

Capstone Essay

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Module One

Dr. Eric Scalise taught about compassion fatigue in the lecture titled, “Managing the High Cost of Care”. This concept is also referred to as secondary or vicarious trauma, and I found it to be very interesting and useful if you work in a helper role. This would most likely include first responders, disaster workers, doctors, nurses, social workers, military chaplains, counselors, ministers, or caregivers.

The term ‘compassion fatigue’ was coined by Charles Figley in the early 1990s and refers to the effects that can be felt by a caretaker even if they are not directly involved in traumatic events. Just being close to victims, caring for them, seeing an event or hearing a great deal about it can bring a lot of stress on emotionally, mentally and spiritually.

Compassion fatigue could cause a lot of negative physical effects that include heart disease, headaches, memory issues, sleep loss, and in general being too tired and worn out. The body eventually shuts down after too much stress. It is important for a helper to be warned of this so they can know what they should handle and what they need to leave for God to handle.

Helpers must learn to take time for rest and spending time in the word, in prayer, to slow down, and to not get so caught up in what they do that it becomes who they are. They need to maintain proper diet and exercise, laugh, be joyful, depersonalize the process and limit time around negative people. Doing some of these things evens the scales and makes their helping ministry stronger and more effective for a longer time because it would reduce breakdown or burnout.

Module Two

Learning about how trauma, stress and depression all relate was relevant to me because I have experienced PTSD from young childhood abuse, and it has led to a long-term struggle with depression ever since. The abuse happened from the age of 5 to 12. I was sexually molested by my grandfather and no one knew. During these years I dealt with my frustration and anger by acting out at school and fighting with my brother. When I finally told my mother, she did not believe me, and I was punished. I believe this, paired with her ongoing heavy drinking and abuse caused such trauma that the only way I knew to deal with it as to shut down and disassociate with anyone or anything I once knew or liked.

I became a shell and felt like I was merely watching myself instead of living inside myself. Someone called me the wrong name one day and I honestly thought that might actually be my name. I wasn't 100% sure. I struggled through this and it got better once I graduated, but then I had a new problem, handling common adult tasks caused me a great deal of stress and I had no coping skills. I have dealt with depression, migraines, unexplained pain, illness, and anxiety my whole adult life.

Since this part of my life has been great since marrying and having children, it is good to know this can all be traced back to my childhood trauma and the PTSD I experienced then. I now know that I am at risk for developing greater depression and anxiety problems because of what I went through and that the effects of trauma will be exacerbated if I experience them again. I believe this is good information for me to have so I can prepare myself and stay on the medication I'm on, accepting that it is ok that I am not perfect but that I can still help so many people because of what I went through and survived.

Module Three

I really enjoyed the lecture by Dr. Ron Hawkins called “Theology of Suffering and the Crisis of Faith”. I have had my share of ‘crisis of faith’ moments. This is when someone feels as though God has abandoned them in some way. There are times in a Christian’s life when God feels further away when we need Him the most. Some of these, are in our times of suffering.

We know there are many reasons why there is suffering in our lives. Suffering is a consequence and a discipline of sin, it is caused by pride and God will even use suffering to break our love affair with this world and draw us closer to Him. Sometimes, we don’t know why we are suffering because it is a battle of spiritual warfare and we are caught in the middle since we are God’s precious children.

In all of this, we can rest assure that God can and will use our suffering for His glory and for our good and the good of others. God is always at work in ways we may never understand. He will comfort us in our suffering so that in turn, we will comfort others the way He comforted us, and they will know Him by our love. It is our job to surrender our suffering to the Lord and have trust in Him to “work for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.” Romans 8:28 (NIV 2011 Biblica, Inc.)

Module 4

I learned a lot from the lecture “Trauma and Abuse” by Dr. Diane Langberg, and the section titled, “How Can Christian Helpers Respond to Those Who Have Been Abused So That They Are Helped and Transformed”. I think this is valuable knowledge for every Christian counselor to know and employ.

First, we must learn from the Lord and know what His word says about who we are and what our identity is in Christ Jesus. If we do not know this, then we will not be able to pass this on to who we are helping. Then, we must be willing to leave glory behind, meaning we will be going where we are uncomfortable and where things are unfamiliar to us. There are no magic words to say to a victim, no lines of scripture that will fix everything. Most times it is a ministry of presence the person needs most. Just being there with them into the hardest circumstances and being willing to go where the ugly of life is.

We then, must “become little”, so that God can be big. We are not helpers to tell anyone what we think or what to do. We should only come to them with a humble spirit, in small doses to love, learn, observe and remember that this is not about us, but about being there for the hurting ones. We need to show them who God is, not just talk about Him.

How are we to reach anyone in the darkness if we are unwilling to enter it? As helpers, we will be encountering dark people and dark places. We sometimes have to enter those dark places that we would normally run from, in order to bring light to someone, in order to bring them out of the darkness. Helping in this way also comes with risks. It is important we always bear the character of the Father, full of grace and truth. We cannot let the darkness enter us even when we are surrounded by it. By keeping our connection with Christ, we can refrain from distorted thinking and a loss of perspective.

Helping someone coming out of abuse is not a quick fix. A helper must know that this is a long-term commitment and they cannot be abandoned when they are still in need. Jesus has not left us in our time of need and He never would. We need to remember that we will grow weary and wish for a drama free life, but we can ask for His strength to carry us through and for a heart like His to sustain us until the mission is complete.

Module 5

Choose Joy: Peace During Life's Darkest Moments by Dr. Gary Oliver really spoke to me in this point in my life. I think this is a concept that speaks life and will be life-changing for so many. Joy truly is a choice. A choice that we need to make every day. Christ taught about joy and it was his objective that His disciples would experience Joy.

Many people believe joy and happiness to be the same thing, but this is not so. Joy is not based on any circumstances or situations. It is independent of all chance and change in life. It is on its own a choice we have to make because we belong to God and because of the salvation we have in Jesus Christ. In the end, we know where we will be going and although we are not worthy, through grace, mercy and love, God made a way for us to be with Him. Happiness is temporary and depends on the external circumstances and conditions of a person's life. Joy comes from God - Happiness comes from man. Sometimes, life gets murky and it is hard to see that joy on your own. Dr. Oliver gave 4 choice reminders we can make that will help us to find that joy.

Number one is, choose to set your mind on things above. In Colossians 3:2-4 (NIV 2011 Biblica, Inc.) it says, "Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory." God's word instructs us on how to think since we are now new in Christ we should be hidden with Christ. I would assume there is no lack of joy hidden in Christ.

Number two is, choose to count your blessings and be thankful. Psalm 9:1 (NIV 2011 Biblica, Inc.) says "I will give thanks to you, Lord, with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonderful deeds." Counting our blessings and thanking God, fills our heart with praises for the Lord. We cannot be focused on our pities and sorrows when we are doing this. God knows this and that is why he tells us so many times to thank Him.

Number three is, choose to claim God's promises. "Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful." Hebrews 10:23 (NIV 2011 Biblica, Inc.). I personally know that I always have more joy when I focus on God's promises instead of my problems. Prayer and worry are the same thing. Both are focused thought and meditation. Prayer, focused thought on God and communication with him; worry, meditation and focused thought on the problem. Which one is going to be more productive and bring more joy?

The last choice is to choose to obey and act on what you know to be true. Deuteronomy 12:28 (NIV 2011 Biblica, Inc.), "Be careful to obey all these regulations I am giving you, so that it may always go well with you and your children after you, because you will be doing what is good and right in the eyes of the Lord your God." Knowing God's word, what it says, and owning it as truth helps us to live a victorious Christian life. This would be a life beyond our moods and feelings which are fickle and lies most of the time. When we are fearful, prideful, lonely or feel

unworthy, we can unfold the truth on what God says about each one of those lies from the enemy.