

Freedom from Self-Absorption

Have you ever noticed how easy it is to become consumed with yourself? We live in a world that constantly encourages self-focus, but this mentality can lead to anxiety, depression, and spiritual burnout. When we become too focused on what we've done, what we're doing, and what we need to do, we miss the beauty of what God is doing all around us.

The Danger of Self-Importance

The story of Elijah in 1 Kings 19 provides a powerful lesson about the dangers of self-importance. After experiencing great victory, Elijah fled from Queen Jezebel and found himself discouraged in the wilderness. He was so consumed with his own efforts that he told God, "I have been very zealous for the Lord my God... I alone am left, and they seek to take my life."

Despite his impressive spiritual resume, Elijah had become bigger in his own eyes than God was to him. He was so focused on his own accomplishments and struggles that he couldn't see beyond himself.

What Causes Spiritual Burnout?

Spiritual burnout often begins with anxiety. As Proverbs tells us, "Anxiety in the heart of man causes depression." When we worry about tomorrow and become consumed with our responsibilities, we begin to sink into discouragement.

This is what happened to Elijah. He was burning the candle at both ends:

- Physical labor on one end
- Emotional and spiritual anxiety on the other

Many of us aren't worn out from physical work but from spiritual neglect. We're depleted because we've stopped:

- Feeding on God's Word
- Fellowshiping with God
- Praising and thanking Him
- Acknowledging His goodness

How God Responds to Our Burnout

God's response to Elijah's burnout is remarkable. Instead of condemning him, God provided:

- Rest - He let Elijah sleep
- Supernatural provision - An angel brought food and water
- Strength for the journey - The food sustained him for 40 days
- A divine encounter - God passed by in wind, earthquake, and fire

God didn't scold Elijah for his weakness. Instead, He ministered to his immediate needs while preparing him for what was ahead. This reveals God's heart toward us when we're discouraged - He doesn't condemn us; He comes to restore us.

The Problem with Being "Half Awake"

Despite God's dramatic intervention, Elijah remained unchanged. After experiencing God's power on Mount Horeb, he gave the exact same self-focused response as before. This teaches us something profound: even powerful spiritual experiences don't guarantee transformation if we remain spiritually "half awake."

In Luke 9, when Jesus was transfigured on the mountain, the Bible says the disciples "were heavy with sleep. But when they were fully awake, they saw His glory." Many of us are spiritually present but not "fully awake" to what God is doing.

We're missing so much because we're:

- Rushing to the next thing
- Anxious about tomorrow
- Focused on problems instead of God's presence
- Too busy to "stand still and consider the wonderful works of God"

Breaking Free from Self-Focus

How do we break free from this self-focus that leads to burnout? The answer is surprisingly simple:

- Slow down and take it all in - Learn to appreciate God's creation and presence around you
- Remember who's really doing the work - "He never stops working" even when we can't see it
- Stop trying to do everything - "I can only do what I can do"
- Give God the glory for everything good - Recognize that every good thing comes from Him
- Live from a place of rest - "He who lives by faith lives in a continual vacation"

When we shift our focus from "I, me, my" to "Him, them, wow," we experience the freedom God intended. We can run our race with joy like Paul did, even through difficulties.

The Danger of Familiarity

One of the most sobering lessons from Elijah's story is how familiarity with God's presence can breed contempt. Even Lucifer, who stood in God's presence, eventually became so impressed with himself that he rebelled.

We must guard against becoming so familiar with God's work that we take it for granted. Revival can get boring. Miracles can become routine. The glory of God can become "normal." When this happens, we've stopped being "fully awake."

Life Application

This week, I challenge you to break free from the "I syndrome" by practicing these habits:

- Start each day thanking God for specific blessings rather than focusing on your problems
- When someone shares something with you, truly listen without planning your response
- Take time each day to "stand still" and notice God's creation around you
- Catch yourself when you begin to criticize others and choose to speak words of grace instead
- Remember that God has already prepared everything you need for what lies ahead

Ask yourself these questions:

- How much of my anxiety comes from trying to control what only God can control?
- When was the last time I was truly "fully awake" to God's presence?
- Am I more impressed with what I've done for God or what He's done for me?
- How can I shift my focus from "I" to "Him" in my daily conversations and thoughts?

Remember, "The joy of the Lord is our strength." When we stop trying to impress others and instead become impressed with God, we find the rest and strength we need to fulfill His purpose for our lives.

Quotes

1. **Excessive self-focus**—leads to anxiety, depression, and spiritual burnout.
2. Worry and fear precede depression.
3. Often it's not physical exhaustion that wears people down; it's spiritual neglect.
4. One of the ways God renews our strength is by leading us beside still waters.
Nature—fields of grass, mountain ranges, farmland, calm lakes—has a restoring effect on the soul.
5. So many people work and labor their whole lives just to someday retire and finally enjoy it all. That's a poor and foolish mentality.
6. I can only do what I can do. There's a lot that needs to be done that I can't do—it's too much. So I don't even go there.
7. We are the objects of God's love.
8. Let God work for you. Let Him bring things to pass.
9. Doing your part may involve sweat, tears, labor, persecution, sacrifice, and pain.

10. Doing what we do by His grace makes the hardest tasks and conditions easy and light.
11. People can experience moves of God and manifestations of the Spirit so often that it becomes normal—and no longer a big deal.
12. Familiarity breeds contempt. What is that? It means being around something so much that you lose your sense of wonder about it.
13. When we're half-awake and preoccupied with so many other things, we miss it. We're just not taking it all in—we're missing a lot.
14. Keep yourself in awe of Him. How? By reminding yourself that every good thing you have comes from Him.
15. When Christians are backslidden, they can be some of the hardest people to be around. They'll bite you if you're not careful. It's hard to be kind when you're living under constant condemnation.
16. It's amazing how merciful we are to ourselves.
17. Don't let this world shrink you down and put you in its box. Be like Jack—come out of that box!
18. We're going to run our race with joy.
19. I'm not trying to impress anybody. I'm impressed with God.
20. He who lives by faith lives in a continual vacation—a place of rest. You're not anxious; you're enjoying life. You're busy with the joy of your heart, serving the Lord.

Verses

1. 1 Kings 19
2. Proverbs 12:25
3. Job 37:14

4. Philippians 4:6
5. Romans 2:4
6. 1 John 5:3
7. Isaiah 14:12-14
8. Ezekiel 28
9. Psalm 18:29
10. Nehemiah 8:10
11. Matthew 5:5-7

Summary

Breaking free from the 'I Syndrome' requires shifting our focus from self-importance to God's presence. Like Elijah in 1 Kings 19, many of us experience spiritual burnout when we become consumed with our own efforts and accomplishments. God responds to our burnout not with condemnation but with rest, provision, strength, and divine encounters. To overcome self-focus, we must slow down, recognize God's continuous work, stop trying to do everything, give God glory, and live from a place of rest. When we shift from 'I, me, my' to 'Him, them, wow,' we experience the freedom and joy God intended for our lives.