

John: Overcoming Burnout By Enjoying Jesus as Our Primary Reward

I. UNDERSTANDING OUR PRIMARY REWARD

- A. In Jesus' training of the disciples, He called them to find their identity *in their relationship to Him* instead of in what they did, how people viewed them, or in their accomplishments or resources. It is common to hear sincere believers speak of being spiritually dry, disillusioned, *thus burned out*. How does this happen? It is by pursuing God and ministry with a wrong mindset. Renewal is within reach of any believer who will change their mindset, as illustrated by the life of John.
- B. Abraham is the father of our faith (Rom. 4:16). God showed him how to live the "life of faith." The Lord revealed Himself to Abraham as his ***exceeding great reward*** or his "primary reward." God promised Abraham wealth, honor, and a historic impact on the nations (Gen. 12:1-3; 17:2).
¹⁶...to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all. (Rom. 4:16)
¹Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward. (Gen. 15:1)
- C. ***Defining Jesus as our great or primary reward***: This includes receiving grace to feel love from God and to feel love for Him. The revelation of Jesus' love and beauty tenderizes and fascinates us. Walking in this becomes our greatest desire, highest life vision, and most urgent prayer request. *Being intentional to cultivate this mindset is an essential element in overcoming spiritual burnout.*
- D. ***Two categories of God's blessing***: Our primary or our greatest reward is Jesus Himself. Our secondary rewards include His favor on our relationships, circumstances, our impact, etc.
- E. Focusing mostly on secondary rewards can hinder our focus on our primary reward. Why? When they *increase*, some get so preoccupied with them that they become distracted in their relationship with Jesus, and when they are delayed or decreased, they become discouraged, burned out, etc.

II. JOHN'S TESTIMONY: BECOMING A SON OF THUNDER IN THE SPIRIT

- A. The life of John provides us with a picture of what it means to have Jesus as our primary reward. When John was young, Jesus prophetically named him a "son of thunder." This prophecy marked his spirit, giving him a vision to experience God's thunder. This speaks of the revelation of God's love for John thundering in his heart as well as love back to God thundering in his heart.
¹⁷James...and John...to whom He gave the name... "Sons of Thunder"... (Mk. 3:17)
- B. The "thunder of John's heart" was initially expressed through his fleshly personality. Our heart naturally thunders with ambition, lust, rejection, anger, bitterness, fear, etc.
- C. Near the end of John's life, he wrote his gospel. He wrote the "signature statement" for his life in John 21:20. By this one statement, John defined what it meant for Jesus to be his "primary reward" and expressed what it meant to him to live as a "son of thunder." Thus, it tells us how he carried his heart and expressed his greatest desire—that Jesus be his "exceeding great reward" (Gen. 15:1).
²⁰Peter...saw the disciple whom Jesus loved [John] following, who also had leaned on His breast at the supper and said, "Lord, who is the one who betrays You?" (Jn. 21:20)

III. DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN OUR SPIRITUAL AND NATURAL IDENTITIES

- A. Our confession is: “I’m loved [by God], and I am a lover [of God]; therefore, *I am successful.*”
- B. We are already successful in life (in the primary sense) if we receive God’s love and return it. We are most at peace when we approach life as *already being successful* instead of seeking to gain it from our accomplishments. There are two ways that we can see or identify ourselves:
 - 1. ***Spiritual identity***: Our spiritual identity includes who we are before God (as one loved by God) and how He sees and evaluates us (as one who loves God) and how He relates to us.
 - 2. ***Natural identity***: Our natural identity includes what we accomplish before people and how they see and evaluate us, and how they relate to us.
- C. John wanted to be known by how he related to Jesus, not by what he accomplished before men.
- D. John had one of the greatest “resumés” in history by being in relationship with Mary (Jn. 19:26-27) and the apostles, including Peter and Paul. He was instrumental in great revivals and wrote five books of the New Testament. Jesus promised him he would rule on a throne in Israel (Mt. 19:28), and he saw his name on a foundation of the wall in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:14).
- E. John never mentions his own name in his gospel but refers to himself five times as “*the disciple the Lord loved*” (Jn. 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20).

IV. SPIRITUAL IDENTITY #1: JOHN SAW HIMSELF AS ONE WHOM JESUS LOVED

- A. John saw himself as “one whom Jesus loved.” This truth greatly strengthened John's heart.

²⁰*Peter, turning around, saw the disciple [John] whom Jesus loved following...* (Jn. 21:20a)

 - 1. God loves His people in the way that God loves God (Jn. 15:9; 17:26). In other words, Jesus feels the same intensity of love for us that the Father feels for Him.

⁹*As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in [stay focused on] My love.* (Jn. 15:9)
 - 2. Our confession is: “Jesus, You love me like the Father loves You.” This truth gives every believer confidence to stand before God as one of “*His favorites.*”
- B. On the same night that Jesus spoke of His great love (Jn. 15:9), He also told His disciples that they would all deny Him. He knew what He was getting into when He chose us. It is pride to think our sin is bigger than His love. It takes humility before God to be bold in His love.

³¹*All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night...* (Mt. 26:31)
- C. John took hold of what Jesus said in John 15:9 and held on to it for the rest of his life. It was foundational to his identity. About 60 years later when he wrote his gospel, he was still saying, “I am the disciple that God loves.” When we know the King loves us, we can be unmoved, even when others overlook us. We cease striving for the attention and approval of influential people.

V. SPIRITUAL IDENTITY #2: JOHN LEANED ON JESUS' HEART—LOVING JESUS

- A. John leaned on Jesus' heart—he set his heart to love Jesus and to be as near to Him as possible. John wanted to go deep in God, and give everything to Him, and pour out his love to Jesus.
²⁰The disciple...who also had leaned on His breast at the supper... (Jn. 21:20b)
- B. This was John's primary life goal, his primary dream. It was his greatest prayer and desire. John had a masculine personality, but was not ashamed to be known as one who loved Jesus.
¹⁴Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him... (Ps. 91:14)
- C. He leaned on Jesus' heart at the last supper, which was not long after Jesus rebuked him for having a wrong spirit (Jn. 13:23; cf. Lk. 9:46; Mk. 10:37; Mt. 20:21). Note John's boldness in Jesus' love, without any shame. He refused to draw back from seeking to love Jesus with all of his heart.

VI. SPIRITUAL IDENTITY #3: JOHN POSITIONED HIMSELF TO RECEIVE GOD'S SECRETS

- A. The principle is that John positioned himself to receive the secrets of Jesus' heart. This involves seeking insight into what is near and dear to His heart from the Word and Spirit. John uncluttered his life to have time to gain understanding and to stand with what was on Jesus' heart.
²⁰The disciple who...said, "Lord, who is the one who betrays You?" (Jn. 21:20c)
- B. At the last supper, Jesus was troubled by Judas' betrayal. It was a great crisis in His team. Judas' betrayal was shocking and heartbreaking to the young apostolic team. Jesus called Judas His "friend" (Mt. 26:50) and Judas was trustworthy enough to be over the money (Jn. 13:29).
²¹He was troubled in spirit...and said, "...one of you will betray Me." ²²Then the disciples looked at one another, perplexed about whom He spoke. ²³There was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples... ²⁴Peter therefore motioned to him to ask who it was of whom He spoke. (Jn. 13:21-24)
- C. How do we practically receive Jesus' secrets? It includes sitting at His feet to hear His Word as Mary of Bethany did. One way we do this is by prayerful meditation on the Word. Jesus defined this as good. No one can choose to do this for us. We must choose to do this over and over.
³⁹Mary...sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word... ⁴¹Jesus said... ⁴²"One thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her." (Lk. 10:39-42)
- D. Some search the Word only to prepare a message to give to others, instead of to encounter God.
- E. Mary of Bethany had no public teaching ministry. She sat at Jesus' feet to understand His heart. The Lord is releasing grace for people to respond to Him like Mary of Bethany—grace to linger long in God's presence. Spending long hours with God will be expressed differently for each person.
- F. God gives His secrets to those who desire them enough to sit before Him. John sat before God long hours as King David did. The book of Revelation was one of the secrets given to John.
¹⁴The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him... (Ps. 25:14)

VII. JOHN'S JOURNEY: FROM A WRONG SPIRIT TO A SON OF THUNDER IN THE SPIRIT

- A. John was transformed from being a son of thunder in the flesh to a son of thunder in the Spirit. This transformation took place in him as he saw himself as *“the disciple whom the Lord loved.”*
- B. In his youth, John was preoccupied with having preeminence over others. On the road to Capernaum, the disciples argued about who was the greatest (Lk. 9:46; Mk. 9:33-34).
⁴⁶Then a dispute arose among them as to which of them would be greatest. (Lk. 9:46)
1. Soon after Capernaum, on the way to Jerusalem, John asked about being the greatest.
³³“The Son of Man will be betrayed...”³⁵James and John, the sons of Zebedee...³⁷said, “Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory.”⁴¹The ten...began to be greatly displeased with James and John. (Mk. 10:33-41)
 2. John's mother also brought up the issue of them being the greatest.
²⁰The mother of Zebedee's sons came to Him...asking something from Him. ²¹He said to her, “What do you wish?” She said, “Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom.” (Mt. 20:20-21)
- C. John stopped a man from helping others to get free because that man was not “on John's team.”
⁴⁹John...said, “Master, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow with us.”⁵⁰Jesus said, “Do not forbid him...” (Lk. 9:49-50)
- D. John wanted to call fire down on a city that did not receive Jesus' ministry. About five years later, John prayed to release the fire of Holy Spirit on Samaria (Acts 8:14-15).
⁵¹They [James and John] entered a village of the Samaritans...⁵³But they did not receive Him...⁵⁴James and John...said, “Lord, do You want us to command fire from heaven...as Elijah did?”⁵⁵He rebuked them, “You do not know what manner of spirit you are of.” (Lk. 9:51-55)
¹⁴...Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, ¹⁵who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. (Acts 8:14-15)
- E. John's testimony is how a person was transformed from being a son of thunder in the natural with negative emotions (pride, anger, lust, etc.) to being a son of thunder in the Spirit.
- F. **Summary:** We embrace a right mindset in becoming a “son of thunder in the Spirit” by setting our hearts to go deep in God and making Jesus our primary reward. This will require that some see themselves differently and change their confession before God. We are those who are loved by Jesus, who lean on His heart in our love for Him, and who seek to know His secrets. Even in our weakness, we are the ones in whom He loves and delights (Ps. 18:19; 149:4; Isa. 62:4).
- G. **Our confession:** We say to Jesus, “You feel about me like the Father feels about You. I am Your beloved—one of Your favorite ones. You delight in me. I lean on Your heart because I love You. That is who I am and what I do. I commit to receive from Your heart by feeding on Your Word, even to sit long hours before You because I long to know the secrets of Your heart.”