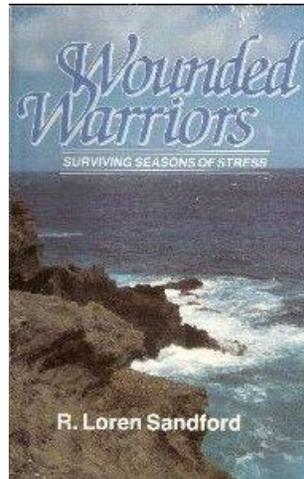


Wounded Warriors

By R. Loren Sandford



Introduction

A middle-aged pastor of a dynamic and growing, multi-staffed congregation sat before me in my office. His face was ashen-gray and his eyes were vaguely unfocused. I noted a subtle shaking of his hands. As I pointed this out to him, he related, “I can work only two hours a day before the shaking becomes unbearable.” I later learned that counseling situations with parishioners caused a swelling of his sinuses and overwhelming drowsiness. The ringing of the telephone would strike fear into him like a knife slicing through his heart. Sundays were an exercise in survival and God only knows how he found the strength to prepare and deliver a message each week. He had made it to that point only with the help of the pills the doctor prescribed.

The prayer closet became a place of fear rather than a sanctuary of peace. To enter into the quiet place with God was synonymous with facing an almost unbearable sense of abandonment and alienation. In the congregation word of his weakness began to spread. As a result the “sharks” began to circle, wagging their tongues of criticism as the blood from their wounded leader excited their instinct to attack. Every mistake he made was magnified by the weak and unbalanced members of the flock. The pastor’s paranoia ran rampant as he sensed the stirring of the troublemakers.

His ability to maintain his tenuous trip on reality wore thinner by the day. How can I possibly help him? I wondered.

This small book had its beginning at the seminar in Spokane, Washington, entitled, “Healing the Wounded Warrior.” My wife, Beth, and I led the discussion along with other members of the Elijah House team. This book is not the product of extensive psychological or statistical research, but is, rather, the fruit of my own experiences. When I examine my own experiences in the light of God’s Word, I am often able to see patterns common to others and then apply them in ministry.

I’m not a psychologist. I’m just a pastor who counsels. My qualification for writing this book is that I, myself, was a Wounded Warrior who went all the way to the bottom, emotionally and physically, and experienced a substantial healing. I’ve counseled a number of others like me and I’ve found considerable commonality in the suffering, causes and recovery we’ve shared.

The subject touches me deeply, not only because of my personal experience, but because I suspect that the great majority of pastors, and even of high-profile lay leaders in our local churches, have at some time experienced a depth of wounding or burn-out that has threatened not only their capacity to minister, but even their ability to deal with daily life.

Surviving such seasons of stress can be very difficult indeed. Very little real help is available. Few counselors truly understand the problem. The sufferer has often been to his family doctor for any number of associated physical symptoms and has been given a clean bill of health. This has left him confused and discouraged because the aches, pains and ills he is experiencing are very real and truly do hinder his ability to function adequately.

The “faith” and success in life” teachings currently in vogue are cruel medicine to such wounded ones who already feel as if they’re failing, and many have reached such a point of emotional and physical weakness that they are unable to accomplish what these teachings call them to perform, no matter how hard they try. They simply can’t “believe” any longer or “confess” positively as they ought.

Such teachings only make them feel accused. They’re filled with fear that their fatigue, anxiety and pain will be exposed and condemned, and these teachings often have a way of visiting condemnation on those who suffer from fear, fatigue and anxiety. Their faith has been shaken and shattered and is of no help to have that shakiness attenuated. They have sunk to a depth from which they can no longer lift themselves by any corrective effort of right thinking or acting.

Some of them have been beaten to the point that they can’t even believe emotionally that God personally loves them any more.

From time to time the inner pressure of despair combines with the outer pressure of the ministry to produce a devastating breakdown. The shock waves then reverberate through the Body of Christ – which usually reacts, not with Christian compassion, but with back-stabbing and comments like, “I told you there was something wrong in the ministry!” All too often it seems that when our leaders stumble, we bite and devour, rather than pray for and heal them.

It is my sincere hope to play a part in awakening the Body of Christ to a crisis in the Church that is already epidemic. Please, God, let us develop compassionate understanding for those in leadership positions in the Body of Christ. I desperately want us to know how to minister to Wounded Warriors.

But most of all, I want to speak to those who are themselves wounded, fearful and teetering on the brink of collapse – both clergy and lay leaders. I want to say that you are not alone, that you are not hopeless and that neither your sins nor your inadequacies are necessarily the cause of what is happening to you. You have not lost your anointing.

Having shared the manuscript with a number of people, both Wounded Warriors and those stressed out because of other causes, I have found this small book to be helpful for more folks than the title suggests. Anyone who has suffered long-term stress from any cause can find something useful here.

I’ve tried to write simple and briefly because I know that those in deep wounding can no longer tolerate complexities and lengthy periods of study. Even small tasks often appear to be insurmountable obstacles. I speak from my heart because I know that the wounded among us

can hear that sort of word and be lifted by it. I speak from my heart because the deeply wounded can no longer find their answers in theology or in method, no matter how eternally true or logically practical these may be. Such are food for healthy people, but I am speaking for the sake of those who have sacrificed their emotional and physical well-being in the service of their Lord. Those who have hit the bottom can no longer think or do as others can, and no amount of new learning or self-help will fix them. A special kind of mercy and grace is called for. They must be lifted and carried in a tender way that gives much and asks little.

I've couched everything in masculine terms, as if all Wounded Warriors are males. This is only for the sake of convenience and because that is the nature of my own experience. I was wounded, and I am male. I realize it is possible to be female and wounded in the same ways and I trust the reader to be able to apply the principles wherever they are appropriate.

Chapter 1

Three Kinds of Damage

Burn-out has become a common term in the last decade or so. Its use is reflective of a heightened awareness of a widespread problem common among those who expend themselves in the service of others. In my view, this condition actually involves three kinds of damage, of which burn-out is only one. Depression and wounding are the other two.

For the present purpose I'll differentiate burn-out from depression and wounding by saying that burn-out happens only to givers. Its nature is the depletion of the physical and emotional resources that enable the giver to keep giving. The loss of these resources leads to despair, depression, irrational anger and a host of physical problems. Burn-outs are those who have too little consciousness of – or care for – their personal needs to do what is necessary to replenish themselves from the intensity of their giving. Frequently a period of rest will cure burn-out, the same is often not true of depression and wounding.

Depression is an emotional manifestation of the depletion of one's physical and emotional resources for dealing with stress and can happen to anyone, giver or not, who faces and inadequately deals with stress over a period of time. In its most extreme form, depression may be so debilitating that the victim almost completely loses the ability to function and cannot in any way summon up enough initiative to get moving with life again. For such people, hopelessness becomes their total environment.

Depression is often the result of one's performance orientation. Performance-oriented people have not learned that they are acceptable apart from what they can achieve. For the performance-oriented person, the hope of love and the ability to accept oneself always center about meeting the expectations of self or others for behavior or productivity. Unfortunately, this fear motivation for living and achieving exacts a terrible physical and emotional toll. The result can be deep depression until the victim learns that self-acceptance, the love of God and the love of others come by grace, and are totally unearned.

Wounding is an emotional condition caused by the hurtful acts of others. I've discovered that just as the body has finite and exhaustible physical resources through which it copes with life, so our emotions draw upon limited resources in human strength in order to meet and deal with the lumps life serves up for the heart. When those resources are spent, the result is devastation and

desperation. Anyone can suffer emotional wounding, but the wounding is especially severe for those who are givers by nature or by profession.

It simply won't do to talk about professional detachment at this point. In order for people to be healed, there must be a meeting of persons, and in any meeting of persons, there is a risking of oneself, a necessary level of vulnerability. Therefore, when one for whom you have poured forth your life turns on you with fangs bared, the pain can be excruciating and the expenditure of emotional and physical energy required to deal with it can be enormous.

Normally, life serves up its hurts, betrayals and abandonments by loved ones at a pace that leaves time for recovery and replenishment, but occasionally they come either too quickly or hurt too deeply for the individual to recover from them effectively. The result is wreckage in the form of physical illness, depression, withdrawal, paranoia and fear of emotional risk.

Obviously, there are significant areas of overlapping and interrelationships between burn-out, depression and wounding, both in causes and effects. I have differentiated between burn-out, wounding and depression in this chapter only to emphasize that the condition I'm ultimately addressing is more serious and more complex than the kind of thing many of us have become accustomed to reading about in professional journals. The pain suffered by so many is clearly deeper than can be accounted for by the mere depletion of energies. Likewise, the remedies involve much more than just rearranging schedules and re-prioritizing activities. Having made this point, I will henceforth use the terms "burn-out," "wounding" and their derivatives interchangeably.

For the sake of discussion, I have divided the process of degeneration into three stages. Each of these stages, in turn, is examined in three sections: the first describing the physical symptoms evident at that stage, the second addressing the emotional condition of the sufferer and the third suggesting what sort of ministry can be appropriately offered by those who wish to help.

Chapter 2

Stage 1 Wounding: Onset

Physical Symptoms

In the early stages of wounding or burn-out, the sufferer may feel chronic fatigues and noticeably increased recovery times following severe exertions of time and energy. Crises such as funerals or commitments (such as leading a youth camp for a week) begin to take discouragingly long periods of time to recover from. Whereas the individual may have recovered quickly, in the past, from extra energy expenditures by "sleeping in" for a day or two, he now needs a week or more to feel really right again.

Tired people make more mistakes than healthy ones. As one in the early stages of burnout grows more fatigued, he will find himself committing more errors, especially in relationships with others. This will take place most especially in sensitive relationships that are important to maintain for the health of the ministry. Because he sometimes doesn't hear all that is said to him, through the veil of his fatigues, he may occasionally respond in inappropriate ways to those who come to him with questions and needs. He may mean to tease a friend in a loving way, but have it come out sounding like a hurtful insult. He may forget to include important people in the plans he makes for the ministry and then suffer their hurt and /or wrath for his error.

All of this feeds the poisonous tongues that are always ready to wag in the church and adds to the burden of stress that has begun to drag him down. Some may begin to assign evil motives to his actions and accuse him of not loving them or of being insensitive to the needs of others. Such talk creates a spiritual pressure on his ministry that tends to lock up the anointing and hinder his effectiveness. Even Jesus couldn't do many miracles in His hometown because of the unbelief of the people living there. The Wounded Warrior knows more deeply than anyone else the meaning of what Jesus faced.

More and more frequently he doesn't feel good about getting up in the morning. Refreshment eludes him and there are whole days when he feels unexplainably and uncharacteristically sleepy and he must push himself to keep moving.

Falling asleep is increasingly difficult, and rarely in the night restful when he finally does nod off. His mind won't let go of things and races on uncontrolled. At first he may pass it off by saying, "I do my most creative thinking in bed before I go to sleep." It's probably true, but in later stages, the creativity will die out, while the wakefulness continues tearing at him night after night. Dreams are increasingly troubled in their content and occur more frequently, leaving him exhausted in the morning as if he'd been working all night.

He begins to notice physical tension reactions. My personal "favorite" is what I call "lock-jaw." It's a wonder my teeth survive the pressure. Others may notice increasing chronic muscle tension in the shoulders or other areas. Nervous tappings of the hands and feet may appear. Twitching of muscles in the face or elsewhere may become habitual. Headaches may increase in frequency and intensity.

For many of us, tension tends to express itself through the digestive systems. The beginnings of colitis may appear as chronic pain in the lower abdomen, or as recurring bouts with irregularities in the bowel movements – or both.

Emotional condition

More than anything else, there may be an increasing consciousness of fear or anxiety –not attributable to any known cause except when it can be attached to a coming situation in which performance is called for. At this stage, such anxiety is still just background noise that can be eclipsed by the intensity of ministry or other activities. For many of us such fear may even be an effective tool for enhanced performance because of the slight adrenalin edge it gives, but this benefit will pass, I promise. This anxiety may be identified as fear of failure, fear of the unknown, fear of attack or any other sort of fear, but my point is that the ability to deal with it, and to subdue it, has begun to erode.

In the early stages of wounding, more and more nagging questions arise concerning one's faith and his personal relationship with God. These questions don't seem to have answers. The wounded one asks, "Is the counseling I'm doing really effective? Will I really receive or achieve the things God has promised me? Will the problems ever be solvable? Is God really here for me?" Yet, in spite the fear and the questioning, he still hopes deeply and is able to encourage others with that hope. The disturbing thing is that his ability to live creatively with the questions is beginning to weaken.

His prayer life remains intact. Daily devotions remain a place of refreshment and of conversation with God, but he begins to wonder at the frequency of dry spots. Perhaps more significantly,

fatigue, the pressure of daily life and the demands of people for his personal ministry begin to cut into his prayer time and he feels helpless to stop it.

At this stage he still has confidence in his ability, anointing and strength, if confidence and strength were what he began his ministry with. I can remember that my wife warned me repeatedly about the quantity of energy I was expending. I would answer, "I have a course to run, Beth, and I don't have God's permission to stop yet. The job isn't done." We were involved in starting a new church, laying foundations, building people and all that comes with the task of carving a body of Christ out of the spiritual wilderness. Today, on the recovery side of wounding, I know I was right and that I would say the same thing again. But I also know that the spirit of my reply would be different. You who've been there know what I mean.

In this period of time the anointing of the Lord does sustain you in spite of fatigue, but more and more often you run on adrenalin strength, sometimes not knowing the difference between adrenalin rush and the anointing of God. Understanding the difference is a function of wisdom, and wisdom is won only through suffering.

In stage one, the individual entering upon burn-out begins to shave such activities as recreation and exercise from his schedule. He may even feel a bit noble about it., glorying in the sense that he is wearing himself out in the service of the Lord. And it's true, he really does love the Lord, but work and it's related stresses leave little energy for fun and personal replenishment. The care of his physical "temple" suffers.

Time away from the work still recharges his batteries and reenergized his creativity, but he is ever more disturbed at how quickly his emotional reserves dissipate after he returns. He begins to wonder how long he would have to be away in order to come back fully recovered.

Ministry to Stage One

At this point, normal ministry is still possible. A stage-one wounded warrior can still engage in the kind of interaction with others that is so necessary to most healing. You can talk with him concerning root causes of his condition and he can respond, recognize his sin and pray wonderfully well in relation to it. You can pray for his deliverance and he'll shed tears and thank you for it. But don't expect much fruit. Most likely he already knows what must be done to turn his condition around and either can't or won't do it.

As I was, by this time he's probably locked into a set of self-destructive patterns that are too strong to be easily or quickly broken. He will likely have to ride them to the bottom before their power is defeated in his life. He'll have to burn out on being burned out.

I myself knew I had a task to perform from which I couldn't turn aside and in which I felt I had too little real help. The pressure of that task prevented me from slowing down long enough to deal with the issue of my own needs in a life-changing way. Real healing was impossible until the course had been run and the task was finished. The finishing nearly finished me.

It seems to me that conventional wisdom focuses on preventing burn-out from occurring. I'm not certain this is always the wisest approach. I'm not at all interested in preventing burn-out because I'm convinced that the condition is a tool of the Lord for crucifying His servants into new life.

In burn-out old patterns are burned away, along with old attitudes and fleshly ways of approaching life and its inhabitants. Even had I known how to stop my downward slide in its early stages, I probably wouldn't have done it, because all along I had the sense that it was the hand of God leading me down this path and that if I simply embraced the pain, I would learn wisdom. I was right. Jesus is Lord.

I was about to enter upon what is often known as "the long dark night of the soul." Especially if you are a dynamic personality, you enter upon your ministry filled with talents and abilities and endowed with boundless energy to make those talents and abilities effective in ministry. In the beginning you aren't wise or experienced enough to know the difference between anointing and natural strength, but isn't yet important for you to know this because the name of the game at this point is growth and knowledge.

Then, when it seems you have it all together and that everything you touch turns to gold because of the anointing of God and the wisdom He's taught you, God takes it all away. Nothing works any more. God seems far away and you begin to question everything you thought you knew. God has taken you to the cross and there is no escape until you know you have nothing and He has all, until the flesh is burned away and the Spirit makes you alive. Until that point, all you can do is hold your heart open to the searingly bright light of His presence and endure the pain His purity creates in your flesh and brokenness.

Finally, when you can endure no more, when the cross has done its work, our Lord restores all that you lost, but now it's no longer yours but His. And you know it more deeply than you ever thought possible.

Therefore, I'm not interested in prevention because I'm not interested in preserving the flesh. This is a suffering to be embraced, accepted and seen through to its end. Though he may not know it, the stage-one Wounded Warrior is still running hard in his natural strength, and God is about to bring it to an end.

Chapter 3

Stage 2 Wounding: Breakdown Begins

Physical Symptoms

Adrenal burn-out begins. I'm not a physician. I know only what those who care professionally for my body tell me. Adrenal burn-out occurs when the adrenal gland has overproduced for such a long time that it can no longer function as it was designed to function. Whereas stress once created an adrenalin "rush" that could be used to enhance performance, it now often produces a sensation of sickness, like trying to start a car in cold weather on a dead battery.

In fact, the sufferer has become stress-addicted. He actually subconsciously needs and creates stressful work situation so that the fear, the pressure and the resulting adrenalin production overcome his fatigue. But adrenalin no longer gets him moving like it once did. The "rush" is gone. Sometimes it makes him sick and angry.

For example, from time to time I used to find myself in unexpected possession of a free day for sermon preparation early in the week, and then almost subconsciously find some way of filling up that free time so that I would be "under the gun" on Saturday. Given a light load, I produced

mediocre work, but given an overload, I worked like a madman at the peak of my form and excellence. I needed stress in order to function, and without it, I went to sleep from fatigue. One of the recovering alcoholics in our congregation asked me once if I was addicted to adrenalin flow. I had to answer yes.

At stage two of the process of degeneration, stress addiction begins to fail as a motivator and fatigue is taken for granted as an unpleasant fact of life. Burn-out victims then find it difficult to remember or even to imagine life without exhaustion.

Digestive disturbances are common, attacking whatever is the weakest link in the system. The wounded one may develop ulcers. Colitis may flair up and cause extreme pain. Food allergies may appear. Diarrhea is common. This is because the digestive system reacts to stress by producing more acid and other chemicals than the system was designed for with the result that it becomes overly sensitive to minor irritants.

Not only is sleep occasionally difficult, it becomes a labor. I remember dreaming night after night that I was in a battle in which I had no power over my enemy. Every movement was like swimming through molasses, my every stroke deprived of power. Or I might find myself in combat without my sword and swinging frantically at my enemy with an imaginary one. After a night of fruitless warfare I would awaken, drained and sick. Sleeping became so difficult that I would stay up late partly in order to reach such a point of fatigue that I knew I would sleep quickly and soundly.

In general, physical illness becomes more common. Colds come more frequently and stay longer. Aches and pains proliferate. Sore throats develop several times each year and take ages to recover from. Headaches increase in frequency and intensity.

The sufferer may notice that his physical-tension reactions to ministry situations have intensified. My sinuses would swell shut and my eyes would feel as if they wanted to cross whenever I faced an afternoon of counseling appointments. They'd become so heavy with sleep that I would catch myself nodding off in the midst of someone's tear-filled account of terrible woe and I would cry out desperately to God to please make it end. I finally discovered that if I loaded up on caffeine from the coffee pot before I began my counseling day, I would make it through. But that caused bad side effects, too, as well as diminishing returns.

Emotional Condition

Fear becomes nearly constant and is harder to ignore. At this stage, the sufferer may be plagued with thoughts that the ministry will fail and that things are going wrong in ways he is powerless to correct. From where will the next blow fall? Betrayals and fears appear larger than life and his perspective is restored only by a major exercise of mental discipline.

For example, I have a burden-bearer's nature. That means I can sense in my spirit how our church is doing at any given time, instinctively knowing when there is discord or trouble, even when I'm two thousand miles away on a speaking trip. During this period in my wounding, I could sense when poisonous tongues began to wag and I would be afraid in a way that I no longer had the capacity to control. I still had the strength to govern how I responded to it, but I couldn't control its intensity.

I sensed when personal attacks were developing and was doubly wounded by reason of fear when they actually materialized. I even began to be afraid that my anointing would expire,

although it never did and God never let me down. Road trips for speaking engagements around the country became welcome respites from pressure in the home ministry. At home I felt powerless, but in foreign places overwhelmingly positive responses from people restored my flagging sense of anointing.

At last the wounded one's confidence is threatened. He begins to feel as if he is ministering from an empty bucket that isn't being refilled. Desperation takes root as again and again he goes to the well for strength and wisdom to meet the needs of others and finds nothing to draw upon.

As he loses perspective of the significance of failures and setbacks, he finds himself unable to take encouragement from successes as he once did. In fact, he may become functionally blind to goodness in his ministry.

Ministry becomes pure pain, interspersed with brief episodes of joy and sanity. He finds himself growing more and more angry with those who ask for his time and energy, most especially with the ubiquitous church "leeches" who consume vast amounts of time and energy for little apparent return or purpose.

Episodes of withdrawal come more and more frequently, with heightened intensity and extended duration. He withdraws even from family and friends, since he has no energy left with which to deal with demands of any kind. In this condition, even offers of love may come to him as demands that he must respond to in some way so that, instead of feeling refreshed by the love of those close to him, he may feel drained by it.

People around him in the ministry may add to his wounding by complaining that he doesn't seem as warm as he once did. For example, circumstances may prevent him from being present for a crisis or two, and that becomes a reason for the victims of the crisis to attack him in private conversation.

He begins to wonder angrily if his people would be satisfied if he gashed himself and gave them his very blood. If his normal nature is to be physically affectionate, people may begin to feel that his hugs aren't as they once were. It may be apparent that he doesn't listen as well as he used to. All this may provoke talk in the fellowship that will add to his stress.

He may begin to stay up late in order to find time alone. In my own case, having both an acute spiritual awareness and a burden-bearing nature, I can feel the people to whom I minister drawing on me spiritually until about 10:00 PM, when they begin to go to bed. At that hour I can actually sense them letting go of me and by 11:00 PM I'm blissfully alone in every way.

When I'm in my withdrawal mode, those late night hours become my time. But it's a self-defeating pattern because morning doesn't come any later, and my sleep hours are accordingly abbreviated. Others in this condition perhaps go to bed early and get up early for the same reason. The wounded one feels driven to find that time in solitude.

Episodes of rage at God become common. The second stage burn-out feels abandoned and betrayed by Him. In his eyes God hasn't been a protector. God hasn't kept His promises to him and never will. He feels as though God is there for others through him, but seldom for him personally. God has let him down.

Our church is five years old. In the beginning, God gave us a number of promises concerning growth and ministry, but rather than fulfill them immediately, He gave us a double dose of

troublemakers who went right to work attacking me and distorting my words and actions. When they couldn't find something to distort, they'd make things up, and along the way they'd convince themselves that what they made up was true. So, until they left, we got nowhere as a congregation in terms of realizing the promises of God for our church.

Later, I understood what a time of laying foundations that was and how precious all the wisdom I learned was, but while it was happening it didn't seem that way. It seemed then that if the Lord said to make room for all the growth He would give us, the next Sunday would see a record low attendance for the year!

Because of the betrayals by people and God's delay in fulfilling promises, I experienced episodes of such deep wounding that I began to call God a liar, betrayer and promise-breaker. I told Him not to promise me anything any more because I couldn't stand the pain of being let down again.

Needless to say, prayer life suffers at this stage and becomes a roller-coaster of ups and downs. Sometimes God comes through in prayer with such blessing that you feel like a fool for all the anger you felt. But more and more the prayer closet becomes a place of pain and alienation, a place to remember God hasn't kept His promises and that He has not protected you from the strife of tongues. As a result, you pray less.

The wounded one in stage two can still hope –and does so in blessed episodes of light and freedom – but the ability to do so is fading fast. Periods of despair are common and almost paralyzing. He finds himself subject to sudden impulses to weep over silly things.

One of the jokes in my family is how I hate children's features like, "Winnie the Pooh" and "101 Dalmatians." We have a friendly family teasing session every time such a movie comes on the television and I am forced to watch it with my kids.

At this point in my downward slide, however, I could be found in the late-night hours secretly turning in to the Disney Channel and sniffing over the sorrows of some ridiculous cartoon character, wondering what on earth was the matter with me? Actually, I had begun to store up unresolved hurts and tensions that could be tapped into and made to overflow by unlikely stimuli.

Creativity in ministry is affected because there just isn't enough energy, enthusiasm or faith left to think up new things. That builds fear for the future of the work, and the fear only adds to the problem. Creative, artistic temperaments need "down" time in which to recharge, times when the mind is allowed to work at its own pace, unbullied, until it naturally generates something new and fresh. When it does, there is a sense of relief, release and lifting that beats dozens of hours of counseling for the refreshment it brings. Stage-two Wounded Warriors find their "down" time invaded and stolen and they feel powerless to stop it. The result is a build-up of tension with no avenue of release.

One's sex life may begin to suffer because emotionally he can no longer function in the give and take of relationships, and because, physically, he's too weak to generate much libido. That can lead to stress in a marriage, which, in turn, adds to the problem.

Beth and I never stumbled in our marriage, but it was evident that in my withdrawal I wasn't giving my wife as much affection, either in public or in private, as I once did. Beth and I had a happy marriage, and she fully understood where I was, giving me the room to withdraw as I

needed, but one of the women in our church took it upon herself to decide how “hurt” Beth was and to attack me for it. Remember what I said about the sharks circling to devour the bleeding servant? Beth set her straight, but the incident plunged me into all those other fears. The cycle continued to spiral downward.

Ministry to Stage Two

If approached at just the right moment, and in just the right way, a Wounded Warrior at this stage of degeneration can still spill his hurt to another human being and receive ministry. More than anything else he needs simply to be listened to with a sympathetic ear. He doesn't usually want a solution and unasked-for advice may lead to rage and more withdrawal. He knows he wouldn't be able to pursue that advice with his fading energies, and so it only comes to him as more pressure to perform what he is losing his ability to perform. He just needs a safe place to dump the pain until he can recover his strength.

He can still look at roots and causes for his pain in terms of his own hidden sins, but he can do so only at times of his own choosing. Job's comforters were well-intentioned fools trying to convince him that his suffering was due to something for which he needed to repent. They were wrong. Unfortunately the Body of Christ today is full of Job's comforters. More than my share of them came to me in my pain to confront me “in love” and to show me that my plight was because of hidden sin. Hidden sin was present. It always is. But it wasn't the cause of my condition.

It may help a state-two burn-out victim if you kidnap him from time to time and take him out for fun, but don't talk ministry when you do. During this period in my life, one man who didn't at that time attend our church would show up at my door from time to time and ask my wife, “Can Loren come out and play?” He might have a trailer full of go-carts waiting out front, or a movie he wanted to attend. Once it was motorcycles which I don't ride well, but enjoyed anyway. Whatever he had up his sleeves, we'd play like kids for a few hours, without uttering a single word about church or ministry. It was healing and holy time from God, designed to restore my balance by rooting me in the good earth.

Intercede in prayer for your Wounded Warriors, but mostly at a distance where he doesn't have to respond. He'll feel it. Tell him you're praying, but don't tell him too much about what you're specifically asking God to do. He might take it as a pressure to make your prayers happen.

Don't discuss his condition with others. If you do, he'll likely sense it and it will feed his paranoia. When you encounter others speaking about him in an unclean way, stop them. Don't even answer questions from those who are concerned, except to say that he can always use prayer from those who love him.

If the Lord gives you a specific Scripture reference or prophecy of hope for him, send it or give it in written form. It will feed his hope. Don't confront him face to face with it, but leave him free to read it and respond in private where he isn't responsible to you for his reaction.

Take up the sword on his behalf. If there is warfare in the church, he will treasure above all, your taking up his cause. I have treasured few gifts more than the one my elders gave me when we fought our last major battle as a church. We had changed our constitution to bring it more into conformity with the Scriptures. The reaction from a small minority was vicious and aimed at me personally. The objections were based on distortions of what we had enacted, and the opposition immediately turned to name calling. I was accused of being everything from

egomaniacal to cultish. In truth, I was at the edge of collapse after three years of warfare in which I had been mostly alone.

Every time the going got rough, my supporters and team members would lapse into paralysis and abandon the flock to be devoured by the wolves. This time the elders rallied and told me that it was their battle and not mine. That support was more healing to me than anyone could imagine. As a result, the church came through in shining triumph, and God began to fulfill what He had promised for us. At last I had gained a team of true co-workers.

Chapter 8

Epilogue

How long will my recovery take?

Speed of recover depends on a number of factors. How healthy were you before you sank into wounding? How strong is your general make-up, both physically and emotionally? What kinds of support systems are available to you to aid and assist in your healing? What kinds of pressures continue to drain your energies? Is good counsel available? Under any circumstances recovery is a lengthy process. It takes months or even years. So, emotionally prepare yourself for a long period of struggle. You've spent resources that are not easily replaced and you must give yourself time to build them up again.

Will I recover completely?

Yes and no. You will probably never fully recover the level on intensity, strength and resiliency you enjoyed before you burned out. Unfortunately, you have squandered an only partially renewable resource and will henceforth and forever be compelled to measure your energies against the tasks that come your way and act accordingly. You will, however, have gained a wisdom more valuable and more life-giving than the resources you lost. You may, therefore, actually become more productive with less expenditure of energy than you thought possible. You will also discover that you are much less easily driven off balance emotionally. Your sense of perspective will have been honed to razor edge.

What about relapses?

You'll have many in the course of your recovery. Even today, if I overextend myself for too long a period of time I may suddenly feel completely undone, as if there had been no recovery at all. I've learned that such episodes mean nothing. Rest and a stronger sense of perspective tend to cure me.

For a time you may feel like a bouncing ball, sometimes in the depths of your former despair, sometimes out. Or you may descend to stage one and then recover quickly, only to plunge to the very bottom a week later. Having done so, you may awaken the next morning wondering what the whole thing was about, after all, because you feel so great again. Remember that recovery takes time and that relapses are part of the process.

What if my mate thinks that all this is just bunch of nonsense and won't stop putting pressure on me to perform what I can no longer perform?

This is not uncommon among women. Too many husbands don't understand the condition and often don't even wish to understand. Because of this they continue making selfish demands upon the wife's emotional and physical energy, condemning her if she can't produce and ultimately placing her in danger of serious breakdown.

The problem can happen to men, as well, but the victims are most often women. Much of my answer to this one is included in the previous chapter, but I'll add one more dimension here. As a last resort, a temporary separation may be in order until you have had time to regain your strength and balance. The pain of your absence may serve to bring about needed humility and understanding in you mate, and in the process you will find the space you require to begin rebuilding your lost strength.

Put aside any legalism you may have accumulated concerning God's command that married people should stay together no matter what. You're doing this in order that you might be able to remain together. In fact, if you don't get some distance, the alternative may be forced separation in the form of extended hospitalization.

Forget all those misapplied Scriptures about wifely submission. This has little to do with the issue of submission, but rather with recovering enough strength that you are able once again to actively submit, one to another (Ephesians 5:21), in effective partnership.

Why did God let this happen to me?

First, I don't know. Second, I'm glad He did. Third, I'd be pleased if He never let it happen again. 'Nuff said.



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