



Burnout!

by Mark Brunner

Burnout or Burn-on! (Haggai 1:5-11)

I'm a nut about campfires. Since we camp a lot, I guess that I need to be. One thing that I've discovered is that there is a point with every fire where you reach that crossroads of "half-empty" or "half-full." It's the critical juncture where the fire could either go out or, with a poke or a shove here or there, rekindle. This is the point at which the fire could go either way and it is a matter of thinking which way, it's almost dead or almost there, that determines what you are going to do with the fire—either stoke it or add more wood.

In a way our lives are sort of like that campfire. We go along full of energy and then we come to a point where we start to feel in need of something. We could go either way—burnout or burn-on. Much depends on our perspective of what is needed—a sit-down with a good book and a nap or a trip to the psychiatrist. Chuck Swindoll writes: "The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. Attitude, to me, is more important than facts. It is more important than the past, the education, the money, than circumstances, than failure, than successes, than what other people think or say or do. It is more important than appearance, giftedness or skill. It will make or break a company . . . a church... a home. The remarkable thing is we have a choice everyday regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot

change our past . . . we cannot change the fact that people will act in a certain way. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our attitude. I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% of how I react to it. And so it is with you... we are in charge of our attitudes.” (Charles R. Swindoll)

Sometimes, when we are feeling burned-out, it’s really a matter of discovering for ourselves whether or not we are a smoldering fire in need of a whole lot of attention or a promising fire, able to rekindle with just a bit of tender care. It really is a matter of attitude. If we focus on up-look rather than outlook, God’s heaven is always more promising than these natural surroundings. If you think you can, you probably will.

“Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own” (Matt 6:34)

Life Tracks! (Haggai 1:5-11)

Did you ever go through the day and then look back on it and not remember much? Zombie-like, you plodded into work and back again, burned-out, sort of numb. “Burnout is nature’s way of telling us, we’ve been going through the motions but our spirit has departed; like a zombie, we leave behind tracks but they lead in only two directions—back and forth.

Architect Frank Lloyd Wright once told of an incident that had a profound influence on him. The winter he was nine, he went walking across a snow-covered field with his reserved, no-nonsense uncle. As the two of them reached the far end of the field, his uncle stopped him. He pointed out his own tracks in the snow, straight and true as an arrow’s flight, and then young Frank’s tracks meandering all over the field. “Notice how your tracks wander aimlessly from the fence to the cattle to the woods and back again,” his uncle said. “And see how my tracks aim directly to my goal. There is an important lesson in that.” Years later the world-famous architect liked to tell how this experience had greatly contributed to his philosophy in life. “I determined right then,” he’d say with a twinkle in his eye, “not to miss most things in life, as my uncle had.” (Focus on the Family letter, September, 1992, p. 14.)

At the end of the day do you feel that life has somehow gotten by you? Perhaps it's an empty sort of feeling; one that lingers into dinner and then pesters all the way until head hits the pillow. You're a hard worker and feel that you're able to accomplish a lot. But that lot just doesn't seem to be satisfying or personally rewarding. God tells us in His Word that we are to "Give careful thought to (our) ways. (We) have planted much, but have harvested little" (Haggai 1:5). If our tracks at the end of the day lead back and forth, from work to home and back again, perhaps the fact that we feel so empty is because what we have planted is not a worthy harvest. Perhaps tomorrow would be a good time to break the back and forth routine and take a side trip here and there. Who knows what God might accomplish by a track that meanders a bit every now and then.

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Of Wicks and Oil! (Haggai 1:5-11)

Is it ever fair to say that we are used up and that we have nothing left to give? If we feel this way, then there must be a point in time when that sort of burning out really does occur. Perhaps the only real question is how did we get there and how do we prevent ourselves from getting there again?

A number of years ago we had a terrible ice storm in the area. The wind and rain blew for a day or two and then the temperatures dropped dramatically turning wet driveways into skating rinks and power wires into huge, swaying weights. It wasn't long and they began to snap and we lost power. My wife and I had prepared somewhat and we did have provisions, a fireplace and a number of flashlights. We also had my grandmother's old oil-burning lamp. It was one of the first things I grabbed when the lights flickered and then went black. I lit a match and we had light. It wasn't long, though, before the light began to dim and then it too went out. It seems that I had forgotten to put oil in the lamp and when the wick dried out it burned up. The lamp was useless, burned-out, because it no longer had any fuel. Even with fuel in hand, because the wick was charred, the lamp could no longer be used.

Feeling burned out? As Chuck Swindoll remarks, “You’re through. Finished. Burned out. Used up. You’ve been replaced. . . forgotten? Well, it’s a lie!” (Chuck Swindoll)

We really need to ask ourselves this: is it burnout we’re talking about here or a simple lack of fuel that has led to a very charred wick? Imagine a wick that is placed in oil, and then lit. If the oil runs out, the wick burns. As long as there is oil, the wick doesn’t burn. As long as we are living in dependence on the power of the Holy Spirit, we don’t burn out. The question to ask: what’s burning? God tells us to “give careful thought to (our) ways” (Haggai 1:7). That means we need to make sure the lamps of our hearts are filled every day with the “fuel” of God’s Word. Burnout is serious stuff; but often it is merely the product of our negligence in attending to our spiritual flame and not a result of life’s daily woes.

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Coming Up Short! (Haggai 1:5-11)

Recently, while preparing to return from a family camping vacation hundreds of miles from home, I noticed that the left front tire of the truck seemed a little lower than the other tires. I should have been alarmed by the fact but passed it off as one of those “it will be all right” situations and began the long trek home. About twenty miles down the road the tire failed and I ended up replacing it in the rain on the side of the road. Had I taken the time to inspect it before leaving camp, I would have had a much easier time working on dry ground. Trying to stretch it ended up causing more work than had I made the effort in the first place to take the care I needed to.

On January 25, 1990, Avianca Flight 52 from Colombia crashed just 15 miles short of New York’s Kennedy International Airport, killing 73 passengers. Reason: the plane just ran out of gas. Under international regulations, an airliner must carry enough fuel to reach its destination as well as its assigned alternate, plus enough extra to handle at least 45 minutes of delays. Due to

low fuel condition, the Avianca pilots had requested “priority” (not “emergency”) landing. Because the exact word “emergency” was not used, and due to heavy traffic and bad weather conditions, the ill-fated plane was placed on a holding pattern...until it simply ran out of gas.

Crashing and burning is something that many of us do every day. We see the warning signs but don't heed them. We feel the pressure to do something different, but ignore the feelings in favor of the willingness to take the risk and keep going and getting as much as possible out of the situation before it turns ugly. We come up short. Although our intentions were good, our reasoning was faulty. Sometimes burnout is a factor of not taking the right precautions ahead of time; making sure we are properly understanding the risks and taking on the right fuel before we start out. The Bible calls this “expecting much that turns out to be little”. Take the time today to fuel up on God's Word. Don't take the risk of coming up short. Making the effort now may be all it takes to avoid a nasty crash and burn tomorrow.

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The Slower Group! (Haggai 1:5-11)

There was a time when I thought that it was real smart to buy the cheapest and get the better deal. For years I based most of my shopping decisions on whether or not I had saved money on the initial purchase. Seldom did I think about the possibility that two cheaper items added together might be more expensive than the one higher-priced item that outlived the the life span of the cheaper purchase. It would have made dollars and sense, but it didn't help me reach my goal of buying the cheapest at all costs.

In that regard as I got older I didn't grow in the knowledge of what was the best value; I had, rather, been dumbing down all that time. But, after years of living with my much wiser wife, I finally came to accept the realization that three of my “cheapies” was usually more expensive than one of her more expensive choices. What I thought were wise choices had often turned out to be some pretty dumb choices.

When it comes to managing our time and avoiding burnout, many of us work in a similar way. We know deep-down what we ought to be doing. It makes sense to take vacations, limit our working hours and leave work at the office. Unfortunately, like the first-grader who wondered why if her father brought home a briefcase full of work every evening that he couldn't finish it all at the office, they didn't put him in a slower group, we often present a pretty dumb picture to our loved ones when we don't realize that it is our choice to burden ourselves. We take the cheaper route because it is really the easiest route and requires far less thought and dedication. We think that we are accomplishing much. But, in the eyes of our God, it is so much dust and nonsense. The Bible tells us that He will "blow it away".

Stop and think. Are you in the "slower" group. Have you gotten caught up in a cycle of dumbing down because it is the easy way out? The easiest way to avoid burnout is to be wise in the choices you make concerning where your time is dedicated. The easy way out may be the dumber path.

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