



FROM THE FRAY

BATTLE WORN

Soul Care is a gritty brand of spiritual care marked by rugged honesty, fierce compassion and robust biblical truth. It is built on three key convictions explored in these pages.



BATTLE WORN

The Approach 01

Life is Messy 04

Theology Must Bleed 06

The Tomb Is Empty 08

Why it Matters 09

NO PAIN. NO CHAPLAIN.

Teachers help people learn. Farmers provide people food. Doctors heal people's bodies. Carpenters give people homes. Chaplains absorb people's pain.

We walk with people in their most vulnerable moments. We are spiritual EMT's. Spiritual triage is our trade. You will find us behind the scene of a crisis tending to unseen wounds.

The principles, stories and lessons you will find in the following pages are hard won. They are bloody, sweaty and tear-stained. They come from the gut of two chaplains.

You will find an approach to spiritual care marked by rugged honesty, fierce compassion and robust biblical truth. We call this brand of gritty pastoral support, "battle worn soul care."

KORY M. CAPPS | BILL J. MESAHE



I just came from a tragedy. As I write, I can smell the residue of smoke sticking to my blue jacket. A maverick flicker of fire and a design flaw would not only test the structure of the house, but the durability of the soul.

The family was huddled in the living room by the fireplace watching Martin Luther King speech videos and discussing the importance of the holiday. It was the first time they felt they could breathe since the surgery that successfully removed the intestinal cancer in mom's body.

When the fire started, the kids were rushed outside and into the van. Smoke billowed through the house and found escape out the windows. As the kids looked on intently, they could make out a figure frantically spraying a fire extinguisher. They were terrified.

The angry flames would not be tamed by one man. Helplessly, he stood outside watching the fire devour his home. He saw panic in his wife's eyes, fear in his children.

The silent groans rattled his soul. The silent questions squeezed his heart. "Why now? Why this? Why God?" The flames assaulted more than his home.

As I drove, I prayed. I always feel inadequate stepping into these situations, always. As I pulled onto the street, a fire truck and multiple support vehicles passed me. I pulled up to the house, threw on my coat and headed to the door.

I could faintly hear voices in the house. I walked through the front door. The couple stood there with coats on staring at the wreckage, unbelief in their eyes. I walked to them and stood. I just stood.

As I looked down, my eyes grew

moist. The sight of their pajama pants was too much. Is there no safe place? We looked at what used to be a living room. The walls and ceiling were destroyed. It no longer looked like a home.

The carpet was torn up and there was three inches of standing water. You could see water logged books and destroyed speakers on the ground right next to the white teddy bear. As we put our arms around each other to pray, I knew. The ground I stood on was sacred.

To be welcomed into someone's pain is a holy privilege. It is the definition of honor. We have learned that hallowed ground most often looks like the shambles of this family's home. It is always messy, it is always raw.

Compassion is our vocation. We are commissioned to walk with people in pain. We get the call when the fire desolates the home. We come, knowing it has done much more than that.

Life is hard, sometimes impossible. The ubiquity of pain demands great care in matters of spiritual support. Rule number one when walking on holy ground, take off your shoes.

We are no strangers to pain. We have been on both ends of spiritual care. We know the sting of trite answers and smiley solutions. We have also experienced the respite of compassionate tears, the reassuring power of presence and the refreshment of a timely word.

As chaplains who live in the fray, we long to live and serve well at the intersection of life's mess and God's Word. We want to provide spiritual care that is rigorous and judicious humble and bold, discerning and fierce. This intentional approach is called "battle worn soul care."

A black and white photograph of a stone wall, possibly a church wall, with a dark overlay on the left side containing text. The wall is made of large, rectangular stone blocks. On the right side, a person is visible sitting on a ledge. The overall tone is somber and reflective.

**LIFE IS
MESSY.**

**THEOLOGY
MUST
BLEED.**

**THE TOMB IS
EMPTY.**

Battle Worn Soul Care is built on three principles.

LIFE IS MESSY

Life is messy. That may be the most self-evident statement ever made. Even with our best efforts and intentions, life gets messy. It's hard. Unpredictable. Disappointing. Frustrating and unfair. Life is very, very not fair.

Regardless of how you keep score, the math doesn't add up the way we think it should. Bad things happen to good people. Good things happen to bad people. Accidents and diseases don't care what color your skin is, whom you worship, or how much time you spend volunteering at nursing homes and animal shelters.

Without exception, every human must use words like cancer, depression, weep, sorrow, frustration, and struggle. Once would be too many times, but it often seems as if those words form the basis for our existence.

Some of our messes are self-inflicted. Others we inherit in the same way we're assigned an eye color and a shoe size. Wish you were a foot taller? Well, you probably didn't ask for an alcoholic parent or receding hairline either. Yet, life is messy. Often, life just hurts.

If we compartmentalize our existence, we can see how every aspect of who we are contributes to the mess: physical, social, emotional and spiritual.

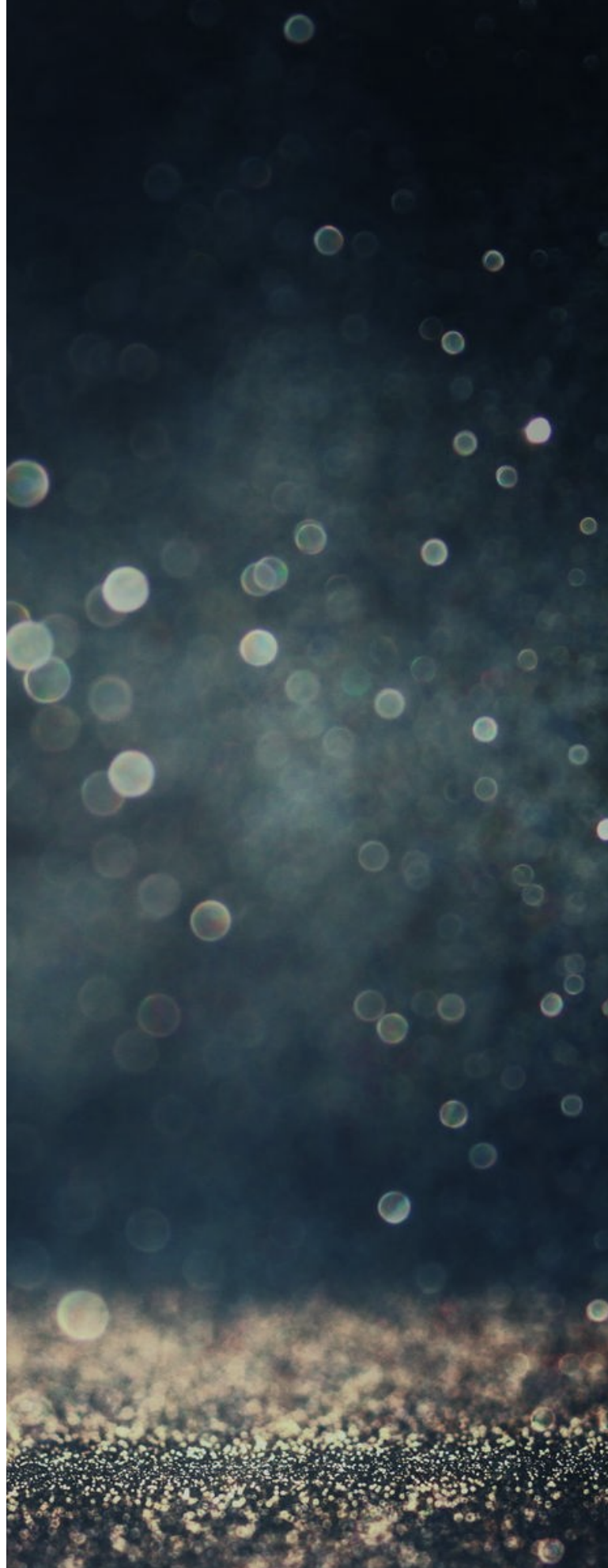
Physical

Our mortality testifies to our brokenness. From the moment we're born, the universe goes to work breaking us down and depleting our life force. Try as we might, much of our physical existence is out of our control.

Eat your vegetables, drink filtered water, and do plenty of cardio. The death rate is still one per person. Every ache, pain, cough and diagnosis reminds us: these bodies and this world are not eternally compatible.

Social

There are approximately 7.5 billion people on the planet. Most of them are indifferent to your existence. However, once you turned two and learned the word "mine," you made your first enemy.





While the names will change, the list of people currently unhappy with you will outlive you. The best people to walk the planet still die with enemies. Being good has little to no impact on being liked. Life is messy.

Even on their best days, our friends and loved ones are carrying around messes of their own. Eventually, parts of their mess spill onto you and your mess. Often, that results in feelings of betrayal, failure, and disappointment. Suddenly those 7.5 billion indifferent people look more appealing.

Emotional

Perhaps more than anything else, our emotions are out front—representing who we are. They reveal what we value, what we fear, and what we fear losing. Emotions shouldn't dominate us, but we can't afford to ignore them either.

On good days, our emotions can move us to be generous and self-sacrificing. By design, they help us survive by signaling danger and impatiently urging us to fight or flee. On occasion, those dangers get emotionally distorted and lead us toward the mother of all messes: insecurity.

It's difficult to overstate the power of insecurity. It's been said that man is driven entirely by his/her insecurities. Whether that's true or not, we expend a tremendous amount of energy compensating (usually over-compensating) for our perceived shortcomings.

We posture. We portray. We practice, and we pretend to be what we think we're supposed to be. It's usually obvious to everyone but ourselves. It's a mess.

Spiritual

Both as cause and effect, all the messes mentioned so far are directly connected to our most profound mess: we are spiritually lost. The messiness of life makes us question our value and purpose. Because we question our value and purpose, we create messes everywhere we go.

Consequently, our most savage insecurity is a spiritual one: Am I enough? Does any of this matter? It goes without saying: those questions are intimately connected to our attitudes and actions.

Life is messy. It's an uncontrollable, inexhaustible mess. In our careers of walking with people in their pain and suffering, often the only appropriate response is to sit and cry in agreement: life's not fair.

THEOLOGY MUST BLEED

If you've ever tried to clean up a mess, you know how hard it is to stay clean while doing it. If it's an especially messy mess, everything you use gets ruined in the process.

The same is true of the messes in our personal lives. You can't go through them unaffected. Whether you're wading into your own mess or the messes of those around you, don't expect to stay clean and dry. Some of the most meaningful words in the English language (compassion, empathy) describe coming along side to share in the experiences of others.

Picture the battlefield surgeon: after hours of intense surgery to save a soldier's life, he's drenched in sweat and covered in blood. Every ounce of who he is went into removing the mess of war from the patient's body. This is what we mean when we talk of "Bleeding Theology." There are many things about God we don't understand. Why does he allow life to be so messy? Perhaps the safest answer is: we don't know. However, one thing seems to be clear: God is willing to bleed.

If—after acknowledging the messiness of life—you still believe God has your best

interests at heart, then you might expect Him to be intimately involved in your rescue effort. To be invested and committed to wading into the pit after you. We believe He is.

And we believe that seeing God in the pit—experiencing Him in the mess—is more powerful and more healing for your soul than any emotional high delivered by self-help or prosperity preaching. This project, our profession, and our very lives endeavor to be expressions of battle-worn soul care.

This is a compassionate attempt to wage war on hopelessness in the most God-like way possible: bleeding in the trenches. All we have to offer will come from the fray of our own experiences—our experience as practicing chaplains to be sure. But more to the point—from our experiences of being messy and getting wounded ourselves.

Every wound that's ever healed has taught us one thing: theology has to bleed. Cheap answers and cookie-cutter faith won't do. The response has to be as gritty as the mess. Bleeding theology is what we have to offer. That, and an empty tomb.

**HOPE
HAS AN
ADDRESS**



**THE
EMPTY
TOMB**

Everyday we're invited to step into the messes of those around us. On any given day, we might be called to notify a parent or spouse that their loved one just died.

Broken marriages, attempted suicides, and terminal diagnoses are the reasons people call us. We expect it. It's what we signed up for.

And it's exhausting. It's humbling. At times, it can be both life-giving and depression-inducing. Why do we do it? We do it because the Tomb is Empty.

When Christians say that, they are referring to the Tomb that held Jesus' dead body. For 3 days. Until He got up and walked out of it.

The resurrection of Jesus proves a lot of things. To sort through all of them here would be to risk missing the most important thing: God wins.

God wins. If you're on God's side you win too.

Take just a moment to reorient yourself in the clarity only that statement can deliver. God wins. This is more powerful than, "You can do it" or "Just try harder."

On the days when you have no "try" left in you, God still wins. During the moments when you think you just can't, God still wins.

Some of the scariest movies are the ones that can convince us—even if we're watching the movie for a second or third time—that the bad guy might win. Maybe he'll kill the hero? Is he going to jump out of the darkness when no one is ready? As long as we think the end is in jeopardy, we sit in tension and fear.

Real life isn't like that. God wins. There's no tension over who gets to walk away. God wins. The end isn't in jeopardy. God wins.


There's no promise your life won't sometimes feel like a scary movie. In fact, we're guaranteed it will. At times, life will feel like a messy, bloody, scary movie full of darkness. But we already know

how this story ends. God wins.

Our prayer is that this project will help you welcome the Light of the World into your life. You'll find His light is full of hope. Hope that endures because the end has already been written.

**DON'T BE
ALARMED, HE
SAID. YOU ARE
LOOKING FOR
JESUS THE
NAZARENE,
WHO WAS
CRUCIFIED.
HE HAS RISEN!**

MARK 16:6



**THE
TOMB
IS EMPTY**



WHY IT MATTERS

In this life, pain is the norm, not the exception. Hardship, suffering and death stare us down. They chase our loved ones. We wrestle hard with this reality. We ask hard questions, as we should.

But answers only go so far in the service of the suffering. Putting your arm around a limping friend, walking with them, sweating with them, hurting with

them, crying with them, having no answers with them...that is a completely different story.

Battle worn soul care is not about answering the problem of pain, it's about absorbing it. It moves beyond philosophy to posture. It is a way of being that refuses to be backed down by pain. It equips us to make it every day and to help others do the same.

END.

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