



Mad Church Disease
Copyright © 2009 by Anne Jackson

Requests for information should be addressed to:

Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49530

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Jackson, Anne, 1980 –
Mad church disease : overcoming the burnout epidemic / Anne Jackson.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN 978-0-310-28755-1 (hardcover)
1. Burn out (Psychology)—Religious aspects—Christianity. I. Title.

BV45O95.J325 2009
253—dc22

2008027412

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the *Holy Bible, New International Version*®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

Internet addresses (websites, blogs, etc.) and telephone numbers printed in this book are offered as a resource to you. These are not intended in any way to be or imply an endorsement on the part of Zondervan, nor do we vouch for the content of these sites and numbers for the life of this book.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Published in association with the literary agency of Alive Communications, Inc., 7680 Goddard Street, Suite 200, Colorado Springs, CO 80920. www.alivecommunications.com

Interior design by Ben Fetterley

Printed in the United States of America

CONTENTS

<i>Foreword by Craig Groeschel</i>	9
<i>How to Use This Book</i>	11
<i>Prologue: No Pity Parties Here</i>	13
<i>Introduction</i>	15

PART 1: HOW THE BURNOUT EPIDEMIC IS KILLING THE GREATEST CALL

1. Comparing Mad Cow Disease to Mad Church Disease	30
Second Opinion: Bill Hybels	43
2. The Emergency	45
Second Opinion: Perry Noble	59

PART 2: AM I AT RISK? EXAMINING RISK FACTORS AND SYMPTOMS

3. Internal Risk Factors	63
4. External Risk Factors	73
Second Opinion: Mike Foster	92
5. Symptoms	94
Second Opinion: Wayne Cordeiro	100

PART 3: GETTING BETTER

6. Five Principles of Recovery	104
--------------------------------------	-----

PART 4: A PATH TO HEALTH AND RECOVERY

7. Spiritual Health	121
Second Opinion: Matt Carter	130
8. Physical Health	132
Second Opinion: Shawn Wood	144

MAD CHURCH DISEASE

9. Emotional Health.....	146
Second Opinion: Gary Kinnaman	153
10. Relational Health.....	156
Second Opinion: Brandi Wilson	163
11. Processing through Pain.....	166
<i>Epilogue: Resting in an Abundant Life</i>	<i>177</i>
<i>Notes</i>	<i>185</i>
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>189</i>

PART I

HOW THE **BURNOUT EPIDEMIC** IS
KILLING **THE GREATEST CALL**

COMPARING MAD COW DISEASE TO MAD CHURCH DISEASE

In front of me sat a large pile of cattle carcasses, still smoldering from the fire that had essentially destroyed them. Occasionally, I'd hear a crackle or pop coming from the heap, but for the most part, the grassy English field was silent.

Thankfully, I was four thousand miles away, cozied up in my apartment and watching this on TV, far removed from the smells that would have been carried by the damp winds. I was tuned in to a BBC channel, viewing a documentary about bovine spongiform encephalopathy, an affliction better known as mad cow disease.

Now, mad cow disease is a pretty odd ailment that, for the most part, only infects cows. And, as I would learn in the documentary, it has four unique characteristics:

1. The disease lies dormant for a given amount of time, going unnoticed. It can be a period of months to a few years before the disease is found.
2. Mad cow disease is caused by a mutated protein that attaches itself to the cow's central nervous system, thus affecting the cow's brain and responses (hence the name). Essentially, it turns the cow's brain and spinal cord into a spongy-type matter. Slowly, the cow's mental and physical health begin to deteriorate.
3. Mad cow disease is transmitted by cows eating the suspect protein. Since cows are often fed the remains of other cattle (something

COMPARING MAD COW DISEASE TO MAD CHURCH DISEASE

yummy called meat and bone meal), it's easy for an entire herd to become infected at once if they share the same food source.

4. Mad cow disease ultimately leads to the infected cow's death. There is no cure.

In the United Kingdom, the country most affected, the disease had reached epidemic proportions. Because of its ability to spread to both cattle and humans, over four million cattle were killed as a precaution.

Now, if humans were to contract mad cow disease through infected meat, they would share the same fate as the cows. Neurological functions would begin to slow down, causing psychosis, uncontrollable body movements, and eventually coma and death.

What struck me about mad cow disease was its similarity to the phenomenon of burnout in the church. (Don't ask me *how* my brain made that leap. All I know is that it did, and here we are!) We'll explore the similarities below.

WHAT YOU CAN'T SEE CAN HURT YOU

Characteristic: The disease lies dormant for a given amount of time, going unnoticed. It can be a period of months to a few years before the disease is found.

The first characteristic, the fact that the disease is unnoticed for a period of time, couldn't be truer in the context of burnout.

Remember the job I accepted in student ministry?

The church was in a rapidly growing community, and my new job couldn't have been better. Our team chemistry was nothing short of amazing. The momentum grew, the number of kids whose lives were changed grew, our staff grew — and everything was healthy and thriving. Soon our one weekly service became two, we started planning our

MAD CHURCH DISEASE

own camps and mission trips, and eventually my husband, Chris, joined the staff as a part-time worship leader.

Things were going so well. We were on top of the world. It seemed too good to be true.

And it was.

Because I loved my job so much, I (proudly) didn't take a single vacation day during my first year on staff. By the end of our summer camp (which I was responsible to manage), I was exhausted.

Needless to say, the quickness of the onset of my weariness caught me off guard. The job I had once looked forward to tackling every single workday (and sometimes on my days off) I was now dreading.

Since I had allowed spending time with God to be replaced by spending time doing things *for* God, my spiritual tank had been sucked dry. When that happened, I began to lose perspective on almost every area of my life. My defenses were down, and I allowed myself to start believing the little lies the enemy would throw into my path.

You know, they are totally taking advantage of you. With your experience in management, they should be paying you double what you're making.

Do you really think what you're doing matters? You're just a little girl on the support staff. Nobody really cares what you think. You'll never be able to lead like one of the guys. It's just the world you're in.

And all that stuff you see and hear in staff meetings? You know this place is nothing but egos and trouble.

Come on. You know you shouldn't be working in this church world. You shouldn't even be in a church. Life was so much better when you could pretend these things didn't exist.

The smart thing at this point would have been to talk to somebody about what I was going through, but ministry was supposed to be so professional—so perfect.

I kept quiet.

COMPARING MAD COW DISEASE TO MAD CHURCH DISEASE

As these thoughts were allowed to simmer silently over the course of a few weeks, I became more convinced these voices were right, so I started looking for a job back in the marketplace. Back where it didn't matter what your gender or your age was. If you put in the time, had the ideas, and made it to happy hour, you'd have all the respect you need to make it to the top.

However, when my efforts proved fruitless, I was discouraged. I actually began feeling guilty about working at the church, since there were so many people who would kill for the chance to be in vocational ministry.

Then out of left field, our church's administrator and senior pastor approached me about a new position that had been created—director of communication and media.

Director? The word seemed to shimmer and glimmer with prestige and power.

This new position would allow me to use my marketing and communications background. I'd oversee all areas of communication and media for the weekend services. I'd get to manage two creative teams. I'd get my own office. I'd be the youngest person on our leadership staff.

Director. Director. *Director!* Man. That sure had a nice ring to it!

I was in. This had to be the answer! I told our youth pastor I was going to be changing positions. He asked me to reconsider and told me I was probably letting the exhaustion of our intense summer schedule get the best of me. Deep down, I think I knew he was right, but I was dead set on taking the new position. So after helping with the transition of bringing in a new hire to our student staff, I moved over to the administration offices, high and lofty, on the second floor of a bank building. I'd be rubbing elbows with our senior leadership staff every day.

This was it! This was the good life.

Like most new things, every aspect of my new position was perfect. My strengths in problem solving and management were being put to good use, as both the communication and media areas were a mess. I was asked to help brand the church, redo the website, strengthen our weekend experiences, and involve and equip new volunteers.

MAD CHURCH DISEASE

I thought things were intense in student ministry, but the new position made my old schedule look like a summer vacation. Because our church was literally bursting at the seams, we had services on Saturday nights and all day on Sundays. We also had an off-site venue with multiple service times. My scheduled day off was Friday, but I'd often find myself finalizing weekend logistics on Friday afternoon and evening.

It was the only way to get it done. And, hey — it was all “for God.” I believed thousands of people were relying on *my* talent every weekend to help engage them in their worship experience. Everything had to be perfect. I would settle for nothing less.

And as time went by, I was still none the wiser to the fact that my pride and I were continuing on a downward spiral.

My busy schedule also provided me a break from the tensions Chris and I were experiencing at home. I chalked it up to us still being newlyweds in an adjustment period, but whatever it was — I wanted away.

Our relationship during those first couple of years was nothing more than surface. I talked a big game — how marriage was a priority. We signed up for all the right couples classes and got involved in a small group for married people. We held hands and went to services and church events with big smiles on our faces.

We talked about my schedule constantly, and I'd always promise to do a better job of taking time off. But I never kept those promises. He warned me if I kept burning the candle at both ends, I would eventually burn out.

I refused to believe him.

And he was right.

About six months into my new position, I started feeling some tightness in my chest and had difficulty breathing. My doctor sent me to an allergy and asthma doctor, who in turn discovered I had pretty severe acid reflux. He scheduled an esophagogastroduodenoscopy (also known as an EGD), which is pretty much a fancy way of saying, “You get to swallow a camera so we can make sure your esophagus hasn't disintegrated.”