

“OVERCOMING SPIRITUAL FATIGUE”

Text: John 8:25-30

By Pastor Yau

November 30, 2014.

INTRODUCTION:

1) Fatigue in physical world: Some 15 years ago, an airplane broken into pieces on flight in the air. The final reports indicated the cause: metal fatigue. If metal, as strong as an airplane, could suffer fatigue to the point of breaking up, how much easier it is for human body of flesh and blood to suffer from fatigue under insurmountable pressures. According to studies by John P. Robinson, an expert on human fatigue, human beings suffer fatigue more frequently in modern days than a century ago even though we have many tools of technology to help us do our job faster. Some of the major reasons are: we have much more to do but we have less time to do all we want to accomplish, we have more competition with others, and we have higher expectation we can't fulfill. Feeling fail and fatigue is a common phenomena.

2) Fatigue in spiritual world: Throughout the Bible and the past 2,000 years of Christian history, fatigue has been a problem for many godly, dedicated and effective servants/people of God. This happens not just to lay people in churches, it happens to many pastors and church leaders. Some of these good people suffer spiritual fatigue, commonly called burn-out, because of overloading of responsibility. Others get burnout because of wavering spiritual power. Still others who were overcome by fatigue because of human nature. We see great servants in the Bible who fell victims of spiritual fatigue like Moses who wanted to throw the towel because the burdens were too much for him, (Numbers 11:14-15) Elijah who felt he had failed God miserably compared to others, (1 Kings 19:10) and Jonah, who asked God to let him die because things didn't happen the way he wanted to. (4:1-3)

HOW TO OVERCOME SPIRITUAL FATIGUE? In terms of fervency and faithfulness in serving God, no one may come close to Jesus but he never had a problem of spiritual fatigue. You might say well, he is the son of God, but we need to remember that he was born as a human being, lived in this world as all of us do. Look at his busy schedule, the varieties of people and their needs, the different level of spiritual conditions, the opposition, the demands from the people, the needs of his disciples, the hatred of his enemies and the cruel death on the cross. Where and how did he get the strength to overcome the crushing pressure to stay focus without fallen into the pit of fatigue? We may find many indications from the Bible, particularly in the Gospels why he

was able to stand strong and not waver or falling. Today let us see some of the sustaining power Jesus had found that helped him to stand firm.

CLEAR SENSE OF COMMISSION:

1) Sense of commission in Jesus' life: “The one who sent me.” (8:29) This is the most important power that sustains all those who were called and sent by God. This is also important to all level of service to God from preachers and pastors, teachers and evangelist as mentioned in the Bible. “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers.” (Eph 4:11) Among all the reasons that caused many of the pastors and preachers to quit their job is they don't have the clear vision of being called and sent by God to do his work. Even among all the volunteer workers in churches, the sense of being called to serve is vitally important. Jesus made it very clear that “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed to you go and bear fruit.” (John 15:16) The sense of being sent is very much central in Jesus life.

2) Sense of commission in Paul's life: The apostle Paul was very clear of the commission of the Lord in his life. Again and Again, he mentioned he was called and sent by the Lord Jesus on his way to Damascus. He testifies that it wasn't his choice to be a messenger of the Gospel message, but he was called to bear the message by God's command. He said, “When I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach...If I preach voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me.” (1 Corinth. 9:16-17) When he introduced himself to the Romans church, he said, “Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle (messenger) of the gospel of God.” (Rom. 1:1) The sense of being called and sent brings us directly back to our God who called and sent us. This means our mission isn't our choice, isn't from human impulse but from the will of God. This also keeps us inside the framework of God's command, method, protection and supply of power and resources. It is very important that we have this sense of commission like Paul in Galatians 1:1, “Paul, an apostle (messenger), sent not from men or by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father.”

When you have the sense of commission, you know you are not alone. You know God is behind you and everything you do if you are faithful in his command. You also will have a clear sense of status: You are serving God in His ministry and His people. You know God will back you up in all situations and he will support you to go through all challenges to victory.

CLEAR SENSE OF COMPANIONSHIP:

1) Sense of companionship in Jesus' life: “The one who sent me is with me; he has never left me alone.” (8:29) One of the vivid image on the closeness of Jesus and his Father is his sense of companionship he always feels in his life. He knew he came from the Father, and will return to the Father. He has strong sense of doing his Father's work, not his work. Jesus said, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.” (John 4:34) He kept a regular ritual of prayer to keep his focus on his Father and the source of his strength. The only time Jesus felt the distance from his Father was when he was bearing the sins of the world on the cross, and he cried: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt 27:46)

2) Sense of companionship in Moses' life: At the height of rebellion of Israel that triggered God's wrath to abandon his leading hand on their exodus trip, Moses pleaded with God to continue his companionship. In Exodus 33:16, he pleaded to God: “How will anyone know you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us?” Feeling abandoned by God as did Jesus and here Moses is a devastating blow in anyone's journey of serving God. It is that “lonely” feeling that drove Elijah to flee from Jezebel, when he said, “I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelis have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.” (1 Kings 19:14) Hundreds of years later, when Paul was in prison at Rome, he felt the same thing when he wrote to Timothy: “At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone had deserted me.” (2 Tim. 4:16)

Have you had that experience of feeling being abandoned by God or the people you trust or both? Do you remember that feeling of extreme lonely, hopeless and helpless? That feeling of being alone is a devastating blow that depletes our spiritual energy: We feel we are down and out.

It is the feeling of closeness with God, Jesus was able to stand firm when he said, “The one who sent me is with me, and he has never left me alone.” The one who sent you is also with you and he would never leave you alone.

CLEAR SENSE OF COMMITMENT:

1) A commitment to please God: “For I always do what pleases him.” (8:29c) A commitment to only please God is a very strong power to keep us close to God, to know his will, to follow his path and instruction and to bring glory only to him. One of the reasons we face fatigue is we try to please everyone and we end up please no one. In all ministries, we are working with people,

and everyone has his/her demand on us to do things his/her way, or do it in ways that make him/her happy. We can never make everyone happy and we will feel burnout, depleted and drained when we try to please people. Paul had that same temptation to please people instead of please God. In Galatians 1:10, he says: “Am I now trying to win the approval of men or of God? Or am I try to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.” We all know that we can't serve money and God as Jesus said in Matt 6:24. Here Paul says we cannot try to please and man at the same time. Trying to please man could cost your spiritual power to deplete.

2) Do things that please God: If you have been serving God long enough, you know there will be times we are being distracted to do things that we know God is not please. Even in service of God in his church, there are times and things we are tempted to do that God won't be happy to see. Temptations of all kind from our fresh, from worldly value or selfish end, these and others are not things that will please God. Anytime, we are not doing thing that please God, we are on our own and the power of the Spirit will leave us, soon you will feel powerless to continue serving God. Remember King Saul when he disobeyed God's command in the battle against the Amalekites in 1 Samuel 15, Samuel told Saul, “You have rejected the word of God, He has rejected you as king.” (15:23) When God rejects us because of our failure to obey him, we are left undone.

CLEAR FRUITS OF ACHIEVEMENT:

1) When lost in the ocean of failure: “Moses asked the Lord: Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me? Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me. If this is how you are going to treat me, put me to death right now—if I have found mercy in your eyes, and do not let me face my wretchedness.” (Numbers 11:11-15) Each time when I read these verses, I can't hold my tears of sympathy for Moses. He was at the end of the rope in the mission God had clearly called him to serve. Even with clear sense of call there still will be times we are lost in the sea of failure not because of God, but because of men. To serve God is much easier than to serve men. I am sure we all will agree on this. Anyone who is in similar situation will understand why Moses wanted to quit and die.

Even you are as faithful as Moses, you still could face insurmountable difficulties situation, people, problems, and we are completely exhausted, so

you want out. But God didn't allow Moses to quit. God offered a plan to help Moses recover from fatigue and continue the journey to the Promised Land.

2) There will be a time for harvest: “Even as he spoke many put their faith in him.” (8:30) This may be the only time that people believed Him as the Son of God. Most of other times when Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, people wanted to kill him, particularly those in the power base. Success or failure in our work are factors that cause us to fluctuate in our sense of spiritual power. We suffer fatigue much more when conditions render fruitless, difficult and hopeless. Many supposed faithful and strong soldiers of the Lord can't stand defeat and quit their posts like John Mark in Acts. But we need to reaffirm the biblical law of harvest:

a) “I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow.” (1 Corinth. 3:6) We do our part, let God do his part.

b) “Let us not become weary of doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.” (Galatians 6:9) We just do what we need to do, and trust God that he knows when the harvest will come.

APPLICATIONS OF TRUTH:

1) There is no superman: Some 40 years ago, Hollywood made a movie with strong hippie culture: Jesus Christ, the Superstar. They tried to mock the holy nature of Christ, but it ended up hundreds of souls were saved through the showing of the movie. Besides Jesus, there is no superstars or superman even in the arena of Christian service. We all are jars of clay, low value and easily broken. Feeling fatigue is part of human nature, for God didn't create men to be supermen, so need to stay in the Lord, drawing strength and support from the Lord at all times so we can be fruitful. (John 15:5)

2) We only have one choice: There are two choices to those who suffer from spiritual fatigue: Keep close to God, draw power from him and keep going, or collapse, quit and disappear, as a deserter. We have seen both kinds in the history of Christian service. But God doesn't want to see us defeated, desert and disappear. He wants to see us holding up, like Moses, Elijah, and Paul, all are heroes in God's kingdom. Paul says: “But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.” (2 Corinth. 4:7)

Please remember this: “Quitters can't win; and winners never quit.” “We can do all things through him who strengthens us.” (Phil 4:13)