

How To Prevent Burn-Out

What is “burn-out”?

It was originally a term that came into use with the space age, referring to when a rocket had used up all its fuel and stopped functioning.

Nowadays, “burn-out” is used to describe emotional and spiritual depletion, when you are mentally fatigued, physically exhausted and frustrated: all these combine to cause what is called “burn-out”.

Britain’s energy crisis occurs every Monday morning when people go back to work.

What does God’s Christian Bible say about avoiding “burn-out”?

In the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon was searching for the reason for life, and most of the time he was looking in the wrong places.

Solomon did, however, along this journey express some wise conclusions, among some “off the wall” statements.

Unless we read Ecclesiastes as a whole, and especially the last two verses, we can come to some wrong conclusions about what God is saying to us through the writings of Solomon.

Although Solomon comes up with some wrong ideas in the middle part of the book, he does finish up with a wise conclusion.

If anybody in life was “burnt out”, Solomon was when he wrote the book of Ecclesiastes.

Solomon was “fed up”, discouraged, depressed, disillusioned, bored, frustrated, very “burnt out”.

Ecclesiastes 1:2-12 [Living Bible] *“In my opinion, nothing is worthwhile; everything is futile. For what does a man get for all his hard work? Generations come and go but it makes no difference. The sun rises and sets and hurries around to rise again. The wind blows south and north, here and there, twisting back and forth, getting nowhere. The rivers run into the sea but the sea is never full, and the water returns again to the rivers, and flows again to the sea... everything is unutterably weary and tiresome. No matter how much we see, we are never satisfied; no matter how much we hear, we are not content. History merely repeats itself. Nothing is truly new; it has all been done or said before. What can you point to that is new? How do you know it didn’t exist long ages ago? We don’t remember what happened in those former times, and in the future generations no one will remember what we have done back here. I, the Preacher, was king of Israel, living in Jerusalem.”*

This is a “Grade A” depression.

Ecclesiastes 2:17-18; 20, 23 [Living Bible] *“So now I hate life because it is all so irrational; all is foolishness, chasing the wind. And I am disgusted about this, that I must leave the fruits of all my hard work to others.” ... “So I turned in despair from hard work as the answer to my search for satisfaction.” ... “Days full of sorrow and grief, and restless, bitter nights. It is all utterly ridiculous.”*

Here we have described someone with a problem!!

Fortunately Solomon did not leave us with this description of the problem in his search for what life is all about. He came up with some right conclusions while he was checking out all the different things that could be experienced in life.

Amongst this we see some preventative steps for “burn-out”.

How to prevent “burn-out” by Solomon.

1) Maintain balance in our lifestyle

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 [Living Bible] *“There is a right time for everything: A time to be born, a time to die; A time to plant; A time to harvest; A time to kill; A time to heal; A time to destroy; A time to rebuild; A time to cry; A time to laugh; A time to grieve; A time to dance; A time for scattering stones; A time for gathering stones; A time to hug; A time not to hug; A time to find; A time to lose; A time for keeping; A time for throwing away; A time to tear; A time to repair; A time to be quiet; A time to speak up; A time for loving; A time for hating; A time for war; A time for peace.”*

Here we have 14 different contrasts we experience in life.

Life is composed of opposites, and if we are to prevent “burn-out” we must balance out our life with opposites.

Life is a balancing act.

There must be a time and place for everything.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 [Living Bible] *“Everything is appropriate in its own time. But though God has planted eternity in the hearts of men, even so, man cannot see the whole scope of God’s work from beginning to end.”*

Ecclesiastes 3:11 [NIV] *“He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men;”*

When I talk to people who have “burn-out” I find the No. 1 characteristic in their life is a lack of balance.

Areas of their lives that are being neglected.

What was Solomon’s problem?

What was his weakness, imbalance?

Read the first two chapters of Ecclesiastes and you have described a workaholic.

Five times in the first two chapters Solomon brags about his hard work.

The law of balance works in all aspects of life and creation.

When you buy a set of new tyres for your car you have the wheels balanced to avoid uneven wear that shortens the bumpy ride!

An architect will tell you that a building that is well balanced will withstand greater pressures exerted on it, wind, etc.

When we get sick, doctors know that it is an imbalance in our bodily functions.

Ecologists tell us of the need to maintain balance in the eco-system to avoid disasters.

All of nature is in balance; God created a balanced universe.

To prevent “burn-out” we must balance out our lifestyle.

Balance professional with personal

Balance work with play

Balance being with doing

Balance physical with spiritual

Balance receiving with giving

Balance speaking with listening

Balance crying with laughing

A survey of the 1,500 achievers in every aspect of professional life showed that the number one common denominator in their lives was a balanced lifestyle with a wide variety of interests.

Contrary to popular opinion, it was not those who devoted their lives totally to one thing who were among the top achievers; they were among those who “burnt out” the fastest.

If we are over-committed we “burn out” but if we give up all our commitments to avoid “burn-out” we end up in the other ditch and “stagnate”.

We become like the Dead Sea in the Middle East that takes in the water of the River Jordan but does not give out any of that water; it becomes salty and everything in it dies.

We have to maintain a balance of receiving and giving.

You don't stop giving when you become “burnt out”, you just get “hooked on to” some receiving as well as to continue to give out.

2) Develop some strong personal relationships

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 [Living Bible] *“Two can accomplish more than twice as much as one, for the results can be much better. If one falls, the other pulls him up; but if a man falls when he is alone, he's in trouble. Also, on a cold night, two under the same blanket gain warmth from each other, but how can one be warm alone? And one standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer; three is even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken.”*

The second great cause of “burn-out” is the lack of emotional support; you feel you are out there all by yourself.

The fact is we all need constant love, attention, care and affirmation from others in our life to avoid emotional stress and “burn-out”.

Pity the person who doesn't have anyone to give support when they become emotionally drained.

The Beatles sang *“I get by with a little help from my friends.”*

How true that is.

Everyone needs at least one person they can count on to give help when they feel “down” in life.

It has been said that *“a friend is someone who walks in when everyone else is walking out.”*

Everyone needs a friend: two are better than one.

Personal support is critical to our survival in this present stressful society.

The Bible says choose your friends wisely.

Psalm 1:1 [Good News Bible] *“Happy are those who reject the advice of evil men, who do not follow the example of sinners or join those who have no use for God.”*

Don’t associate with negative, sarcastic, cynical people because some of their attitude is bound to “rub off” onto you.

Such a negative person is a stress in your life rather than a support.

I’m grateful for my friends who give me support.

Much of the credit for anything I do goes to them.

Why?

Because you can do far more when others believe in you!

We all need such strong relationships; we cannot survive pressure without support of family and friends: ask for it and accept it.

You may say, *“that’s great, I would like to have some personal friends to give me such support but!!”*

You make friends by being friendly to others.

You make a personal support group by being a support to others.

Hebrews 10:25 [NIV] *“Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another-- and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”*

This is one of the reasons Christ formed His Church: as a support group for all His Followers.

To enable us to build strong relationships with other Christians.

There is great strength that comes from sharing.

Never be too busy for building strong relationships, especially within a church fellowship.

Acts 2:41-43 [Good News Bible] *“Many of them believed His [Peter’s] message and were baptised ... they spent their time in learning from the Apostles, taking part in the fellowship, and sharing in the fellowship meals and the prayers.”*

3) Take time to enjoy the present

Ecclesiastes 5:18-20 [Good News Bible] *“This is what I have found out: the best thing that anyone can do is to eat, and drink and enjoy what he has worked for during the short life that God has given him, this is man’s fate. If God gives a man wealth and property and lets him enjoy them, he should be grateful and enjoy what he has worked for. It is a gift from God. Since God has allowed him to be happy, he will not worry too much about how short life is.”*

Ecclesiastes 5:18-20 [Living Bible] *“Well, one thing, at least, is good: it is for a man to eat well, drink a good glass of wine, accept his position in life, and enjoy his work whatever his job may be, for however long the Lord may let him live. And, of course, it is very good if a man has received wealth from the Lord, and the good health to enjoy it. To enjoy your work and to accept your lot in life – that*

is indeed a gift from God. The person who does that will not need to look back with sorrow on his past, for God gives him joy.”

Take time to enjoy the present; life was meant to be enjoyed, not just endured. Stop and smell the roses.

My father, a sub-postmaster, when he encountered someone who was being “*pushy*” because they were in a great hurry to be served, he would deliberately pause and quote a verse from the poem: “*What is life if so full of care that we don’t have time to stand and stare.*”

He taught me that great key to releasing the pressure of day.

Stop and look at some part of God’s beautiful creation and praise Him for it.

It’s a great safety valve for built-up pressure.

A flower; the clouds in the sky; or even a fly on the windowpane.

You can get so busy working that you never stop to enjoy the result of that work; and that is a condition for “*burn-out*”.

Never get in the position where you regret the past: ignore the present and worry about the future.

The past and future are **not** in your total control but the present is.

Don’t ignore enjoying it to the full.

Some people are like that: they even take a briefcase of work home with them or when they go on vocation.

There is an old Greek motto that says, “*you will break the bow if you always keep it bent.*”

Loosening the strings on our “*bows*” means that when we leisure time we use it to relax and forget all about work, concentrating on enjoying relaxation and relationships.

Gain some perspective that our “*work rut*” will prevent us from seeing.

Two things I’ve noticed about people who have suffered “*burn-out*”:

a) **They feel guilty anytime they relax**

b) **They take everything too seriously**

One of the healthiest habits is to develop a sense of humour.

Proverbs 17:22 [Living Bible] “*A cheerful heart does good like medicine.*”

Laughter is a tremendous device for coping with life with its ups and downs.

A mark of consistency in a person is their ability to laugh at their inconsistencies.

Do you think God has a sense of humour?

Well, he made you and I didn’t He!!

4) Learn contentment

Why?

Contentment allows you to enjoy the present, while you are working on your goals for the future.

Ecclesiastes 5:10-12 [Living Bible] *“He who loves money shall never have enough. The foolishness of thinking that wealth brings happiness! The more you have, the more you spend, right up to the limits of your income, so what is the advantage of wealth – except perhaps to watch it as it runs through your fingers! The man who works hard sleeps well whether he eats little or much, but the rich must worry and suffer insomnia.”*

Ecclesiastes 6:6 [Living Bible] *“Though a man lives a thousand years twice over, but doesn’t find contentment – well, what’s the use?”*

What is the use of living if you never find contentment.

5) Stop playing God

Let God be God, resign as *“manager of the universe”*.

We “burn out” because we take on burdens that God never intended us to shoulder.

Worry is assuming responsibility for something that God never intended us to have responsibility for.

Trying to play God is one job description you cannot fill.

The message of Ecclesiastes is that it is foolish and frustrating if we try to live our lives without God in it.

What then do we do?

a) We recognise our limitations

We are not God; we are not even Superman!

We are human beings, and when we try to be anything more than that we are going to *“burn-out”*.

Admit to God that *“there are areas in my life that are beyond my control. God I need your help. God I need your strength.”*

b) We draw strength from that eternal unlimited source, God

We set aside time every day to develop a relationship with God through study of His Word [listening to what He wants to tell us] and in prayer [telling Him of all our hopes and fears, and ask Him to help us through all the trials and pressures of the day ahead].

What was Solomon’s conclusion to all of this?

Remember, I said not to read Ecclesiastes without reading the last two verses.

Solomon says don’t play God.

Recognise God for who He is.

Let humans be human and God be God, and don’t confuse the two roles.

God will do His job as God if we treat Him as God and obey His Rules then we will be just fine in life.

Solomon was looking for the reasons for life in all the wrong places; continually came to a dead end. Then he was forced into this final conclusion.

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 [Living Bible] *“Here is my final conclusion: **fear God and obey His commandments**, for this is the entire duty of man. For God will judge us for everything we do, including every hidden thing, good or bad.”*

“Fear God” doesn’t mean to be terrified of God, for He is a loving God; **it means have reverence or godly awe of him.**

It means treat God as God [supreme]; **not** the *“big buddy in the sky”*.

He is God and we are human.

Accept God’s decisions as valid.

“Obey his commandments”

These principles that God has given us are not to limit our lives but prevent all the things that will be harmful to us and take our happiness and fulfilment from us.

Avoid our suffering *“burn-out”* and similar traumas in life.

When a person ignores these principles for life that God has blessed us with, they will suffer all kinds of problems in life.

We have emotional conflicts because we are not living in harmony with a lifestyle we were created to experience.

Some of you here are *“modern day Solomons”* saying *“I’ve tried it all, I’ve looked for fulfilment everywhere, and I’m still just not satisfied.”*

You tried pleasure, possessions, power, position but all left you unsatisfied and *“burnt out”*.

Jesus summarised the whole of Ecclesiastes in one short sentence.

Mark 8:36 [Living Bible] *“And how does a man benefit if he gains the whole world and loses his soul in the process?”*

That is a lack of balance.

We only balance our lives out when God is in the centre of that life.

When we put Jesus Christ in the centre of our life He is like the centre of a gyroscope; He brings everything into balance.

We can then tap into a source of strength that is unlimited.