

Dealing with Burnout

1- Objectives

- To discuss the warning signs of burnout and steps to enact for our mental, physical, emotional and spiritual health.
- To look at the path that can lead to burnout and what we can do to avoid and or rectify each area of concern.

2- References

- Anba Angaelos: Battling Burnout; sermon www.orthodoxsermons.org
- Rick Warren: Avoiding Personal Burnout; www.sermoncentral.com

3- Scriptural Verse

- “Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the Lord!” (Psalm 27:14)

4- Lesson Outline

What is burnout?

- Burnout is the commonly used term to describe when we are exhausted physically or emotionally usually because of prolonged stress or frustration. When we are burnt out, we feel empty as if we have nothing left to contribute. We feel over committed, are over tired (physically and/ or emotionally) and will therefore, have a hard time coping. This is a very vulnerable position as we cannot cope with any stress of life, temptation of the enemy or test from God. Our stability goes away and we end up losing our peace.

How does one go from healthy to burnout?

- We often forget that we are creation made of dust. It is God who gives us life “The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life” (Job 33:4). Every time we take credit for something or become arrogant or possessive about a talent or accomplishment, we are revealing our forgetfulness and are already on the path to burnout.
- Every time we buy into the world's system of esteeming beauty, accomplishment, wealth, influence, intelligence; we step away from the sustaining life that God has for us and are headed toward burnout. “Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day..... For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Corinthians 4: 16-18).
- When we lose sight of the Eternal and we become so entrenched in the world's ways or the temporal, we are close to burnout and we exemplify the people in the days of Jeremiah when God said: “My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns—broken cisterns that can hold no water.” (Jeremiah 2:13).

- David the prophet said: “Unless Your law had been my delight, I would then have perished in my affliction” (Psalm 119:92). In other words, we can say I perish in my affliction (Burnout) because your law was not my delight.

What hasten burnout?

I. We allow ourselves to become overtired

- Physical fatigue is the easiest to fix-- get good sleep. Sometimes we need to sit back and see whether we are overcommitted and delegate some of our responsibilities like Moses in Exodus 18:13-27.
- We also need to give rest to our souls by following the Lord Jesus’ example in Luke 4:42. He departed in a deserted place; likewise we need time away and apart.
- Daily quiet time with God is necessary for us to become refreshed and nourished by the word of God. Read the Bible, and pray and think and reflect on both what is read and on the day we live.

II. Comparing ourselves to others

- Comparing is dangerous in so many ways, when we start comparing ourselves to somebody else; we set our self up for emotional burnout. What we tend to do is comparing our life with the accomplishments of other people: "I’m not doing enough." We compare our talents and our gifts and think how meager we are compared to the super star quality of the person next door, the other person in the office.
- Once we start comparing, the next thing we start doing is criticizing our self. We tell our self, "I must... I should ... I have to ... I ought to ... I’ve got to ... " Then, when it doesn’t happen, we move to the next thing.
- The next thing is to feel guilty about all the work we haven’t gotten done. You feel guilty because you don’t get it all done. You’re setting yourself up for burnout. You can combat this with (Matthew 23:11) “But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant”.

III. Start giving your life away again in helping somebody else

- As long as we serve with right motivation and ability, we actually gain ourselves. But helping others when we are not ready or helping over our capacity leads to burnout as we will not be able to cope. Remember the safety measure instruction in an airplane; it tells you to ensure yourself prior to help your son who is sitting beside you, otherwise you will not be able to save yourself or your son.
- Trying to control everything: This is where we act as if the whole world rests on our shoulders (I have to make sure everything’s going to turn out all right; I have to hold everything together; I have to make it all work out...). When you try to be general manager of the universe, we are quickly headed for burnout. This is a burden God never intended for us to carry.
- While we may be responsible for people, we are not responsible for every choice that they make. As a parent, I am responsible to raise my children in love and the admonition of the Lord. At some point, though, they are going to make their own choices and I can

only pray that they will choose wisely. There is only one person whose responses we are responsible to control-- our own!

- God is the controller of the Universe. We need to get our eyes off our problem and start looking at the Lord Jesus. Remember, the root of all burnout is forgetting God's part. When we start playing God, when we start acting as if God doesn't matter, like we have to make it all work, that we're in charge, we're in control, we're the manager of our life; we are on the slippery slope to burnout. God never meant for us to be the manager of our life. We pray: Manage my life as You deem fit. Verses to combat: "Be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10); "Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, Peace, be still! And the wind ceased and there was a great calm" (Mark 4:39); "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase" (1 Corinthians 3:6)

IV- Living in the future with dread

- Our job is to be faithful this day. We are incapable of predicting the future. God knows the future and He knows what we need. "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble" (Matthew 6:34)
- Sometimes from this fear of the future, we begin to listen and be led by our emotions. You focus on how you feel rather than on what's reality, what's the truth. Feelings could lie. Just because you feel something doesn't mean it's the truth. Ask any professional athlete or performer or musician, he can tell you they feel very discouraged after a great performance. Feelings are highly unreliable. Psychologists tell us, "You need to get in touch with your feelings." That's true (Any area where we don't understand our feelings or hide them is an area of denial and non growth). But that's not enough. There's something more important which is getting in touch with the truth. It's the truth that gives us a solid, successful, significant life, not feelings. The Lord Jesus said: "When you know the truth, the truth shall set you free"; the problem is we don't really like to face the truth about ourselves so we hide. We don't like to face the truth about our relationships so we throw bombs at each other. We don't like to face the truth about life, about death, about reality, about the future, about the past. So we make up all kinds of stories. The truth sets us free from all this and we quit using up our emotional storage to avoid it.

What to do if we succumb and are in a process of burnout

Don't Panic!

- "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).
- God has the way of escape planned. We need to stop, and assess. Allow for proper rest and nutrition, and spend quality time with God, releasing our frustrations listening for His direction. "Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you." (1 Peter 5:6)

Share your burden with others

- St. Paul said: “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2)
- You can share your burden with someone you trust like David and Jonathan but make sure to choose a spiritually wise person lest you get a destructive advice like Amnon (2 Samuel 13: 1- 16)
- Your father of confession is a great advisor as he delivers to you honestly the word of God. Also your good relationship with your parents can help a lot.

5- Conclusion

- Avoid causes that may cause you to fall into “burnout” and say with David the Psalmist: “I would have lost heart, unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the Lord!” (Psalm 27: 13-14)
- Get advices and speak up with trustee persons.

6- Activities / Discussion Points

Discuss together the tribulations of St Paul and how did he overcome everything:

- “From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness— I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall..... a thorn in the flesh was given to me, Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Corinthians 11: 24 – 33; 12: 7-9).
- “Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” (2 Corinthians 12: 9-10)