



ENDORSEMENTS



From Burned Out to Beloved ***Soul Care for Wounded Healers***

November 17, 2020 | \$17, 208 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-4795-2

Bethany Dearborn Hiser is the director of soul care for Northwest Family Life, a network of therapists trained to work with survivors of domestic violence and sexual trauma. As a bilingual social worker, chaplain, and pastoral advocate, Hiser has worked in a variety of ministry and social service settings with people affected by addiction, sexual exploitation, incarceration, and immigration.

Teaching Others How to Flourish

“What Bethany Dearborn Hiser offers here is essential for every pastor, social worker, caregiver, or friend: a gaze into the groaning beauty of being human. Her vision of this mystery is candid, sustained, tender, and hopeful. Holistic life and ministry has seldom been portrayed as more inspiring, or as more daunting. Hiser gives those of us in ministry a clear reminder that human beings reflect the exquisite glory of God’s design as well as our human proclivity to be victims and perpetrators of our own worst instincts. Therein lies the glory and agony of the human journey that every teenager, young adult, client, older parishioner, family, or small group must face. Our individual and collective need for credible hope turns first on God’s gift in Jesus Christ and also on our readiness to live nothing more, but nothing less, than a truly human life—for our sake and our neighbor’s. This is the mission of God’s grace in every ministry setting. I’m grateful that Hiser helps us see why we need this ourselves and how to live it in freedom and joy, more than in exhaustion.”

—Mark Labberton, president of Fuller Theological Seminary

“If you are picking up this book, you probably have a huge heart for the desperate and broken ones on the earth. This is beautiful, but if you try to save the world in your own strength, you will be extremely burned out. Bethany Dearborn Hiser could attest to that. Then God led her on a journey of recovery and reflection, and this powerful book was birthed through the process. During our first years in Mozambique rescuing abandoned children from the streets and praying for daily provision, I also reached my limits. I just wanted to go work at K-Mart, but then God encountered me in a radical way. He taught me to abide in him. John 14 and 15 became my life verses. As you read these pages, let God do a deep work in your heart and lead you into his fullness. God wants to encounter you and fill you with the oil of his presence. He wants to reshape your ideas about who you are and how you’re called to minister. We are the lovers of Jesus, the body of Christ. We are fully accepted in him. Living from the secret place, we can truly burn for him and not burn out!”

—Heidi G. Baker, cofounder and executive chairman of the board, Iris Global

“Applicable. Accessible. Essential. *From Burned Out to Beloved* gently and authentically challenges false belief systems, especially for those of us addicted to helping, overcommitting, and saying yes. Bethany Dearborn Hiser addresses the barriers that keep us from living fully from our true selves and provides applicable guidance toward healing and freedom. The text is vivid with concrete stories and examples, full of practical steps and guides, and grounded in prayer and authentic connection with God. Hiser looks not just at the why of burnout but even deeper at the motives behind our work . . . and at the how of healing, with clear steps toward freedom and growth. The text sings of God’s deep love for us and our ultimate need for connection with him to sustain any meaningful work we do. This is a relevant and critical guide for anyone who is involved in ministry and people-centered work. We’re adopting it as part of our staff-training program as an essential read.”

—Hannah Bryant, executive director of Leadership Mission International

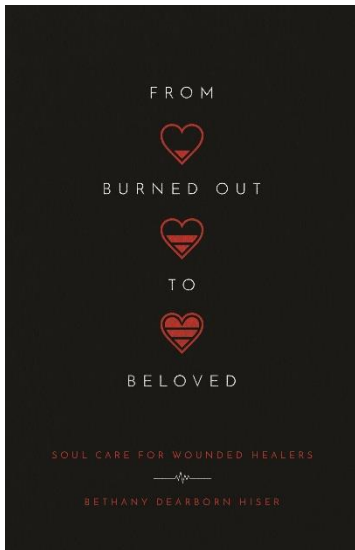


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As a social worker, jail chaplain, and justice advocate, Bethany Dearborn Hiser pushed herself to the brink of burnout—only to discover that she needed the very soul care she was providing to others. Tackling the effects of secondary trauma and burnout, this is a trauma-informed soul care guide for Christians working in high-stress, helping professions.

Help for the Professional Helpers

I'm not sure exactly when my burnout started. When I look back at journal writings from even the early days of my social-work career, I see signs of despair, exhaustion, misplaced guilt, and inadequacy.

About five years before I burned out, I was working for the first time as a case manager at one of the largest service providers for people experiencing homelessness in downtown Seattle. It was my role to assist the “employable homeless” in finding housing and employment. Although I had previously volunteered as a mentor in juvenile detention, organized youth service trips in Seattle, and lived and studied in Central America, I was in over my head. I wrote in my journal: “I am completely overwhelmed right now. Socked in the stomach, overcome by grief, infuriated at the injustice and disparity that exists in the world—the absolutely insane violation of people’s basic human rights. I feel like I’m not really moving anything forward. It’s not enough. When will it ever be enough?”

Not long into the job, I started a master’s degree in social work. I already knew I was struggling to handle the work, but I thought I just needed more training. For three years, I studied while working two part-time case-management jobs. I simultaneously took classes, researched sex trafficking, managed a drop-in center for migrant farmworkers, and accompanied families as they faced deportation, abuse, and the everyday grind of barely making ends meet. Twice a week, I led domestic-violence support groups and staffed the women’s shelter until midnight. I organized a coalition to address local sex trafficking and held monthly meetings for law enforcement professionals, social workers, community leaders, and educators.

There was always more to do. I rarely slowed down, let alone considered vacations. My family spent a week at a nearby cabin each summer, and instead of joining them, I drove down just for an afternoon or maybe an overnight. Then I went back to work. When I took time off, it was to visit organizations working with former sex workers in Thailand and Cambodia.

I didn’t give myself permission to play or to do anything solely for fun or relaxation. I only read novels and watched movies that had a globally significant storyline.

I felt that I didn’t deserve or couldn’t afford to take care of myself in the face of so much suffering. Saying no felt like either a liability or an expression of disdain for the needs of others and for myself.

When I recognized my exhaustion and compassion fatigue, I judged myself. I thought, *Who am I to complain? My life is full of blessings that go far beyond my essential needs.*

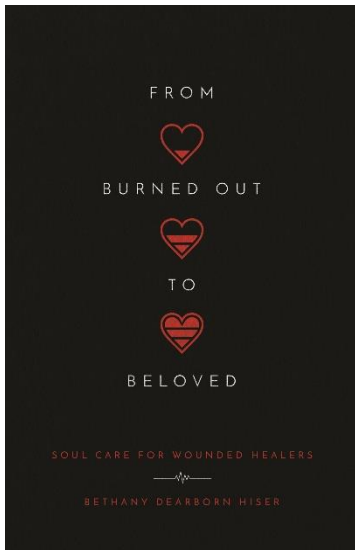
I heard countless stories of trauma directly from survivors as well as time after time from my community. I had very few boundaries and answered calls at all hours. More than once I agreed to go to the hospital for sexual assault calls because I happened to live closer than other staff. I could take it for the team. I thought I was invincible.



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“From Burned Out to Beloved is an essential road map for those who want to be of service. We welcome our wounds and shift how we see. We don’t go to the margins to make a difference but to be made different by those we encounter there. Hiser’s book leads the way.” —Father Greg Boyle, founder of Homeboy Industries

My mind began to feel saturated with traumatic realities. Pressing on felt easier than making changes. I also didn’t want to stop engaging and advocating for changes. I felt called to the work and grateful for the gift of listening and knowing people’s stories. I wanted to move forward, to move mountains of societal barriers.

Over time my obsession with always doing the work had chipped away at my ability to do the work at all. I didn’t yet realize the impact of my internal narratives and belief systems.

Slowly my identity became more and more centered on what I did, rather than who I was. I started to believe that my identity and worth were based on helping others. Worse, I thought I didn’t have value as a person unless I was serving people in need. I couldn’t stop doing this type of work, because I was called, because I cared, because I was addicted. Beneath my compassion was a drive—even a need for meaning and self-worth.

During the final year of my master’s degree, a fellow student encouraged me to take a class called “Self-Care for Social Workers.” I resisted. It sounded tedious. They would probably just tell me I needed to exercise, eat healthy food, rest, and write a self-care plan. I didn’t think I needed it. I thought I was already doing those things—and I had too much to do in general.

Despite my doubts—and with some persuasion—I signed up for the class. I began to learn that trauma affects everyone who is exposed to it. So this includes not only those plagued by violence, homelessness, and addiction, but also the social workers, therapists, pastors, relief workers, and community development workers who try to help. Psychologists call this secondary trauma or vicarious trauma. It is the trauma that comes with repeatedly hearing the stories of and working with people in crisis. In the same way firefighters can be stained with soot and ash, I was covered with the residue of my own work.

Secondary trauma is normal and hard to avoid, so I didn’t need to apologize for being affected or for needing help. But learning how affected I was by trauma was one thing. Making changes and moving forward was another. I realized I needed to be saved, but not from the difficulty of the work. I needed to be saved from my unhealthy motives and beliefs, which had led me to dark spaces.

Before I experienced burnout, I thought self-care was superficial. In popular culture, *self-care* often means nothing more than pampering. As I’ve worked through my own barriers to self-care, I’ve come to see that taking care of myself involves deeper inner healing and recovery as well as more integrated practices than occasional excursions to the salon. For me, it is about connection to God, who not only sustains and partners with me but also helps me to accept my brokenness and tend to my wounds. It involves knowing that I am beloved, regardless of what I do.

Now I confess that I am in recovery of being a social-justice messiah-complex workaholic.

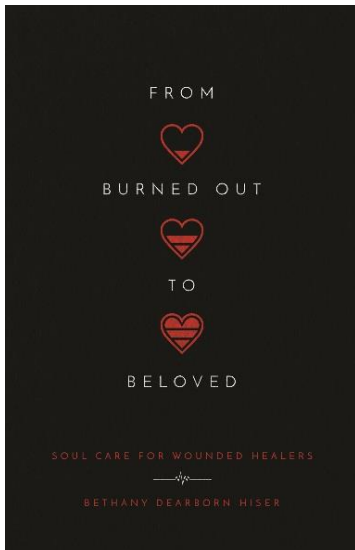


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“From Burned Out to Beloved takes us on an important journey of self-discovery, enabling us to balance contemplation and activism in a way that brings healing and wholeness. This is an important book for all who feel the growing pressures of ministry.”

—Christine Sine, author of *The Gift of Wonder: Creative Practices for Delighting in God*

And I’m not alone. I know many who are also desperate for support, burning out, and leaving their work. They’re longing to be resilient as they live out their calling and yearning to know the God of love who accepts and supports them as they are. Instead of feeling invigorated by their work, they are discouraged, depleted, and depressed. Perhaps you are one of them.

I don’t intend to offer you a detailed explanation of how we are affected by the work or by trauma in general. Many excellent resources have been published on self-care, resiliency, compassion fatigue, trauma exposure, and burnout.

I invite you to join me on a journey that weaves together trauma research, spiritual practices, addiction recovery, and inner healing. Although I’ve gained much from others’ perspectives, my offerings largely stem from walking through the fire of my own burnout.

I believe that together we can journey toward basing our identity on being God’s beloveds instead of on what we do or what others say about us. We can walk together toward freedom and grace instead of in a desperate attempt to make a difference. We can learn to love ourselves as we love our neighbors.

This is a journey of pride and brokenness, of learning to say no and to ask for help. It’s a journey of forgiveness and healing that involves learning to combine contemplation with activism and being with doing. This work is worth it, because you are worth it. It’s also worth it because, as you heal, you’ll become more resilient. Your work will be more sustainable and effective, and you will have the tools and insight to enhance the structures and systems you are a part of, fostering environments that encourage others to live sustainably as well.

Soul care is not for the faint of heart. Yet, to thrive—let alone survive—in this work, soul care is not optional. It is essential.

—Adapted from the introduction, “Confessions of a Social Justice Workaholic”



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