



Member Care Update

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Caring for Yourself while Caring for Others

How do you, the care-giver, care for yourself while helping others recover from traumatic events?

This month, a few mission leaders from around the world are answering this question. As you read their thoughts, ponder how you would respond. Are you caring for yourself as you care for others? Carefully consider their honest, real answers below. Though they've not conquered this aspect of ministry, they each offer valuable insights. Their wisdom may help each of us become more healthy and effective in the ministry God has given us to do. The final entry is from a different "hot spot" perspective, and I've already found the truth shared in this brief contribution to be very helpful to me this month as I put this update together. The following are the questions our writers were asked to answer:

1. What are the biggest challenges to your spiritual, emotional, and mental health when you are living in a hot zone?
2. How do you care for yourself when you are dealing with suffering and helping people recover from trauma?
 - a. Mental health practices
 - b. Emotional health practices
 - c. Spiritual health practices
3. We often ignore our physical bodies when we are living with incredible suffering. After all, when people are dying from hunger or running from terror, it is hard to motivate ourselves to go for our daily run. What do you do to physically care for your body?
4. Do you have a philosophy of care you could share with us?
5. What tips would you like to share with our readers?

Angela Harding is married to Bill Harding, who is CEO of MAF Australia. This New Zealander is a wife, mom and a lawyer who participates in mission leadership, prayer initiatives and as a crisis responder.

The biggest challenge I have faced to my health is being so busy working for the Lord that I don't take time to be with the Lord. This obviously affects my spiritual health, but also my physical and mental health, too. I am an extremely focused and driven person and achievement has been my key to success. 'Doing' for the Lord has been most important and, at times, has caused me to physically become run down and exhausted, and mentally feel like a failure when I can't get everything done I want to in order to 'please' God.

Spiritual Self-care: Over the last few years I have really been challenged about the importance of sitting at the Lord's feet. When I take the time to do this, I most clearly hear him saying that he loves me and that I have chosen the better thing. It is always a choice though, and some days I decide that I don't have the time to spend with the Lord. If I make this decision, then I will spend the day running on my own energy and in my own strength and eventually get burnt out. But if I choose to sit and be still before the Lord, I find that my priorities change. Then, when I do go to work in His strength, I do what the Lord asks me to do, which is ultimately more pleasing to him.

I should add that my time with the Lord is not always first thing in the morning. With a growing family and deadlines to meet to get us all out the door for the day, morning can be a challenging time for me to meet the Lord. However the key is prioritizing - saying this matters and I will make the time to be with God, to worship him, to get to know him more, not just to present my shopping list before him.

Self Care while helping others: In our leadership roles, my husband Bill and I have had to help staff deal with fatal accidents, evacuations and crisis events. When this happens, Bill and I are just in survival mode. The only way we can get through is depending on God. He enables us, He is everywhere we turn. The Holy Spirit gives us words as we deal with grieving people. He comforts us as we grieve. He gives us strength beyond what we can explain. It's as if we work on adrenaline and the Holy Spirit. It is not a conscious thing, it is instinctive.

During those time, I certainly don't spend hours just being still before the Lord. It is more of a continual, internal tirade before God - which He is more than big enough to deal with while giving me the answers I need. His answers in these times are usually, and not surprisingly, "Be still and know that I am Lord!"

Of course you can't sustain this pace for long periods of time. It's an extremely draining time emotionally and physically - and a challenging, but often precious, time spiritually. So in answer to the second question, AFTER the initial time of trauma, I try to get back into my routine of quiet times, journaling, worshipping, exercise (I swim). Sometimes, when there has been great hurt, I need to forgive people (things they have said and done) or ask for their forgiveness. In addition, I will take opportunities to talk with others about my reaction to the crisis (i.e. where I was when I heard, how I felt, what I said). With our staff (adults and children) we always do this with psychologists trained in crisis counseling.

And IF I have managed to do all these things successfully, then time is a wonderful healer. But it does take time.

Physical care during a crisis: In answer to question three, yes I do ignore the physical needs of my body during a time of crisis. I often fast. But to deny my body in these instances often aids my dependence on God. As I said, you can't sustain this for any length of time - but that is the nature of crisis I guess.

My **philosophy of care** is to be aware of my own weaknesses and dependence on God. When I am weak then I am strong. If I try to cope in our own strength, I'll fail and burn out eventually. If I do it in God's strength, i.e. do what he wants me to do and say (that means sometimes saying no to things) then I'll last the distance. And I'll have peace.

Marjan Companjen says, *“I am a missionary kid with a Dutch passport, born while my parents were at Bible College in the UK before they served in Vietnam. Due to political instability, all foreigners had to leave the country, which meant I had all my schooling years in the Netherlands. I have lived in England for the last 9.5 years to serve with Mission Aviation Fellowship (MAF). In the last five years I have done various short-term troubleshooting stints lasting between one and five months, in MAF field programs in Madagascar, South Africa, Mongolia, South Sudan and Chad. My current role is as Executive Officer for MAF International where I have responsibility for internal organizational communications and assist the MAFI CEO/President in the integration process of MAF groups worldwide. I am currently based in England and committed to this role until November this year. Not sure yet what’s next: continue in this role or pursue other options. Before I start thinking about this, I want to enjoy my first summer at home in five years”*

Marjan responded to the same questions Angela answered above:

1. What are the biggest challenges to your spiritual, emotional, and mental health when you are living in a hot zone?

Spiritual

- Lack of relevant spiritual teaching
- Language barriers preventing me from worshipping together with nationals in their own language

Emotional

- Constant flow of people, so lots of hellos and goodbyes
This can make you apprehensive to invest in new friendships. I’ve had times when I preferred to watch a DVD on my own to going to a party where I could meet lots of new people.
- A lack of sense of belonging due to different background, culture, language, etc.
- Lack of perspective
Life can feel like a pressure cooker, and things that happen on the field, that at home wouldn’t be much of an issue, can be blown out of proportion and take a lot of emotional energy.

Mental

- Loneliness and a sense of not fitting in, being ‘other’
- Cross-cultural differences in how to approach people, make visits, etc can lead to stress

2. How do you care for yourself when you are dealing with suffering and helping people recover from trauma?

Mental health practices

- Count my blessings!
- Not compare with my home culture
- Deliberately seek the good and enjoyable things in the host culture
So far I’ve always found these as long as I was willing to look for them.
- Not spend too much time on email and Facebook
Although they are great tools to keep in touch with home, they can also prevent me from building relationships locally and doing ministry.

Emotional health practices

- Enjoy the small things in life, a good cup of coffee, baking
- Try to include some familiar things in my new home, for example bring special photographs, my favorite cologne, candles, etc.
- Find places away from my work place where I like to hang out, alone or with friends

- Make friends both in- and outside my organization
- Talk with people who have been in that location a long time and find out their lessons learnt

Spiritual health practices

- Download good sermons from the Internet beforehand to listen to
- Bring good books
- Seek a prayer partner locally
- Seek a Bible study group locally
- Have a mentor (based in the home culture)

3. We often ignore our physical bodies when we are living with incredible suffering. After all, when people are dying from hunger or running from terror, it is hard to motivate ourselves to go for our daily run. What do you do to physically care for your body?

- Try to eat as healthily as possible
- Where possible and appropriate for my hosts, I steer clear of food that I know can make me sick, e.g. unclean water, unwashed vegetables
- If not available, organize opportunities for physical exercise with others, e.g. team sports (I've played indoor hockey, volleyball and tennis)
- Get sufficient sleep, especially in a hot climate it's good to go to bed early and rise early when the temperatures are cool

4. Do you have a philosophy of care you could share with us?

It's ok to treat yourself from time to time, to know what you enjoy. At the same time, be flexible and embrace the challenges and see them as opportunities for personal development. Different is not necessarily wrong.

***Larrie Gardner** says, "My husband, Dick, and I have been in missions (Wycliffe and SIL) for many years, serving as translators, trainers, counselors, administrators, leaders, and consultants. I serve on four boards, as well as various committees. Our assignment (International Personnel Consultants and Trainers for Wycliffe and SIL) involves a lot of travel--60 countries so far. Our current focus involves leadership development, consulting, and stimulating member care. Dick and I have two married sons, four grandchildren, and another granddaughter, soon to be born. We rejoice every day in the privilege of serving God and His people.*

1. What are the biggest challenges to your spiritual, emotional, and mental health when you are living in a hot zone?

One of my biggest challenges is getting sidetracked--it is very hard to be productive when so many other things press in and demand attention. It is also hard to have any kind of balance when surrounded by great need. When things are fearful, it is hard to be attentive to hidden needs. And when the danger is a spiritual one, I find myself somewhat unskilled in using the spiritual weapons of Eph. 6.

2. How do you care for yourself when you are dealing with suffering and helping people recover from trauma?

Mental health practices

- Be outside; look at nature and remember that this is still God's world(Ps. 24:1)
- Read the Psalms of lament; others have undergone similar things (I Peter 5:9); why should I expect to be exempt?
- Maintain as much routine as possible—habits of health practiced regularly
- Focus on positive things—there have to be some!

Emotional health practices

- Discipline myself to be productive
- Be as generous as possible
- Be patient and kind to those in need (they are often very demanding)
- Reflective Journaling - helps me to focus
- Regular exercise

Spiritual health practices

- Sing; read poetry; listen to music--old hymns often come to mind
- Be with people; don't withdraw; pray together; encourage one another

3. We often ignore our physical bodies when we are living with incredible suffering. After all, when people are dying from hunger or running from terror, it is hard to motivate ourselves to go for our daily run. What do you do to physically care for your body?

- Exercise
- Eat something
- Eat protein if available; it seems to be helpful
- Bathe regularly - I can't do much about the situation, but I can care for my body

4. A philosophy of care—For Larrie this is a mindset of truths to remember

- Things WILL get better. This can't go on forever.
- Many things are bad, but a few are still good. I'll be thankful for them.
- God put me here to make a difference. Self pity doesn't do anyone any good.
- God is sovereign - Look up and memorize verses that underscore that truth.
- God is faithful; He can be relied on.
- God is loving; He cares.
- You can do more than you ever thought you could; get at it!
- Trust your leadership!
- People will remember what they see in you and me at such times. Let them see Jesus.
- Be careful not to 'play the aint's it awful' game! Be one who speaks positively, with hope and faith.

Thank you, Larrie, Angela and Marjan. You've given us practical ways to care for ourselves when we're in that hectic, hot zone. While every tip may not fit each of our readers' circumstances, please consider what you can do where you are to care for yourself. Consider answering the questions above with the facts: how would you respond today? Are your answers promoting spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical health? Are there changes you can make? What can you do to better care for yourself?

Now, please consider the truth that not all hot zones are the cause of crisis, wars, or trauma. Some, like the one below, are much more personal. How do we care for ourselves when our personal hot zone is tearing us apart?

Finding God's Help in a Personal Hot Zone

Anonymous

2 Peter 1: 3 "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness."

For eight months I was in my own, personal hot zone. It was not caused by a traumatic earthquake or tsunami, nor did it occur in a war-torn or famine-ravaged country. But it was a disaster! Three spiritual disciples helped regain my equilibrium and find my way back to God. I emerged from my hot zone stronger and wiser. To God be all honor and glory and praise!

Three Spiritual Disciplines

1. Be in the Word! Though there were days when God's Word seemed as dry as my cried-out eyes, I "religiously" held to my daily Bible reading. To my starving spirit, scripture was my spiritual food. Sometimes my daily portion of spiritual nutrition would be just one phrase or one word, but it sustained me.
2. Listen to praise music! I would listen to sacred music on the way home from work, drive into the garage and weep until the wells of tears ran dry. The melodies and words went deep into my soul to replay themselves when I needed them. In the sleepless night hours, I would force myself to sing over and over again the praise songs of King David's Psalter to help me think on *whatsoever is pure, lovely, praise worthy, true, honorable, just*.
3. Pray! Romans 8:26 mentions prayers of unspeakable groaning. I certainly did not know how to pray as I should. I'd been treated despicably, summarily dismissed without recourse and I had to watch my replacement destroy the ministry until it had completely shut down. This was the time in my life when I prayed unutterable mutterings of petition from the depths of my soul. I was, and we can be, assured the Holy Spirit will carry our unspoken petitions to the Father.

Questions to consider:

Are you in your own personal hot zone?

What can you do to turn your heart towards God?

Do you need help?

Is there someone you can talk to?

Are there spiritual disciplines that help you return to spiritual health?

If you aren't in a personal hot zone right now, what spiritual disciplines are you practicing to keep your heart and actions aligned with God's?

Resources for self care while caring for people in crisis situations

Spiritual

[Keeping your Head in a Crisis](#)

[Soul Care](#)

Physical

[Help for Insomnia](#)

[Nutrition Secrets from around the World](#)

[Dietary Guidelines around the World](#)

[Exercise and Anxiety](#)

Mental Health

[Understand, Prevent and Resolve Life's Challenges](#)