

Pursuing Peace

1. ELIJAH AND BURNOUT (I Kg 18: 16 - 19:5)

- Elijah's exploits - Jezebel the queen was killing off prophets,
 - The King himself had been looking for Elijah, supposedly to finish him off . . . and then God tells Elijah to go confront the King.
 - So Elijah confronted the King and even commanded him to call a contest - 850 false prophets against Elijah.
 - Elijah then challenged the people to follow God . . .
 - and then for a full day he sat waiting for Baal to answer the false prophets . . .
 - then he repaired the alter of the Lord
 - then he built a trench around the pool
 - and then he hauled wood onto the alter . . . all strenuous physical work.
 - After that he killed his bull and cut it up into pieces, all alone
 - Finally he prayed for God to burn up the offering - which God did.
- But his work was not yet over
- Next he had all the false prophets arrested and slaughtered - gory work
 - Next he climbed up Mt. Carmel
 - At the top he prayed intensely for an extended time for God to break the drought and send rain . . . which God did
 - And when the rain came he raced all the way back to Jezreel, running faster than Ahab's chariot!

. . . all this was one days work! You would expect that after such a day, seeing God's mighty work, he would be rearing to face that wicked queen, Jezebel. But when Jezebel swore she would have his head, he run away instead, crying "God, I've had enough!" He was gripped with an irrational fear and run away. Totally out of whack. Why? Because Elijah was a man on the verge of burnout

III - cat and mouse game

I often feel as though my week is the cat and I am the mouse. It lets me run for a little while thinking I'm free and in control; then it stops me with one of those impossible deadlines day; slaps me around with some time wasters; pulls on my tail with some unplanned appointments and generally wears me out till I'm finished!

My guess is that the majority of us sometimes feel the same way - we live very stressful lives and the only thing that will stop you is that heart attack that is surely on its way. But that's not all, we struggle with

- Panic attacks
- Do lists that grow longer no matter how hard you work
- Constant noise, music, TV around you
- Headaches that never quite go away

We are harassed with too much to do, too little time, too many appointments, too many meetings, too many friends; we are a driven people though we're not sure where and why we're driven. Ironically, we are also the generation that has the greatest time savers in the history of man.

Jesus - "It is finished" at the end of his life

We - "I am finished" at the end of our lives.

2. PEACE IS NOT PASSIVE : the key to peace begins by recognising this truth PEACE IS NOT PASSIVE! Look at a few peace passages in the bible.

- a. **Ps 34:12-14** ¹² *Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days,*
¹³ *keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies.*

¹⁴ *Turn from evil and do good;
seek peace and pursue it.*

... seek peace and pursue it." Peace is elusive, it is evasive; just when you have found it, something comes and disrupts your life and your old friend, chaos, returns. 2 words particularly stand out for me in Ps 34:14

- Seek - in other word look for, search for carefully, it is not easily found! Sometimes we think if only I could stop; I'd have peace. But no - stopping your activities is not enough - you have to seek and search diligently.
- Pursue - even after you find it you have to catch hold of it! *You don't get peace by sitting back and waiting!*

b. **Jer 29:7** *"Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile, pray to the Lord for it because if it prospers, you too will prosper."*

We are all very good at seeking prosperity with diligence, but we should seek peace with the same diligence.

c. **Rom 14:19** *"Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification."*

Make every effort!

d. **II Tim 2:22** *"Flee the evil desires of youth and PURSUE righteousness, faith, love and peace..."*

PEACE IS NOT PASSIVE Whether it is - Peace with God - God has actively pursued our peace with him - he didn't just sit back and wait; and now he calls us to actively maintain that peace.

- Peace with fellow men in relationship. Paul says we are to make every effort to live at peace with all men.
- Peace in society - I once saw a poster in a police station that said "The price of peace is constant vigilance". Peace has to be sought.

In the same way inner peace, peace in my lifestyle, peace in my family, peace at home - they all have to be sought diligently; they all have to be pursued. It won't come by sitting back and waiting for it to happen.

3. USHURING IN PEACE

So how do we seek and actively pursue it? Well, let me give you two models and two additional principles to help you seek peace.

III - 3 car gauges.

Petrol - The Physical Tank

- **Depleting this** . . . Burning the candle at both ends, doing exhausting physical work without enough rest, running overcrowded weeks.
- **Signs** that the tank is empty - headaches, insomnia, irritable, lethargic. If unattended then it leads to physical breakdown and the psychosomatic complications of stress.
- **Replenishing it** - eat properly, exercise, sleep & rest well. Also better organisation of my time, delegating tasks, reducing my expectations, sticking with my priorities, hiring extra help - all help.

In fact, to try and make sure I do not even drain this tank, one of the principles I have sought to apply on a daily basis is to practice the presence of God continually. I begin by planning each day as part of my spiritual discipline of good stewardship - stewardship of the resources of time, energy and opportunity that God has given me for that day. But after I have planned my day, I pray thru each appointment, meeting, or engagement even as I give back the day to the Lord, and free him to change it in any way he wishes. I give him back the day with this understanding - that thru the course of the day, when things get out of hand, or I have unscheduled appointments, or I'm not even in control any more, then I can pull into the petrol station and just check who is driving this car.

- If I have been faithful to approach things prayerfully, to apply good time management principles, to stick with my priorities, and to take hold of God given opportunities, then he is still in control.
- But if I have been wasting time, I have forgotten my priorities, I have included needless meetings and time wasters, then I'm back in the seat and making a mess of it.

The challenge for me is to live by Col 1²⁸⁻²⁹

"We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labour, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me."

Water - The Spiritual Tank

- **Depleting this** - A busy week, ministering to others without enough time to prepare well, skipping prayer and quiet times for a period of time, harbouring hidden or known sin.
- **Leads** to easy compromise, a dry Christian life and a sense of guilt about my relationship with God.
- **Replenishing it** - Journaling, prayer, quiet time, study, fasting and the practice of the other spiritual disciplines on a regular basis.

Oil - The Emotions - *this is the tank we most often ignore, and the one that most often raises complications.*

- **Depleting it** - a demanding, fast week, criticism, long term frustration, conflict and anger, unfulfilled expectations, counselling or ministering to others with emotional needs. Crisis such as major marital conflict or grief deplete this tank fast.
- **Signs** of an empty tank are feeling especially vulnerable and insecure, depression, panic attacks, crying easily for no seeming reason, a strong desire to quit, being snappy on the phone, avoiding people, being grumpy, critical and cynical, being pessimistic about life. This is what Elijah seemed to be struggling with - emotional burnout.

- **Replenishing it** - This is in fact the easiest tank to deplete AND the hardest to refill. It's like a car battery - you can drain a battery in 30 mins if you run all the electricals off the battery at once, but recharging it again takes time otherwise you damage the battery. In Elijah's case the Lord took him out of ministry for 40 days of rest, and from then on also gave him an assistant and companion in Elisha.

I'm still trying to learn how to fill this tank up again for me. I find that being out in nature - especially large expanses of water, music, reading novels, marital harmony, hobbies, my annual leave, energising people who place no demands on me - all refresh me emotionally. Each of us have to find the warning signs that our tanks are empty, and find our way of replenishing them. Running on an empty tank is heading for disaster.

One of my pleasant surprises from the Bible was to find that the Bible has a lot to say about Joy in the heart and about replenishing joy. The work occurs at least 210 times in the Bible, most of which is in the Psalms.

*Psalm 16¹¹ You have made known to me the path of life;
you will fill me with joy in your presence,
with eternal pleasures at your right hand.*

*Ps 19⁸ The precepts of the LORD are right,
giving joy to the heart.*

*Ps28⁶ Praise be to the LORD,
for he has heard my cry for mercy.
⁷ The LORD is my strength and my shield;
my heart trusts in him, and I am helped.
My heart leaps for joy
and I will give thanks to him in song.*

The concept of-course occurs many more times. In fact, the other place where the term joy occurs frequently in the Bible is in association with "celebration". Public festivals like The Feast of Tabernacles, the enthronement of God's King, the building of the temple, the dedication of the temple, all those times when the people got together in large numbers to celebrate the Lord's goodness - the term joy is associated with that. Maybe as christians we should be more attentive in organising good, clean celebrations and feasts (as long as you don't ask **me** to organise it cause that will drain my tank).

Now these tanks are not mutually exclusive - If you drain your physical tank, you soon begin to drain the spiritual and emotional ones as well. On top of this, we not only have to watch out for draining times due to our schedules, but also to watch out for minor and major leaks. Our bad habits or life shoots holes in our tanks.

- Disorganisation shoots holes in our physical tank that soon begin to drain the other tanks also.
- Sin shoots holes in our spiritual tank . . .
- Broken relationships like marriage, a disobedient child or even a broken courtship shoots major holes in the emotional tank.
- Probably one of the most draining holes in this tank that immediately affects the others however, is grief. Patching up the hole that grief leaves takes hard work and careful attention. Many people, especially men, think the way to deal with grief is to ignore it and just throw yourself at your work . . . but if the tank is not repaired, then you're heading for unresolved grief, possible depression or burnout.

There is another model I like to use to understand the state of my life, and my hope for ushering in peace.

III - Living on the edge of the cliff

Time-wise, financially, emotionally, spiritually and physically we are stretched to the limit, and any unscheduled demand on our time, any unexpected bill, any emotional crisis, any temptation, or any physical

illness, even a small one like flu becomes the proverbial straw that broke the camels back because we have no margins to accommodate the unexpected. We're living at the cliffs edge and a small gust of wind will prove to be our undoing.

How do we build margins in these 5 areas? In our **time-use** slow down, delegate, account for travel time in-between appointments, schedule in margins for unexpected appointments, don't schedule your appointments back to back in case one is late or runs overtime.

In our **finances** I like the advise that we should live at 70% of our income after we have deducted taxes and tithe. The other 30 % should go into savings or into a liquidisable money market such as shares.

Think thru the other 3 areas - **Spiritually, Physically** and **Emotionally** and ask yourself how much margin you have or if you are living on the cliff-edge.

Think About It

1. Read I Kings 18. Which of Elijah's 3 tanks (spiritual, emotional and physical) were completely exhausted? Now read I Kings 19. How does God restore Elijah and help him fill up his tanks again.
2. Of the 4 margin areas (financial, emotional, time-wise, and physical), given in the sermon, how are you doing? Which area(s) do you need to build in margins into? Begin with the time margins - what can you do with your schedule? What do you need to drop immediately, and what can you delegate? What new projects should you shelve (new projects normally take less energy to begin than to sustain).
3. What about Physically (the younger ones may not find this area to be a problem)? What exercise, activity, sport can you pick up to build your capacity & margin. Do you recognize when in the day your energy runs out? Is there anything you can do to quit before that point?
4. Make a list below of which activities, hobbies and people energise your spirit? How can you ensure you do more of these things on a regular basis?
5. There are 3 ways to build up financial margin : (i) use your present resources better without major changes, eg - bulk shopping, better buys, less utilities, (ii) spend less by making major budget changes, eg live less expensively - diet, housing, transport (iii) earn more without speeding up & stressing your life more, eg job change, investments, interests, etc. What do you need to do in each of these areas to build up your financial margin?
6. Do you ever, as part of your daily spiritual discipline, set your priorities and pray thru them, or do you just charge into the day? How can you be a better steward of each days opportunities?
7. What "toll stations" (to practice his presence and remind yourself who is in control) can you build into your daily journey?