotional tension they have experienced.

You also need to realise that ministering to people discharges a certain quantity of spiritual strength. When Jesus ministered to the woman with an issue of blood the writer says, *"He perceived that virtue had flown out from Him."* When we minister in prayer and faith to people who are drawing on our strength, we also give out of our life and strength. This demands some rest and recuperation afterwards. Failure to recognise this and to take appropriate steps to reimburse our emotional resources can eventually lead to serious exhaustion.

USE THESE STRESS ELIMINATORS.

There are numerous simple yet effective ways in which one can lessen the possible occurrence of Burnout. I will list these under five categories.

1: ADOPTING A HEALTHY MENTAL ATTITUDE.

The Bible clearly indicates that we can choose and determine our mental attitude. - *"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus."*

(Phil. 2:5) The Bible also teaches that our mind, and the attitudes we allow to dominate our minds, have an extremely powerful influence on our total health and well being. If we choose our attitude correctly, we can control our life and destiny to a large degree.

The word "attitude", is most commonly associated with the human mind and emotions, indicating the way one thinks, acts, behaves, and responds to life. We sometimes say, "She has a wonderful attitude to life."

But the word also has some other applications, one of which is to describe the angle of a plane in flight, this is particularly important when the plane is preparing to land. It must make its final approach with the correct attitude.

It is also a nautical phrase, used to describe the "set of the sails", on a sailing ship. One of the lessons we can learn from this is that the sailor can make his boat go in any

direction he wishes, irrespective of which way the wind is blowing, providing he sets the attitude of the sails correctly. The correct setting and positioning of the sails enable him to reach his desired destination despite the contrary winds that may blow.

In a similar manner we can help to determine our state of health by having the right attitude of mind towards life and its challenges. Here are some simple thoughts to help you to accomplish this.

a: Control what goes into your mind.

*"Finally brothers, whatever things are **true**, whatever things are **noble**, whatever things are **just**, whatever things are **pure**, whatever things are **lovely**, whatever things are **of good report**, if there is any **virtue**, and if there is anything **praiseworthy**, - **meditate on these things**. And the things which you have learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, **do**, and the God of peace will be with you. **And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.**" (Phil. 4 : 8,9)*

All the things which Paul encourages us to think about and meditate upon, are positive, wholesome and constructive. As we train our mind to concentrate on such positive things we eliminate the tendency to dwell on those things which are negative and highly stressful and destructive.

b: Let the attitude of Christ infiltrate your mind. (Phil. 2 : 5)

"Let this mind (attitude) be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." Christ is living in you by His Spirit, and His thoughts and feelings are in you. However, you also have your own natural thoughts and feelings so you must learn to sublimate your mind to His. Learn how to bring your own senses under the control of the Mind of Christ within you. Learn how to think His thoughts and to see things from His perspective.

c: Assume a posture of meekness and humility.

"Come to me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." (Matt. 11 : 28-30.)

d: See yourself in a positive light.

No one is perfect but Christ. Everyone has some negative features as well as many positive ones. Do not major on the negatives. Major on your positive features. Make a list of all your positive attributes. Thank God for them. Rejoice in them. Accentuate them. Use them for the benefit of others and for the glory of God. God loves you and has a positive attitude towards you, and you should have a positive attitude towards yourself otherwise you are thinking contrary to what God thinks and you are in rebellion against Him.

e: See every crisis as an opportunity to trust God.

The Chinese word for "Crisis" is composed of two characters. The first means danger, and the second signifies opportunity. When a big crisis overshadows our life it can be demoralising and devastating. The more we reflect on it in a negative way, the more it eats into our peace and confidence. So we must determine to see it as an opportunity for God to reveal His salvation.

f: Keep a watch over your mouth.

Consciously, or sub-consciously, everyone talks to themselves. The conversations can be either negative and destructive, or positive and constructive. Whilst these conversations are in one's mind they are thought patterns. These are quite powerful, beneficially or detrimentally, but once the words are formed in our mouths and spoken through our lips, they assume even greater power. So we need to consciously refrain from voicing negative thoughts and statements.

Psychologists frequently call this kind of conversation "self talk", and are virtually unanimous in their conclusions about the immense power and influence it can have upon your life. Its affect can be extremely powerful, either beneficially or detrimentally.

The Bible says that

"Death and life are in the power of the tongue." (Prov. 18:21.)

"A wholesome tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit." (Prov. 15:4.)

"The tongue of the wise promotes health." (Prov. 12:18.)

g: Be anxious for nothing. (Phil. 4:6.)

Emotional anxiety is a common and widely acknowledged contributing factor to stress and burnout and is probably a common denominator amongst stress victims. However, its presence and activity is often not recognised until its devastating negative effect has already done considerable damage. It often works away quietly and insidiously, eroding the reserves of nervous energy until they are depleted. So many people tend to underestimate the powerful negative effect of anxiety until it is too late.

Anxiety is a nervous, negative anticipation of impending disaster in the future. It begins in the mind in the form of negative thoughts and if unchecked is ultimately manifest in the nervous emotional system. Anxiety is much easier to overcome while it is still in the form of negative thoughts which is why Jesus counselled, "have no anxious thoughts concerning the future". Jesus spoke very strongly against anxiety and anxious thought. The attitude to life that He advocated was one in which all care and anxious thought should be committed to God through prayer with thanksgiving.

If we do not effectively deal with those anxious thoughts, they will eventually assume a much more powerful form in our nervous system. Once a person is into a Burnout condition, the anxiety level increases alarmingly. Its presence and detrimental effect becomes much more harmful. Instead of merely being "anxious thoughts" it assumes gigantic proportions that threaten to engulf and overwhelm the whole being.

The Burnout victim experiences horrific emotional depression in which life seems pointless, futile and meaningless. Suddenly the whole purpose of life is brought into question and the future appears to be bleak and hopeless. Clouds of dark depression sweep in on the victim filling them with despair.

Worry (anxious thought) achieves nothing and the secret of dealing with it is found in **1 Pet 5:7. "Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you."**

Two thoughts are implicit in this scripture :-

1: ALL anxious thoughts must be summarily dealt with. They must be CAST OUT of the mind and on to the Lord. We must not tolerate their presence in our mind. God wants to deal with them for us, therefore cast them on Him.

2: We must constantly remind ourselves that God, the Heavenly Father, loves and cares for us unconditionally and unceasingly and He delights to see us totally free from all anxious care.

An old Irish lady who was 105 years old once told me, "There are two things about which you should never worry. The first is the things about which you can do something, and the second is the things about which you can do nothing." Her philosophy of life was that it is pointless to worry about the things about which you can do something. Do something about them instead of worrying. And what is the point of worrying about those things about which you can do nothing? Your worrying will not change them anyway!

h: Try to practice moderation in everything.

"Let your moderation be known unto all men." (Phil. 4:5.)

Moderation is the practice of restraint or the exercise of self control. It is the avoidance of extremes. Excesses of any kind are always dangerous. They destroy the healthy balance of life and induce stress. We should always aim for temperance and moderation in everything. Don't work to excess or eat to excess. Try to maintain a healthy balance in everything.

I: Allow yourself healthy emotional expression.

God has created us, in His own image, as "emotive beings", i.e. beings with emotional characteristics. To some degree our mental health and well being depends on the proper discharge and expression of those emotions. Unfortunately many people have been taught to suppress their emotions instead of allowing them normal expression and release. The stifling and bottling up of emotion is dangerous and definitely detrimental.

Many cultures strongly discourage the expression of normal emotions. This is particularly true for males who are often taught that emotional expression is not manly. It is also true that the traditional church view has been to suppress all emotion. This is not a biblical concept, it is a religious tradition, an idea that man has introduced into Christianity. It actually runs contrary to biblical admonition. This is particularly true in respect of the exercise of positive, joyful emotion. In the "Feasts of the Lord" (**Deut 16: 14,15**) God commanded His people to "*Rejoice before Him for seven days*". The Bible is filled with such exhortations to rejoice, declaring that "*The Joy of the Lord is your strength*". We are also told that a "*Merry heart does you good like a medicine*". **Prov 17:22.**

2: TAKING CONTROL OF YOUR LIFE.

One of the factors which frequently appears to induce stress and burnout is the feeling that things are out of control. This can arise from a number of sources which in themselves may seem insignificant, but when combined constitute an irritant that can erode your well being and confidence.

Take control of your time.

The feeling that time is escaping from you and that you don't have sufficient time to do all the things you need to do is a common problem. This can cause panic and despair

unless you get on top of it. The obvious way to overcome this problem is to "plan your work, and work your plan." A simple program of time management will help you.

The simplest way to do this is to allocate your days. Determine ahead of time which tasks you will aim to do on certain days. Then plan the individual days, dividing them into segments of one hour each and apportioning the day to the various jobs you need to accomplish.

You must also find some ways to restrict unexpected calls on your time. People who come to see you without an appointment. Phone calls which break into your work schedule. Some intrusions such as emergencies are unavoidable. Others can be controlled by good management.

3: GET YOURSELF ORGANISED.

Disorganisation is a major cause of stress. The feeling that everything is chaotic and out of control is frequently a source of stress. This is particularly so when you are already suffering from stress and nervous exhaustion.

The antidote for this is to keep things as tidy and well organised as possible. Take a break every once in a while to tidy up your desk and your office. Designate a place for every item that you frequently seem to misplace. Try to get everything as orderly as possible so that you know where everything is.

Determine your priorities and concentrate on them.

Every person who has numerous responsibilities needs to determine an order of priority and have it clearly established in their mind. Otherwise it is easy to find yourself working hard at tasks which may actually have a low priority, and neglecting other things which are much more important.

Write out a list of all your responsibilities and things you need to accomplish. Just write them down in any order initially. Then go through the list and establish the order of priority. Number each item from 1 to 15, or whatever. Once you have determined an order of importance and priority, allot sufficient time to each item on the list. Don't forget to list such things as time for relaxation, time to spend with your family. Some time to spend on pursuits which will renew and refresh you. Keeping yourself in good health and a positive frame of mind should have a very high priority.

4: MAKE TIME FOR RELAXATION

Busy persons often convince themselves that they "have no time to relax". They genuinely believe that they cannot afford to take time out to relax and take it easy once in a while.

There is a story in church history of a young preacher who once visited the Apostle John. The young visitor had heard so much about the esteemed apostle and fully expected the great man to be in prayer, or studying the scriptures, or involved in some other deeply spiritual activity. Instead of which John was playing with a parrot. The young man commented on this with some degree of surprise and a suggestion of criticism. The wise old apostle replied that "The bow that is always bent, will soon lose its strength". He recommended that the young man also should find some diversions and ways to relax from the tensions of life.

If you cannot “find” time in which to relax, then you must “make” some time to do it. God has built a principle of Sabbath rest into nature that decrees that at least one day in seven should be used for relaxation from the pressures of the working schedule. We ignore God’s principle to our detriment.

a: Keep your home as a place in which to relax.

Everyone, especially persons in public roles, needs a place to relax and be themselves. The obvious and ideal place for this is in your home. The obvious people with whom to do this is your family for they too deserve some relaxation from the demands and expectations which are put on those who carry a public office. The leader needs somewhere to unwind at the end of a demanding day. He needs people with whom he can relax, enjoy some casual conversation, and indulge in relaxation and laughter. If it is possible and within your budget, try to furnish your home with some items of furniture which help you to unwind.

b: Don't turn your home into an extension of your office or church.

Your home should be "A place apart." A place to which you can retreat to enjoy some respite from the demands which a pastorate or other leadership responsibilities can place on you.

Resist the temptation to take work home with you at the end of the day. Don't let your home become like a place of public gathering. Don't encourage everyone to just drop in at your home at any time. You need a break from your responsibilities. Your spouse and family need a break from being under public scrutiny too.

c: Schedule some relaxation into your routine.

"And Jesus said to His disciples, Come aside by yourselves, to a deserted place and rest a while. For there were many coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat." (Mark. 6:31.)

Someone said that "If we don't come apart and rest a while, we will eventually come apart." Jesus Himself frequently went off alone to some isolated place to pray and recuperate and He encouraged His disciples to do the same. If Jesus and His disciples needed to take time out for relaxation, how much more do we need to do it?

Many Christians seem to have lost the ability to relax. They seem to feel guilty if they are not constantly doing something and such people usually appoint themselves as watchmen to ensure that everyone else feels guilty if they are not intensely involved in some spiritual activity.

5: PHYSICAL EXERCISE.

"For bodily exercise profits a little, but Godliness is profitable for all things." (1 Tim. 4:8a.)

Some Christians believe that this scripture indicates that bodily exercise is not profitable when in fact it says that it is profitable, but only a little when compared to Godly exercises which will profit us eternally. The reason it only profits "a little", is because the physical body is only for time, but our spirit is eternal. Unfortunately many Christians seem to have the impression that physical exercise is not spiritual and they have the idea that because they are Christians their bodies are not subject to the same requirements as those of non-Christians.

It is an indisputable fact that regular exercise is necessary to the proper maintenance of health. It is also true that it is necessary to the well being of your emotional health. Healthy people, who exercise regularly, are far less likely to suffer the disorders which can be caused by stress. Brisk walking is the simplest and possibly the finest type of exercise. It does not require any special type of equipment and can easily be fitted into your regular lifestyle and commitments.

Chapter Nine

PRACTICAL IDEAS TO HELP YOUR RECOVERY

When a person is caught in the throes of Burnout they need very practical help. It is a time when clichés and glib answers prove their total inadequacy and only add to the person's frustration. The last thing they need to hear is someone saying, "Now just pull yourself together", or "You will just have to get on top of this thing". They desperately need some simple, practical, workable guide-lines. Some principles which they can easily grasp despite the distraught state of their mind and emotions.

The main factors in recovery and restoration are undoubtedly faith, rest, relaxation and the passing of time. All Psychotherapists seem to agree that it takes time for one to recover from Burnout and total exhaustion. Most will actually encourage you by telling you that **YOU WILL GET WELL, BUT IT WILL TAKE TIME.**

There is actually a widely held belief that depressions are seasonal. That once they come they last for a particular length of time, and then like the passing of Winter, they give way to Spring. This idea may be an encouragement but the patient still wants to know how best to survive that Winter period. How can he help himself? What can he do that will make this awful period more bearable? What can he do that will improve his chances of complete recovery and actually accelerate the process of that recovery?

Here are some of those kind of suggestions.

Realise that it can happen to anyone.

Burnout can happen to even the most unlikely person, the very one that you never imagined would be vulnerable to such stress.

It has not been sent as a judgement or punishment from God.

It has not come upon you because you have sinned and inherited some dreadful punishment as a result. It is usually the inevitable consequence of over work, too much responsibility, too many stress factors, too little rest and recreation.

Repent of any known sin.

If there has been some secret sin which has brought you into a deep sense of guilt and been one of the stress factors, then this certainly must be repented of and put right because guilt is undoubtedly a powerful stress ingredient and must be eliminated.

Don't be ashamed or embarrassed.

Suffering from Burnout is not something of which to be ashamed or embarrassed any more than one might be ashamed of any other kind of sickness. This is a sickness which happens to be in the realm of the nerves and emotions rather than in a more physical or bodily sense. Most sicknesses begin in this area anyway and are known as psychosomatic diseases. Problems which originate in the mind or emotions and then manifest their repercussions in the physical realm.

Find a trusted friend and counsellor.

You will undoubtedly need a trusted friend, confidant and counsellor to walk with you through this trying time. This person may not be too easy to find because relatively few people have any real understanding of this problem. If you are truly fortunate this

person will be your spouse, the person who knows and understands you better than anyone. It is always distressing for her to see her loved one suffering such pain. Her distress is often augmented by the fact that it is often difficult for either of you to adequately understand what is really happening. This is not a criticism of your spouse. It is a statement of fact.

However, if you are fortunate and your spouse is strong enough to cope with the bewildering symptoms and changing moods, then this person, in such close proximity to you every day and having a stronger commitment to you than any other person, is the one best able to help you. This condition will severely test you both and it will test your relationship. It is a sufficiently powerful intrusion to either make or break your relationship. Happy and blessed is the Burnout victim whose spouse is strong enough, gracious enough and patient enough to cope with this horrific experience and walk through it with their partner until the storm has passed and peace is restored. The process of doing this together successfully will strengthen and add greater dimensions to the relationship, enriching and enhancing it.

Your family may need a counsellor too.

Your spouse, and family members may also need access to some competent counselling too. Living with a loved one who is suffering from Burnout is not an easy thing to do. They are exposed to all kinds of emotional pressures and the very requirement of watching their loved one go through periods of deep depression can be extremely traumatic and wearing. Many marriages do not survive the imposition of this traumatic ordeal.

Prevention is better than cure.

Always remember that the old saying is true "An ounce of prevention is better than a ton of cure". Never presume that "It could never happen to you". Beware of the possibility that it can happen to anyone who does not heed the warning and persists in pushing themselves beyond the brink of their resources.

Practise these principles.

A close friend of mine, a successful Pastor who experienced and survived Burnout and discovered that he was a better and stronger person afterwards, shared four principles which he had learned from his experience. Let me pass them on to you :-

- Work with God, not for Him.
- Love people dearly but don't try to carry all their problems.
- Keep short accounts. (Confess your faults and get forgiveness)
- Develop the attitude of gratitude. Be thankful in all things.

Come apart and rest a while.

"And Jesus said to His disciples, Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while".
(Mark 6:31)

I know that you have heard this saying before, but let's say it again anyway. "If you don't come apart and rest once in a while, you will eventually fall apart". It's a saying as old as the proverbial hills. Everyone knows it, but very few take it seriously, and even fewer actually practise it. A minister is one person that may frequently talk about the virtues of the Sabbath principle, but he is often the last one to practise it.

It is evident from the scriptures that even Jesus needed to take a recreational break periodically. Several times we read that *“Jesus went up into a mountain apart”*. Isn't it amazing that even the Son of God needed to take a break from the demands and pressures of His ministry? Although He was constantly ministering to the multitudes, accustomed to being surrounded by masses of people, many with heart breaking problems, Jesus needed to slip away from them at frequent intervals. He needed to get right away from the unrelenting pressures of a demanding public life to seek spiritual refreshment. If He had to do so, how much more do you and me?

Take a Restful break.

We all need to not only “come apart” but also “rest a while”. A great deal of harm is done when your system is already overtaxed and weary, but you persist in pushing yourself the extra mile. When we continue to press the accelerator to the floor even though we know that the motor is over hearted, lacking lubrication and threatening to explode, we are asking for trouble. Our whole system needs regular periods of rest.

Take a Recreational break.

So many conscientious people allow themselves to feel guilty if they make time for some form of recreation. Recreation means diversion, distraction, amusement, entertainment, merriment, refreshment and renewal. But the most obvious meaning is re-creation. We are re-created through recreational breaks.

Take a Re-creative break.

When we are under severe pressure and our system is over taxed, there is a dramatic loss of creativity. We have to push ourselves to produce, particularly when it is anything that requires creative skills. It is an onerous task to simply maintain movement and momentum. The only way to revive our creative energies and skills is through proper rest, relaxation and recuperation. We should never feel guilty for doing this. No one can run on an empty tank.

Rest your body.

Your physical body is a magnificent machine but every machine needs to be rested once in a while. This is not always achieved through lying down or sleeping. Sometimes a walk or swim is restful and recuperative.

Relax your mind.

When our mind is engaged in the same thought patterns continually, it frequently becomes exhausted. One simple solution for this is to diversify your interests. Give your mind something relaxing to do. Take up a hobby that occupies and stimulates your mind without making too much demand on it.

Refresh your spirit.

Spiritual refreshment, for a Christian, is the most important of all. Our spirit is really the computer that runs our whole system. When it is “down” every department of our being is negatively affected.

It is all too easy, in the hectic program of our busy lives, to seriously neglect our own personal need for regular spiritual renewal, particularly the kind of exercises that actually “refresh” our spirit. The true refreshment of our spirit involves experiencing release, liberty, the joy of the Lord, and sheer enjoyment of God's presence.

The experience of spiritual refreshing involves honestly opening our whole being, — spirit, soul, mind and body, to the limitless power of the greater being, God Himself. The belief that there is an all powerful, loving God, a being infinitely greater than ourselves, who stands ready to help and assist us at all times, is a tremendous potential source of encouragement.

Practise casting ALL your cares on to Jesus.

You need to do this regularly. As soon as some burden or care comes up, before you are able to let it settle into your mind, cast it upon the Lord. This is often easier said than done. Many preachers can teach about it but they do not necessarily practise it. It is not sufficient to know about this, or even to teach others about it, **YOU MUST DO IT.**

Receive and enjoy His rest.

When you have come to Jesus, and cast your care upon Him, then receive and enjoy His rest without any sense of guilt or condemnation. Many leaders feel guilty if they ever take a break from their work. They allow themselves to be driven by a need to be working all the time without proper respite. Remember that Jesus Himself frequently *"went apart and rested awhile"*, and He exhorts others, *"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened down, and I will give you rest. Learn from My example, for I am meek and humble, and you will find rest for your souls."* (Matt. 11: 28-30.)

Keep believing and confessing that YOU WILL GET WELL.

Do this even when your mind is screaming that you are never going to recover and that you will never feel normal again. When your emotions are so depressed that you fear they will never be elated again, that you will never sing joyfully or shout for joy again. Perhaps you never realised that millions of people have gone this way before you and they have recovered and are enjoying good health again. Some people of your acquaintance, that you never suspected have suffered in this manner, have been fully restored and are experiencing and enjoying normal living once more.

Remember, your recovery WILL TAKE TIME.

Allowing that time to pass without being agitated and impatient will be extremely difficult. You want to get well quickly for every possible reason but this kind of sickness rarely clears up speedily unless you have recognised it in the very early stages and taken positive and effective action. If you did not recognise it early enough and became a victim of a full blown episode of Burnout, then it will definitely take time unless you receive a miraculous intervention.

Praise God as often as possible every day.

There will be many times when this will be the last thing that you feel like doing. When your mind tells you that you have nothing for which to praise Him and your emotional level is so low that you feel it impossible to rejoice in anything. Ignore every thought and feeling and praise God anyway. Speak out your praise forcefully irrespective of how you think or feel. Go ahead and thank Him by faith for your healing and deliverance. This is what King David did during his traumatic experiences of deep depression and despair. Hear his words in (Psalm. 42:11). *"Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; For I shall yet praise Him Who is the help of my countenance and my God."*

Establish a regular exercise routine.

Part of the reason why some people experience Burnout is because they are not fit. They have neglected the need to exercise their body and have become unfit. Once you are into Burnout it will be more difficult than ever to stir yourself to do some regular exercise but you must strongly urge yourself to do so. You will have to do this gradually and patiently because your energy levels will be so low that the last thing you will feel like doing will be physical exercise. Walking is usually the best exercise to undertake. You may have to be content with very short walks to begin with and then try to increase the distance each day or each week. On the other hand some patients find that they can walk miles without great effort and find this a most relaxing break from the imprisonment often imposed by their Burnout. Swimming is also an excellent form of exercise and very refreshing.

Make time for relaxation and fun.

Many leaders feel that they just "do not have time to relax." So, if you don't have it, then you must make it. When you plan your schedule of work and responsibilities, write into it some periods when you will take time out for fun and relaxation. I recently heard of a preacher who had finally learned this lesson. He began to allot periods in his busy schedule when he would simply enjoy doing nothing. One day a friend asked him, "What are you doing on Friday?" to which the preacher replied, "I've planned to do nothing on Friday." "Oh good", said his friend, "then you can come and speak at the seminar we are holding in our church". "Wait a minute" said the preacher, "you don't understand. I said I've planned to do nothing on Friday, and that is what I will be doing - NOTHING!"

Learn to say NO.

You must learn to say a very small word which is difficult for most leaders to say. That word has only two letters, - "N O". Many leaders find it extremely difficult to do that. They feel they must do everything that is asked of them and particularly if it is "ministry". They feel that they are at everybody's command at all times of the day or night. They feel obliged to respond to every call regardless of from whom it comes. Such people must realise that the whole world does not depend on them. There are a few other people around too who can undertake some tasks. No matter how hard you work, you cannot save the whole world.

Prioritise your time with God.

You will probably discover during your Burnout experience that it is very difficult to study the Bible or to get down to serious prayer. Don't feel too dismayed or guilty about this. The basic reason is that your powers of concentration are severely depleted and it difficult, if not impossible to concentrate properly on anything. However, this does not mean that you cannot spend time with God, but you must make those times more informal. Instead of attempting do serious study of the Bible, simply browse through a few inspiring verses. Try to memorise them and recite them to yourself. You will probably find it easier to stay in the Psalms and the Gospels especially the positive and inspiring portions.

Realise too that informal conversation with God is also prayer. In fact your prayers may become a whole lot more honest and sincere when you are going through deep problems. Many Bible characters discovered this. Some of the most profound and powerful prayers in the Bible were made in times of desperation. They were short and to the point and they gained a very positive result. The shortest prayer on record was

probably one of the most effective. When Peter cried out to Jesus, "Lord save me", he only uttered three words. There was Peter at one end, Jesus at the other, and salvation in the middle.

You must realise that your devotional times are not to be periods of heavy theological study. They should be personal, intimate, informal times of true inter-action with God. You may well discover God in a dimension in which you have never previously known Him.

You should learn to spend time quietly waiting on God and resting before Him, opening your being to imbibe the atmosphere of the greatest power in the universe. Linking yourself afresh to the energy of the Creator and allowing His life to infiltrate your spirit, mind, emotions and body.

As you quietly wait before God, receive His Spirit into your spirit. Actively invoke His presence into your deepest being. As you read the scriptures let your mind be filled with comforting images of God as your heavenly Father. Feast your imagination on the images of Jesus that the Spirit will quicken on the screen of your mind.

Let your thoughts and emotions be channelled by the healing power of God's Spirit and allow your sub-conscious mind to be positively and powerfully impacted by the words of God. Learn to intimately "commune with God in the Spirit".

Allow God's Word, through His Spirit, to fill you with joy, for "*the Joy of the Lord is your strength*". (Neh 8:10.)

Re-evaluate your goals and priorities.

There are some extremely important lessons to be learned from an experience of Burnout and the first and most important is that you must not rush back into doing things the way you were doing them previously. You must acknowledge that your previous routine eventually brought you calamity and you must beware of going back to the same old grind and bringing the problem back again. You must evaluate your task. Examine your previous situation. See what God wants you to change and make sure that you do it. One of the foremost things is that you must determine is to work *with* God and not *for* Him. He wants to work in and through you. He does not want you slaving away in your own strength, - "serving the Lord."

Some fairly drastic changes need to be made before you can return to your task again. Priorities must be seriously evaluated. You must learn to put first things first. You must discover from God the manner in which He wants you to serve Him. This may mean a whole new direction for you. You may discover yourself involved in a brand new field of ministry. You have to be willing to change. If God allowed this whole Burnout scenario in order to get your undivided attention, He must have something very important to say to you. So when you are well enough to hear Him clearly you need to pay serious attention to what He has to say to you. If you do not allow Him to change certain things in your routine you may find yourself going through the long painful experience again.

You can be better and stronger than you were.

Realise that you can become a stronger and better person as a result of what you have been through. Burnout can be a refining experience. It can be used to sift many things

from your life which were possibly not healthy or good. It can change your attitude about many things, making you more understanding and considerate of others than you were previously. You should certainly be a wiser person than you were previously, understanding a lot of things about life and people than you ever really understood before.

Many persons have made this discovery and I have known numerous people who have lived to thank God for the experience of Burnout because it has eventually made them a better person. Many have enjoyed life much more after their healing, having been freed from many inhibitions and tensions which previously imprisoned them.

Remember that Samson accomplished more in the final hours of his life than he had in his whole life span. He was a person who had suffered numerous set backs in his life. The last of them led to his imprisonment and blindness. Little did he realise as he daily trod the grinding mill that his hair, the sign of his dedication to God, was growing again. That soon he would experience again the anointing of God on his life and would accomplish a greater victory than he had known in all his life.

Positively anticipate the future.

Use your imagination to "live beyond the now". Don't allow your thoughts to always keep you in the painful present. Give wings to your thoughts by the power of sanctified imagination. Project yourself into the better days that lie ahead. Begin to enjoy the atmosphere of the future when you are healed and restored, accomplishing even better things than you did in the past.

Begin to thank God in faith every day in anticipation of your recovery.

Do this instead of praying. Instead of crying out to God from the midst of your despair. Begin to thank him positively and firmly for your anticipated recovery.

Help other sufferers to recover.

Once you are in a recovery mode, you will want to start helping others who are suffering from similar conditions. You will now feel a new and deeper empathy with them which will make you want to help them. Many people are naturally rather impatient with others who suffer nervous exhaustion. This is because they have no way of knowing or understanding the nature or potential severity of such problems. Unless you are specifically trained in this area, e.g a psychologist or psychiatrist, there is probably no way that you can understand such matters except you have experienced them personally. Unless you have such understanding and empathy there is little chance that you would be able to help or encourage such people. The chances are that you would only hurt or frustrate them further through your inept approach and lack of understanding.

However, you must not rush too quickly into trying to help others. You must allow yourself adequate time to properly recover, otherwise you will be ministering out of empathy without necessarily having the personal strength that is needed. You may find yourself ministering to their need, out of your own need, and this will quickly deplete your own resources again.

You will live to bring glory to God and to His Name.

God says : *Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will glorify Me.* " (Psalm. 50:15.)

When you are in the middle of your trouble you are frequently so discouraged that you feel you will never accomplish anything again. You often feel that your usefulness and your service for God is over and that you will never again be able to bring glory to His Name. But God says the opposite to this in the verse above and you must pin your faith on what God says and not on what you think or feel.

Anticipate your resurrection.

The Bible constantly portrays the glorious splendour of resurrection. It consistently enhances the image of resurrection by contrasting it with the dark gloom of death. Resurrection is as brilliant as death is dismal. The two are in complete contrast and absolutely incompatible.

There is a very real sense in which Burnout and its similar conditions is actually a partial and temporary death. At death a person loses every physical and material possession. Their spirit leaves their body and the material world and every earthly possession and contact. They are separated from their physical being, their loved ones and relatives, their earthly dreams, plans and possessions.

Death is depicted as darkness, loss, and separation, and these are also the symbols of Burnout, which is also an experience typified by blackness, darkness, gloom, confusion and uncertainty.

It is also one of profound loss in which the person loses touch with reality and with everything that has made life bearable, enjoyable and productive. The unfortunate victim loses all sense of security and inherits the sense of fear and foreboding. Just as a person loses every earthly possession at death, so the Burnout victim seems to lose every precious and comforting thing. Job said, "*Naked I came into this world and naked I shall leave it.*" Job.1:21. Burnout causes such a sense of loss and nakedness, —the feeling that you have lost everything and have been detached from all things.

It also involves separation as the victim is isolated from familiar sources of comfort and encouragement. There is also the separation that occurs as relationships can no longer afford the intimate reward and encouragement they once gave. The Burnout victim is plunged into the searing loneliness of a path of darkness which no one can walk with him.

The good news in all of this is that after death comes resurrection. After the darkness and loss of Winter comes the resurrection and restoration of Spring. It often seems that the severity of the Winter enhances the glory of the Spring. Undoubtedly this is partly because the Winter has been so trying, so dark and seemingly endless that everything about Spring seems to be so much more welcome and glorious. A further wonderful thing about Spring is that it is the herald of Summer when everything that was promised in Spring comes to full fruition.

Recovery from Burnout is like this. You tend to value every lovely thing so much more because you have been through a Winter season when all was lost to you. You completely lost your ability to enjoy the sound of music. It tormented you rather than soothed you, but now that you enjoy it once more it seems to be sweeter than ever. The same is true of every other thing that you lost the ability to enjoy. Now that you can enjoy them again they seem to be so much richer, sweeter and more enjoyable.

I believe too that there are some things that you never regain. Things that you are better off without. Some aspects of your character and life that did not enrich or enhance you. You rise from the dead a better person than you were. Those things that you never regain were not the best aspects of your life. The resurrected person is different and better. So I pray for all of us who have experienced this unsought transition that we shall all be ultimately better persons because of it.

**It is the nature and delight of God,
to turn darkness into light,
tragedy into triumph, and
death into resurrection.**

Chapter Ten

THE TRIAL OF OUR FAITH

"Though now, for a little while, you have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith, of much greater worth than gold which perishes even though refined by fire, may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed." 1 Pet 1:6,7.

"Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice in that you participate in the sufferings of Christ so that you may be overjoyed when His glory is revealed." 1 Pet 4:12.

"Burnout", like many other similar experiences, usually constitutes a great trial of our faith. Our whole belief system is challenged by the harsh realities of some of life's traumas. This is particularly so for Christians who have a hyper-triumphal perspective that suggests that if you have the right kind of faith you need never suffer reversals, setbacks, trials or sickness.

The words of God through His servant Peter as in the above verses, suggest differently. Peter assures his readers that they have received *"like precious faith"*, a faith of like quality and quantity as did he and his fellow Apostles. **2 Pet 1:1**. He reminds us that this faith, a gift from God, is a precious commodity, but he further tells us that the trial of that faith, in which it is proven to be the genuine article, is even more precious than gold.

He also informs us that we should not think it strange when our faith is tried through many trials, as though something unusual had happened to us. The trial of our Christian faith is not an unexpected, unusual or bizarre thing. All through Bible history and Church history, the faith of Godly men and women has been tested and tried in the severe experiences and trials of life. Peter then proceeds to tell us that such precious faith, that triumphs amidst the fiery trials of life will result in praise, honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ. Men and women who survive and triumph over the trials of life frequently find that "their faith" is totally depleted and they discover and experience the "faith of God", which is sufficient for all things.

1: TRIALS WILL CHALLENGE YOUR THEOLOGICAL POSITION.

The perceived meaning of "theology" has changed at some point. Whereas it originally signified, "the knowledge of God", it has more recently been understood to mean "knowledge of the Bible", which is quite a different thing. However, for the moment we will take it to mean our "knowledge and understanding of what the Bible teaches on a given subject". Theology is therefore a technical word for what you have come to believe about God from a biblical perspective.

All but the newest believers have developed a belief system based on their understanding of what the Bible teaches about God, His nature, character, ways and about His relationship and attitude to mankind, particularly to those who are "called according to His purpose." This belief system is usually influenced by numerous factors including the teaching and emphases we hear and imbibe as new believers. As we begin to study the Bible we develop certain positions and conclusions many of which pertain to our position and privileges as children of God.

Amongst the many things we need to understand about God is His attitude towards human suffering, and what we may learn from His attitude. Many sincere Christians have the concept that if you have real faith it will save you from experiencing any of the trials of life and that such persons will never experience anything other than health, wealth and prosperity. However, the scriptures, if read in total context and with honesty and integrity do not support that idea. On the contrary we discover that some of the greatest saints of God experienced the most severe trials of their faith. A certain preacher once had the audacity to tell me that, "if the Apostle Paul had experienced the great revelation of faith that we have today, he would never have suffered the shipwrecks, stonings and imprisonment which were his lot in life." I did not somehow feel that my boastful preacher friend really possessed a higher revelation than the Apostle Paul!

2: TRIALS WILL TEST YOUR COMMITMENT TO GOD.

Experiencing trials frequently tests your relationship to God and your commitment to Him. When severe testings came to Job and his family his wife urged him to "*curse God and die*". (**Job 2:9**) But the faith of Job was such that he declared, "*Though He kills me, yet will I trust Him*". (**Job 13:15**)

Trials and testings will usually reveal whether your faith is based on sentiment, emotion, or whether it is true faith based on God's Word alone. Testings will reveal whether or not your faith is based on subjective or objective foundations. If your faith is subjective, based on good feelings and emotional highs, it may fail you when you need it most. But if it is objective in character, based on the Word of God alone, it will survive and triumph. Trials will test the depth of your relationship, whether it is superficial or deeply grounded. This is why the trial of our faith is said to be precious to God because it proves the depth and quality of our faith.

3: TRIALS WILL TEST THE NATURE OF YOUR FAITH.

They will reveal whether your faith is the fair weather variety or a faith for all seasons. Only that faith which is truly from God will bring you through the deep trials of life triumphantly with your faith in God undiminished and even stronger than it was previously. Christians who believe that faith is like an insurance policy that guarantees freedom from the trials and painful things of life have probably never fully understood **Hebrews 11**, in which the writer details great exploits of faith, which includes mention of :-

V.5. Faith to walk with God through the common things of life. (Enoch)

Gen 5:21-24.

V.7. Faith to fear God. (Noah)

V.8. Faith to surrender your most precious possession. (Abraham)

V.13. Faith that can take no for an answer.

V. 24-28 Faith that refuses riches and honours to embrace suffering.(Moses)

V. 35. Faith that can accept torture, refusing deliverance to obtain a better resurrection.

V.36. Faith that survives jeers, flogging, chains and imprisonment.

V. 37. Faith that carried them through stonings, being sawn in half, Men and women who wandered about in sheep skins and goat skins being destitute, tormented and afflicted.

There is a wide spread concept of faith abroad today that consistently emphasises the positive and totally denies the negative. I believe that such a view is unbalanced and unbiblical. Certainly many heroes of faith wrought great miracles and performed mighty

wonders. Others were enriched and prospered through faith in God. But many of the heroes of faith mentioned in Hebrews 11, refused riches, refused deliverance, embraced suffering and torture and wandered destitute, tormented and afflicted. yet the Bible says of those same people, "*Of whom this world was not worthy,... these all received a good report.* Vs. 38,39.

Many important truths that penetrate far deeper than the mind or emotions, can only be learned in the laboratory of life and in the harsh environment of testing and trials. Many years ago, as a much younger and less mature believer, I was intrigued by a verse in **Heb 5:8** which says of Jesus, "*though he were a son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered*". This interesting scripture indicates that in His humanity, Jesus learned many lessons through those things that He suffered and endured. If it was true of Jesus, how much truer it may be of us.

4: BURNOUT EXAGGERATES THE NEGATIVES.

Many victims of Burnout discover that their mind frequently exaggerates negative perceptions, which may even include our understanding of God and His purposes for our life. In such a depleted condition the mind can play fearful tricks and we may discover a deeper significance in David's words when he says that we are "*fearfully and wonderfully made*". (**Psa 139:14**) Wonderful when everything is working correctly, fearful when something goes wrong. It is particularly fearful when the thought processes constantly affirm negative prospects and the whole future seems to lose its meaning and purpose. The depleted and often depressed mind tends to conjure up all manner of morbid, pessimistic views of the future frequently making the prospect of the future too horrendous to contemplate.

Recent medical research is discovering many things about the organisation and operation of the brain in respect to its right and left hemispheres. It would seem that the left hemisphere is involved primarily in intellectual perception and speech expression, whereas the right side is primarily involved in emotional feelings and expression. A temporary impairment of the right hemisphere may result in a severe depletion of the ability to experience emotional pleasure. It may even cause the victim to be tormented by the very things that previously relaxed him and afforded great pleasure. I found this to be true of music. I have always enjoyed music. Every meal time we would play some relaxing music to enhance the enjoyment of the meal. However, when my emotions became depleted through burnout, I could no longer enjoy that pleasure. In fact I could not stand the sound of it. I became agitated and distressed by it.

The sounds of nature no longer charmed me. The song of birds tormented me. The sound of wind and rain became a source of torment to me. I could get no pleasure from reading and could not bear to watch the television, particularly the news or current event programs that brought scenes of suffering to the screen.

Undoubtedly the most painful of these negative perceptions is a dreadful sense that you have lost contact with God, or worse still, that He has deserted and forsaken you. You may then be inclined to believe that the whole problem is of a spiritual nature. Many Christians do not understand that the depleted brain can produce such thoughts and feelings.

David A. Miller in "*Pastoral Psychology*", reports an apparent link between certain brain impairments and "religious experience" He tells of encounters with four patients at a

rehabilitation centre. They had all experienced emotional depletion as a result of right hemisphere lesions and were also struggling with the reality of their faith. He says, "These individuals were continuing to act in accordance with well ingrained patterns of belief, but without the same quality as before their injuries." One of these people said, "My faith has left me." Another said "I can't pray anymore, I can only say the words."

He further declares, "Those closest to the patients reported that they showed a diminished interest and zest in their religious activities." Miller concludes that "damage to the right hemisphere appears to disrupt the emotional component of their faith and belief system."

Dr. Claire Weekes mentions a similar issue ② She says, "Some nervously sick people complain of being unable to contact their religion. This is an added worry, especially when they find no solace in prayer. When they begin to understand that they feel this way simply because their emotions are exhausted, they are greatly relieved."

①Miller. *"Neuropsychology and the Emotional Components of Religion."*

②Weekes. *"Self Help for Your Nerves."*

5: REMEMBER THAT BURNOUT IS NOT A NORMAL CONDITION.

In the midst of the negative and fearful thoughts and emotions that may plague you, always remember that your mind and emotions are not functioning normally right now. When the whole world appears to have the elements of a Greek tragedy, remember that it is your mind that is not presently normal. The world is basically just as it has always been. Your nerves are depleted. You are seriously unwell. When your condition is "normalised" your true perspectives will be restored. Remember how you thought and felt when your mind and nerves were well and strong and cling to those kinds of thoughts.

6: MEANWHILE, GO IN THE FAITH DIRECTION.

Use your faith even when you cannot seem to perceive or feel God. When your emotions and senses may try to tell you that God has deserted you. Break-down victims often feel that God has deserted them, but actually He is closer to you in your times of extremity than ever before. Don't rely on your feelings, emotions and sentiment. God has not changed. His love has not altered. Your relationship to Him can deepen and grow through this time of extremity. Ignore every negative, destructive thought and feeling. Praise God for His faithfulness, that He never changes or alters. Offer the sacrifice of praise to Him for it is a vivid expression of triumphant faith. Determine what your faith options are and go with them regardless of what your unreliable negative thoughts may try to tell you.

When King David experienced a similar time of testing when his spirit was overwhelmed within him, he said, *"I will remember the days of old; I will meditate on all Your works. I will muse on the works of Your hands."*

(Psalm 143:5)

7: THE TRIUMPH OF YOUR FAITH WILL REVEAL PRAISE AND GLORY.

Ultimately the trial and triumph of your faith will bring praise, honour and glory to Jesus Christ. (**1 Pet 1:6,7**) This is a huge and mysterious subject, often extremely difficult to understand, but the scriptures frequently allude to this fact, —the ultimate triumph of those who suffer, yet retain the integrity of their faith in God. Real faith is revealed under conditions of testing. Genuine faith is often manifested in times of stress and difficulty. Faith that to God is more precious than gold, is often purged and purified in the furnaces of affliction. For eternal reasons, best known to Himself, God thoroughly tests the quality and endurance of faith. The end result is a faith more valuable to God than refined gold. If we relied on our own depressed thoughts and feelings in such times of testing we could conclude that God is completely disinterested in our situation or that He is utterly impersonal and devoid of feeling and empathy. Only the true knowledge of God, revealed through Jesus Christ, can give us the kind of faith that persists through the trials and adversities we sometimes experience. Only the faith of God that He imparts to us in Christ can continue to believe in, and praise God irrespective of what happens.

This is the faith that is tried, refined and purified in the furnaces of affliction. The faith that will one day bring honour, glory and praise to God through Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSION.

As I come to the end of these brief chapters, I want to dedicate them to every person to whom they are specifically applicable. If my words have described some of the stress and trials through which you are passing, I sincerely trust that some of the ideas I have shared and the suggestions I have made will be really helpful to you.

Above all I encourage you to pursue and maintain your faith in God. You definitely need someone beyond yourself. Someone who is greater and more powerful than you. Someone who cares for you unconditionally and consistently. Who invites and encourages you to ***"Cast ALL your care upon Him, because He cares for you"***.

May the God of all peace, fill YOU with peace through believing.