

Staying Healthy In Ministry (for women for the long-term)

Conference for women in ministry & ministry wives, June 21, 2014, Moore Theological, co-hosted by Kara Hartley & Jane Tooher

Session 1 - Staying healthy spiritually (Wendy Potts)

- *Some obvious things to say, could just give a list of to-dos (bible, prayer, evangelism, service etc). Lists are good for clarity but they can be legalistic...*
- *Looking at key patterns and principles from the lives of Jesus & Paul - survey & touching down in a few places.*
- *6 points...*
- *Our story & some lessons from it*
 - *Saved by grace*
 - *Don't be ashamed of the gospel*
 - *Eternal perspective*
 - *Invest in what matters most*
 - *Soak self in God's word*
 - *The gospel is God's power to save people*
 - *Flexibility*
 - *Trust God in the curve balls*
 - *God opens & shuts doors*
 - *God uses us in our weakness - in jars of clay*
 - *God gives joy in pain*
 - *God is not into quick fixes*
 - *God is our refuge & glue for our marriage*

Work & Rest & finding a good rhythm

- *A ministry can be exhilarating - just like people can get addicted to exercise, ministry can be addictive too - we get to see God at work!*
- *Yet it is also exhausting. People can be demanding, ungracious, complicated, broken - like us*

- *Bill Hybels - 'Courageous leadership' gives a good description of burnout - he sank like a rock, angry and depressed, when he finally wrote publically he said I couldn't even sleep at night, I didn't have compassion for people anymore, people think I had a crisis of faith but the fact is that I collapsed on the inside*
- *How be other-people-centered and yet rest? How last the distance?*
- *What patterns do we see in Jesus' life?*
 - *Mark 1:21-46*
 - *Jesus' ministry begins with a bang - baptism, temptation, preaching the kingdom, healing the sick, news spreads & the crowd gathers*
 - *Vs 32: the whole town at the door!*
 - *Vs 35: after this intense patch of ministry Jesus goes off to a solitary place to pray.*
 - *What was his prayer? Not recorded but surely seeking his Father's wisdom and closeness.*
 - *Vs 36 - the demands are high & instant.*
 - *Vs 37 - 'everyone is looking for you!' You've got important ministry to do, is the implication*
 - *But vs 38 - Jesus asks to go elsewhere to preach. Jesus is very clear about why he is here. He leaves the seek to preach in the other villages - he has a sense of the greater need of humanity & that's what sets his priorities. He still heals the sick, a mixture of priority but also flexibility and compassion at the same time (eg leper vs 40).*
 - *Jesus holds onto the priority of preaching the kingdom which is the greater need.*
 - *Pattern of intense ministry followed by retreat, solitary, rest*
 - *Clear kingdom priorities but also compassionate to people's needs.*
 - *Mark 2*
 - *Jesus' starts by preaching but faced with the paralytic he heals. Your sins are forgiven - Jesus*

puts his deepest need up front and central. But he does heal him because he is compassionate and show he can deal with the deepest need

- *This pattern continues in Mark and the other gospels.*
- *Mark 4:38:*
 - *We see his human needs - sleeping in the boat after a particularly intense time of ministry.*
- *Mark 6 - feeding of the 5000 (c.f. Matthew's Gospel)*
 - *Context: 12 have been sent out, come back excited, terrible interlude of John the Baptist being beheaded.*
 - *'Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest'...but people follow & rather than saying 'sorry this is our rest time' he has compassion on them. Then late in the day, nothing to eat...you feed them! He demonstrates that he is the sustainer of life & then vs 45 - Jesus makes his disciples get in the boat and go ahead. Then he goes up to pray. So they get rest (although storm...), he gets rest*
 - *Matthew 14:13 of the same story - John the Baptist's beheading just before (his cousin beheaded for the gospel) - he withdrew to a solitary place, but has compassion when the crowd comes.*
 - *Looking after himself and his people but also has this incredible flexibility. The crowd's needs interrupt the plan. Then retreats and refreshes.*
- *In our spiritual life:*
 - *What is it that you do to keep fresh? How keep that commitment to ministry and to time off but also some flexibility in rest but not so need centered that you never look after yourself.*
 - *We need to retreat and have God-centered soul time.*
 - *Some good marriage advice that applies to our time alone with God:*

- *Connecting once a day (10-20 mins touching base), once a week (a good solid hour or so), once a term (a real day off, alone with God retreating), once a year (a few days alone with God). A good pattern, haven't yet implemented it.*
 - *A day off that I try to guard, physical exercise, enough things to refresh my spirit (bush walks, bible time, gardening, whatever refreshes).*
 - *Keeping our hearts aligned with God, trying to keep from drifting into ministry maintenance and structures.*
- *As leaders, our best gift we can give to those we lead is our spiritual walk.*
- *Hybels - I came close to a total emotional meltdown, didn't understand self-leadership, I remember sitting at a restaurant writing - the pace at which I've been doing God's work is destroying God's work in me. Who is forcing you to overcommit? Who's applause other than mine (God's) are you seeking? My whole pace problem was my own making. It's your responsibility to devise a sustainability plan and stick to it.*
- *Worth planning - how do we sustain?*

Stretched to the Limit - weakness & God's strength (learning from Paul)

- *Paul speaks of being spent for the gospel, Jesus invited us to lose our lives*
- *When we feel weak and wrung out - so did Paul - 2 Cor 1:8-9*
 - *We were under great pressure, beyond our ability to endure, but this happened that we might rely on God who raises the dead*
 - *2 Cor 4 - hard- pressed, perplexed, persecuted but not abandoned*
 - *2 Cor 12 - in our weakness, God is strong and so we delight in them*

- *Knowing our weakness is a sign of spiritual health if it helps us to rely on God more. E.g. Moses, Joshua, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Gideon, - that thread of seeing God's power through our weakness.*
- *2 Chron 20:12 - King Jehosaphat's prayer - we have no power to face this army, we do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you. God replies - do not be discouraged, the battle is not yours but God's. Take up your position and see what God will do*
- *2 Tim 4 - everyone has deserted me but the Lord hasn't*
- *We need to depend on God in prayer when we're empty.*
- *One of my prayers from last year: I'm empty, angry, tired. Only you can fill me up. Don't let those things ensnare or define me.*
- *Sometimes tiredness can be due to other things:*
 - *Eg operating outside our giftedness for the long term*
 - *Depression & anxiety - need to address that medically, mentally*
 - *Family conflicts or other internal issues*
 - *A few years ago asked to give 3 talks at a women's retreat, time at home was so stressful, difficulties at home, had to ring up and say I can't manage the 3rd talks, can we do something different. And she said - your first ministry is your family, as a wife and mum. I had to just say where she was at and she was fantastic*
 - *Sometimes internal issues are to blame for the pace we work at - seeking people's approval, seeing self as the savior...*

Humility & pride

- *John the Baptist is a fine example - he knows its not about him: John 3 'a person can receive only what is given them from heaven, I'm not the Messiah, I'm the friend of the bridegroom - he must become greater and I must become less'*

- *What are the gifts that God has given me to serve his body? And you? They will be different. That is what I'm called to give an account for. We can spend a lot of time comparing ourselves to others - but I'm not responsible to live up to her gifts, just my own.*
- *Sean (husband with chronic fatigue) a wonderful example - so gifted, but can't, so humble. Well aware that God does not need him.*
- *I tend to swing from egocentric pride to trapped loss of confidence. A balance is in-between.*
- *Rom 12:3 - do not think of yourself more highly than you ought but with sober judgment.*
- *1 Cor 1 - Paul didn't come with eloquence, just came to you knowing Christ crucified, came with weakness, not wise & persuasive words so your faith doesn't rest on human wisdom but on God's power.*
- *1 Cor 3:6 - God gives the growth, those who water & plant aren't anything.*
- *2 Cor 12 - Paul boasts in his weakness! When I am weak then I am strong.*
- *In the face of opposition he delights that the gospel goes out because of his chains, rejoices that the gospel goes out even if at cost of his own reputation.*
- *God considers health as that person who trembles at his word.*

Loving God's word but loving Jesus more

- *Do we love God's word? Is it personal or just academic? Sometimes we chase the excitement of understanding his word but don't apply it to ourselves.*
- *The psalms are full of the personal with God's word.*
- *Yet do you need to be diligent to God's word, 1/2 Timothy - our highest priority to correctly handle the word of God. But not like the Pharisees - don't want to diligently study the scriptures but not come to Jesus.*
- *We can't bear fruit unless we're connected to him.*

- *Easy to tell lots of other people about Jesus but not come to him ourselves.*
- *Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest. You will find rest for your souls for my burden is easy and my yoke is light.*
- *Consider Paul's love and energy for his people - striving to present people mature in Christ. IN God's strength, in the love for people which he gives.*

Endurance.

- *To last the distance we need to have an eternal perspective - eyes fixed on heaven, 2 Tim 4:7-8 - I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith*

Session 2 - Staying healthy physically (Ian Caterson)

[foundation director of Boden Institute of Obesity, Nutrition and eating disorders at Sydney Uni. Works for the government, does clinical trials and writes books]

- *Question 1 - If Tobacco is the biggest risk factor to the health of men in Australia, what's the biggest risk factor for women?*
 - *chocolate?*
 - *Alcohol?*
 - *No.*
 - *Answer: physical inactivity. Certainly in middle-aged women.*
- *As a society, we're good once we get sick, but not so much preventative. Particularly as obesity is a key underlying problem for many significant diseases.*
- *Obesity in Australia has increased over the last few decades (1/4 children obese)*
- *One of the problems with evangelical Christians is hospitality - we don't drink, we don't smoke, but we come to meeting and we eat.*
- *Which age group is putting on weight the fastest?*
 - *25-34.*
- *35% of Australian adults are overweight. 28.3% are obese.*
- *Women gain more weight than men.*
- *The Obesity Family*
 - *Weight is a health issue, not so much an appearance issue*
 - *Links to diabetes, CVD, high blood pressure, metabolic syndrome, OSA (Sleep apnea), gall bladder disease, osteoarthritis, coronary heart disease, cancer (breast, uterus, prostate, bowel, pancreas, kidney, polycystic ovaries, infertility (the average BMI of women undergoing IVF: 32-33, if those women lose 6 kgs their fertility rate goes up 15%),*
 - *Diabetes tends to impact not so much the very obese but particularly the overweight or slightly obese.*

- *If gain 11+ kg since age 21 6-21% likelihood of diabetes. i.e. young adulthood a key time to watch weight.*
 - *At age 15 - the greater the BMI the greater the risk of heart disease.*
 - *Sleep apnea*
 - *Symptoms: tired, hard to concentrate, due to the fact that during the night we're not breathing properly due to weight around neck & chest. The snore is the body trying to get our body to breath.*
 - *If you're waist is less than 80cm as a woman - good, higher - risk, more than 88 - higher risk (Caucasian). i.e. weight on the waist is more a risk than weight on hips.*
 - *Obesity costs the health system & national productivity.*
 - *As Australians we think that we're god but we're actually not.*
- *Causes of obesity:*
 - *Our environment has changed: we're affluent, urbanized, we do less activity.*
 - *What you eat during pregnancy will influence your children and their children. What you eat can have a dramatic effect on disease.*
 - *American studies have shown it's the number of food outlets (not just fast food, any food). Also as cost of cigarettes increases - people spend money on food. The more the mother works, the higher the likelihood of obesity in the children.*
 - *Supersizing in fast food industry.*
 - *People tend to under-report food intake by at least 25%.*
 - *If asked how much activity we did in the last 24 hours, people tend to over-report by 50-60%*
- *Children*
 - *15-25% more kilojoules fed to kids in 1995 than in 1980s.*
 - *1/3 of what they eat is 'extra food' i.e. snacks*
 - *decline in kids walking and cycling to school*

- *increase in small screen recreation (more time spent on this than on education, social activity, travel, combined)*
- *How to keep healthy*
 - *Eating*
 - *We don't mean diets - they are temporary*
 - *Activity:*
 - *Incidental - take the healthy option: walk up the stairs*
 - *Exercise - needs to be varied, but something you enjoy. Don't just do the same thing everyday.*
 - *Behaviour & activity*
 - *Be willing to change them*
- *Dispelling Common misconceptions:*
 - *Organic food does not provide better nutrition*
 - *Trans fats - are not a major issue in Australia (only perhaps in corner stores)*
 - *Supplements are not necessary when you eat a normal diet except occasionally for Iron in premenopausal women or vitamin D in later life.*
 - *Sugar does not make children "hyper"*
 - *Food additives are not harmful to children.*
 - *There are no super foods*
- *Carbohydrates*
 - *The more you eat, the more likely you are to become obese because they are energy*
 - *As humans we don't normally make fat. Every bit of fat you have is because you put it there.*
 - *If you want to lose weight - Low carb diets are a good way of getting energy down, but not good to stick to*
 - *Low GI is not good for everyone but good for people with diabetes.*
- *Protein*
 - *Don't forget about protein!*
 - *It appears that we are programmed to eat a certain amount of protein at different stages of life*

- *But in our diet, our protein has stayed fairly constant but fat/carb levels have gone up.*
- *First think about how much protein you're having and build your other foods around it, rather than taking the protein out.*
- *Fats*
 - *High energy*
 - *Easy storage*
 - *Intake increases with affluence*
 - *It promotes appetite*
 - *You don't recognize when you eat fat and have to be high activity to overcome it*
 - *Found that if people did high activity (90 minutes on bike a day) they could eat up to 54% fat, but if low activity, only 25%.*
 - *Olive oil is a fat, so can't use it willy, nilly*
- *Dairy*
 - *Low fat dairy is fantastic*
 - *Normal milk - 4%, go for the 1% - provides calcium & for kids it helps prevent diseases later in life*
- *What's important about eating?*
 - *Smaller portions*
 - *Maintain habitual nutrient intake. i.e. don't make radical changes. Look at what you're eating and trim a little, a rid of a bit of the fat. Look at your plate: ½ vegetables, 20% protein, 25% carbs.*
 - *Do something you can stick to, not something which won't work long time.*
 - *Compliance is the key, rather than what the actual diet it.*
- *Activity*
 - *If 60-70 kg and want to burn 500 calories, need to do another 18000 steps a day. i.e. activity is about a 1/3 of what you need to do for lower weight. Although it is good for fitness. Higher intensity is better*
 - *High intensity interval training (eg 1 minute on, then off, then 5 mins on etc) compared to ongoing - the people*

who did walking lost abdominal fat better. Although HIIT may help us get fitter in a shorter time.

- *If you do want help - there is a free helpline: 1300 806 258. Run by the NSW government. You get 10 phone consultations with a therapist to help you get healthy. For you and the women you minister to.*
- *8700kJ is what the average 20 year old should have.*
- *Weight Watchers Australia has performed well in studies. If you go through a program for about a year, even 25 years later you are less likely to have diseases than if you never did the program. Even if weight was put back on.*
- *Surgery*
 - *The issue is the type of surgery - often depends on what the surgeon wants to do rather than what is actually helpful for you*
- *Prevention is better than cure*
 - *Eat a bit better*
 - *Do a bit more exercise.*
 - *We have everything we need in this country to be healthy.*
 - *[NSW schools canteen website has suggestions of what to eat as snacks]*

Session 3 - Staying healthy mentally (Sandy Morrison)

[Clinical psychologist, lower mountains]

Thrilled to be here, clinical psychologist, four children, knows what it is to be the wife of someone in ministry and be in ministry myself. But really thrilled that emotional psychological health is being looked at today - for so long, so often its been excluded.

A huge topic. We all have our own experiences. Just be aware that I'll give examples that may apply to you or not but it's the principles. I may give extreme examples and you need to think of as a continuum where you may fall now, or in the future.

Many things Wendy mentioned are a great foundation for this.

I see a lot of Christians in my work, many who are involved in lay or vocational ministry themselves or spouses. Of course I have a bias sample, but there is often exhaustion. Often anxiety. Often guilt. And so for that reason I've chosen to look at the idea of burn out.

Burn out = decline in emotional health. Originally in 1980s a pop-psychology term but since then it has been given a huge amount of research. Its not a pop-psychology term. It's a well researched syndrome.

The term comes from idea of the smothering of a fire or the extinguishing of a candle. We go out to try and be lights and the last thing we want is for that candle to burn down or be smothered. A candle cannot burn brightly without sufficient resources.

This metaphor described the exhaustion of a person's capacity to maintain an intense involvement that has meaningful impact.

The key original researcher: Maslack: Burnout has 3 components:

1) exhaustion

- feeling overextended and depleted of one's emotional and physical resources, over an extended period of time and in an increasing sense*

- *exhaustion is one component*

2) relational component:

- *feeling depersonalized/angry/not wanting to engage/see people*
- *detachment to overcome exhaustion*

3) self-evaluation component

- *negative self-evaluation*
- *lowered satisfaction at work etc.*

Early on, research suggested there was no burn-out in religious organizations where there was a sense of 'calling'. (Kranz)

Since then, more research has been done and one figure is that 1/4 clergy experience burnout as a significant or extreme issue.

What are the key factors in burnout?

- *will vary depending on the work environment but research has shown some specific factors.*
- *We need to remember that we're not all the same - if we go somewhere and meet people we behave differently. E.g. if we go to a movie - same input - we will have different responses to it. Who we are, our own personality and our own experiences creates an attitude to what we're saying. That happens everyday with everything we see and do - its filtered through our attribution of meaning.*
- *Simply: Childhood experiences (way brought up, experiences, memories etc) + personality => an attitude and attribution of meaning we give to things in our life.*
- *Case studies:*
 - *Jill*

- Always told: 'always do your best'. What I mean is 'its ok, just do your best'. She heard it as 'I have to do my best' (anxious personality), developed a whole lot of strategies to make sure that she always did her best.
 - Sandy:
 - Youngest of four. Lovely family. Never got asked opinion. Laughed at by siblings, not to be mean but just because its funny. i.e. its normal relating. Not terrible things => Sense of 'I am not taken seriously', although did get over it.
- Scheme triad trap (developed by Jeffery Young).
 - Three beliefs commonly held by people (although is culturally both)
 - A) subjugation - Suppression of ones' preferences, decisions and desires or of our emotional expression especially anger
 - B) Self-sacrifice - excessive focus on other's needs at expense of self
 - C) Unrelenting standards - one must strive to meet high internalize standards of behaviour and performance. Sense that its hard to slow down.
 - Certain doctrines can lead us to be extra susceptible to these and other teachings may help us be less susceptible
 - i.e. Childhood experiences + personality + theology => attitude & attribution of meaning
- Case studies again:
 - Sue
 - Full time staff worker in fairly large church. Fit. But feels guilty about wasting time. E.g. runs to work, agitated if has to wait in line or at appointments.
 - Jane
 - Part time in large church. Increasingly frustrated with rude people. Feels unable to set boundaries because need to love people.
 - Kate

- *Married to a minister, 3 kids, involved. He works long hours and loves the social side of parish life. Struggling with kids. Frustrated at being last on the list. She won't ask her husband for support because 'he's doing ministry'.*
 - *Consider how the triad plays out - how these women are filtering things. I can't be selfish. I can't waste time.*
- *We have a belief that we're not allowed to set boundaries. The pace of God's work is destroying God's work in me.*

So what can we do? And why we can't?

- *We know rest is important, exercise is important etc - why can't we do it?*
- *Research suggests the following factors are negatively associated with emotional wellbeing:*
 - *Boundary ambiguity*
 - *There is an expectation of flexibility and availability*
 - *Open-ended nature of ministry*
 - *We fail to give ourselves permission to set boundaries.*
- *Ruth:*
 - *Christian couple in ministry who have a friend and they promised to that person that their home would be an open home. ON this occasion, this couple had been going through a long term very difficult time. High stress due to family issues. The person they were supporting was very needy.*
 - *One night, the person rang and the husband said to the kids 'don't answer' but they did. Ruth said - of course you can come over, the husband fell apart. Then she rang back and said no - good. But they felt so guilty.*
 - *First of all they need to give themselves permission to say we don't have black and white rules, we have permission to look at the context. How are we going? And also how is that person going? It's not always in their best interest for you to step in/help - sometimes they need to learn to care for themselves.*

- E.g. 'its never ok to be selfish. Selfish is ever putting my needs before another' - but ultimately she is not helping others, or reflecting the grace of God, by burning out herself.
 - i.e. Be careful what you promise.
 - You are allowed to be in the circle of care - to care for yourself is to care for others.
- Need to be mindful that we all have other roles. The women's movement which says we should be able to work, and CEO, and work the same hours, and also ...and also - we can just add things in rather than taking things out
 - Need to give ourselves permission to say that we don't have to be the best at everything we do.
 - I have had to recognize that I won't go as far in my work as what I might be able to do otherwise as because of my beautiful family I cannot always do my best at both all the time. There are people I have to say no too, things that I may want to do that I won't do.
- In ministry there are not environmental boundaries, so we need to put them in. Some suggestions:
 - If possible, not have office at home?
 - Split shifts: thinking mentally 'I'm changing shifts now' this is 'mum shift', this is 'work shift'. I am for this time turning the other role off. Even what you wear can be helpful for that. E.g. if this is relationship/kid time - sometimes a way of dressing can help you remember that. Or voicemail saying when you'll be back on board.
- Try not to draw on the same resource too often
 - E.g. you may have no energy to talk to another person. But you do have energy to go to the gym. How do you feel when you say - I can't talk to you, but I can go to the gym. Research suggests that sometimes we don't have energy for relational things but do have energy to hang out with friends/do exercise. So take permission to do that.
 - Burnout literature is strong on the need for variety in what we do.
- Permission - it is our job to create job sustainability.

- *God wants us to do what we need to do to manage our resources, he's not asking us to run ourselves dry.*
- *Research suggests some other environmental risk factors:*
 - *Level and intensity of person-to-person contact (can even suffer vicarious trauma: symptoms are intrusive thoughts, flashes, disturbed sleep, rumination - consider chatting with a friend or therapist)*
 - *Conflicting demands*
 - *Lack of work variety*
- *Some factors which help prevent burnout:*
 - *Shared goals and values - we have that & can build on this!*
 - *Peer support & having a mentor/supervisor.*
- *Everybody is different, different gifts, personalities etc. If you think you have to do the role the way the person before did it => I 'should', but its their shoes, not your own.*
 - *Personality tests can be helpful, but don't take them as law*
 - *Ask friends for feedback*
 - *What exhausts you, what energises you? The person who did your role before you was really good as some aspects which you are not or vice versa.*
 - *Take permission to be yourself and not wear other people's shoes.*
- *What makes us good at what we do is also our Achilles heel*
 - *Often people can keep going and going and driving themselves into the ground because they are good at what they do. But it is not sustainable.*