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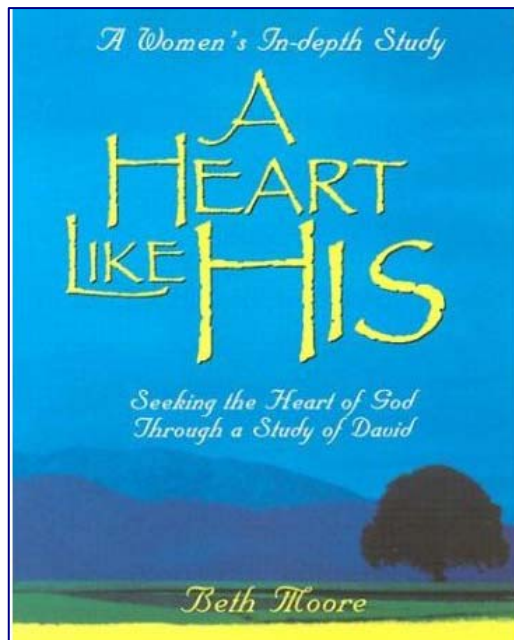
SURVIVING THE EXHAUSTED CHRISTIAN LIFE

[COMBATTING EXHAUSTION: 2 SAMUEL 19-24]

WEEKLY SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

APRIL 13, 2008

LESSON #7 FROM THE *MASTER WORKS* SERIES STUDY OF:



SURVIVING THE EXHAUSTED CHRISTIAN LIFE

[COMBATting EXHAUSTION: 2 SAMUEL 19-24]

The long shadows of age and pressure are beginning to fall across David's face. He has lived a full life and experienced both the heights and the depths. He has entered what we might call his twilight years now—probably in his mid to late-seventies. David often had to trust God in impossible circumstances, but it seems as though recently things have occurred that have kept him on his knees. In our study of David's life from Beth Moore's book *A Heart Like His* over the past six weeks, we've seen David as shepherd, giant-killer, warrior, hero, friend, adulterer, murderer, king, and father. This week in our study we saw David back where he belonged as we spent five days focused on passages in 2 Samuel 19-24.

Driving David to his knees in our studies previously, he suffered the anguish and grief of the premature death of his son, Absalom, who you will recall was murdered following the conspiracy he led against his father. Then because of the sin by Saul and Israel, there was a three-year famine that struck the land, adding calamity to humility and keeping David on his knees. Finally, in this week's lesson, we find that Israel is back at war with their age-old enemy, the Philistines. Turn to **2 SAMUEL 21:15-22 (NLT)** and follow along as we begin:

¹⁵Once again the Philistines were at war with Israel. And when David and his men were in the thick of battle, David became weak and exhausted. ¹⁶Ishbi-benob was a descendant of the giants; his bronze spearhead weighed more than seven pounds, and he was armed with a new sword. He had cornered David and was about to kill him. ¹⁷But Abishai son of Zeruah came to David's rescue and killed the Philistine. Then David's men declared, "You are not going out to battle with us again! Why risk snuffing out the light of Israel?" ¹⁸After this, there was another battle against the Philistines at Gob. As they fought, Sibbecai from Hushah killed Saph, another descendant of the giants.

¹⁹During another battle at Gob, Elhanan son of Jair from Bethlehem killed the brother of Goliath of Gath. The handle of his spear was as thick as a weaver's beam! ²⁰In another battle with the Philistines at Gath, they encountered a huge man with six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot, twenty-four in all, who was also a descendant of the giants. ²¹But when he defied and taunted Israel, he was killed by Jonathan, the son of David's brother Shimea. ²²These four Philistines were descendants of the giants of Gath, but David and his warriors killed them.

Look back at the end of verse 15. The NIV concludes that verse, "and he became **exhausted**." Whew! I would imagine. After all he'd been through, who wouldn't feel exhausted? But remember that this is the same person who years ago had begun his service to Israel by killing the Philistine giant, Goliath. But, a person can only take so much. The loss of a son, the suffering brought on by famine, the misery of battle—it all wears on him until he begins to crack. Have you ever been there? Do you ever think you're leading the exhausted Christian life? Listen to the typical Sunday morning dilemma for many a believer and see if this strikes a nerve in you.

This dilemma plays out in most churches every Sunday morning. You come to church already exhausted, having failed at living the Christian life in your own strength the past week. The pastor stands up and says, 'Be more dedicated. Be more committed. Sell out to God! Obey the Lord on this or that important matter. If He's not Lord of all—He's not Lord at all. Obedience. Obedience. Obedience. The whole service builds to an emotional song or prayer at the end where we "surrender all" for the ten thousandth time. Eventually, most Christians tune out the challenge to change, concluding that they just don't have what it takes and settle into a sort of numb, passionless, pseudo-Christian experience. We sit and listen to preaching like this week in and week out and feel guilty about our disobedience. We promise God we will try harder, and some weeks if we are really serious, our promises will last all the way to Tuesday or Wednesday before we fall flat on our faces, exhausted and frustrated.

Exhaustion often comes when we've been fighting the same enemy for too long. So, don't feel like The Lone Ranger here, because I hope you have realized by now that if this can happen to David, it can certainly happen to you and I. David was just too tired to face the same old enemy again. He probably said the same words you may have said, *"God, give me a new battle. Give me something new to fight. I am so tired of this one."*

Turn to **PSALM 55:4-8 (NIV)** and let's get a little picture of how David may have felt but using his words from another occasion. Psalm 55:4-8, *⁴"My heart is in anguish within me; the terrors of death assail me. ⁵Fear and trembling have beset me; horror has overwhelmed me. ⁶I said, "Oh, that I had the wings of a dove! I would fly away and be at rest- ⁷I would flee far away and stay in the desert; ⁸I would hurry to my place of shelter, far from the tempest and storm."* Anybody ever felt that way? Wings like a dove and just want to fly away in the face of battle.

You get the picture of David and can identify with his dilemma. But let's look at another example of one of God's faithful servants, Elijah, who was facing the same problems as David. I want you to compare this man with what we see in David's life because God had done so many things in this man's life and he too had seen the evidence of the power of the Holy Spirit—just like David. And, if it could happen in the lives of these two men, no wonder we battle with exhaustion and come to the place in our lives and think we can't go on.

Turn to **1 KINGS 19:1-4 (NIV)**, *¹Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. ²So 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." ³Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, ⁴while he himself went a day's journey into the desert...*

Stop right there and look at Elijah—after all the success God had given him. Perhaps you remember the contest on Mt. Carmel, recapped in the previous chapter (**1 KINGS 18**), when he challenged the 450 prophets of Baal to call down their god and Elijah would call down his God and just see what happens here. And after all the odds were stacked against him, what happened? God really showed Himself! And Elijah mocked the Baal prophets and asked what was wrong, was their god out to lunch—had he gone down the street? This is a man who'd been fed by ravens at the brook—and yet one little woman rebuked him and said what you've done to our prophets, I'm going to do to you before the sun sets. And what did Elijah do? And after all he'd seen God do, he became exhausted. Overcome with fear—he'd fought the same enemy over and over—but not this time. It was too much.

Something that contributes to exhaustion, as we said, is when we face the same enemy for too long. Let's continue with our reading in **1 KINGS 19**, picking back up in **verse 3 (-5)**, *³Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, ⁴while he himself went a day's journey into the desert. He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and **prayed that he might die.** "I **have had enough, LORD,**" he said. "**Take my life;** I am no better than my ancestors." ⁵Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep.* We're looking at an example of biblical depression.

So, what can **WE** do to combat this feeling of exhaustion—when we feel like, maybe, we're the only one facing this situation? When we just want to quit and give up? We need to follow the example of David and of Elijah—eventually. The weary David lifts his hands to God and declares his feelings in a song, which covers no less than 51 verses in **2 SAMUEL 22**. But the tone is not what you might expect, given his circumstances. It is not a dark, somber lament, but a psalm of praise that the gifted, aging composer "*said to the Lord.*"

Look at the opening words from **2 SAMUEL 22:2-3** with me that seem to remind us when times are tough, god is our only

security, *“And he said, ‘the Lord is my rock and my fortress and my delivered; My God, my rock, in who I take refuge; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge...”* Then, skipping down to verse **7**, *“In my distress I called upon the Lord. Yes, I cried to my God; and from His temple He heard my voice, and my cry for help came into His ears.”*

Did you see that? To David, God was no distant deity, preoccupied with other galaxies or concerned with the changing of the seasons. His God heard his voice! And today, we need to remember that we have Christ that’s sitting at the right hand of God, interceding for us. Listen to the last few words from **HEBREWS 7:25 (NLT)**, *“He lives forever to intercede with God on their behalf.”* Please don’t forget that as believers and members of the body of Christ (the church), we have Christ and the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit to help us during these tough times. Christ lives today to make intercession for us. He comes before the throne of heaven as our mediator, to make requests before the father for our moment-by-moment needs. WOW! But, also, He wants to live His life through us. Right?

As I prepared the lesson this week, I was convicted about that statement—especially in light of what I saw in the lives of both David and Elijah. He wants to live His life through ME! *Uh-oh! I’m afraid sometimes the Lord Jesus has looked down at my Christian experience and possible at yours and said, ‘THIS is it? This is what I rose for? This is the degree to which you are going to draw upon MY resurrection power? This is the degree to which you’re going to let Me live My life through you? This is the sum total? This is as good as it gets?*

I don’t think it’s hard to relate to the fact that David was exhausted and that Elijah was exhausted. There’s no doubt in my mind that everyone here this morning has been exhausted. So, how do we handle this? What do we do to combat exhaustion—especially as believers in Christ, as children of God? How can we safeguard against coming to the end of our strength—of being absolutely exhausted. Look with me at **MARK**

6:30-32 (NIV), *³⁰The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. ³¹Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." ³²So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.*

This is Jesus talking with his disciples after a day of ministry—ending when He fed the 5,000. See what He says here? You've excited, you're talking a hundred miles an hour, you're exhausted and you haven't even had a chance to eat. You need to eat and you need to rest awhile. One of the greatest things to combat exhaustion, according to Beth Moore, is to recognize our need to retreat and to respond to that. The words here mean to come away and retreat—not a prayer retreat, but a play retreat—just to come before God and do absolutely nothing but bask and enjoy His presence. We all know when we're so exhausted that we need some time away and that's what He means here. Get some rest. Walk along the beach. Sleep later. Spend time with me. Just retreat.

Next, to combat exhaustion, Beth Moore reminds us to be sure you are not wearying yourself with service which is not under the yoke of His authority. Everything we do in God's name is not necessarily what God wants us to do. Did you hear that? Sometimes God says it's a good idea—but NOT a God idea. There's a difference too. Sometimes we are weary because we are doing stuff that He did not send us to do. Right?

Max Lucado tells a story about one of the most confounding missing-persons cases. In August 1930, forty-five year old Joseph Crater waved goodbye to friends after an evening meal in a New York restaurant, flagged down a taxi, and rode off. He was never seen or heard from again. Over 75-years of research has offered countless theories but no conclusions. Since Crater was a successful New York Supreme Court judge, many have suspected murder, but a solid lead has never been found. Other options have been presented: kidnapping, Mafia involvement, even

suicide. A search of his apartment revealed one clue. It was a note attached to a check, and both were left for his wife. The check was for a sizable amount, and the note simply read, *"I am very weary. Love, Joe."* The note could have been nothing more than a thought at the end of a hard day. Or it could have meant a great deal more—the epitaph of a despairing man. **Weariness** is tough. I don't mean the physical weariness that comes from mowing the lawn or the mental weariness that follows a hard day of decisions and thinking.

No, the weariness that attacked Judge Crater is much worse. It's the weariness that comes just before you give up. That feeling of honest desperation. It's the dispirited father, the abandoned child, or the retiree with time on his hands. It's that stage in life when motivation disappears: the children grow up, a job is lost, a spouse dies. The result is weariness—deep, lonely, frustrated weariness. Only one man in history has claimed to have an answer for it. He stands before all the Joseph Craters of the world with the same promise.

Listen to these words from **MATTHEW 11: 28-30 (NIV)**. They are very familiar words to most of you—words you expect to hear in a lesson like this on exhaustion, depression and weariness. Listen. *²⁸"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."*

What God has in mind with this example of the yoke is authority. I've given you my spirit. We've all got this power within us—the power of the Holy Spirit of God. We are to take this power and take on the yoke of His authority so that we are able to do what He has placed us on this earth to do—so He can steer us where He wants us. If we're not underneath his yoke of authority, we become exhausted—even when we're doing church work. So make sure you're not exhausted because you're in the wrong place of service. Ask Him and He will tell you.

Our next point in combating exhaustion is that we must make sure that we are not battling over areas of unrepented sin. We've got to make sure we're not battling with God over areas of unrepented sin. Let's look at this in **ACTS 3:19 (NIV)** as you follow along while I read: ***19**"Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord,".* What did He say about HOW we can be refreshed when we're exhausted? Perhaps there's some repentance that needs to take place. Repentance is a very positive thing. Had it not been for the conviction of the Holy Spirit, none of us would have received Christ to begin with. We should be so thankful for the gift of conviction. We have the privilege to repent. Are you exhausted? Perhaps you're battling with me over an area of sin. He said that if that's true, repent then and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out that times of refreshing may come from the Lord. A great memory verse to remember here is **1 JOHN 1:9** about repentance: ***If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.***

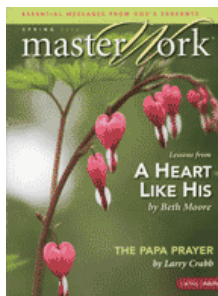
Don't miss the point in ACTS 3 that it says REPENT, but then it says TURN to God. It's not enough to just repent or we'll be right back next time. Turn all the way to God.

Now, our fourth point in combating exhaustion is to **be sure to accept the assistance of others in the body of Christ**. Turn with me to **1 CORINTHIANS 12: 14, 16-21 (NIV)**: ***14**Now the body is not made up of one part but of many... **16**And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. **17**If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? **18**But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. **19**If they were all one part, where would the body be? **20**As it is, there are many parts, but one body. **21**The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!"*

We need one another and He doesn't mince words when He says the word "need." He says you can't look at the rest of body of Christ and think I don't need them. Yes you do. He reminds you that part of your exhaustion results from trying to be a one-man show—and you're not. You're not! God has equipped us with people around us to share that burden. Remember it's not all about me! The body is edified! (EXAMPLE: JETHRO TO MOSES)

Final point, number 5, can be seen in **PSALM 12:5 (NIV)**. We have to **be absolutely sure that we are not fighting our own battles**. We've got to bow our knees to God and claim that the battle is the Lord's. When we're fighting in our own strength, no wonder we're exhausted. Listen to these words from David now in **PSALM 12: 5**, "*Because of the oppression of the weak and the groaning of the needy, I will now arise," says the LORD. I will protect them from those who malign them.*" See what He's saying. When I see you groaning—in anguish—I do respond. It's like Him saying, "*I'm going to have to get up on this one. I see how tired my children are.*" The battle is the Lord's.

Listen to the words from this old poem and hymn as we close: "*Whom have we Lord, but Thee, soul-thirst to satisfy? Exhaustless spring, the water is free, all other streams are dry.*" We Christians frequently have trouble believing He is our only hope, security, light, and strength because we are so prone to try everything else. We automatically depend upon everything except the Lord. Yet he still waits there for us—patiently waiting to show Himself strong. Just like David learned, God, through Christ, is our light and our salvation; whom should we fear? He hears our cry. He lifts us up out of a horrible pit; He places our feet upon a rock and establishes our going. He proves Himself strong in our weakness; He sheds light in our darkness; He becomes hope in our uncertainty and security in our confusion. He is the Centerpiece of our lives. **Who have we, Lord, but Thee?**



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