

A BIBLICAL CASE OF BURNOUT

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It just doesn't seem possible that a worshiper of the true God who is successful in business, in the affairs of the church, and is a father and family man, could suffer from burnout. But it happens, and it happened in Old Testament times as well. Asaph was such a talented musician that King David asked him to provide the praise music for the worship services (I Chronicles 15:19). These psalms were so good that they were listed right along with David's psalms (II Chronicles 35:15). He was so dependable in religious affairs that King David asked him and Asaph's brothers to minister at the very heart of the worship services before the ark on a regular bases (I Chronicles 16:37). And he was a Levite, which meant that he had to be a very dedicated and religiously active servant of God (I Chronicles 15:17).

He was such a fantastic father that he raised his sons to be responsible young men; so responsible that King David gave them places of responsibility and asked them to prophesy for him. They were talented instrumental musicians, playing cymbals, stringed instruments and harps (I Chronicles 25: 1-6). And according to Nehemiah, it didn't stop with his sons. Five generations of Asaph's sons continued to have active musical, religious and political careers.

But in the midst of all this success and activity, something happens, Asaph begins the downward trend to complete burnout. He knows God has been good to him (v.1); but in verse 2 he tells us that he almost lost it because he lost sight of his foundation. Without a sound foundation, his feet began to slip. Why did this happen? What was his foundation that was becoming slippery? As with every child of God, his foundation is his God. But Asaph had taken his eyes off God and had begun to look at the foolish people around him. He began to notice how prosperous they were (v.3). In fact, these prosperous people around him became the very foundation of his thoughts. Then his thinking became foggy. He felt that these ungodly people weren't hindered by any religious laws, and yet they remained strong (v.4). They didn't have any troubles; people weren't harassing them (v.5). In fact, they were actually proud of their violent actions (v.6). They had more money and luxury than they knew what to do with (v.7), and even their language was blasphemous and boastful (v.8-9). In spite of all this, they got the most and the best of everything. In fact, Asaph begins to wonder if God really knows what's going on (v.10-12).

Then he turned his thought toward himself, another very slippery foundation for mental concentration. He began to ask himself if living for God wasn't really just a waste of time. All he was getting out of it was trouble and woe (v.13-14). And to make things worse, he couldn't even talk to anyone about his unkind thoughts about the way God was treating him. He had to keep up a good spiritual front as he provided music and served at the ark in the religious services. He couldn't offend those who looked to him as a spiritual leader (v.15). He reached an all-time low when his thoughts became too painful for him to even continue thinking (v.16). His was a perfect example of com-

plete burnout. His job, his family, his musical talents, his religious endeavors, just weren't fun anymore.

Fortunately, Asaph did not stay in this condition. He stopped looking at the prosperous people around him. He quit thinking about his problems and looked toward God. Then, he understood (v.17). He thought about heaven and what would happen to these apparently lucky, well-off people. They were really in very slippery places. They were going to be destroyed (v.18). he began to think clearly again as he realized that in a short time, the riches of the ungodly would be gone. Their luxury was like a short dream that ended in a nightmare (v.19-20).

His mind is now clear enough to look at himself honestly and to see his own sinfulness and sinful thoughts (v.21). He realizes how foolish he has been; he was no better than an animal who bases its feelings on its surroundings (v.22). Then he made another great discovery: God was still with him, even though he had been so wrong. God was holding him by the hand the entire time (v.23). His faith returned and he now believed that God would guide him with His word; and some day he would be received into heaven where he would receive a reward far superior to any earthly reward (v.24).

Now he could praise God, instead of complaining. He could truthfully say, "There is no one besides you, Lord: I don't want anybody or anything but you. I fail You all the time; but you are my strength and all I need forever (.25-26)." He now remembers that all who do not trust God will perish. Once again he enjoys drawing near to God and putting his trust in Him. He is no longer concerned with keeping up with the Joneses, he just wants the work he does to demonstrate who God is and reveal how God has rescued him (v.28). In his book *Spiritual Burnout* (Honor Books, Tulsa Oklahoma, p. 113), Malcolm Smith gives a clear statement of what changed in Asaph. "Asaph didn't learn anything that was really new - he came to understand the word he already had that was now made alive and applied by the Spirit. He moved from looking for formulas, answers and keys to being as successful and happy as the wicked, to a relationship with the Father that is the heart of faith. As he told it, it was a repentance, a changing of his mind about the conclusion that had been made in bitterness and self pity."

Let's see if these steps into and out of burnout are applicable to today's chiropractor.

Let's look at the descent:

1. He takes his eyes off Christ
2. He looks at the chiropractors around him.
3. He notices that some of his colleagues have a much bigger practice than he has.
4. As he concentrates on things around him, his thinking becomes foggy, and he begins to believe a lie:

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- a. The ungodly chiropractor is always rich.
- b. The prosperous chiropractor is free to go fishing all day Sunday and pull a few crooked deals during the week.
- c. The ungodly practitioner never has troubles.
- d. They waste their money and still have more than they know what to do with.
- e. They blaspheme God, but they are never punished.

5. Then he begins to think about himself - how God has mistreated him:

- a. It doesn't pay to live for God: all I ever get is trouble.
- b. I can't even talk about it. I don't dare let my fellow church members know how I feel, they think I am a strong Christian. I certainly can't talk to my peers they are the competition. I can't even get a little sympathy here.

6. Then the last stage hits. His thoughts become too painful to handle. He has to get away from his thoughts. He has hit rock bottom, but he doesn't have to stay there because this can be a definite turning point.

Notice the ascent:

1. He stops looking at others and their prosperity.
2. He stops looking at his problems.
3. He looks toward God.
4. He understands, the fog lifts.
 - a. He remembers the temporality of things.
 - b. He remembers the final judgment of the ungodly.
5. He realizes his own sinfulness and repents.
6. He notices that God is still there in spite of his stupidity.
7. He trusts God to guide him.
8. He draws on God's strength, not his own.
9. He praises God.
10. He seeks to glorify God.

Some of our Christian chiropractors may find that a short-term mission trip is just the thing that determines the turning point in their downward slide to burnout. It's there you see the unimportance of "things" and the importance of a right relationship with God. It's also a place to see what chiropractic can do with just one adjustment without any modern conveniences to claim the credit. Thus you can know God has a definite job for you through chiropractic. You can know that as you trust Him, He will take you through any problems of the future.

Dr. Paul Meir, in an article on Burnout in Focus on the Family Physician, January, 1989 gives 7 excellent solutions to burnout. His amplification of point 1 is particularly applicable to the chiropractor.

1. Get the right insight into truth. Since Jesus says in Matthew 11:30 that the yoke He gives us is easy and the burden He allows us to bear is light, why are we finding our lives as Christian doctors so filled with problems and why are our burdens so unbearable. Since God's Word is true, even though we thought we were serving God by working overtime, we were really only serving the teachings of our critical parents, our college, our patients or fellow church members. We even thought we were pleasing God by neglecting our families in order to serve Him.

2. Have a personal relationship with God.

3. Make sure your own mental health is being cared for.

4. Set aside time to meet the emotional and spiritual needs of your wife.

5. Set aside time to meet the emotional and spiritual needs of your children. (Quantity is as important as Quality.)

6. Start a part-time ministry. (A short-term mission trip is a good place to start.)

7. After doing number one through six, use the left over time to be a doctor.