

Lecture 3 – Battling Burnout

Focus Verse:

“He gives power to the weak, And to those who have no might He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, And the young men shall utterly fall, But those who wait on the Lord Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint. (Isaiah 10:29-31).

Introduction:

Whose heart has not been thrilled by Elijah's exploits, his proclamation to King Ahab of the three-and-a-half-year drought, his ministry to the widow of Zarephath, and his victorious battle with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel? Elijah was greatly used of God. Yet this is the same man whom we find later under a juniper tree in the wilderness—suffering from burnout.

Burnout can occur in the physical, emotional, and spiritual areas of life. Sometimes it affects only one or two of these areas, but it often takes its toll in all three, as it did with Elijah. He was physically exhausted from running before King Ahab's chariot some 25 miles from Mount Carmel to the entrance of Jezreel (I Kings 18:46). He was emotionally drained as evidenced by his wish to die: “It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life” (I Kings 19:4). He was spiritually distraught, which was shown by his words, “I, even I only, am left” (I Kings 19:10).

When you feel like you are the only one getting things done or the only one working toward a goal you can begin to doubt your efforts and fall into a spiral trap of defeat. Burning out means giving up and a true Christian is steadfast in the faith regardless of the obstacles set before them. So, how can we overcome feelings of inadequacy and defeat? How can we fight the good fight and finish the race without losing hope or strength?

So many Christians are facing their everyday lives with problems and situations that are causing them to become weak and eventually falling away from their faith. Our world has become a place where people have allowed their lifestyles to become their God, many look at their career as their main focus, or their personal life as being the most important part of their life. As a result of this way of thinking many Christians are burning out and giving up on the best thing that could possibly happen to them in their entire life.

We're talking about everlasting life and peace that cannot be explained in human terms, an eternity of living with the creator of the universe that has created a place called Heaven that will be beyond anything we could ever imagine or think.

The reward for endurance—eternal life and rulership with Christ in God's kingdom—is indeed handsome. Yet at times, that reward may seem far off, somewhat unreal, and blurred. At times, the present, with all of its trials and challenges, is all we can see. It is only the most unusual human being who can keep going without something tangible to hold on to—and most of us would not claim to have unusual strength or endurance.

As we have been told before, even some of God's greatest servants faced the temptation to quit. Yet, quitting is simply not an option. Remember God's promise: “...God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able...” (I Cor. 10:13).

Jesus Christ knows what it is like to be tempted. He knows there is a limit to mere human strength and will. He also knows that our calling requires strenuous action. He instructs us to “strive to enter in at the strait

gate” (Luke 13:24), “fight the good fight of faith” (I Tim. 6:12), and to “labor therefore to enter into that rest” (Heb. 4:11).

That is why He sent us the Holy Spirit—the same power of God that He had when He was on the earth. Without it, we are unable to fulfill our calling and do our part in the Work. The Holy Spirit flows out of us, and is only replenished as we remain part of the vine—the Body of Christ, the one true Church. We must stay close to God through Bible study, prayer, meditation and fasting. Armed with the same Spirit, we can complete our calling and the job we have been given to do.

Christ never promised that it would be easy. He described our calling as a cross that we must bear: “And whoever does not *bear his cross*, and come after Me, cannot be My disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sits not down first, and *counts the cost*, whether he have sufficient to finish it?” (Luke 14:27-28).

The apostle Peter describes our adversary the devil as a roaring lion who walks about, looking for someone to destroy (I Pet. 5:8). Satan has dedicated his time to trying to thwart God’s Plan. He will do his best to turn your focus away from God and His Way, to yourself. He will try to make you feel overwhelmed by tempting you to change your priorities. Christ warns, “And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting [gluttony], and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares” (Luke 21:34).

Not only must we endure, but as this age draws to a close—as events and the Work accelerate, as the world becomes darker—we must be ready, willing and able to let our lights burn even brighter.

Burnout is a process that usually occurs sequentially, progressing through stages. Therefore, it gives you an opportunity to identify it early, and take the necessary steps to prevent it. Remember, quitting is *not* an option!

Lecture 3 – Battling Burnout Note taking Guide

1. Identify ways that you have "burnt out," lost hope, or given up on something because you couldn't give any more.
2. Why can burning out be burdensome? What does it take to ensure this doesn't happen to us?
3. Now that you have identified the problem, what do you need to do to overcome it? Think Practically! Think of what you are capable of committing to.

Lecture 3 – Battling Burnout - ABBA NOUFER THE HERMIT

Abba Bebnoda once said: I wanted to venture into the inner wilderness for the sake of receiving the blessings of the hermit fathers. I took some bread and water and walked for four days. My bread and water had finished, but I continued walking for a further four days until I was fraught with fear and the thought that I was going to die. With the little strength that was left in me, I stood to pray. With the Lord's encouragement, I continued walking for a few more days until I became extremely hungry and thirsty, and in exhaustion I fell to the ground. I opened my eyes and found a person standing before me. He touched my lips with his fingertips and immediately my strength was renewed. After walking continuously for another four days, I once again felt drained of any energy, so I lifted up my hands and prayed to the Lord. Before me approached the person I had seen before. Once more he touched my lips and my body and again my strength returned. After God granted me this wonderful miracle, I journeyed for a further seventeen days within the wilderness. In the distance I noticed a very strange looking man who wore no clothes, but the hair on his body covered him like a cloak. As he approached me, I became very frightened and so I ran to the top of the mountain; I thought that perhaps he may be a mountain lion. He remained at the foot of the mountain, but lifted his face towards me and said, "Come down my brother Bebnoda and do not be afraid, for I am a man like you and I have dwelt in this wilderness for many years because of my love for Christ." I was astonished he knew my name, but felt that indeed he was filled with the Holy Spirit, so at once I descended and knelt before him.

As we sat together, I asked him to tell me about his life. He humbly responded, "My name is Noufer, and I have dwelt in this wilderness for the past sixty years, living in the fear of God. The beasts are my friends and with them I share my cave. I feed upon wild grass and these fruit-bearing trees and you are the first person I have seen in sixty years." After a brief pause, he continued: "I began my spiritual life as a monk in the Barida Monastery where one hundred and forty monks lived together in love and harmony. Daily we ate together and praised together, and the peace of our Lord filled our hearts. At that time, I was still in my youth and diligently I learnt and observed the virtues and wisdom of my saintly fathers, for they resembled the angels of God. One day I heard my fathers speaking about the desert fathers who dwell within the wilderness. They said that these fathers speak to God as if face to face, just like Elijah and John the Baptist, so curiously I asked, "How could these desert fathers be of higher spirituality than yourselves?" They answered, "My son, they are the ones who are found just and righteous in the sight of God; we are nothing in comparison for we live a communal life - eat and drink when we feel the need, are served when we feel weak and we console one another in times of depression. But as for the desert dwellers, they have none of this. From the start of their ascetic life, they roam the wilderness in the intense heat of the day and the bitter coldness of the night. They suffer from the severity of hunger, thirst and exhaustion, and face relentless spiritual struggles and Satanic wars. But all this they endure patiently and willingly because of their great love for our Lord Jesus Christ and in expectation of their heavenly reward. Because of their perseverance and their strong faith, the Lord sends His angels to administer and serve them, just as it is written in the book of Isaiah the prophet, "Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint...when [they] seek water and there is none...I the Lord will hear them; I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers in desolate heights and fountains in the midst of valleys; I will make the wilderness a pool of water and the dry land springs of water..." (Isaiah 40:31, 41:17-18), and also in the Psalms of King David we are told "The righteous cry, and the Lord hears them and delivers them out of all their troubles" (Ps 34:17). Abba Noufer then said to me, "Abba Bebnoda, as I heard these words, my heart was enlightened, and so that night I packed enough bread to last me three days and went forth from the monastery in the hope that the Lord will lead me to the place He has chosen for me. As I left the monastery gate by night, I found standing before me a person full of light. I was very frightened and wanted to quickly return to my cell within the monastery. The lighted person approached me saying, "Do not be afraid for I am the angel of the Lord; I have been with you from your childhood, and I will accompany you always." Together we walked side by side for about seven miles through the wilderness.

I then continued journeying alone until I reached a small cave, so I knocked on the door and said, "Bless me my father!" A saintly father with the face of an angel emerged from within the cave with a warm smile. I knelt at his feet, but he raised me up saying, "May the Lord bless you my dear friend Noufer, please come in." I remained with him for a few days in order to learn and benefit from his spirituality and wisdom. He taught me how I should spend my time each day and he strengthened and forewarned me of the Satanic wars which I shall face. Finally he said to me, "My son, you too must face spiritual struggles, so arise and venture deep within the inner wilderness, and there spend your time in prayer and praise, for the Lord has called you to live an ascetic life." The saintly father accompanied me for four days until we found a deserted fortress and beside it was a fruit bearing palm tree. He turned to me and said, "Noufer, this is the place which God has chosen for you to serve Him in." The hermit father remained with me for a month, during which time he instructed me in the ways of virtues and godly deeds which I was to apply in my life of ascetism. We continued meeting one another once a year, until he passed away to the Heavenly Kingdom. I buried him with great respect and reverence in the place where he spent his life worshipping God. I Bebnoda then asked Abba Noufer, "Did you face any trials or hardships when you began your life of hermitage in the wilderness?" to which he replied, "Believe me my beloved brother, I have faced death many times; from hunger, thirst, extremes in temperature to the extent that my body withered, but I was patient and endured all things. Many times the devil would appear and torment me, but my Lord Jesus Christ, blessed be His name, would comfort me and save me from the traps of the enemy. This palm tree produces twelve baskets of dates a year, and each basket feeds me for a month. I also eat wild grass and because of God's great love, He makes

the grass taste as sweet as honey in my mouth. Now my brother Bebnoda, let us go to the place where I live." We walked for about three miles through the wilderness until we reached his fortress, and its nearby palm tree. After we stood to pray, we sat together and spoke about the many wonders of God. As the sun began to set, I saw before the entrance of the fortress a loaf of bread and a jug of water. Abba Noufer said to me, "Get up my brother and eat this bread and drink this water, for you have suffered greatly along the way to find me." We shared the meal and even though we ate until we were satisfied, there was plenty left over. We then stood to pray and remained praying throughout the night. The following day I looked at Abba Noufer's face and found it had become like fire. I was very frightened, but he turned to me and said, "Do not be afraid brother Bebnoda, for our beloved Lord Jesus Christ has sent you to me so that you may take care of and bury my body, for the hour of my deliverance quickly approaches." I Bebnoda then asked him, "Father, do you think that the Lord will make me worthy enough to live within your dwelling place after your blessed departure?" But he replied, "My dear son, the only reason the Lord had in leading you here is to bury my body, and then return to your monastery to tell your fellow brothers the monks all the wonders you have seen, for in so doing they may praise and glorify our Father in heaven." I knelt before him and said, "Bless me my saintly father; may God be merciful to me and make me worthy of seeing you once again in His Heavenly Kingdom." Abba Noufer remained praying on me for a long while, then he turned to pray for himself with many tears before lying on the ground with his hands outstretched, and quietly he released his spirit. It was the 16th day of the blessed month of Baouna, and I Bebnoda saw before me a whole host of angels praising and singing as they carried the soul of the pure saint Abba Noufer saying, "Pure is your soul Noufer, for it is without blemish; so let us present it as a beautiful 'korban' to Christ our Lord, the King of Glory!"

Immediately I took the tunic I was wearing and tore it in two. I wrapped the body of the blessed father Abba Noufer with one piece, and covered myself with the other. I placed his body in a small stone cave, and prayed on him before sealing the cave's entrance. The same hour Abba Noufer departed, the palm tree withered and fell, and the fortress which was his home crumbled to the ground. It was then that I realised the strength of Abba Noufer's words when he told me that it was not God's will that I remain in his place. I ate the bread which was left over from the meal we shared together and drank the rest of the water. I then stood to pray before returning to the monastery. Suddenly, the person who had come to me at the beginning of my journey and touched my lips, again returned to me. He strengthened and encouraged me and so I left Abba Noufer's blessed place glorifying the Lord through His beloved saint Abba Noufer the hermit. May his blessings be with us all, amen.