



SELF CARE FOR PASTORS COPING WITH THE IMPACT OF CORONAVIRUS

Dr. Sam Leong

On Easter Sunday morning, I watched the news which showed an interview with a minister preparing for worship service where he was going to speak to an empty sanctuary. Fighting back tears he spoke of how much he misses seeing the members of his church. I am sure many of you can relate to this heartfelt experience.

The direct impact of the shelter in place order for pastors is a sense of loss on many levels. As people called of God to minister to others – there is a high relational aspect to your work. Your gifting also is best realized when you are with others; face to face and sensing how God might be using your teaching and counsel to help your flock. Being forced to keep social distance has changed so much of your daily ministry activities. The transition to relying on online calls or meetings and also phone or text is what many are left to do. Those who are less technologically inclined are forced to learn to connect with others in these less personal means. We will come back to the need to process these losses later.

***“To shepherd well in this season and afterwards,
ministers must consider their own mental health.”***

To shepherd well in this season and afterwards, ministers must consider their own mental health. The term “Cabin Fever” came from the experience of those who live in extreme weather in the Northern Hemisphere where they are shut in during the long winter months; surrounded only by family members. The symptoms are feelings of dissatisfaction at home, restlessness, boredom, irritability, and needing to break routine. Clinically, this has been described as mild to moderate signs of depression and anxiety. Are you experiencing some signs of “Cabin Fever; or even mild or moderate depression and anxiety?

How are you doing in coping with your emotions and thoughts? What default behaviors are you finding yourself resorting to? - withdrawing, overeating, mindless surfing the internet for news or for distraction, some may turn to alcohol or pornography.

Let’s consider what is the pain that you are avoiding which keeps God at a distance so that He cannot minister to you. You cannot give to others what we do not have; so, the phrase “Physicians, heal thyself!” is a principle we need to heed.

The Grief Beneath Your Fears

So, how do you face the pain of your own grief beneath your fears? You begin by identifying them, naming them one by one. Take a minute and jot down all the losses that you have experienced since the beginning of this pandemic: Here are a few to get you started...but try to list at least 10 specific losses:

1. Loss of human contact outside of your family – name the people you miss spending time with
2. Loss of control and daily routine – make a list of each of these activities
3. Limited contact with only those within your home – this can be good or not so good depending on the health of these relationships; so, there could be the added loss of peace and quiet and space to yourself (especially for those with young children and even college age children who are all back home now from school)

David Kessler is a national expert on grief, and he helps us by detailing even more specifically what are the types of losses that we are each going through: the loss of normalcy; the fear of economic toll; the loss of connection. He also reminds us there is also a

feeling of anticipatory grief about what the future holds when we're uncertain. This is the loss of sense of safety and security which we are grieving individually and corporately.

What does grief look like during this COVID 19 crisis: Understanding the stages of grief is a start. You want to honor each of these feelings and steps:

1. There's denial, when we say or think: *"This virus won't affect us."*
2. There's anger: *"You're making me stay home and taking away my activities".*
3. There's bargaining: *"Okay, if I social distance for two weeks everything will be better, right?"*
4. There's sadness: *"I don't know when this will end."*
5. Finally there's acceptance. *"This is happening; I have to figure out how to proceed."* We find control in acceptance – *"I can wash my hands. I can keep a safe distance. I can learn how to work virtually."*

There is now an additional stage that Kessler has added to the grief process: finding meaning. As people of faith, this is particularly helpful step as we can find meaning and purpose in our grief. Many Christian leaders are speaking of how they are finding meaning to this pandemic by *"seeing it as an opportunity to call the church to revival, renewal of faith and to the sharing of the Gospel."*

"Since you can only take others as far as you have gone yourselves, learn to manage your own fears/anxieties and depression/grief."

Looking Forward by Doing Something in the Present

The best way to prepare for ministry in the days ahead begins by taking steps to ensure your own mental health. Since you can only take others as far as you have gone yourselves, learn to manage your own fears/anxieties and depression/grief. These suggestions come from self-care lessons that we glean from biblical characters like King David, Job, Elijah, and the Apostle Paul:

1. Instead of repression (denial or avoidance) or expression (dumping or exploding) you need to learn to practice confession before God and those you trust, disclosing and opening up, speaking out your deep fears and insecurities and using a journal to chronicle this special season of your spiritual life.
2. Stay active physically – remember - a healthy body leads to a healthy brain and heart (and spirit). Find an exercise that you can do for at least an hour a day. Honor God's temple with movement and proper care.
3. Your sense of usefulness comes when you have achieved or accomplished something each day. Include such activities each day to counter the feeling of boredom and helplessness that many feel in these Cabin Fever conditions. For example, cleaning out the garage or basement, gardening, reorganizing library and setting aside books to donate or give away.
4. Reach out and connect with someone each day, like, writing a note or letter to encourage a church member; calling someone on the phone to break up the silence in their home with your voice; and, using text messages or WhatsApp video chats.
5. Remember your need for an intentional sabbath rest. Plan out a regular time to do something that brings you joy and renewal. Play. Eating your favorite food or making a new dish, taking a relaxing bath, reading a good book, watching a comedy, dancing and singing with grandkids over the internet (also counts).



Once you have walked this path of spiritual, emotional and physical health, then you can accompany others to do the same.

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牧者如何應對冠狀肺炎病毒衝擊

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在復活節主日早上，我觀看了一條新聞，該新聞報道了一位牧師在預備對著一個空曠的禮拜堂講話的崇拜時的採訪。他忍著眼淚，談到他如何思念見到會友。我敢肯定，你們中許多的人都心有同感。

就地庇護在許多層面上給牧師們帶來失落感。作為神所呼召來服侍他人的人 – 人際關係佔你的工作一個非常重要的部分。你的恩賜在你與他人在一起時得到最好的體現。面對面地認識上帝會怎樣使用你的教導和協談來幫助你的羊群。被迫保持社交距離已經大大滴改變了你日常的服侍活動。餘下你能夠做的就是轉向依靠在線會議，電話，或短信。那些科技能力較弱的人被迫學習以這些沒有那麼個人化的方式來與他人建立聯繫。我們稍再談怎樣處理這些損失的需要。

**“...在疫情當中...過後能有效地牧養，
傳道人必須考慮到自己的心理健康。”**

要能夠在這個疫情當中，並在疫情過後能有效地牧養，傳道人必須考慮到自己的心理健康。這意味著要應付「室內局促」(Cabin Fever)，這名詞來自活在北半球極端氣候下的人們的經歷，他們在漫長的冬季與家人關在一起。症狀是在家中感到不滿，煩躁不安，無聊，暴躁和要打破規矩。在臨床上，這已被描述為輕度至中度的抑鬱和焦慮的症狀。你是否正在經歷「室內局促」的跡象；甚至輕度或中度的抑鬱症和焦慮症？

你如何應對自己的情緒和思想？你要選擇哪些預設的行為：退縮，暴飲暴食，漫不經心地上網瀏覽新聞或分散自己的注意力，有些人可能會酗酒或觀看色情網站？讓我們思想一下你正在逃避的痛苦是什麼，這使你遠離上帝，使祂無法照顧你。你不能給別人你所沒有的東西；因此，“醫生，醫治自己吧！”這句話是我們所需要注意的原則。

恐懼底下的悲傷

那麼，在恐懼之下你如何面對自己的悲傷痛苦呢？你要以識別它們來開始，並一一命名。花一分鐘時間，記下自大流行疫情開始以來你經歷的所有損失：以下是一些可以幫助你開始的事情...但請嘗試列出至少 10 種具體損失例如：

1. 失去家人以外的人際交往 – 列出你想共度時光的人
2. 失去對日常活動的控制 – 列出每一個活動
3. 僅與你家中的人進行有限的聯繫 – 失去自己安寧，安靜和空間（特別是對於那些有小孩和回到家裏的大學年齡的孩子）

悲傷專家大衛·凱斯勒 (David Kessler) 通過詳細介紹我們每個人經歷的損失類型來幫助我們：失去常態，對經濟損失的恐懼；失去聯繫。他說，在不確定的情況下，我們對未來的前景也有著悲痛。這是我們個人和集體對安全感和安全感的喪失所感到的悲傷。

在這次 COVID19 危機中，悲痛是什麼樣的？這是我們要尊重和經歷的悲傷和感受的階段：

1. 否認，當我們說或想：“這病毒不會影響我們。”
2. 生氣：“你是要我呆在家裡，奪走我的活動”。
3. 討價還價：“好吧，如我有兩週的社交距離，一切會更好，對吧？”
4. 難過：“我不知道何時會結束。”
5. 最後，接受。“這正在發生；我必須弄清楚如何走下去。” 我們在接受中找到了控制權 – “我可以洗手。我可以保持安全距離。我可以學習如何虛擬地工作。”

凱斯勒現在在悲傷過程中又增加了一個階段：尋找意義。作為有信仰的人，這是特別有用的一步，因為我們可以在悲傷中找到意義和目的。許多基督教領袖藉著“將其視為呼籲教會復興，更新信仰和分享福音的機會”來談論他們如何在這流行病中發現意義。

***“由於你只能帶領他人走到自己所能及之處，
因此要學會處理自己的恐懼/焦慮，和沮喪/悲痛。”***

藉著在今天所行的來展望未來

為在未來的日子裡的事奉做準備的最好方法，就是採取步驟來確保自己的心理健康。由於你只能帶領他人走到自己所能及之處，因此要學會處理自己的恐懼/焦慮，和沮喪/悲痛。這些建議來自聖經中的人物（例如大衛王，約伯，以利亞和使徒保羅）所給我們的自我照顧的功課。

1. 你需學會在上帝面前並和與你信任的人一起坦誠和開放地，表達你內心的恐懼和不安全感，並使用日記記錄你在這疫情中的靈性生活，而不是壓抑（拒絕或避免）或表達（傾倒或爆炸）。
2. 保持身體活躍；要記得健康的身體會導致大腦和心臟（並心靈）健康。找到每天至少可以做一個小時的運動。運動和適當的照顧來榮耀神的殿。
3. 當你每天完成或達成某件事情時，就會產生有用的感覺。這有助於抵抗「室內局促」環境所引起的無聊和無助感。包括日常活動如清理車庫或地下室，園藝，重組圖書館並揀選書籍捐贈他人。
4. 每天並與某些人聯繫，如寫便條或信件以鼓勵會友；打電話給某人，以你的聲音打破他們家中的沉默；以及使用短信或 WhatsApp 視頻聊天。
5. 記得你自己的需要和刻意的「安息日休息」。計劃有規律的時間來做帶給你歡樂和更新的事情。玩耍。吃你最喜歡的食物或做新菜，洗個使你鬆弛的澡，讀一本好書，看喜劇，和孫子孫女們在互聯網上跳舞和唱歌（都算在內）。

當你走上了靈命，情緒和身體健康的道路上，你就可以陪伴他人同樣行。



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