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Burnout? What Burnout?

Every person who has responded to the awesome call of God has or will face similar feelings, frustrations and failures. They are common to the call. Why? If for no other reason, we are human. Dr. Brooks Faulkner calls burnout the “closet sin of ministry”.

Moshe (Moses) was fatally human; so are we. Blended into the fabric of our being are lessons to be learned from failures, frustrations and fears. They have been repeated since Eden. The thorns of life are very present. They come with the territory of life and ministry.

There are three distinctive seasons in the life of God's servants. Conditioned by call, character, integrity and grit, we face ministry in phases. These stages are not necessarily chronological; they may not be repeated or might become visibly repetitious. However or whenever they appear, they are predictable and human. Every servant memorialized in scripture can illustrate these stages to some degree.

One phase rises from the occasion of God's call. Believing "God and me" are an invincible team, we are confident we can change our world. Failure is beyond our vocabulary. Threats and obstacles are no more a threat than a sand trap to a nine year old with a golf club in hand, repeating "I am Tiger Woods!" There is no fear – only opportunity. Obstacles are challenges, not threats. "God and me – we are an unconquerable foe."

One might only hope for the resolve and tenacity to stay this powerful. But overconfidence will dissolve into naiveté and reality will appear. Life is pungent with reality and pain.

Another moment occurs when we begin to suspect our humanity. We wonder if God's call might have been temporary. We struggle to discover the stumbling stones we seem to

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discover in the moments of darkness. At first, we suspect a too lofty perspective of ministry and begin to watch for entrapments. Then we find they appear only after stumping one's toe. The promise of God's presence seems somewhere distant. The ceiling of earth seems impenetrable. Our prayer life feels vain, empty, and unheard. We still believe, though plagued with questions.

We are experiencing a momentary doubt. I identify with the disciples called to the mountain, some of whom doubted in Matthew 28. We are discovering frailty. It is remedial.

"This, too, shall pass," we struggle to convince ourselves. God promised, "He would never leave or forsake us." Nevertheless, where is our courage? Where are the feelings? Why do I tremble silently inside? What has happened to the joy of ministry? Where have the enthusiasm and determination gone?

The third season is more optional. This moment occurs when we suddenly experience the clouds clearing. Our spiritual and ministerial vitality becomes renewed. We are tempered from the storms. We have grown beyond arrogance that left us vulnerable. We have become more transparent and genuine. Compassion is not a practice; it is a lifestyle growing from our failures. We have come near burnout. We have nestled near the foot of our Rock of Meribah and our place of Masah. We have wondered if the anointing of God's call has been canceled. We have felt the disappointments and frustrations of ministry. We have felt guilty; we have blamed others and then God. We have wrestled with ourselves, others and God. And God wins!

"What is there about me that has allowed these failures to command my life, Lord?" Scripture does not reveal this question of Moshe. One would hardly be surprised that he would ask such a question of himself when he hears God speak. "Because you have not believed Me, to treat Me as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them." Moshe forfeited the conclusion of his journey. Maybe Moses is the first documented burnout – or maybe there were others. For sure there will be more; still, burnout is a choice! What is yours?

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Yours . . . His,

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