

Denny Howard has dedicated his career to helping people. In addition to being fully credentialed, he has a heart for those in vocational ministry. If you are a people-helper, this is a must-read. Denny articulates the issues people helpers face and gives suggestions for overcoming the issues and operating at full strength.

—Wendell Bontrager, board chair of LivStyle LLC

After thirty years of domestic and international leadership experience in both non- and for-profit sectors, I can say with great confidence that no one is better suited or equipped to have written this book. Denny's lifelong commitment to those who serve—and his unparalleled insights into the challenges, struggles, and battles they face—make every page of this book worth reading and digesting. He has rescued me from leadership heartaches more times than I can count, and has given me, my wife, and our family wise direction and hope on many occasions.

—Kelly Byrd, executive leadership development at Sweetwater Sound

As an elite mountain climber, Denny Howard has literally been to the mountaintop. But more importantly, as an elite counselor, he has spent decades learning the art of guiding weary ministers safely back to base camp. That's good news for anyone who has dared to risk the heights of vocational ministry and inevitably found themselves on a ledge physically, emotionally, or spiritually. With this book, Denny combines groundbreaking research, wisdom from soul-care literature, and a lifetime of field experience to provide a manual for surviving and thriving in vocational ministry. Peaks and valleys will come for us all; I am grateful for this reliable guidebook.

—Del Fehsenfeld, LMFT, senior editor of *Revive*, pastoral services director at Life Action Ministries

Weekly, I hear from pastors, missionaries, ministry spouses, and their children seeking guidance in navigating potential landmines and scars from the front lines of ministry. As I come alongside these servants and their families, I am so grateful for Denny Howard's experience, research, discernment, and practical tools to help in recognizing pitfalls and bolstering resiliency—so instead of becoming collateral damage, they remain healthy and vital. What a strategic and valuable work!

—Linda Kline, director of Psalm One Ministries

If you are exploring this book, then we share a similar interest of care for those who serve in ministry. Drawing from many years of counseling with over 6,000 ministry leaders, Denny offers exceptional insights and unique perspectives from his vast pool of experience. His meaningful perceptions enable us to grasp these life-giving concepts and become better equipped to stay near full strength while navigating the many relational, spiritual, moral, emotional, and directional challenges of ministry.

—Rod Kraybill, PCC leadership coach, training and leadership development coordinator at AIM International

Methods are many and principles are few; methods always change but principles never do! Thanks, Denny, for a book focused on principles—principles that will help those who serve others stay in the game for the long haul. If you are new to ministry or involved in any people-serving vocation, you need this book. If you are on the final turn of your career, you need this book. Why? Because the ideas, suggestions, recommendations, and directives are all true! Denny’s writings speak truth gained from a lifetime of service to others. Let’s stay in the game.

—Larry Lance, CEO of Youth for Christ of Northern Indiana

Insightful, practical, researched, and helpful; biblically solid and immediately applicable to a leader’s life. Denny Howard is a long-time expert in the field of caring for Christian leaders and it shows in his work. Packed with wisdom, insight, and real-life applications that work, this book could be a difference-maker in the lives of many Christian leaders.

—Michael MacKenzie, clinical director of Marble Retreat

The wave of burnout, depression, and attrition among ministry leaders and caregivers is alarming. Denny and Hugh hit the nail on the head with *At Full Strength*. Both the preventive and prescriptive tools offered will help any leader or caregiver extend their leadership shelf-life, while enjoying their journey more!

—John Opalewski, owner of Converge Coaching

As a pastor personally impacted by Denny and his work, I believe in the message of this book. Ministry is a marathon, not a sprint. Anyone wanting to run for the long haul should devour this game-changing resource immediately.

—Kevin Rivers, lead pastor of Blackhawk Ministries

There is an epidemic today among church leaders who struggle, burn out, and ultimately drop out of ministry. *At Full Strength* provides hope for turning this tide. From a wealth of practical experience and a heart for those leaders, Denny Howard has given us a gift that identifies the warning signs and offers safeguards to proactively navigate the pitfalls unique to those in people-helping vocations. This book brings hope that will positively change the course of individual leaders and entire organizations.

—Rocky Rocholl, president of The Fellowship of Evangelical Churches



— At —

Full Strength

**NAVIGATING THE RISKS
ALL PASTORS FACE**

.....

The Complete Survival Guide for Those Who
Serve in Ministry and Other Caregiving Vocations

.....

*Denny Howard, LMHC, LMFT,
Licensed Clinical Counselor
with Hugh White, MDiv*

Contents

Introduction 7

Part 1: The Crosshairs Research Project

- 1** Warning: Danger Ahead! 17
- 2** Early Warning Signs: Difficult Challenges Ahead! 29
- 3** Navigating Stress: Sharp Curves Ahead! 45

Part 2: Navigating Relational Challenges

- 4** Interpersonal Encounters and the Toxic Triangle 71
- 5** Confronting Difficult People 91
- 6** Mastering Effective Confrontation Strategies 107

Part 3: Navigating Spiritual and Moral Challenges

- 7** Self-Deception and Moral Failure: “It Will Never Happen to Me!” 135
- 8** Incongruence: Pride, Humility, and Idolatry 147
- 9** Mistakes, Failures, and Other Disappointments 171

Part 4: Navigating Emotional and Directional Challenges

- 10** Danger: The Challenge of Anger 187
- 11** Depression and Worry Sickness 205
- 12** Call, Mission, Vision, and Values 237
- 13** All Aboard the Principle Train 253

Part 5: Navigating toward Gaining and Maintaining Vitality

- 14** Developing a Strategic Plan for Vitality 269
- 15** Balancing Principles of a Strategic Vitality Plan 297

Appendix 311

Notes 315

Introduction

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

—GALATIANS 6:9

For over three decades, I've been involved in a counseling and coaching ministry for nonprofit leaders as well as those serving in people-helping vocations. Over the years, I have formed some deeply held convictions around what it takes for them to sustain their vitality for a lifetime of caring service to others. Captured in this book are many of my insights on the risks and perils of ministry that must be understood and managed for these good people to thrive and flourish.



Youthful enthusiasm alone—that thrill commonly experienced when they first begin a career of vocational service—will not sustain a lifetime of ministry. I've heard the same story countless times of leaders who have announced their resignations simply because they had burned out. There was no moral failure, no major crisis event, no major family or health issues—they were just worn out. They reached a point in their sacred vocation where ministry became either a mundane drudgery or they were so overwhelmed, they couldn't cope with another day, week, or month of ministry leadership.

These fine people remind me of dedicated soldiers who stay engaged in the battle under all kinds of adverse circumstances. The scars from wounds suffered, combined with a relentless fatigue, have exacted an insidious toll over time. These good soldiers continued to advance the cause faithfully, eventually *bleeding out* from a thousand little paper cuts. They perished from a condition that could have been easily treated.

In my younger years, running marathons and mountain climbing were personal passions; I had an innate drive to reach the summits and cross the finish lines. For me, there was no thrill greater than being on a mountain wall looking down through my climbing boots at giant pine trees that looked like stalks of grass.

While on a major mountain ascent in Switzerland, an unexpected electric storm engulfed various climbing teams ascending the mountain; all were impacted by lightning strikes. Several members of one team were removed from the mountain in body bags. Several climbers plummeted thousands of feet to their death in the valley below. My own body trembled uncontrollably as our team worked to place climbing hardware into cracks in the wall, to secure our positions, and rest until our nerves calmed enough to continue our ascent. We continued climbing after this harrowing experience, but never without having a secure escape route in mind, should something unexpected occur again.

There are several climbing proverbs or aphorisms that can apply to all those who serve in people-helping professions, including ministry work.

Reaching the summit is optional. Getting down is mandatory.¹

There are old climbers and bold climbers, but no old and bold climbers.²

Youthful enthusiasm and lofty intentions are a great way to start an endeavor, but alone are insufficient to help you reach the summit or cross the finish line of a successful ministry career in fulfillment of God's calling on your life. In ministry, unexpected storms will occur. You will be tested to the limit of your endurance. You will encounter obstacles

that seem impossible to overcome. Every vocation has terms to describe these career-threatening moments. Here are some examples:

- Marathon runners *hit the wall*.
- Aspiring writers experience *writer's block*.
- Mountain climbers encounter *false summits*.
- Students taking exams *choke* and perform poorly.
- Aspiring professionals encounter *glass ceilings*.
- Deep-sea divers *hit rock bottom*.
- Psychologists' patients have *brain freeze*, making clarity of thought impossible.
- The psalmist discussed *the valley of the shadow of death*.
- St. John of the Cross called it *the dark night of the soul*.
- Kierkegaard wrote about *fear and trembling* and *sickness unto death*.

All these expressions describe that dangerous place where motivation to continue completely *disappears into thin air*.

Scripture is filled with examples of leaders who encountered blocked goals leading to discouragement and despair:

- Abraham waited twenty-five years for a promised son to be born.
- Moses wandered forty years in the wilderness and only viewed the promised land from afar.
- Job lost all his ten children, his health, and his possessions in a single week.
- David fled from jealous Saul for over twelve years.
- Isaiah was undone.
- Elijah wanted to die.
- The apostle Paul reported, "There was no rest for us. We faced conflict from every direction, with battles on the outside and fear on the inside" (2 Cor. 7:5 NLT).

In the “Faith Hall of Fame” chapter in Hebrews 11, we read:

Some were jeered at, and their backs were cut open with whips. Others were chained in prisons. Some died by stoning, some were sawed in half, and others were killed with the sword. Some went about wearing skins of sheep and goats, destitute and oppressed and mistreated. They were too good for this world, wandering over deserts and mountains, hiding in caves and holes in the ground. All these people earned a good reputation because of their faith, yet none of them received all that God had promised. For God had something better in mind for us, so that they would not reach perfection without us. Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. (Heb. 11:36—12:2 NLT)

The heroes described in Scripture are all characterized by a *hope* that empowered them to endure and persevere in their calling. Not all reached the summit or crossed the finish line, but all maintained that unquenchable spark of hope that kept them moving forward, knowing that God lovingly awaited them on the other side.

The desires (or gods) of this world are exposed and summarized by the apostle John in his first epistle:

For the world offers only a craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions. These are not from the Father, but are from this world. (1 John 2:16 NLT)

These desires or worldly cravings may promise fulfillment, but they never deliver on what they promise. They do not fulfill; they only enslave. What our Father in heaven offers *does* fulfill. He asks us to fulfill our stewardship. In so doing, we will experience life and vitality when our human spirits grow weary in the journey.

Viktor Frankl, an Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist, and his wife, Tilly, were detained in Nazi concentration camps. Frankl worked as a slave laborer in the Dachau camp. Tilly perished in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. Frankl's mother, Elsa, was executed at Auschwitz. His brother died as a slave in the mining operations at Auschwitz. In his book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, Dr. Frankl penned these words:

We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.³

Jesus talked about the kind of life that he desired for his followers, including those he called to shepherd or lead others: “The thief’s purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life” (John 10:10 NLT).

The apostle Paul, when mentoring his young protégé on how to instruct people to use their wealth properly for kingdom purposes, gave Timothy the explanation or rationale with these words: “. . . so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life” (1 Tim. 6:19).

What did Jesus mean when he said, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10)?

What was the apostle Paul referring to when he said to Timothy: “. . . epi lambanomai tes ontos zoes,” which is translated “*to grasp hold of the life that is truly living*”?⁴

How does this apply to those who are called to serve God and others in ministry or other caregiving vocations? Are we living the life that we call others to live?

Statistics on clergy burnout as well as the fallout from other caregiving vocations is alarmingly high. Of those men and women who go to seminary (postgraduate, two to three years beyond college), only one out of six are still in ministry at retirement age. Hardly a week goes by that I don’t hear another story of a burnout victim in ministry. Why? What is unique to ministry-related vocations that have such a dramatic dropout rate?

This book is based on the findings of a twelve-year longitudinal study called the Crosshairs Research Project, which began in 2001 to discover why people drop out of the ministry profession and vocations related to caregiving. The outcome of the research project was startling, yet amazingly simple. This book is about the findings and seeks to answer the question: What does one do to curb the fallout?

Consider those people who serve in ministry and people-helping vocations as marathon runners. The distribution curve indicates that more marathoners drop out of the race between miles eighteen and twenty-one

than during the other twenty-two miles. Knowing the statistics can help prepare runners for what they'll face during those critical four miles. Similarly, knowing the indicators of trouble in ministerial and other people-helping vocations can help individuals take preemptive action.

This book is for those of you who . . .

- Choose a life of serving others.
- Live a life marked by the ministry of interruptions and inconvenience.
- Realize that the true paycheck of life this side of heaven does not reach a bank account.
- Recognize that life is full of opportunities to make an incorruptible eternal investment.
- Want to reach their full strength in every area of life.

Why was this book written? God wants his children to experience a sustaining, abundant life *now*, on this part of our journey, not only later when we transition to the next life. Ministry leaders and caregivers, if they are to effectively lead and disciple others, must come to understand and experience what God desires for them . . . now!

In the chapters that deal with navigating specific risks of ministry, very few of the ideas, concepts, and strategies originate with me. They represent wisdom and insight I have gleaned from countless authors and other sources, and of course from my experience with thousands of clients across my career.

The topics are included here because they were found to be helpful in counseling and coaching leaders and vocational caregivers. I have learned to see life through the eyes of my clients. I have vicariously experienced their stumbles and failures. I have felt the agony and pain when leaders have chosen not to trust or believe God about the path to abundant life, thinking one of the world's systems more beneficial and rewarding than God's ways.

If you are a pastor, church staff, nonprofit ministry leader, involved in a people-helping profession, or a professional counselor or coach, then it is my prayer that the content of this book will be helpful to you.

This book is dedicated to God's servants who desire to be proactive in maintaining their health and wellbeing throughout their lifetime of service to others.

This book is for those who want to better understand, predict, and prepare to navigate through the low times in life without being derailed or taken off purpose with God's calling on their life.

This book is also dedicated to those who desire helpful strategies that lead to the resiliency, sustainability, and vitality that are essential for lifelong service to others in a way that honors God.

Acknowledgments

Writing this book was clearly not an individual effort. It involved influencers who have spoken into my life over a lifetime. Without them, there would be no book to write. My gratitude goes out to those friends who have spoken into my life over many breakfasts for more than thirty years—Bob, Tug, and Tom. I deeply appreciate Hugh, a gifted word-smith, who did a rewrite of my draft that read more like a dissertation to publish in a psychological journal. Many thanks go to Susan and her editorial team at Wesleyan Publishing House who only increased my appreciation of publishing. I am deeply grateful to my parents, Bob and Jan, who were living examples of love and service over my lifetime. To my love, Debbie, you have gracefully engraved so many good things on my heart with the inner beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit. To my favorite vocational people helpers, sons and daughters—Josh, Becca, and Tim (wife, Kelsey)—you inspire me with your lives of love for God and service to others.

—Denny Howard



PART 1

The Crosshairs Research Project

Warning: Danger Ahead!

Peril is unavoidable in life. Wherever you live, conditions may arise that create natural peril with the potential to produce catastrophic life-changing impact, disrupting or destroying the normal routine of life. In coastal regions, it may be the risk of a tsunami, hurricane, or storm surge. Inland it could be a tornado, earthquake, blizzard, or wildfire. Others face lightning, sinkholes, mudslides, disease—the list could go on.



Fortunately, early warning systems now give people time to prepare for or evade most potentially catastrophic events. This has not always been the case. As recent as the early twentieth century, many of these life-threatening natural phenomena would arrive with little warning. For example, the hurricane of 1900 made landfall on September 8 in the United States (US) city of Galveston, Texas. Its estimated winds of 145 miles per hour made it a Category 4 storm. It was the deadliest hurricane in the history of US and the second costliest. The hurricane caused the deaths of an estimated 6,000 to 12,000 people, mostly due to either a lack of warning or a foolish disregard for warnings.

Similarly, history is replete with accounts of ministry leaders whose lives, reputations, and families were devastated or destroyed when they fell victim to the catastrophic spiritual, emotional, or relational dangers related to their professions. Just like unexpected natural perils, *inner perils* can manifest themselves when least expected, catching these leaders

unprepared and leaving them desperately scrambling to survive in the wake of a disastrous event.

Based on research, we now know that there are predictable dangers and low times, once hidden, for those who serve in ministry and other people-helping vocations. With a new understanding, we can be pre-emptive in navigating these times.

The Challenge Question

Most people who are constantly exposed to the threat of a natural peril take precautionary measures and make advance preparations to weather the storm. In many cases, preparation involves leaving the threat zone entirely, following evaluation routes established to bring people out of harm's way.

The challenge question is this: As one who serves in a ministry or another people-helping vocation:

- If you could anticipate the hidden dangers and low periods of life, would you heed the warning?
- Would you prepare for the impending dangers and low times? Or would you, like some facing hurricanes, tornadoes, blizzards, and earthquakes, ignore the warnings?

Hopefully, your answer is emphatic: *Yes, I would heed and prepare.* When we possess a deeper understanding and anticipate the challenges before us, we can be better prepared to deal with those challenges. Being prepared is your best defense and offense in meeting those challenges you will inevitably face in a vocation of caring for others.

A Common Malady

The greater share of my life's work has involved counseling and coaching those who serve in people-helping vocations. Who are *people helpers*? They include ministry leaders, clergy, humanitarian workers, nonprofit workers, missionaries, healthcare workers, and others in similar career fields. These people have spent a great deal of time, financial resources, and energy to gain education and credentials in their respective fields.

In the last two decades, I have conducted face-to-face counseling and coaching appointments with more than 6,000 ministry leaders both inside and outside the US. What I have discovered is that many of them are afflicted with a common malady. Countless times I've heard words similar to the following phrases spoken by ministry leaders and other people-helping professionals:

- "I don't know what is wrong with me. I can't seem to get back in the game."
- "I'm just not with it! It's like my rhythm is off or something."
- "I don't want to do this anymore, but what else can I do?"
- "I'm successful, but it isn't satisfying anymore."
- "I'm bored! I want to do something different."

What they didn't realize was that they were caught in the crosshairs.

The Crosshairs

A distinct and predictable low period in life, often without a known cause, is a crosshair. These low times are marked by a lack of resiliency, satisfaction, vitality, and vision.

During a crosshair period, a particular circumstance can cause the vocational people helper to be in a state of extreme spiritual, emotional,

or relational vulnerability. A crosshair can diminish sound judgment, impair decision making, or compromise one's self-control. All the while, the person caught in a crosshair may not be able to get his or her heart and mind around the *why* of their low period. There is just a sense of not being “with it.”

In this chapter, you will gain an overview of the Crosshairs Research Study. This information is intended to increase your awareness and help you prepare for the crosshair moments unique to those who serve in caregiving and ministry professions.

I have a deep-felt gratitude for the leaders and vocational people helpers for the mutual wisdom acquired as they invited me into their private worlds in order to help them navigate the challenges before them. This long and winding journey with others has taken me, in a sense, through a thousand depressions, betrayals, infidelities, moral failures, disillusionments, and fears.

Some of these good people in different parts of the world have experienced being jailed, persecuted, and tortured for their faith—fingers chopped off one at a time, slowly burned in the hot sun while chained to a stake, or even burned with a hot iron. Others have had knuckles broken or flesh pulled from their bodies with pliers. Yet it was not these severe adversities that caused so many of them to abandon the mission. In fact, those who have been through such adversities seem to be endowed with a grace that fuels a remarkable resiliency. Though many suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, they possess an inner reserve that drives them back to the front lines of the fray.

Instead, it was the subtle, hidden dangers—the unexpected snipers and landmines of ministry or serving in people-helping vocations—that prevented them from meeting the long-term challenges of serving others for a lifetime.

The Study

There seems to be a predictable pattern of low times among those who serve in vocations such as the pastorate, nonprofit work, missions, education, and other helping professions. The Crosshairs Research Study includes the gathering of data from more than 663 participants in counseling and coaching who have exited their vocations during these predictable low periods.

In the remainder of this chapter, you'll find an overview of the Crosshairs Research, including its hypothesis and findings. This may help you begin to understand the low and challenging seasons in your life that did not seem to make sense to you at the time. The rest of the book, then, attempts to answer the questions: *So what? What can I do about the crosshairs?*

As you read, keep in mind that two significant mistakes can be made in regards to research projects and their outcomes. The first is to ignore the results and not take them seriously. The second is to take them too seriously, as if they were gospel truth. Both extremes are potentially harmful.

The invitation and challenge to you as the reader is to first understand the Crosshairs Research outcomes and then consider the ramifications in your own life. In the same way that people prepare for natural disasters like tornadoes, hurricanes, and tsunamis—these research findings can help you be proactive and preemptive in preparing for times when you may be vulnerable, thereby minimizing their potential damaging impact.

The Hypothesis

There are distinct periods of low times for those who serve in ministry and other people-helping vocations throughout their career. It is possible to establish a way to predict these distinct low periods. If these seasons of low vitality are predictable and can be anticipated, then it may be within the realm of possibilities to discover ways to navigate these challenging seasons more effectively.¹

The Findings

Over a twelve-year period of tracking 663 ministry and nonprofit workers, 83 percent of those who sought counseling did so in one of five distinct periods of service in their career field. The Crosshairs Research relied on surveys, inventories, and case studies for the data collection.

The counseling and coaching pointed to troubling dynamics that seemed to fall somewhere in a cycle of six to seven years of serving. In other words, years six through seven, thirteen through fourteen, twenty-one through twenty-two, twenty-eight through twenty-nine, and thirty-six through thirty-seven were when people seemed to struggle the most. The issues they experienced could be professional or personal in nature, and seemed to apply in relationship to a current assignment as well as to the overall years of service.

- The first crosshair pertained to the total number of years in the vocation.
- The second crosshair pertained to the total number of years in the current assignment.
- The third crosshair pertained to the total number of years of marriage.²

For example, Angela has been in ministry for fourteen years total at two churches. She served in youth ministry for six years at her first church assignment and then served in women's ministry for eight years at her second assignment. The first assignment just ran its course, and she was done with youth ministry. After all, Angela's training and dream was to lead a women's ministry. But after eight years in women's ministry, she found herself thinking, "I'm tired of this. It seems like the same old thing over and over. I think it's time to move on."

Angela was caught in the crosshairs.

When presenting the research data to vocational people helpers, frequently someone will say, "Oh, the seven-year itch!" However, this

seven-year itch is just a reference to a movie from long ago and has no bearing on the Crosshairs Research. Other individuals responded by making reference to the Bible on the significance of the number seven or the Year of Jubilee. However, the only preconceived notion that called for the research project was the repeated and cyclic patterns of when counseling or coaching were sought by clients who served in people-helping vocations. The data was collected inductively. The counselor who worked with vocational people helpers seemed to experience a “here we go again” dynamic, which begged to question as to whether it was just coincidence or an actual pattern.

The study revealed that these low periods emerged in patterns that could be anticipated and therefore predictable. If these low periods could be clearly established and anticipated, then it might be possible to be better prepared in advance.

Marks of Being Caught in the Crosshairs

Crosshairs moments—those predictable and identifiable low periods when most exits from ministry and nonprofit leadership occur—involve the low times, the valley experiences, or what we refer to as *bad days*. As the research was compiled involving hundreds of case files, the following patterns began to emerge that seemed to predict when these vulnerable low times would surface in the life of the vocational people helper.

These low times were characterized by the following indicators:

- **Lack of personal resiliency** characterized by difficulty in “bouncing back” from the rigors and blows of everyday ministry life.
- **Lack of personal satisfaction** characterized by depleted enjoyment in working with and serving people’s spiritual needs through love.

- **Lack of overall vitality** characterized by low or no energy to embrace the day with enthusiasm and joy in fulfilling the call to shepherd others in their walks with God.
- **A clouded vision of the future** characterized by uncertainty about how to lead one's congregation into the future.³

From this research, we believe that such low times are predictable enough to issue warnings, just like we would if catastrophic damage was likely if storm preparations were not made. If these patterns can be identified and anticipated, then preparation can be made in advance to weather the storm, do cleanup work, and resume life as normal.

A Crosshairs Time Continuum

A word picture may be helpful to understand the crosshairs dynamic as it applies to your life. White-water rafting and kayaking can be a very rewarding adventure. There is nothing like the adrenaline rush when going down the small waterfalls and crashing through the wild rapids. However, at times, the adrenaline rush turns into fear and one wonders if the chosen route was a mistake. Some people consider the rush in the stomach an exhilarating feeling. Others call it “the butterflies” while others consider it sheer panic.

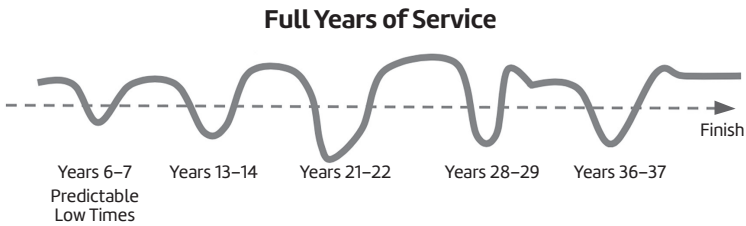
By examining the Crosshairs Research findings on a time continuum, you can see the predictable low times much like a river rafting map can indicate the dangerous areas while rafting or kayaking. Having a guide anticipate the difficult rapids, allows a person to navigate the challenges more effectively. The rapids make life interesting. However, the rapids can also take a life.

Let's take a look at the time-continuum map of the predictable low times and danger points as we navigate the rapids of ministry and other people-helping vocations. Eighty-three percent of vocational people

Warning: Danger Ahead!

.....

helpers who sought ongoing counseling or coaching did so within a six-month range of these five distinct periods. We will examine those periods up close later.



A Word of Encouragement

We encourage you to do your own crosshairs analysis. If you take nothing else from this research, please never lose sight of the low-time indicators. Proactive and preemptive action can save your ministry and your marriage as you respond with rest, restoration, and renewal activities.

You may not be in a crosshair at the current season of life. However, just in the same way we can prepare for a hurricane or tornado, we can be prepared for the crosshairs. In this next chapter, we will take a closer look at the indicators of being caught in the crosshairs. The remainder of the book will help you answer these questions:

- So why should this be important to me?
- What can I do to more effectively navigate the crosshairs?
- How can I help a friend or colleague grow through a crosshairs experience?

Before moving on, see the “Personal Insight Exercise” in chapter 1 of the At Full Strength Workbook. The workbook also includes an expanded version of the research statistics presented in this chapter. At Full Strength Workbook is available for free download at: FullStrength.org/AtFullStrength.

.....

Additional Stats and Insights from Our Research

- Eighty-three percent of the ministry leader participants who sought formalized counseling or coaching met the criteria of being in one or more crosshairs when they sought assistance. It may indicate that professional people helpers (ministers in particular), seek help only when they are in a very complicated situation. There were some indications that personal pride and image management may have deterred some from seeking preemptive help.
- Over 65 percent of the moral failures, forced terminations, and distressed resignations involved a crosshairs moment.
- Surprisingly to the people helpers, the moral failures, forced terminations, and distressed resignations were not the problem, but rather, symptoms of a deeply hidden issue. For example, a ministry leader who had an affair may assume that when the marriage was back on track that the problem was solved. However, the adultery needed to be treated as the symptom of a deeper problem. The relationship to the true problem is similar to a headache when one actually has a brain tumor.

- The participants who had served in ministry and other types of people helping indicated that long term, everyone will eventually experience at least one or more crosshairs experience.
- The crosshairs experiences were not necessarily accompanied or triggered by any particular precipitating situations. For example, a ministry or nonprofit leader (outside the crosshairs experience) could be going through terrible circumstances, but still maintain resilience and satisfaction in the overall mission, vitality, and clear vision. Paradoxically, a person could have a thriving ministry and be in a crosshairs experience.⁴

.....