

“DEALING WITH BURNOUT”

1 Kings 19

INTRODUCTION

A few days ago, someone sent me some classic animal photos from *National Geographic Magazine*. These photos are a graphic reminder of how some of us feel about this time of the year.

Would you agree that about this time of the year it's easy to feel like we are buried up to our necks in all kinds of stuff?

We tend to run from one project to another, one appointment to another, one conversation to another...and we feel like we're just swinging from limb to limb hoping to catch whatever comes along.

2. Some of you are young parents, and you're walking around in a “zombie-like state” because your little cherub isn't sleeping. I remember the days when our 1st born didn't sleep through the night until she was a year old! You just dream of the time when you felt rested!

Some of you are parents of elementary age children and your life consists of being a coach, a chauffeur, a cook, a counselor, tutor, teacher, trainer and a thousand other jobs.

And, some of you are parents of teens who go from one relational crisis to another and act like you don't have the slightest idea what they're going through.

Some of you are students going to school full-time and working full-time. You're wondering how to fit in extra-curricular activities you really crave in life.

And, some of you are retired, and you're busier today than you've ever been.

3. The truth is, many of us live hurried, hectic, hassled lives that are on the verge of burnout. The pace of life impacts our marriages, our friendships and our parenting. We experience health ramifications because of the pace of life. In fact, the Japanese have studied the health ramifications of our frantic schedules and discovered that 10,000 Japanese die annually because of “*keroshi*.”

Eg. This problem is so pervasive that Christian psychiatrists, Frank Minrith and Paul Meir discovered that the majority of Americans suffer from a serious, clinical depression at some point in their lives. Most of these people never get help...they just fight this battle on their own.

Eg. Have you ever walked or run on a treadmill? It's easy to get a treadmill moving, and before long it's moving at a pretty good pace. What happens if you forget to touch the console and slow down the treadmill when you want to stop? The treadmill will just about throw you into the wall, won't it? How many of you have seen this commercial?

That's the way some of us feel this morning. Our lives are going faster and faster, and we don't know how to slow down. Some of you wonder how much longer you can keep up the pace. Others of you feel like you've been thrown off the treadmill of life and you're not quite sure how to get back on.

4. As I look around, I think there is a great correlation between what we experience today and what Elijah encountered about 3,000 years ago. When we study Elijah’s life, we discover he was overloaded. He was on the verge of burnout.

In recent weeks, we’ve learned that *“Elijah was a man just like us.”* We’ve discovered he faced many of the same pressures and issues we face.

A great author named, J. Oswald Sanders, said,

“Elijah appeared at zero hour in Israel’s history...like a meteor, he flashed across the inky blackness of Israel’s spiritual night.”

If you’ve been with us, you know Elijah’s story is recorded in the book of 1 Kings. So, if you have a Bible today, I’d encourage you to turn to 1 Kings 19. You might want to take out your notes today as we focus on a couple of guidelines from Elijah’s life that will help us overcome the problem of burnout that we face in our world. First of all, from Elijah’s experience, I want you to see...

1. THE CAUSES OF BURNOUT

The first cause of burnout is...

- An impossible pace

Look at verse 1 of this chapter:

“Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword”
(1 Kings 19:1).

If you’ve been with us in our study, you know Elijah has just come through an incredible period of great success in his life. God had provided food and water miraculously for Elijah at the Kerith Ravine. Then, Elijah had visited the house of a widow whose son died, and Elijah raised the boy from the dead. Then, Elijah challenged 850 false prophets to a showdown on top of Mt. Carmel. They prayed, and Elijah prayed – but only Elijah’s prayer was answered by the God of heaven. In response to Elijah’s prayer, God sent fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice Elijah had prepared. All of that was shortly followed by a downpour which occurred as a result of Elijah’s praying.

Elijah must have been really pumped after this amazing victory on Mt. Carmel! In fact, the previous chapter tells us Elijah pulled a Forrest Gump and ran about 20 miles through some pretty rough terrain to celebrate. He was on a spiritual high. Then verse 1 tells us that Jezebel threatened him. That one threat pushed Elijah over the top!

Did you ever feel that way? Did you ever find yourself saying, *“I can’t take one more thing!”*?

You see, the pace of life can drain us to the point of burnout. Another cause of burnout is...

- Ignorance about blessing and testing

Let’s read on in verse 2:

“So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, ‘May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them.’ Elijah was afraid and ran for his life” (1 Kings 19:2-3a).

Do you understand that the most vulnerable point in life is right after a great victory? When we come off the mountain, like Elijah, it's easy to go right into the valley.

One of the principles of Scripture is: testing usually follows blessing. It happened with Moses after he led the people of Israel across the Red Sea. He blew up in anger because the people were rebellious. It happened for King David. After his great military victories, he fell into immorality with Bathsheba. It happened with Peter after he followed Jesus for 3 years. He denied he even knew the Lord.

One of the principles of life is that a time of testing will follow a time of blessing. It happened for Elijah. It will happen to you and me.

There is a third cause of burnout in Elijah's life. That was...

- Isolation

Let's pick up in verse 3,

“When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, while he himself went a day's journey into the desert” (1 Kings 19:3b-4a).

Elijah demonstrated one of the classic signs of burnout when he left his servant in Beersheba and went to the desert alone.

Don't mistake solitude with isolation. There's a big difference.

Eg. An author named, Wayne Cordeiro, has written a wonderful book called, *Leading on Empty*. In that book, he says it like this:

“Solitude is a chosen separation for refining your soul. Isolation is what you crave when you neglect the first. Solitude is a healthy discipline; isolation is a symptom of emotional depletion.”

Frankly, this is common. We can allow the pace of life to so consume us that we reach the point of emotional and spiritual exhaustion. I've seen that happen in my life. When I get there, I want to be isolated. Isolation happens when I start saying, *“Nobody else understands what I'm going through. Nobody understands what I've encountered. Nobody understands the pain I've experienced.”*

Many of us do this. When we're hurting, we withdraw from others. Instead of reaching out, we pull into our shells. And then we wonder why we feel so alone.

Isolation will just suck the sense of God's presence right out of our lives.

Burnout is caused by an impossible pace, by ignorance about blessing and testing, and by isolation. It's also caused by...

- Imaginary martyrdom

Let's read on in verse 4:

“He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die” (1 Kings 19:4b).

By now, Elijah probably had run about 75 miles from Jezreel in the north to Beersheba in the south. No wonder he was ready to die! He was in full-tilt burnout mode. He had defeated the prophets of Baal in a great victory, and now he was in the depths of despair. He let self-pity cultivate a “victim mentality” in his own heart.

Eg. Chuck Swindoll writes it like this:

“Self-pity mulls its way inside our minds like a beast and claws us to shreds.”

Some of us face this almost every week. We come here on Sundays, and we experience a great spiritual high. But by Wednesday, we’re beaten down, discouraged and depressed, and we’re ready to throw in the towel. It’s easy to think thoughts that are not from God in moments like that. We can think, *“I’ll never be good enough. I’ll never get good enough grades. I’ll never do a good enough job.”*

Let me ask you something: *“When was the last time you threw up your hands and said, ‘You know, I think I’d be better off dead’?”* Many of us have felt that.

That leads us to a 5th cause of burnout. Elijah experienced an...

- Inflated ego

Look at the last part of verse 4 in 1 Kings 19:

“I have had enough, LORD,’ he said. ‘Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors’” (1 Kings 19:4c).

I love that last phrase. Elijah thought about all the great spiritual heroes of the past – like Noah, Abraham and Moses. He threw up his hands and said, *“Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.”* I heard one speaker say years ago, *“Whoever said he was?”*

When you have a relationship with God, it’s easy to think that God owes you something in life. But when you study the great characters of Scripture, they encountered times of intense heartache. It was true for Abraham. It was true for Moses. It was true for David. It was true for Job.

I like these words of Jesus in Luke 17:10:

“So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty’ ” (Luke 17:10).

Eg. Dave Plaster, Josh McDowell, Pastor Issavi

One of the fastest ways to end up in burnout is to have an exaggerated sense of my own importance.

So, how do I overcome all this, anyway? What are the...

2. CURES FOR BURNOUT ...

that we discover in Elijah’s life?

There are several cures in this story that I want to mention. The first is...

- Rest

Let’s read verses 5 through 8a...

“Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, ‘Get up and eat.’

He looked around, and there by his head was a cake of bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water.

He ate and drank and then lay down again. The angel of the LORD came back a second time and touched him and said,

‘Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you.’ So he got up and ate and drank” (1 Kings 19:5-8a).

This might surprise you. Instead of telling Elijah to snap out of it, God knew Elijah just needed some rest. He didn't give him a sermon or shower him with shame. Elijah collapsed because he was exhausted.

If you're sensing the signs of burnout in your life, the most spiritual thing you can do is rest. Some of you just need to go home and take a nap this afternoon. Not right now...but this afternoon.

The Bible warns us about the danger of physical exhaustion. Look at Galatians 6:9:

“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).

It's no wonder Jesus said it like this in Matthew 11:28:

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

I love these words of Psalm 127:

“In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat - for He grants sleep to those He loves” (Psalm 127:2).

God designed life so it works best when we spend one day out of seven resting. That's called a “Sabbath.” Many of us violate that principle week after week.

So, the first thing to do when I'm on the verge of burnout is rest. The second cure for burnout is to...

- Reconnect with God

The Bible goes on to tell us that Elijah traveled 40 days and 40 nights until he came to Mt. Horeb or Mt. Sinai where he spent the night in a cave. Let's pick up the story in verse 11:

“The LORD said, ‘Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.’

Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake.

After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.

When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, ‘What are you doing here, Elijah?’” (1 Kings 19:11-13)

Can you imagine this moment? While Elijah was in the cave, a violent, rushing wind swept across the canyons and over the mountain. Stones and boulders shook loose and crashed down on each other. But the Bible says God was not in the wind.

Then an earthquake ripped through the area causing rockslides and cracks everywhere. But God wasn't in the earthquake. That was followed by a furious fire that consumed everything that was growing on the mountain. But God wasn't in the fire.

And then it happened. When the wind was gone and the earth stopped trembling and the fire died out, there was stillness on the mountain. In that moment, the voice of God came to Elijah in a whisper.

Many of us want God to show up in a whirlwind, an earthquake or a fire. But more often than not, God communicates to us with a whisper.

A whisper is the most intimate form of communication. We usually whisper when we have something very important we want to say to someone privately. That's often the way God wants to communicate with us. I'm reminded of the words of Zechariah where it says:

“Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord” (Zechariah 4:6).

I love these words of Psalm 91:

“He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty” (Psalm 91:1).

In those moments when I'm on the verge of burnout, I need to reconnect with God. I love what Paul wrote in Romans 8:31:

“What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31).

There is a third cure for burnout and that's to...

- Realize What Only You Can Do

“The LORD said to him, ‘Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram.

Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet.

Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu.

Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel - all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him” (1 Kings 19:15-18).

Now Elijah was a prophet. It was his job to hear from God and communicate God's Word to the people. God gave him a specific job.

In the same way, you and I have a role in life that nobody else can play.

Again, in Wayne Cordaro’s book, he calls this the top 5%. Let me give you the top 5% that I should establish for my own life.

1. Only I can develop and grow in my relationship with Jesus.
2. Only I can be Roxanne’s husband and father to my daughters and their husbands.
3. Only I can work and provide for my family.
4. Only I can fill the role God has given me in this Body.
5. Only I can make sure I have enough margin in my life for my friends and my health.

We have to be crystal clear on our top five percent because that influences the remaining 95 percent of life.

There is one more cure to overcoming burnout. You have to...

- Remember your relationships

“So Elijah went from there and found Elisha son of Shaphat. He was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen, and he himself was driving the twelfth pair.

Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him. Elisha then left his oxen and ran after Elijah. ‘Let me kiss my father and mother good-bye,’ he said, ‘and then I will come with you.’

‘Go back,’ Elijah replied. ‘What have I done to you?’ So Elisha left him and went back. He took his yoke of oxen and slaughtered them.

He burned the plowing equipment to cook the meat and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he set out to

follow Elijah and became his attendant” (1 Kings 19:19-21).

Elijah was alone and isolated in despair. Even though he had rested and reconnected with God, he was still alienated from others. So, God provided a genuine friend named Elisha. Elisha became Elijah’s personal attendant. They worked side by side from that point on until Elijah was taken to heaven.

Do you understand the value of healthy relationships with others?

Hebrews says it like this:

“Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:25).

Just as God led Elijah to a friend, He wants you and me to cultivate authentic relationships with others.

CONCLUSION

1. Elijah was a man just like us. One moment, he felt bold, and the next moment, he felt burned out. He needed rest so God provided him sleep and food. He needed to reconnect with God so God quietly whispered to him. He needed a sense of purpose so God reminded him of what only he could do. And, he needed close relationships with others so God provided him with a friend.

Let’s face it, many of us are tired...even burned out. We’re running like mad on the treadmill of life. God wants

us to slow down. He wants us to reach out to Him so He can adjust the pace of life for us.

2. I want to ask you the same question God asked Elijah: *“What are you doing here?”* Is God prodding you to re-evaluate your priorities this morning? Is He prodding you to make time in your life for Him?

I love the way Max Lucado writes it:

- *“God likes you just the way you are - but He loves you too much to let you stay that way.”*