

Get a Grip
On Fatigue
November 8, 2020

What a great way to intro today's message which is number six of eight in our series *Get a Grip* ... because "running on empty" is how so many us have been feeling in recent months.

And we've been feeling that way with good reason. This has been a very hard year, a crazy year, and a year that I suspect few of us will ever forget.

I was thinking about that recently and remembering how many people – myself included – at the end of *last year* said, "Wow, 2019 was no fun. I'm so ready for 2020. Bring it on."

Did you say that? Did you think that?

I did.

Well, as they say ... "be careful what you wish for because you just might get it."

We've "gotten it" alright.

And "it" has been emotionally exhausting, to say nothing of the physical toll that's been exacted on our bodies from all the stress ...

...which is why we're going to talk today about getting a grip on "emotional fatigue."

What It Looks Like

Now, I don't have a tidy definition for that term because I think it's self-explanatory. I think you know it when you see it.

"Emotional fatigue" is when you get to the

point where you start thinking and saying to yourself ...

- “I’m not sure how much more of this I can take. I’m just sick of this.”
- “I’m not sure I can keep going. I just don’t have the energy anymore.”
- “I’m not sure it’s worth the struggle and the pain. I’m not sure it matters that I keep on trying.”

Those are the early warning signs, so to speak.

In its more advanced stages, *emotional fatigue* looks and sounds a lot like *despair* – when you start telling yourself ...

- That nothing good can ever come from your situation.

- That you'll never be happy again.
- That there really is no light at the end of the tunnel.

And you're tempted to run, quit, leave, give up, give in, or drink or drug yourself into oblivion.

Emotional fatigue is kind of like what Solomon expresses in the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes ...

...when he writes:

*Everything is meaningless –
completely meaningless!*

And here's why:

*What do people get for all
their hard work under the sun?*

In the end, Solomon says they get nothing.

*Generations come and go, but
nothing really changes.*

*Everything is wearisome
beyond description!*

*Ecclesiastes 1:2-4,8a
(NLT)*

That's a great description of emotional fatigue: when everything is wearisome beyond description.

As I was preparing for this message, I made a list of all the things that have become wearisome to me and have worn me down.

I call it my "sick and tired of" list.

- I'm sick and tired of the political posturing and outright lies from both sides

- I'm sick and tired of people demonizing and blaming those who have differing opinions on things
- I'm sick and tired of confusion and uncertainty when it comes to COVID
- I'm sick and tired of seeing what illness and death does to people and to those who love them
- I'm sick and tired of continuing to fall short of who I want to be.
- And most of all, I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired.

Now, having said all that, I should probably make it clear that I'm not thinking about doing anything drastic.

- I'm not quitting or running away.
- I'm not losing my faith.
- I'm not thinking about "ending it all" which, sadly, is the option more and more people are choosing these days because they've concluded they just can't do it anymore and it's just not worth it.

For me, it's more that I don't have the motivation to do what is right in front of me.

I'm talking about simple things, like cooking dinner or vacuuming the house or cutting the lawn. The very thought of those things sometimes feels like a ton of bricks. I know they're *not* a ton of bricks, but sometimes it feels like it.

And when it comes to the things that I

normally love to do like working out or taking care of my yard or playing wallyball or golf and even my job, I just feel “blah.” I feel weary.

How about you? Can you relate to any of this?

I’m sure you can. I’ve been watching you and listening to you. This isn’t just me.

Helpful Strategies

So, what can we do about it? How can we get a grip on our fatigue? How can we take control of *it* so that *it* doesn’t control us?

I think there are a few things we can do. Actually, these are suggestions that Solomon makes as part of his reflections on life.

The first is obvious – or, at least, I hope it is.

1. Make sure you get enough R&R – rest and recreation.

Sometimes you just need to *make* yourself sleep because getting enough sleep can make a huge difference in your emotional state.

And sometimes – and I know it's not possible in some situations – but sometimes, you just need to make yourself have fun.

Solomon writes:

*Eat your food with joy, and
drink your wine with a happy
heart, for God approves of
this!*

*Wear fine clothes, with a
splash of cologne!*

*Live happily with the woman
you love ...*

And then, of course, he has to add the caveat ...

*... through all the
meaningless days of life that
God has given you ...*

Ecclesiastes 9:7-8 (NLT)

Don't want to get too carried away with having fun.

So, first suggestion is to make sure you're getting enough R&R.

The second suggestion is ...

2. Realize you only have one shot, so make the most of it.

Again, Solomon writes ...

Whatever you do, do well.

If you're digging ditches or building rockets or changing diapers or doing school online ...

make the most of it.

*For when you go to the grave,
there will be no work or
planning or knowledge or
wisdom. Ecclesiastes
9:10 (NLT)*

It's game over ... which is yet another encouraging motivation.

You only have one shot, Solomon is saying. So, don't waste it.

Now, if you're a person who is more towards the beginning stages of emotional fatigue, that kick in the pants might be all you need. Those two ideas might be a big help to you.

- Get more sleep and have more fun.

- Realize you only have one shot, so make it a good one. Don't waste it.

But if you're beyond that stage – if you're moving in the direction of despair – those will not help you very much.

Oh, they might bring you a little bit of *relief* but they're not going to address the underlying issue that *feeds* your despair and increases your fatigue to the point where it feels like ...

The only *reasonable* thing to do is to run, quit, leave, give up, give in, drink or drug yourself into oblivion ... or worse – to end it all.

So, what can we do when we've reached that point?

Why Keep Going?

Now, I've been giving this a lot of thought

lately, trying to identify what gives me motivation to keep at it when I'm feeling *physically* worn down or worn out and I really don't *want* to anymore.

And one of the things I thought about was working out with my youngest daughter, Janelle, who is a physical trainer. Every Monday, Wednesday and Friday we do a video call where she tells me to do really hard things that aren't much fun physically.

I sometimes think she's trying to get back at me for all the mistakes I made as a parent.

But here's what I've noticed.

- So many days in the hours leading up to the "appointed time" I will come up with some flimsy reason why "Gee, I can't make it today" ... when the truth is I just don't *want* to do it.

But ... I almost always do it anyway.

- Sometimes, while I'm exercising – and I mean, right in the middle of a set – I imagine myself saying, “kid, I really do love you, but I'm done with this” and, then, just hanging up and walking away and having a couple of donuts.

But I never do. I keep going.

Now, sometimes I might have to stop for a minute because something doesn't feel right. I'm old and things don't move like they used to.

And sometimes I literally *can't* do what she is telling me to do. I'm old and things don't move like they used to.

But I always get right back into the routine as

soon as I can.

And I've been thinking ... *why do I do that?*
Why don't I bail or quit?

It's because I know that ...

The gain is worth the pain.

I know that what I am going through or having to do in those moments of physical stress is going to lead somewhere good. I know that it will be worth it.

And I know it because, over the years, I have experienced it again and again.

But not right then. Not in the moment.

The gain is rarely experienced in the short-term. Rarely does it feel like it was worth it to work out right after I hang up.

The gain is almost always something that happens in the long-term, down the line, in the future.

And so much of life works that way, right?

On any given day, denying yourself sweets doesn't appear to make that much of a difference. But do it every day for a year and the impact is unmistakable.

On any given day, being invested in the stock market often doesn't appear to be profitable. In fact, some days it looks like a waste.

But over time, if you'll stick with it, there is always a huge gain for whatever pain you might suffer in the short-term.

Now there is a word that describes this phenomenon; a word that describes what it means to believe that your present suffering is going somewhere good in the long-term.

The word is *hope*. Hope.

Hope is what tells us “this current pain will be worth it in light of the future gain.”

Hope is what tells us that what we're going through (that we don't *like* going through) ... that what we *have* to do (what we don't *want* to do) ... is eventually going to lead somewhere good.

When you have hope, all kinds of amazing things can happen in your life.

On the other hand, without hope, all kinds of *equally terrible* things can happen.

Without hope people run, quit, leave, give up, give in, drink or drug themselves into oblivion.

And some who have no hope choose to end it all.

Now, here's the point I'm trying to make.

When you and I are emotionally worn out and worn down ...

When we're sick and tired of being sick and tired ...

The only cure for our emotional and spiritual fatigue is *hope*. We have to know it's worth it in the long run to persevere ...

... or we're just going to give up and quit.

And it might be obvious how we do that, or it might be hidden.

A lot of us keep going through the motions *externally* while *internally* we've given up because we have lost hope.

So, the obvious question (I hope) is ... "where

does hope come from?"

And this is an extremely important question because ...

A lot of us hope for things that simply aren't promised or guaranteed.

- *We hope* we'll get the job.
- *We hope* he or she will love us back.
- *We hope* it's not cancer.
- *We hope* our side will win the election.
- *We hope* coronavirus goes away by Easter ... by Thanksgiving ... then by Christmas.
- And the list could go on and on.

And if enough of whatever we hope for

doesn't happen, we'll begin to despair. And our emotional fatigue will grow and grow until, eventually, we're numb and immobilized.

So, again, where does hope come from?

And I know that some of you are thinking, "Come on Rick, we're in church. Everybody knows that is God or Jesus, right?"

And, yes, that is right.

But it's also way too generic and way too nebulous. Because ...

- When you're burying a loved one
- Or you're watching a dream come crashing down

- Or you're just sick and tired of being sick and tired, and you wonder if it's worth it to keep on trying ...

... "generic" and "nebulous" won't cut it.

You need something much more specific and much more powerful than whatever is happening right now.

You need something that reminds you that there is a long-term gain for whatever pain there is today, in the short-term.

The "Revelation"

And, if you're a Christian, I'm sure you know that there a multitude of those reminders all over the New Testament.

In fact, if you've been at NHCC for a while,

you've heard me or Ladell or Shannon preach many of them.

But I'm not going to talk about any of them today.

Instead, I want to tell you about an experience I had one evening back in September – an experience that brought this home to me in a new way. (I say “evening” but really it was most of the night; I didn't go to bed until 4 or 5am).

I was sitting on my couch and I was thinking about how I needed to get a grip on my emotions. And, for some reason, I was drawn to listen to a bunch of worship songs – several of which we've sung in this series.

- Evidence
- Nothing But the Blood
- Chainbreaker

- Less Like Me
- There Was Jesus

And I listened to them over and over and it was extremely moving and emotional – which was really strange for me.

But there was one song that was particularly moving and emotional ... and our band is actually going to do it at the end of this message (and we'll hopefully start singing it as a congregational worship song in the future).

It's based on something that was written in a letter that Christians call *The Book of Revelation*, which probably isn't the best name since it's actually a *letter* and not a *book*.

I mean, in the first few sentences, it's literally addressed to "the seven churches in the

province of Asia" from an author ...

... who identifies himself only as ...

John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus.

Revelation 1:9 (NIV)

As to whether or not this "John" is John the Apostle – the friend of Jesus who wrote *The Gospel of John* – no one knows for sure.

But what we do know is that one day he had an incredible vision from the Lord, and he was instructed to write it down and then send it to those seven churchesⁱ ... which he did ... which is why we have it today.

Of course, if you've ever tried to read what John wrote, you know that it is very, very confusing, and difficult to understand.

In fact, the Reformer Martin Luther once went so far as to claim in frustration that “Revelation reveals nothing” ... which is probably a bit extreme on his part!

I’m sure you also know that the *Book of Revelation* has been the source of many different and conflicting interpretations concerning “the end times” and that, for many hundreds of years, well-meaning Christians have tried to apply the symbolism of *Revelation* to their day and age ...

... which is understandable because, after all, *who doesn’t want to know that they might be living in the end times?*

Unfortunately, in my opinion, that approach sometimes leads us to overlook how the Christians living in John’s day might have understood what he was saying *to them*.

And that's important to know because, as a seminary professor of mine used to say, "you can never forget that God's Word was God's Word to someone else before it became God's Word to you."

"And if you want to really understand what God is saying to *you*, you have to first understand what He was saying to *them*."

That's not to say that *Revelation* doesn't have some predictive aspect to it – it clearly does, especially when you read the final chapters.

But I don't believe God's primary intention was to give John and those first-century Christians who were part of those "seven churches in the province of Asia" the scoop on what was going to happen thousands of years later.

I think they had a much more pressing concern than that.

After all, the very first sentence identifies the purpose:

The revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place.

Revelation 1:1 (NIV)

Jesus meant for John's vision to have an impact on the people living *right then*, in John's time, as much as it might have in our time or in any other time.

And a few sentences later we read what that intended impact is.

Blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.

Revelation 1:3 (NIV)

So, before we do anything else with what John wrote, we need to ask: if we were living in the first century, what would it mean to take this to heart?

Now, I'm telling you all of this not because we're going to study the *Book of Revelation* today but because ...

- I want you to understand the context of the part of it that we're going to look at ...
- Which the band is going to sing about in just a few minutes ...
- Which speaks to the issue of emotional and spiritual fatigue.

That's why we've gone so far down the rabbit hole on this.

So, what is going on when John has this vision and writes it down and sends it?

Well, John gives us a little clue when he tells us that he was “on Patmos” – which is a 60-square-mile island, located 37 miles off the coast of Asia Minor, which was a long way by boat in those days.

Patmos was a barren and rocky place of exile; a place where people were sent by the Romans because they had committed some kind of crime.

In John’s case, he was there because he was a Christian leader who wouldn’t stop talking about and worshipping *Jesus* instead of talking about and worshipping *Caesar*.

See, in those days, to keep the peace among

the nations they had conquered, the Romans allowed you to keep your own religion BUT, you had to also burn incense to the emperor, offering prayers as evidence of your thankfulness and allegianceⁱⁱ for them not killing you and wiping out your country.

For obvious reasons, Christians wouldn't do that ... *unless*, of course, they had lost hope and they were giving up and giving in ... which is exactly what was going on in those seven churches to whom this letter was sent.

Now, we don't know how long John had been on this island but, it doesn't take a whole lot of imagination to conclude that he had to have been discouraged.

I mean, not only was he there being punished for his own beliefs and convictions; he was also there on Patmos because of his leadership over these churches. From the

way he identifies himself at the beginning of the letter, it's obvious that he had been influential in their coming to know Jesus in the first place.

And, in this vision, he discovers – from Jesus! – that most of them were compromising their faith. They were starting to give up and give in.

And I think John – like many of the biblical prophets – reached a point where he was worn out and worn down emotionally and spiritually.

I think he may have reached the point where he was thinking and saying to himself ...

- “Why am I putting myself through this? Why am I stuck here on this island?”
- “I’m not sure how much more of this I

can take. I'm not sure I can keep doing this if everyone else is giving up."

- "I'm not sure it's worth the struggle and the pain."

And I think he may have thought about giving up and giving in.

And, so, the angel who is leading him through this vision says "John, come up here and look at this."

And next thing he knows he is standing in the throne room of God in Heaven.

And he writes ...

I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals.

Revelation 5:1 (NIV)

To you and me, that means nothing.

But if you lived in that time and place, you would have immediately understood that this was a contract deed.

- ... where the agreement between the parties would have been written on one side of the paper
- ... which would have then been rolled up
- ... and then sealed with seven seals.
- ... then a brief description of the contract would be written on the outside of the scroll.

And the purpose of the seals was to signify that only an authorized person could open the contract and carry out the conditions

stated within it.ⁱⁱⁱ

So, John sees God the Father seated on the throne, holding a sealed contract deed.

Then, he writes ...

*I saw a mighty angel
proclaiming in a loud voice,
"Who is worthy to break the
seals and open the scroll?"
Revelation 5:2 (NIV)*

In other words, who has the authority to carry out the provisions of the contract?

Who can ensure that what has been promised and agreed to actually does happen?

Unfortunately, the answer seems to be "no one."

*But no one in heaven or on
earth or under the earth could*

*open the scroll or even look
inside it. Revelation 5:3
(NIV)*

At this, John says ...

*I wept and wept because no
one was found who was
worthy to open the scroll or
look inside.*

Revelation 5:4 (NIV)

Wow!

Whatever is in that scroll must be pretty important. There must be a lot riding on it for John to be that emotional that there is no one who can make it happen.

And there is a lot riding on it ... for this scroll contains God's promise to finally take back His world which has been held captive by Satan and by our sin.

This scroll is God's plan to put an end to all the things that we're just so sick and tired of: illness and death, crying and pain, mourning and sadness, strife and hatred.

This scroll is God's contract with humanity to ...

- To undo the works of Satan (1 John 3:8)
- To restore all things (Acts 3:21)
- To administer justice for God's people (Rev 6:10-11)
- To remove all effects of sin (Rom 8:21)
- To bring forth a new creation where only righteousness exists (2 Pet 3:13)^{iv}

And when John thinks those things might not come to pass because there is no one worthy

to open the scroll – because there is no one capable of bringing history to its ordained end ...

He is devastated. He is broken. He is completely on empty.

That scroll and what's in it is *everything* for which John ultimately hopes.

And not just him. These are the things for which I am hoping as well; the things for which many of you are hoping.

And on that night when I heard the song that describes this scene and I read this passage, I thought, "this is exactly what I feel sometimes. This is the despair that I have that leads to me to think it doesn't matter. This is the despair that wipes me out."

And so, like John, I wept and wept.

Because if what we're experiencing right now is as good as it's going to get ... if God isn't going to do something ... if God isn't going to follow through on his promises ... then what hope do we have?

None. And we should all just give up.

But, thankfully, John's vision doesn't end there.

He writes ...

Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals."

Revelation 5:5 (NIV)

And then the most fascinating thing happens.

After first seeing – beholding – a lion in front of the throne ...

John writes ...

Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne ...

Revelation 5:6 (NIV)

The Lion and the Lamb are the same person!

- The Lion who wields power and strength that none can resist is also the Lamb who walked this earth in weakness and suffering, resisting none.
- The Lion who rules the world and governs its every move is also the Lamb who was meekly led to slaughter by his enemies.
- The Lion who is known for his

uncompromising commitment to righteousness is also the Lamb who overflows in love and grace to sinners like you and me.

- The Lion who could silence a raging storm with a single word is also the Lamb who refused to speak against those who nailed him to a cross.
- The Lion who is life itself is also the Lamb who willingly dies for his enemies.
- The Lion who is holy and pure beyond our wildest imagination is also the Lamb who is gracious and kind and tender-hearted to all.^v

John says that ...

He – Jesus, the Lion/Lamb – went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat

*on the throne. Revelation 5:7
(NIV)*

And John says that at that point, all of Heaven sang a new song, saying:

*"You are worthy to take the
scroll
and to open its seals,
because you were slain,
and with your blood you
purchased for God
persons from every tribe
and language and people
and nation.*

*You have made them to be a
kingdom and priests to serve
our God,
and they will reign on the
earth."*

*Then I looked and heard the
voice of many angels,
numbering thousands upon
thousands, and ten thousand*

times ten thousand. They encircled the throne ... and in a loud voice they were saying:

*"Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain,
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength
and honor and glory and praise!"*

Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying:

*"To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be praise and honor and glory and power,
for ever and ever!"*

Revelation 5:9-14 (NIV)

Amen.

He Is Worthy

It's quite an amazing scene isn't it?

What's more amazing is that what John saw isn't something that *will* happen. It's what *has* happened. This is reality in heaven right this very minute.

And this is where hope comes from as we live in a world that makes us sick and tired.

This is how we know whatever we're going through or having to do is going to lead somewhere good. It's how we know that it will be worth it.

It's why Paul could write things like ...

*That is why we never give up.
Though our bodies are dying,
our spirits are being renewed*

every day.

And he could affirm ...

Our present troubles are quite small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us an immeasurably great glory that will last forever! 2 Corinthians 4:16-17 (NLT)

And then encourage ...

Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. 1 Corinthians 15:58 (ESV)

And THAT means that Solomon was wrong. It's *not* all meaningless.

And it is this vision, friends, which needs to motivate you and me when we are

emotionally and spiritually worn out, worn down and fatigued.

So, don't lose heart. Keep doing what you've been doing. It matters.

- Love others even though it doesn't always make an immediate difference.
- Put others first even though it doesn't always come back to you immediately.
- Serve and do your best even though it doesn't always work out.
- Plan. Dream. Build. But don't put all your hopes in those plans, dreams, and ambitions because they will fall you.

Put your hope in God and in the reality that exists right now in Heaven.

Set your mind on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. He will not fail you.

Blessed are those who hear this message and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.

Conclusion

Now, with all that said, I want the band to come on out and do this song for us.

And as they sing it, just let the words and the vision wash over your soul. Let whatever weariness and burdens are weighing you down come to the front of your mind.

And then, as they sing, set your mind on things above – on what is true and real.

But first, let's pray together.

Endnotes

ⁱ Revelation 1:11-12

ⁱⁱ <https://michaeldefazio.wordpress.com/2009/09/29/no-obedience-without-resistance-revelation-2-3/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://christopherscottblog.com/the-one-worthy-to-open-the-scroll-rev-5-1-5-7/>

^{iv} <https://revelationlogic.com/articles/the-great-promise/>

^v From <https://www.samstorms.org/all-articles/post/-weep-no-more----revelation-51-14>