

Lead strong – leading while grieving – Patsy Way notes from:

FAST4 Online Teaching Series: Taking your children's ministry from good to great with Karen Warner, Patsy Way and Rachel Roche, Episode 3 (Covid-19 special), 6 April 2020
lifelonglearning.nz/children

How to grieve well so we can stay strong in our leadership and connected to our Leader when a new normal is thrust upon us and keeps changing around us

Tonight I'm going to talk about how we as CM leaders can grieve well so we can stay strong in our leadership and connected to God in this new and constantly changing season of our lives.

We're going to look at a definition of strong, move through the stages of grief and look at how to self-care so we can stay strong and ensure that we are not only surviving but thriving in our new ministry space.

Let's look at the dictionary definition of strong

Having the power to move heavy weights or perform other physically demanding tasks.

or

Able to withstand force, pressure, or wear.

What strikes me about these definitions is that to be able to move weights, or withstand anything there needs to be preparation.

My Church Care Pastor always likened it to a surf life saver – do the work before the need.

You've been training for this your whole life. You are already strong, let's stay that way by grieving well.

We all know that Grief is a natural response to loss. It's the emotional suffering you feel when something or someone you love is taken away. In this instance with Covid-19 it takes so many forms that we spoke about last week. It's the graduation you miss, the school ball, the job you loved, financial security, beach walks, tramping, flying overseas and the list goes on.

Raewyn posted an excellent article about grief and I thought this little drawing is such a good expression of the grief we are all experiencing. We can't quite explain or describe it, it's that faint sense of nausea or dizziness, that sudden, unexplained wave of anxiety.

We all know about the 5 or 7 stages of grief but I want to talk to you from this gem of a book called Good Grief which says that grief can be a good thing because it gives us the opportunity to grow. The book describes 10 stages of grief and I've connected each one to my own grief experience in this season of Covid-19.

Whilst we go through these stages I want to remind you – as I constantly need to remind myself that we all grieve differently, the stages aren't linear and we often can't quite tell the difference between them. Good grief is not about graduating from stage 10, or reaching the end finishing line, there isn't one. Its about growing through and coming through stronger being a totally different person and liking that person more than who you were before.

This is one of my favourite images of grief and how we are shaped and changed by it but we persevere and come out without bitterness and keep moving forward, mature, kinder, more grateful, more whole.

1. We are in a state of shock. Sometimes temporarily anesthetized so we don't face the reality. (It's just a flu, it's only in China, why is everyone over reacting? We keep doing normal every day activities)
2. We express emotion. Reality sinks in- uncontrollable urge to feel emotion – express it! Don't apologise for your emotions. We all will remember where we were when Level 4 was announced. It's a big deal, yes an opportunity to do church in a different way, yes good for leadership, yes families are spending time together, yes, yes, yes but also – this sucks and it's ok to say that.
3. We feel depressed and very lonely. No two people face the same kind of loss in the same way, but most feel isolated and depressed – like a very dark day, storm clouds there but we know the sun is too. David: why are you downcast oh my soul, my God, my rock why have you forsaken me. I feel a sense of helplessness.
4. We may experience physical symptoms of distress. Worst migraines, worst anxiety. Suddenly our world isn't safe, every person, every pet, even a park bench is our enemy,
5. We may become panicky. Focus on only the loss, lose effectiveness, lose creativity. When something has been so important to us for so long we can't help but keep turning our minds to what was and then get overwhelmed again by the changes – store room, calendar for the year
6. We feel a sense of guilt about the loss – could I have done more, could I have prevented this, why didn't I buy flour when there was any?
7. We are filled with anger and resentment – blame, racism, this isn't fair, criticise authority.

8. We resist – don't want this new normal. Grieving is painful but less so than having to face reality and all the decisions and new situations and challenges
9. Gradually hope comes through. We settle into a new routine. Every morning I change from my night pj's to my day pj's, some of us like this guy may find creative ways to keep our routine commutes. FaceTime and Zoom become the new lets go for a drink or a coffee. Seeing the good, teddy bear hunt, community kindness and it's no longer a desperate bid to numb the emotion but an acceptance of the bad and a genuine enjoyment of the good.
10. We affirm reality. This is our new reality. Church, ministry, community, economy, nothing will ever be the same. Looking around my quiet store room I felt like this guy. Nothing quite fits like we thought it did. But is this change a completely bad thing? Depending how we respond in this season we will come through stronger or weaker. As we accept this new season and all the changes it's brought about we can start to survive and thrive in it and see the joy. And we can be certain that just as we all feel like we're thriving in lockdown we will move down to Level 3 or 2 and with that will come its own new grief.

Grieving over changed things shakes the very foundation of our lives. And knowing these stages helps us become more self-aware and then we are better able to self-care well.

Throughout all these stages what strikes me is that the key to thriving and growing stronger still lies in taking care of ourselves and sticking close to God, believing in His goodness and faithfulness, even when we don't believe.

Self-Care is a vital part of our ministry because healthy and sustainable ministry, at any time but particularly in times of grief, is a bi-product of our spiritual health and happens best out of the overflow.

We need to be doing life, work and leading ministry in a sustainable, holistic and integrated way, and run a ministry that does not deplete. We can only give out from what we receive in.

Mother Teresa put it beautifully when she said:

'To keep the lamp burning we have to keep oil in it'

Mark 12.30 – 31 says,

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength... 'Love your neighbour as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these." Mark
12.30 – 31

This scripture reminds us to love God above all else and to love ourselves so that with the overflow we can love others. We cannot care for others if we do not care for ourselves first. A few years ago our Pastor of Church Care and I wrote a course called "Called to Care" and she spoke of self-care as *equipping* ourselves at two levels:

Being-in-Christ and Doing-for-Christ.

I find the Cross to be a good image of how to do this:

The ***vertical post*** of the cross represents ***Being-in-Christ***, having a relationship with Jesus, knowing Him, the infilling of the Holy Spirit – it focusses on who we are in Christ.

The vertical post of our Being-in-Christ facilitates the **horizontal post** which is our **Doing-for-Christ**. This represents us extending our arms to others, what we do for Christ, our ministry.

We are filled by our relationship with Christ so that we can give out to others. The flow is through Christ to us and then through us to others. Everything we do, where we serve in ministry must flow from our self-care of 'Being-in-Christ'. We can't do-for-Christ if we can't be-in-Christ.

So much of our daily lives are spent doing tasks, checking off our to-do list, now figuring out the logistics and working around the challenges of doing ministry in lockdown. On average **85%** of what we do, anyone can do – checking email, answering messages, attending meetings, making simple decisions. **10%** of what we do, someone with a little training should be able to accomplish. After all if you have been trained to do what you do, someone else can be too...

- **5%** of what we do, only we can do – **this is the most important 5% that I want to focus on as I end**. These are the things that nobody else can do for you that only you can do and if you neglected them, it would affect the rest of your life. These require a daily investment of time and heart – the condition of these will determine the state of your life and therefore your ministry. They can include:
 - Building vibrant, healthy and thriving relationships with God, partners, family and close friends. Only you can do this.
 - Using our Gifting's for His Glory
 - Keeping our bodies healthy and strong

- Nurturing our creativity and passions
- Taking Sabbath rest to enjoy time with our loved ones.

I want to encourage each one of you to prioritize this 5% by spending some time this week looking at:

- What fills your emotional and energy tank and what empties it.

Making sure what fills you outweighs what drains you.

I know for me I need to calendar in FaceTime catch ups with friends and family, walks and other things that fill me up.

I don't know about any of you guys but I've found myself getting so drained and overwhelmed by the amount of ideas, suggestions and debates going on on social media. Switch off notifications, unfollow etc and choose when you look at others I see what other churches are doing, the incredible productions they've put together for their kids programmes and I have to try really hard to remind myself connection over content, to trust my creativity and relationship with my kids. I've learnt that too many ideas are as bad as none, that comparison is the thief of joy so keep focus on what you can do not what you can't do. Hold fast to and remind yourself of your calling, your core ministry values and motivation because these do not change.

Pay attention now more than ever to what drains you and talk to someone you trust to pray with you and help you problem solve.

- Think about your sacred rhythms you had in place before lockdown. Do they still work? Are you keeping them sacred? Maybe ask someone to keep you accountable to your sacred rhythms and self-care.
- Ask yourself, what are you doing whilst you're in lockdown that's going to make you a stronger leader?

When the kids in my ministry or someone I meet on the street – at 2m distance sees me delivering shopping, running errands for my families or walking my puppy they may think I'm like the rescue guy in this picture, that I have it all together, but most of the time lately I actually feel like the dog – desperately clinging to my rescuer, the one my hope comes from. So I encourage you, as I remind myself to, to pray, pray and pray.

Have grace, grace and more grace, grace for yourself, grace for others, grace for your hopes, dreams and grief journeys and may we all love the person this grief to changes us to be.