The Overcommitted Deacon

5 Keys to Surviving the Storm

It had been an especially difficult year for our church. A number of key long-standing members abruptly left our church in protest to the changes we had incorporated in our schedule in the hopes of reaching new people. At our monthly deacon's meeting, we were discussing the issue when Carl stood up, grabbed his coat and surrendered with a shocking declaration. "I'm out. I've had enough of all this!"

As his pastor, no one was more surprised that I was. What had led him to this sudden outburst? After the meeting I called and asked him to meet me at a coffee shop nearby. Well into the night, I listened to him share his story. Carl had bottomed out and had nothing more to give. The demands of a new baby, a wife with postpartum depression, teaching a small group, coaching his son's soccer team and the constant care of his father in the late stages of Alzheimer's had so wearied him that his despair was unmanageable. I wept with him and realized that I had completely failed to put the pieces of his story together. It was a stern reminder to me that we are all strugglers. The storms of circumstance and over-commitment can send the best of us to the brink.

None of us are immune to the ravages of adversity. We all have stories of troubles that come in bunches mixed with the trap of over-commitment. This includes pastors, wives and all leaders. The choices we make will ultimately determine our success in surviving and thriving in the midst of a perfect storm.

By the way, if you are in one of those seasons where everything is manageable, you might want to tear this article out and stick it in your pocket. Chances are, you're going to need it in the future.

These following five choices are lifesavers that you'll need to have on board when you feel overwhelmed and overextended.

- **Connect**

As men we often want to be that lone silent warrior holding everything together singlehandedly. Read this slowly: *This is not biblical.* There was a reason God created the church. The Bible implores us to connect and collaborate in a shared journey of discipleship. If you are struggling or feeling overwhelmed, tell someone. Phone a friend. Yes, pray. But pray with other men who will have your back and walk you through the fire. David, find your Jonathan. Moses, find your Aaron. Shadrach, find your Meshach and Abednego. Connect biblically, or you may be Samson looking for his Delilah and we know how that turned out!

- **Condition**

In other words, get moving. Make physical conditioning a part of your daily routine. Hit the gym. Take a walk. You might not feel like it when you are overwhelmed. If you get to the place where you are saying, *"I just don't have time to exercise,"* then you probably need to more than ever. Keep the body working even when life isn't working. Drink lots of water. Stay away from food that's handed to you through your car window. Fast food will send you on the fast track to burnout.

- **Clear**

Prioritize the important responsibilities you have on your plate and clear the rest of it off your plate. I grew up believing that God was most pleased with me if I had more things to do than anyone else. In my forties, I had to create new nuero-pathways in my brain to fully accept that busyness is not next to godliness.

The following is NOT in the Bible.

Thus Jesus hurriedly got up realizing what an important day this was going to be. He ran to Galilee and there He created 13 lesson parchments, visited 15 lepers in one night. Exhausted, the disciples verily tried to keep up with the Son of God but nay, they could not. They marveled at his time management skills and his strength in persuasive skills. People flocked to him and stayed with him for they knew that if He could accomplish such management tasks with great haste, effort and fluidity that he knew the habits for being an effective person.

Nope. It never happened.

For me, living a clear life means spending some time clearing off my desk so that I can think. It also means that I need to look critically at my calendar and begin to say the most difficult two letter word in the English language. "No". I confess. I don't like the way it sounds when it comes out of my mouth. Especially when I have to say it to someone I love and admire.

Clear your schedule, clear your desk, and clear your mind. It's truly amazing how simpler life becomes when your clear it up.

- **Cool Down**

Take time to recover from a difficult meeting, hospital visit or funeral. Don't put tape over the dummy lights on your dashboard. If the pace of your life is overheating, take time to cool down. Start turning stuff off. Put your phone on silent mode and become mindful of what your body is saying to you. If you are overheating, you'll get nowhere fast.

- **Confess**

I'm not referring to making a confession of your sins, although that's a good thing we should constantly do. By confessing, I mean turning to God and confessing that you are

weak. I used to believe the following statement was scripture:

“God will never give you more than you can handle.”

It’s not in there and it’s not true. God will often give us more than we can handle for the expressed purpose of showing us that we must confess our weakness. However, God will never give us more than ***He*** can handle. And that’s good news.

So what happened with my deacon friend, Carl? Our amazing group of deacons rallied around him, and stood in the gap as he navigated through the storms and recalibrated his life. He learned that he didn’t have to do everything. He’s still serving today but this time with more focus and support. His prefect storm served as a reminder of God’s grace in our times of weakness and over-commitment.