

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPT //

STRESS, BURNOUT, AND HOPE | WEEDS IN MY GARDEN

AARON BROCKETT | MAY 5, 2024

Hey, I want to welcome everybody gathered across all of our locations and those of you who may be joining us online. We are thrilled to have you. If you have a Bible go ahead and head over to 1 Kings, chapters 18 and 19. 1 Kings 18 and 19 are in the Old Testament. That is going to be the passage that we are going to be walking through together here in just a moment.

But, before we do all of that, I just want to make you aware of a couple of things heading into this month. It is finally the month of May. And I love the month of May, especially in Indianapolis, because that means that we can finally go outside and it just kind of seems like our city comes alive during the month of May. Isn't that the case?

Yesterday, how many of you ran the Mini Marathon? Any of you people crying out in pain right now? In fact, here in just a minute... I ran the Mini and you're going to be like, "Man. Aaron just feels like he's really preaching with a lot of angst and passion." It's pain. That's pain. I'm trying to recover from that. That was yesterday.

It's all going to culminate at the end of this month on Memorial Day weekend. And for those of us in Indy, that's race weekend. So, yeah. We just want you to know that we have developed a special, online only, service experience on Memorial Day weekend. A couple of different reasons for that. Number one: There are some things that we can do online that we can't always do in person. That would be the case here. Very similar to what we do with the last weekend of the year, that online service. So, I actually sat down with our very own Ed Carpenter and we talked about life and leadership and faith and family. You're not going to want to miss that. Use that as an opportunity to invite friends and family and engage with others as you are out and about in the community.

The other reason why we do that, and we're going to talk about this here in just a minute, is just recognizing the hundreds and hundreds of volunteers who we want to give Sabbath rest to. That's one of the weekends designated for that. So, that's coming up on Memorial Day weekend.

The week before that is Compassion Sunday. So, we're going to highlight one of our compassion partners, Compassion International, and child sponsorships that day. Next weekend, this is just your fair warning, is Mother's Day. Alright? So, let's make sure that we celebrate our Moms. There we go. Yeah, there we go.



We have a special guest speaker. Tiana Spencer is going to be here to bring the message next week. You do not want to miss that message.

Today, hard to believe, we are wrapping up this five-week series that we have been in called Weeds in My Garden. If you are just now joining us, this has been a message series on mental health. And I don't know exactly how that term hits you. And I don't know what your emotional response to that term is.

Now, if you've been tracking with us through the series, hopefully it's a good one, hopefully you have recognized that the statistics are real, that the Bible speaks to it a lot. But, maybe you're just now joining us and you're like, "I don't know, man. Is that really a thing? Do we make too much of it?"

It's kind of interesting because there would be three areas in which we would talk about how it's important to maintain health: physical, spiritual, and mental or emotional. And there is, unfortunately, a stigma that is oftentimes connected to mental health that isn't connected to the others.

Here's what I mean. Within Christian circles, and especially the church, if I were to say to you, or if somebody comes up to you in your group or whatever and says, "Hey, man. How is your spiritual health?" That question might be a little bit uncomfortable, but there is not really a stigma attached to it. You would expect that question to be asked in church or group. You'd be talking about it and be real about it.

Especially, this should be true with physical health. Man, we talk about our physical health all of the time, don't we? Little aches and pains. You know, if I were to come up to you and say, "Man, I've just been wrestling with these headaches." "I've got a pulled muscle." "I've got a popping in my jaw." There is no stigma to that.

You wouldn't look at me and go, "Well, it sounds to me like you've got some unresolved sin issues in your life and you need to get right with God." That wouldn't be the case. You would be like, "Oh, man. Have you tried this aspirin?" Or, "Have you put this cream on your pulled muscle?" Whatever it is, there is no stigma attached to it.

But, unfortunately, with mental health there is. And it oftentimes changes the conversation if we even have a conversation at all. So, when we're struggling with our mental health, instead of just kind of being vulnerable about that, we sort of stuff it, we numb it, we mask it, we cope with it in very unhealthy ways that just breed more unhealth.

Now, to avoid all of that, we've just tried to be very frank and very honest about having this conversation. I've heard from so many of you over the last few weeks. In fact, this



message series, quite possibly, has had a more positive response than any other series that I can remember preaching in recent memory.

And I just want you to know this. As we put a period or an exclamation point on this series, that we are, you are, a whole person. You know that. I think we need to be reminded of it. You are a body, soul, and mind. And I think that oftentimes in church the main thing that we hear is soul, soul, soul, soul. And rightfully so. That is eternal. God cares about your soul. Not as often do we talk about the body. And hardly ever do we talk about mind.

But I want to talk about the body today and how it relates to your spiritual and physical health. And I want you to know that God cares about your mind and the health of it. In fact, Jesus would say this in Matthew, chapter 22, verse 37:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul,” and we would expect Him to say that. But then He says this, “and with all your mind.” Matthew 22:37 (NIV) And if your mind is unhealthy or you are struggling with your thoughts, you can’t fully love God with your mind. In Ephesians, chapter 6 Paul is urging the Ephesians to put on the full armor of God. Why? Because we are in a spiritual battle. We talked about that a few weeks ago. And one of the pieces of the armor is a helmet. The helmet of salvation. Proverbs says that as a man thinks, so is he. In other words, your steps first start with your mind. The direction of your life, decisions that you make, all of them culminate by some things that you say in your mind. What this means is that if Satan wants to sabotage your life, he first sabotages your thoughts. So, we’ve just got to recognize how important this subject is.

And maybe at one time or another you fell into the line of thinking that said, “You know what? If I were just more spiritual, if I was a better Christian, if I loved Jesus better, then I wouldn’t have weeds in my garden.”

And I want you to know that that is not true. And I want you to know as we look to the people in the Scriptures who God used in powerful ways, every single one of them, without exception, had weeds in their garden. They all struggled with mental health. And it didn’t mean that they were not loving God well. It didn’t mean that they were doing the Christian thing horribly. It’s just that they were human.

In fact, we’re actually going to see this. It could have meant that God was using them in a powerful way, and this is part of the reason why they struggled with their mental health, because there were adversaries coming against them. You and I were made on purpose for a purpose and that’s going to get resistance.



So, there is this guy named Jonah and God called him to be a missionary to a really pagan city called Ninevah. Jonah didn't want to do it. You may know the whole story. Jonah finally goes. And he preaches this sermon and 120,000 people turn and give their lives to God.

Now, I've preached a lot of sermons in my lifetime. I have never had that kind of response. And you would think that he would have a good day after that, but instead Jonah struggles with his mental health and he goes away and wishes he could die. Moses, he was used of God in this really powerful way. He delivers the Israelites from Egyptian slavery. And then it says in that same book, right after that he became overwhelmed and distraught.

If you didn't know any better, it's almost as if you could correlate the more you accomplish for God, the more God uses you, the more susceptible you might become to struggles in your mental health.

Now, just because you love Jesus doesn't mean that you are exempt from it. And just because you're following a Bible reading plan does not mean that there won't be pain. Just because you joined a Rooted group doesn't mean that there won't be valleys of darkness. Just because you're serving in a ministry doesn't mean that there won't be storms. Here's what it does mean. It means that after the storm passes, and it will, after the storm passes you're still standing. That's what that means.

So, I hope that if there are weeds in your garden that you realize that this is not a sign that you are failing spiritually, it's a sign that you're a human being living in a fallen world and God has called you to a purpose. And there is a spiritual battle being waged for your body, your soul, and your mind. We no longer need to hide the weeds in our garden. Instead we can say, "Yep, there are weeds in my garden but I have given my life to and I follow the Master Gardener." That's what we can say.

Now, as we were laying out this message series, hopefully you've seen, if you've been tracking with us, the last few weeks have been highly, highly practical. High, high, high application as we've chosen to tackle some topics head on. And those topics are not random. The reason why we landed on those topic is because you said those are the things that you are struggling with.

If you don't know what I'm talking about, right before Easter we did a poll. We polled 5,000 of you from our church. And you just shared with us some of your top struggles. 72% in our church said they struggled with anxiety/worry
The top struggle mentioned at 72 percent was anxiety and depression. And we talked about that last week. That's why we did.
71.6% stress/burnout



Then, number two, coming right behind it—you could even say it tied it because it was at 71.6 percent—was stress and burnout. And this was especially true of men. Men's top struggle at 68%

Sixty-eight percent of men in our church said, "Yep, that's my top struggle." Anxiety and depression for ladies. They said that was their top struggle. For men, it was stress and burnout.

So, what I want to do today is I want to talk about those two things but I want to first of all distinguish the differences. There are overlaps between stress and burnout, but I think that sometimes we throw them into the same category. I don't think that's very helpful. They are different. So, let me offer this definition of stress:

Stress: a state of mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse or very demanding circumstances

Now, adverse and very demanding circumstances could include but are not limited to things like project and assignment deadlines, paying bills, changing diapers, sick kids at home, fixing the leaky faucet, folding laundry, mowing the yard, getting the oil changed, taking the call, dealing with a frustrated customer, responding to criticism, having a hard conversation, having the airline lose your luggage (that may of hypothetically happened to me a couple of weeks ago), getting a flat tire, filing taxes, cleaning up after the dog, and cleaning up after your husband.

In other words, life. Life. Stress is a part of life. Doing multiple hard things at once to keep your household going and to keep your life going is just a part of life. And that stress is like the tension against the adverse circumstances that we all experience. Let me say this. Not all stress is bad. Some stress is good. And stress ebbs and it flows. Some stress is situational. It's the unexpected or the untimely. Some stress is seasonal. It's a certain time of day, a certain time of week, a certain time of year. It rises and it falls depending upon the season or depending upon what you do for a living or your family dynamics.

If I could use this word, part of adulting is understanding and developing a certain amount of resilience, responsibility, fortitude, and grit to navigate the stresses of life. And if you don't, when life gets challenging you'll fold. When life gets challenging you avoid, you blame, you numb to the stresses that just naturally arise.

Actually, growing into a responsible adult is really a process in leaning into the stresses that come and developing sure feet and a thick skin around some of those things. We see stress all throughout the Bible. King Saul was a guy who had accomplished a lot. He was well respected. But we begin to see as he grows older that the stress eventually begins to get to him, especially when it comes to succession planning



because his identity, like so many of us—it's not just men, but a lot of men wrestle with this, women wrestle with it too—we can wrestle with what we do and we tie that up in our identity. That's what Saul did.

Saul couldn't distinguish between what he did and who he was. So, when he was starting to get up there in years, he brings in his successor, a guy by the name of David, who begins to outshine him.

Then to make matters worse, the people start singing songs about David and Saul. And here's the lyric to the song: Saul has killed his thousands, David his tens of thousands. And Saul was like, "I'm irrelevant." And he was stressed. And he didn't manage it well. His whole life unraveled in a tragic way. He did not finish well.

You go to a guy like Moses. Moses gets utterly frustrated with the people. He goes up on Mount Sinai, gets the Ten Commandments. He comes down. He sees that the Israelites had lost their minds. They were partying. They were worshipping a golden calf. He takes the Ten Commandments throws them on the ground and shatters them. That was a moment of stress.

Elijah, who we're going to read about in a minute, he asked a single mom for some food in the middle of a famine. That would have been stressful. But she's stressed. You can tell by her response to him. She said, "Well, I'm going to make one last meal for me and my child and then I'm going to die." That's what stressful people say. Jesus even experienced stress. Some of you are like, "Really? How so?" He was always retreating. He was always going away to be replenished.

When we look at the creation account, there is a reason why God created Sabbath rest. This is like preventative maintenance to keep us from this place where the wheels end up coming off.

Now, I say all of that to say this. There is nothing wrong with you if you're feeling some stress. That is totally normal. The problem is not work. We were made to work. Work preceded the fall. Work is not a curse of sin. Sin has just complicated the work. The problem isn't the demands or the deadlines. People depend on us to fulfill what we said we would do at the time we said we would do it. The problem arises when we don't manage the stress well. We don't do preventative maintenance. We don't develop rhythms and routines and pay attention to replenishment cycles. I think that many of us think that it's either an on or off switch. But it's like we've actually got to develop rhythms to the way that we work.

Think about it like maintenance on your car. Your car was not made to stay parked in the garage. Your car was made to run. Your car was made to get out on the road. Your



engine was made to start. But when it does it creates friction. That's stress on the engine. There are moving parts. They heat up. And then you've got to take your car in to get an oil change. You have to take care of it in order to keep it on the road longer. You are no different. You were made to run. God made you on purpose for a purpose—to be productive, to provide, and to protect. You were made to create and to contribute, but not without regular maintenance.

If you run full out, open accelerator, never replenish, and you're not paying attention to the gages on your emotional, spiritual, or physical dashboards you will eventually break down. It's not a matter of if, it's a matter of when. And the word for that is burnout. Now, let me define burnout.

Burnout is a psychological syndrome that occurs as a result of chronic stress. Now, the reason I threw that word in there is because it's not just a result of stress. Stress is a part of life. But chronic stress, where you've not been sabbathing, you've not been developing routines and rhythms to maintain your emotional, physical, and spiritual health, they become chronic. In other words you're so stressed and you get to this place where you think it's normal, but it's not normal. And then you eventually break down into one of those three categories: emotionally, spiritually, or physically.

Here are some words that are used to describe what burnout feels like: exhaustion, cynicism, detachment, ineffectiveness, lack of accomplishment, alienation, numbness, feeling useless, feeling powerless and feeling empty.

Here's a chart behind me. You can maybe take a picture with your phone to get this filled in. The difference between stress and burnout:

STRESS

- Over-engagement
- Overactive emotions
- Urgency or hyperactivity
- Loss of energy
- Physical wear
- Need to slow down

BURNOUT

- Disengagement
- Blunted emotions
- Detached or lethargic
- Loss of motivation and hope
- Emotional wear
- Unable to start up

Stress is over engagement but burnout is disengagement. Stress is an overactive emotion; burnout is blunted emotions—you just don't feel anything. Stress is urgency or

hyperactivity. Burnout is detached or lethargic. Stress is a loss of energy. Burnout is a loss of motivation and hope. Stress is physical wear. Burnout is emotional wear. Stress is the need to slow down but burnout is that you are unable to start up.

Now, as you look at that graph, for some of you this may be hitting you right where you live and you realize that you fit the description, not of left category [stress] but of the right [burnout].

You're like, "Man, I'm burned out or I am dangerously close to that," and you're not quite sure what to do about it, which can lead to further isolation and masking or we deal with it in really unhealthy ways. We ignore it, numb it, deny it, we develop addictions to a substance or a behavior to cover it up.

And you just drive and drive and drive and drive and ignore and ignore and ignore until you break.

When I was in college, the catalytic converter on my car went out. I didn't know what a catalytic converter was then. I still don't know. I knew the little red light came on on my dashboard. And I knew I was going to need to take it in, but I was afraid to take it in because I didn't know how expensive it was going to be to fix it. And I didn't have any money because I was a poor college student.

I didn't have the money to pay for it but I did have money to purchase black tape, a whole roll of it. I went to the store and I bought some black tape and I cut a little piece just big enough to cover the little red light on the dashboard. Problem solved. I didn't have to see the light any more. The car started every time. It ran okay. I was like, "That little pesky light is not there to bother me."

Until one day I was driving home. I was on the interstate going about 70 miles an hour and I heard a large popping sound and the accelerator dropped all the way to the floor. The car slowed down. My max speed was about 40 miles an hour. And I looked in the rearview mirror. Black smoke was billowing out the back.

Now, you would think, being as bright as I am, that I would have pulled over. Oh no. Oh no. Here's what I did. I firmly fixed my hands at ten and two and I leaned forward over the steering wheel and I just kept the accelerator all of the way down. I was like, "I've got about 40 miles to go. I can get back into town. I think it's going to be okay."

I just kept going and going and going, black smoke billowing out the back. And this older couple in a Buick pulled up right beside me. They were driving parallel on the interstate, top speed about 40 miles per hour. I don't think it was because their car was broken. I think that is just how fast they drove.

And I can tell that they are trying to flag me down. And I'm ignoring them. I can see out of my peripheral and I didn't want to face them. So, I just stayed leaning over my steering wheel. I didn't know what good that was doing but I was like willing the car down the road.

Finally, I was like, "Okay, just look over." And I looked over and she was so sweet. She was looking at me and she was pointing to the back of my car. Here's what I did. I said, "I know. I know." And I just kept going.

Now, I don't think I even need to tell you how that illustration ends. It ended eventually with me on the side of the road fluids pouring out the bottom of the car and it wouldn't even start.

When I had it towed into the shop the guy was like, "What were you thinking, man? If you would have brought this in it would have been a fraction of the cost. But, now you've got all of this additional expense." He was pretty much like, "You blew all of this stuff in your engine."

And you know what? You and I are no different. The little light comes on and you take the black tape and you just kind of cover it however you want to do that. Masking it with a substance. Masking it with more work. Masking it by just pretending it's not there. Masking it with this, "I'm fine."

You just put it over the dash and your like, "Ten and two, man. Just get me across the finish line. Let me close the deal." "Let me retire." "Let me graduate the kids." "Let me get to the end of this season." And people are trying to flag you down, "I don't want to pay attention to that because they're telling me things I don't want to hear."

So, what ends up happening is that eventually you completely crash and burn. And it's even more costly than it would have been if you would have just gotten a little bit of the regular maintenance.

Choose your pain — long-term or short-term

Can I just say this? When it comes to stress and burnout in your life, it's going to cost you something to address it. You choose the cost. It's either short term pain or long term pain. And it is far better to choose the short term pain, the inconvenience. Maybe it's going to be the investment of counselling or it's going to be the investment of healthy processes and developing disciplines or going to the gym or eating better or whatever it's going to be.

Now, here's really why this message is so critical. I want to be really clear about this. When I'm talking about stress and burnout, I'm talking about monitoring your dashboard, your physical, spiritual, mental health. I'm not just talking about self-care. And I'm not



talking about insuring that you have a good energy level. You just feel good. Although those things are important, we'd never minimize them.

Here's why this is important. When you are stressed out to the point of burnout, that's when you make some of your dumbest decisions. That's when you blow up a marriage. That's when you sabotage a career. That's when you wind up with a permanent record. You're not thinking clearly. You're stressed. That's when you say things you don't mean. But you said it, and now your loved one is going to remember it forever. It's going to leave a mark.

Oftentimes I'll be talking to leaders in certain circles and they are so stressed, they are under so much pressure, and they don't know how to... They don't know where the off ramp is. So they make a decision to blow up their lives just to get off the road. And by that time the shrapnel of their decision hits all of the people around them and it hurts everybody.

So, what we want to do... Stress is a part of life and when you see the red light come on the dashboard, you don't cover it. You say, "You know what? I need to actually develop some rhythms and replenishments in order to stay at a high level so that spiritually, emotionally, and physically I can stay filled up to do what it is that God has tasked me to do. Your loved ones need you to be there. We need you to be there. The kingdom of God needs you to be there, to be at your absolute best.

We can't eliminate stress, but we can be intentional about recovery and replenishment. You cannot eliminate stress. What you can do is be intentional about recovery and replenishment. And it's more practical than you think. I think, oftentimes, we're looking for this big, huge, mysterious ah ha kind of a thing. And what we see in the passage today is that God is extremely practical.

Now, I want to look at Elijah's life here. Elijah, if you don't know anything about him, he was a prophet. And prophets in the Old Testament were some of the most stressed out dudes in the Bible. Their job was to deliver bad news to bad people every day.

You want to talk about stress. They made a lot of enemies and these enemies wanted to kill them. These were the occupational hazards of being a prophet. They couldn't get anybody to approve a life insurance policy for them. (That joke didn't work any hour. I was really confident in you guys. I think it was the delivery. I think it was the delivery). His story is in 1 Kings. And here's what God called Elijah to do. Elijah goes to deliver bad news to an evil king named Ahab. The only one more evil than Ahab was his wife, a lady by the name of Jezebel. And she hated Elijah.

His first assignment was to deliver a message of a coming drought and famine that would last for years. That didn't get him any friends. And, by the way, Elijah would suffer from this drought as well. Tons of stress—it required him to move to a different country. Tons of stress.

When the drought came, the water dried up, there was no food, he was forced to put his trust in God and he relied upon a Gentile woman who was a single mom. Stressed. Her son dies. It falls on Elijah's shoulders to bring him back to life. Stress. A guy by the name of Obadiah comes to him and he tells him, "Hey, man. Ahab has sent these headhunters to come get you and he's not relenting." Look at verse 10 of chapter 18:

"As surely as the Lord your God lives, there is not a nation or kingdom where my master has not sent someone to look for you. And whenever a nation or kingdom claimed you were not there, he made them swear they could not find you." 1 Kings 18:10 (NIV) In other words, "Ahab is not going to rest until you are dead, Elijah." And there were multiple months of all of that. And then it all culminates with actually, sort of like a spiritual victory. And if you've never read this story I want to encourage you to go read it later today. It's one of my favorite stories in the Bible. Elijah challenges King Ahab and the prophets of his false god, Baal, there were 450 of them, to a dual. An old fashioned western dual. It's so great. There would have been tumble weeds and everything. And what happened is that they built an altar, put an animal on it, built another altar and put an animal on it. And Elijah says, "Here's the deal. Why don't you pray to all of your false gods and see if they send fire to consume the altar. And then when that doesn't work, I'll pray to the one true God and watch Him send fire to consume.

So, man. They start praying. Elijah lets them go first. They start praying. They are tearing their clothes. They are doing everything and nothing is happening. And I love it because this is where trash talking gets born. Elijah starts talking trash. I get this visual that he is standing there with his feet crossed and maybe chewing on a toothpick. And he says, "Nothing is happening here. Why don't you guys shout a little louder?"

And you can read this in the text. He says, "Maybe your false gods are asleep." And then here's my favorite. He goes, "Maybe they are relieving themselves." It's so good, man. It's in the Scripture. Alright?

So, all of that happened, nothing goes down. And then Elijah prays. Boom. God consumes the altar with fire. It's amazing. And then right after that, God sends the clouds and the rain, ends the drought. You would think that Elijah would just be on cloud nine like, "Yeah, we did it. It's amazing."

Not exactly. This is after years and years and years of stress and him not really managing all of it that well. It didn't matter that he had that spiritual victory, he burned out. Look at chapter 19, verses 1 through 5:

"Now Ahab told Jezebel," his wife, "everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. 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.'"

If you don't know what she just said, she's basically giving him 24 hours to live. She's like, "I'm coming after you and I want you dead." Here's Elijah's response:

"Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, while he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die." '

Now, here's the statement.

"I have had enough, LORD,"

That's what burnout sounds like. I have had enough:

"Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors."

That is imposture syndrome, negative self-talk right there. It's not true. It's what he felt.

Verse 5:

"Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep." 1 Kings 19:1-5a (NIV)

That's a picture of burnout. He is emotionally exhausted. If you were to read on in verse 9, he no longer feels effective so he hides in a cave. In verse 10 he feels all alone and isolated when he declares, "I'm the only one left." He is in complete despair. He asked God to take his life. And all of that is after a huge, spiritual, mountaintop victory experience.

Oftentimes that's the way that it works. I've just gotten used to it. I know coming in to Christmas services, Easter services, worship nights, anything on the calendar that looks like it might be a spiritually mountaintop experience, I make sure... I normally get prayed up for the ascend, but I make sure that I'm prayed up for the descend because that's where the enemy will get us.

You come down off of the spiritual mountaintop, you come back from the conference, you come back from the camp, you come back from the thing and you are like all fired up and then all of a sudden all of your adrenals calm down and then Satan pounces.

And oftentimes we make our worst decisions after spiritual mountaintop experiences.

Guys, I experience this almost every single Sunday afternoon. I come down after preaching and I just feel, probably the most intense spiritual attack on Sunday

afternoon. It's just the way this spiritual battle has a tendency to work. And we can be most vulnerable to temptation and make some our most foolish decisions. And this is what Elijah is going through. God has used him in incredible ways. But he's human. And he's spent.

Now, here's what I want you to see. In the midst of that moment, God meets Elijah right where he is and he walks him through it and out of it. And right now, if you're feeling stressed, chronic stress, or even if you're going, "You know what? There is no doubt about it. I'm burned out." I want you to hear this:
God will meet you in it and help you through it

God will meet you in it and He will walk you through it, maybe in ways that you haven't anticipated because we expect God to move in these big, dramatic things. God will move in the more subtle. And we see this in the case of Elijah. What God says to Elijah is extremely practical. So practical. We have a tendency, oftentimes...
In fact I'm trying to think of the last time I even heard a message that is going to talk about some of the things that I'm going to talk about here in just a minute.
See, the best time to address burnout is before you need to. That's always better. That's called preventative care. The best way to recover from burnout is by taking a deep breath, diagnosing your dashboards, and asking God to meet your needs. And here's the first place where God begins with Elijah:
God met his physical needs

Look at chapter 19, verse 5 through 8. Remember where Elijah was, passed out under the bush:

"All at once an angel touched him and said, 'Get up and eat.'"
Notice he didn't say, "Hey, get up and pray." "Hey, get up read your Bible." "Get up and do your devotions." All great things. That's not what the angel starts with. The angel starts with eating. Praise God! That's one of my favorite things to do. And in verse 6 it says:
"He looked around, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals,"
Bread! It wasn't protein. It wasn't a vegetable. It wasn't some fruit. It was carbs! Praise Jesus for gluten. Alright? You've got a scripture and a verse right there.
"and a jar of water."

I don't know, I'm sure it had electrolytes in it or something. It says this:
"He ate and drank and then," he prayed? No. "He ate and drank and then lay down again." He took another nap. And then it says:

"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 19:5b-8 (NIV)

Here's what I want you to see. You've got three dashboards: emotional, spiritual, and physical. You cannot separate them. They are integrated and if one is down or struggling, it's going to affect the others. God knows that.

So Elijah's tanks are empty emotionally and spiritually and physically, but the way that God chooses to fill the emotional and spiritual tank is He fed him first. He paid attention to the physical. Now, here's why this is so important. Until your physical needs are met then you're not going to be able to address the emotional and the spiritual.

This is the part of the message that I really wrestled with a little bit because any preacher will tell you this. There is a fine line between factual application and putting my nose in your business where it doesn't belong—meddling. This could border on that, but I'm going to go ahead and do it. It's the end of the series.

Here are the three questions I just want you to consider. This is just for you. It's not up to me or anybody else to answer these for you, you answer these on your own:

Are you eating right?

Are you getting enough exercise?

Are you getting enough quality sleep?

Occasionally, I will have people either come into my office or other leaders from other states will text me or call me and say, "Hey, can I get a little bit of your time? I'm so stressed. I think I might be burned out. And I'm wanting to know from you, do I need some time off? Do I need a sabbatical?"

It's kind of interesting to me. Most of the time that's usually some of the first suggestions come when we're dealing with stress and burnout, "I think I just need time off." "I think I need a sabbatical." Well, maybe. Maybe.

But let's not start there. How about we start with this? Are you getting 10,000 steps a day in? Are you laying off of the chicken chimichanga at midnight and then you are going to bed? Boy, it got really quiet and awkward. I kind of feel like an Old Testament prophet right now.

We need to start with the physical. Now, I'm not saying this at you. I'm saying this because, man, I learned this the hard way. My 20s, some of you can attest to this, my 20s were the hardest decade of my life. I hope I don't have another decade that is as hard as my 20s. My 20s to me felt like an extended adolescence, except the stakes were much higher.

I was newly married. I was trying to figure that out. I brought a couple of little kids into the world, trying to care for them. I was starting off in ministry—really, honestly, all kinds of self-doubt. I didn't know if I had what it took. I started a church on top of that. That is one of the hardest things you can do.



I had a high metabolism. I was a high school athlete. And so I just kind of thought that my metabolism would stay with me into my 20s. I was eating poorly and was up two sizes. I was meeting with all kinds of people. We were having lunches at Chinese buffets and I was having all kinds of deserts with people. I wasn't sleeping well. I wasn't exercising. I was overweight and under rested. And I was over stressed.

It really kind of culminated... It was affecting me emotionally and spiritually. God felt distant. My sermons didn't have power. I was so frustrated. I was struggling in all of these different areas.

I'll never forget. It culminated for me when I was 29 years old. I went to the doctor's office for my annual checkup and I was sitting there on that butcher paper. We have lots of doctors in our church. Why?

So, I'm sitting there on that butcher paper and I've got my shirt off. I'm sitting there kind of hunched over. And my doctor, who was annoyingly fit and good looking, walked in and he looked at me. I'll never forget this question. He looked at me and he goes, "Hey, Aaron. Do you think you could lose some weight?" I was like, "Now I do. And I hate your face." I'm really glad that he said it because it was kind of like a wake up call. And it didn't happen all at once. It was sort of a turning point for me where I was like, "You know..."

Now, here's the thing. I want you to hear this. Part of the reason why we don't talk enough about this in church is because you're like, "What does this have to do with the Bible and spiritual things?" It has everything to do with them. It doesn't have anything to do with vanity or getting six-pack abs.

It has everything to do with this. God pulled the curtain back and he said, "Aaron, I've called you to something and I want you to do something at a high level, and I want you to do it for a long period of time. And if you're 29 feeling this way, by the time you're 49 you're not going to be able to do what I have called you to do."

So, it wasn't like a switch. It was just like a natural thing where I was like, "Okay. We've got to figure out how to eat better, exercise. Trial and error. Backward and forward all throughout life.

And I would say the same thing to you. I don't need to meddle in your life and not everything is for everyone. You've got to figure out your own metrics: physical, emotional, and spiritual. And, "What is it that God has called me to do?"

You thought the first set of questions was meddling. These definitely are. Alright?

Buckle up:

Have your bloodwork and hormone levels checked



I don't know how many people say, "Man, I just feel like low energy and irritable and I feel like I'm under spiritual attack." Well, maybe. But your hormone levels could be way off. And you need to get that stuff checked.

Do your research on cold plunges and heat therapy

Yeah. I said it. I said it. Thank you guys. I said it. Now, here's part of the reason. I sit in a cold barrel of 38 degree water about 12 minutes a week and I sit in hot boxes called saunas. People think I'm crazy for that, "Does that really help?" Well, I think there is enough evidence to show that it does help with inflammation and all that kind of thing. Here's why I do it. I do it because sitting in 38 degree water for three minutes is the hardest thing I'll do all day. And it develops mental fortitude because then I can go in and have a hard... Nobody clapped for that. I will go in and I will have a hard conversation and I'll go, "Well, it wasn't as hard as sitting in 38 degree water.

And here's the video. When it comes to cold plunges, this is the most common response I get. People go, "I don't like cold water." Nobody likes cold water. That's the point. I hate it. Every time I get in it. But it develops mental fortitude. Alright? That's the part. Hey, man. You can take that. You can leave it.

Here's another one:

Get an app that helps you track your physical metrics

Get an app that helps you track your physical metrics: heart rate, sleep, all of that kind of stuff. For the record, this is a watch [on his left wrist] this is not [on his right wrist]. This tracks my metrics. Stop emailing me. Pay attention to the sermon, not what I'm wearing. Here's the last one:

Do some stretching and breathwork

I threw that one in for me because I stink at both of those things. I'm as flexible as a two by four and I forget to breathe. Alright? So you can put that in there.

Now, listen. Not all of those things are for everybody. But you owe it to yourself to look into them because oftentimes we're looking at a spiritual dashboard when it's physical. God fed Elijah. God let Elijah sleep. And then He dealt with the emotional and the spiritual.

You might need time off. Maybe not. I love what author Carey Nieuwhof said about this. He said:

"More time off isn't the solution when the problem is the way you spend time on."

So, you could take three months off and then come back to eating poorly, not getting enough sleep, running yourself into the ground. You're just going to need another three months off three months later.

Here's the next thing. Alright?

God broadened his perspective



God broadened Elijah's perspective. And that's what you and I need. God asked him what he was doing there and Elijah responds by feeling a little sorry for himself. And then he says this, "God, I've been very zealous for You." Translation, "God, I've been putting in 50 plus hours a week for You. God, I've been working overtime for You and I'm the only one left, I'm the only one who has been faithful and now they are trying to kill me."

And here's what God said to him:

"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," that's a high wind.

Listen. "...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."
That's what God was in.

"When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave." 1 Kings 19:11-13a (NIV)

Here's what that means. Most of the time when we are burned out we are looking for some massive move of God. We're looking for the wind. We're looking for the earthquake. We're looking for the fire.

And it's not that God can't and won't move in those ways, but most of the time He speaks and moves in a gentle whisper. And He says, "I'm not asking you to find Me on some sabbatical on a mountain or a beach somewhere. I'm asking to meet with you in your living room or on your front porch in the daily rhythms of your day—the gentle whisper.

I want you to hear this, man:

When you give your life to Christ, things don't just happen to you, but for you
When you give your life to Christ, things don't just happen to you, they happen for you.
And God wants to use some of those challenges and trials that some of you are walking in right now, "I know that it feels like this is coming against you, but I actually want to use this stress to strengthen you."

And you can have this promise. You can take it to the bank. God will never take you through a valley where He doesn't return to you something of equal or greater value. It all depends upon where you are looking. And ultimately there is hope. There is hope no matter what it is that you are going through, you don't need to hide the weeds in your garden.



I pray that this would be a church where we can be vulnerable or we can say, “Man, this is what I’m going through.” And then we can also recognize in the same breath, “I follow and I serve and I give my life to the Master Gardener. I want you to give the Master Gardener access to your garden by inviting Him in and just asking Him to do what only He can do.

We just want to wrap up today by doing what we’ve done every week of this series, just by offering you a time to reflect and to pray and to be prayed over. I would hope that this would become a house of prayer. And not only would you come down front to receive prayer from prayer counselors, but even just praying with your friends and family right where you are in the seats around you. Just huddle up and pray.

I would hope that our church, no matter what location, that we would say, “You know what? It is really hard to go to that church without being prayed over. We just know. I’m voicing something in the lobby, ‘Hey, man. I’m not just going to tell you I’m going to pray for you. I’m going to pray for you right now.’” Right now if you need to be prayed for and prayed over, we just want to pray that the Gardener would meet us right where we are to give us strength to do it.

Let me just finish this with this. You owe it to yourself and to others and to God to be at your optimal best: your physical, your emotional, and your spiritual because your life is on purpose. Your days are numbered. And they count and they matter. And God has placed you in this place and in this time to bring a contribution that nobody else can make, only you. And He wants you to be at your optimal best. So, let me pray for you.

Father, we love You. We thank You, thank You for being the Master Gardener who tends to the weeds in our garden. We don’t have to hide them from You. We just need to be real.

So, Father, I just pray for those who are—they’ve got a heavy load right now: single parents, business owners, people in high stress jobs—I just pray that You would sustain them. I pray that they would see the meaning in their work. I pray that You would keep their tanks full. I pray that you would give them wisdom on how to navigate the replenishment cycles.

God, for those who are just burned out I pray that they would realize that they are firmly fixed in that right side of that category that we looked at a few moments ago, God I pray that You, just like You did with Elijah, would meet them right where they are at in it and walk them through it. Strengthen them God so that that way they can get back up on their feet and keep going. We ask this right now in Jesus’ name. Amen.

