

What to Do When You're Running Empty

Proverbs 3:5-6

How many of you have ever run out of gas?

How low do you let your gas tank get before you refill?

How many of you refill when it gets to a quarter of a tank?

How many of you refill when your tank is half empty?

How many of you refill when your tank is at three-quarters of a tank?

How many of you refill when you are five miles past empty?

We are going to look at how to keep your tank filled instead of running on empty.

We are going to talk about how to stay spiritually, emotionally, and relationally filled so that your tank does not run dry. There are some common reasons why people are running and living on empty. It's not one thing that will cause you to feel empty. It's multiple things that just drain you, and that's the times we're living in.

- We Don't Start Out With A Full Tank.

How you start your day sets the tone for your day. Not starting out every day with a full tank means you're going to be on empty much of the day.

- Being Too Busy To Stop And Refuel

We can be too busy to stop and refuel, and some of you can relate to that in your emotional life, in your relational life, and your spiritual life.

- Pushing Farther Than We Were Created To Go

When you push it farther than the owner's manual tells you, you're going to run out of gas. We all have limits, and one of the limits that God puts in our life is actually in the Ten Commandments. Every seventh day is for worship, rest, and relaxation. It's called the Sabbath, and if you ignore the Sabbath and don't take a day for worship, rest, and relaxation, then you're going to pay for it, and you're going to be running on empty most of your life.

- Being Unaware Of Hidden Leaks

We all have things that are draining us. The most common causes of leaks in our life are our relationships, responsibilities, conflicts, criticisms, grief, disappointments, and frustrations. These are common leaks that empty your soul. When we are unaware of the hidden leaks in our life, we're going to run out of gas emotionally and spiritually.

- Being In A Hurry

Being in a hurry drains our tank. Just like how going faster in our car uses more gas. The faster we drive, the faster we're going to run out of gas. The same is true with our soul. When we're in a hurry and don't pause to refuel, our tank is going to get empty quicker. The faster we go in life, the faster the pace of your life, the quicker we are going to get to empty. We have to ask ourselves, "What is the speed of my life?" If I'm running on empty, if I'm running on fumes, if I feel a little low, then maybe I'm still going too fast.

- Not Paying Attention To My Gauges

Did you know that we have gauges in our life that can tell you if we're getting near empty? What are the spiritual and emotional gauges in your life? Our sleep pattern is a good gauge. When we're not getting enough sleep, we are heading toward empty. Our irritability is another gauge. When we're more irritable than normal, that's a gauge that says we're running on empty. We're a lot less irritable when our tank's full emotionally and spiritually. Our relationships are a gauge. How are we getting along in our relationships? Our attitude is a good gauge. We're much more generous when our tank is full. When you don't have a full tank, we're not very generous in life with our time, our money, or anything else. Worship attendance is a gauge. When people stop going to worship, that's a sign. Patience is a good indicator of whether you've got a full tank or you're heading toward empty.

- Being Overloaded

If our car is carrying too much weight, it uses more gas than when it isn't carrying as much weight. The heavier the load you carry, the sooner you're going to run out of gas.

- Not Knowing How To Refill

This isn't such a big problem anymore because we all have smartphones and Google Maps and Apple Maps, but before that happened, we would ask where is a gas station? You had no idea where it was, especially if you were out on a long trip. When you don't know where you could get refilled, that's a problem. But spiritually and emotionally, a lot of people don't know where to get refilled too.

Sometimes we come walking into church and we are drained. We have been getting beat up all week long. Our hope is that, as a church, we help you get recharged and refilled emotionally and spiritually for the week ahead. But for people who've gotten out of the habit of coming, they're just getting more and more drained.

Step One: Stop Running On Empty.

We have to come to the point in our life where we say, "I'm not going to live this way anymore! I've had enough of this! I'm going to change. I'm going to do something about the way that I feel!" Nothing happens until you get desperate. You see, it's too easy to put up with everything you're going through, even when you don't like it, simply because it's familiar. It may be uncomfortable; it may be even painful. It may be even empty, but it's familiar.

Nothing is going to change until we get dissatisfied with the way things are. Are you tired of running on empty? Are you fed up with the emptiness that you've been feeling in your life? And are you willing to do something about it? As I said, we don't change until we feel the heat! You have to come to some point in your life where you say, "I have had enough! I refuse to live this way any longer!" It is a point of dissatisfaction!

Worry and doubt drain our energy fast because they demand we control things we can't. Worry drains our spirit, but trust refills our peace. Filling our tank with faith means trading anxiety for trust in God's provision. Worry is really trying to control the uncontrollable. It seems like there's a downpour of things to be worried about today.

It's good to be positive, but we need something deeper than just a positive attitude when we're going through the storms of life. We need faith. There are only two responses to the storms of life. There are only two ways to live. You can choose to live by fear, or you can choose to live by faith. When you choose to live by fear, you're going to make decisions out of fear, and you're going to turn the wrong way. You're going to make a lot of wrong decisions. You're going to get off track in life. But when you live by faith, God guides you through life to a place of wisdom and blessing and strength.

Somebody came here today running on 5% capacity. You put on your Sunday best, you put a smile on your face, but inside, there is a red light blinking on the dashboard of your soul! You've been running scenarios in your head. You've been staring at the bills, staring at the doctor's report, worrying about your children, worrying about tomorrow—and you are exhausted! That's why we are starting a brand new series today called Running on Empty.

There is an enemy that is siphoning off your peace every single day: FEAR. Fear is a thief! It drains your joy, it suffocates your worship, and it leaves you empty before the week even begins. We don't have to live on the fumes of fear when God has provided the fire of FAITH!

“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.” 2 Timothy 1:7

Fear is not just a passing mood. Fear is a spirit. If God didn't give it to you, *where did we pick it up?*

Some of us have been nursing fear like it's a family heirloom. We say, “My mother was a worrier, so I'm a worrier.” Fear is not in our bloodline! When you were washed in the blood of Jesus and filled with the Holy Spirit, you received a brand-new DNA!

The enemy wants to keep you on a low-grade diet of panic because he knows that a fearful Christian is an inactive Christian. When fear takes the wheel, you stop trusting, you stop giving, you stop praying bold prayers, and you start living a defeated life.

In Mark 4 Jesus told His disciples, *“Let us cross over to the other side.”* Mark 4:35

They get into the boat. The disciples are experienced fishermen. They know the Sea of Galilee, but suddenly, a violent storm comes up. *“A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly sank.”* Mark 4:37 The waves are breaking into the boat, and the water is coming over the sides.

Have you ever been there? You were obeying God, you were doing what He told you to do, and out of nowhere, life hit you with a storm?

The ship was going down, and Jesus was asleep. *“Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion.”* Mark 4:38 The disciples run to Him in a full panic: *“Master, don't you care if we drown?”* Mark 4:38 Isn't that just like us? The moment the storm gets loud, we question the heart of God. “Lord, don't You see what's happening to my family? Don't You see my bank account? Don't You care?”

Jesus stands up in the middle of the tossing boat. He doesn't look at the storm with fear. He speaks to the storm with authority. *“He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, ‘Peace! Be still!’ Then the wind died down and it was completely calm!”* Mark 4:39

Then Jesus turns to His disciples and asks a piercing question: *“Why are you so fearful? How is it that you still have no faith?”* Mark 4:41

Jesus didn't scold them for being in a storm. He confronted them for letting the storm get inside of them! The water outside the boat can't sink you—it's only when the water gets inside the boat that you begin to drown! Believers don't just worship when the weather is clear. We serve a God who walks on the very waves that are trying to knock us down!

It doesn't matter what storm brought you into this sanctuary today. Maybe it's a financial storm that's keeping you awake at night. Maybe it's a storm in your marriage or a wandering child. Maybe it's just that quiet, heavy cloud of anxiety that tells you, “You're not going to make it.” But the same Jesus who spoke to the Sea of Galilee, is able by the power of the Holy Spirit to speak peace into our lives!

You cannot pull up to the world's gas station to fill a spiritual drain. Scrolling on social media won't fix it. Binge-watching shows won't fix it. Pouring another drink won't fix it. You need to pull up to the Heavenly Station and let the Holy Spirit fill your tank with unshakable, mountain-moving FAITH!

Step Two: Start Trusting In God.

- **Faith vs. Fear: *Fueling Up on Trust***

If you are tired of running on empty, if fear has been robbing you of your sleep, your peace, and your joy, it's time to start filling your tank with better fuel. There is a difference in doubt and unbelief. We do not doubt what we do not first believe. As Christians, we live with a sense of assurance and certainty and confidence.

Paul said, in 2 Timothy 1:12, *"I know whom I believe, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that Day (until we meet Christ face to face)."*

Our doubts can become the doorway to a deeper faith, a more mature faith, and a more powerful, fortified faith.

How did Thomas turn his questions into stronger faith?

We know him as Doubting Thomas because he had some doubts and questions. He was a sincere, reflective doubter. He was a disciple of Jesus. Thanks to Thomas, and to his questioning the Lord, and interrupting the Lord, and at times rejecting the words of others so that he would know himself, we have two of the most powerful affirmations of faith in all the Word of God!

In John chapter 14, Jesus is explaining that He is going away to prepare a place in the Father's house. Jesus spoke there in the dark night of that upper room, as He is on His way to the cross, preparing His disciples for His death, and speaking of His resurrection, and yet the disciples don't seem to get it.

Jesus said John 14:4, *"And where I go you know, and the way you know!"* A hand shoots up in the air! It's Thomas and he's got a question. *"Lord, we don't know where you're going or how to get there!"* Thanks to that question, we have one of the most firm foundational truths of our faith: the words of Jesus in John 14:6: *"I am the way, the truth, the life! No one comes to the Father except by Me."* With that sincere doubt and hard question comes our opportunity to believe in the One who said, *"I am the way."* Jesus answers the ultimate questions of life, how we live, how we die, and what comes afterwards.

In John 20:25, Thomas said, *"I'm not going to believe that until I see Him and put my hands in His side, the spear wound in His side, the prints of the nails in His hands and His feet."* Thomas came with his questions, and immediately when he saw Jesus, he gave us one of the greatest affirmations of the Christian faith ever given. He fell on his face and said, *"My Lord and my God!"* John 20:28 Thomas was confessing faith in Christ, and Jesus received that, because that is who He is! But it was doubt that became the doorway to his faith.

Don't exchange what you don't know for what you know. There are many things that we know. Job, in the midst of his darkness, said, *"I know that my Redeemer lives and at the end will stand upon the earth."* Job 19:25

The psalmist said, *"Know that the Lord is God!"* (Psalm 100:3) and, *"But know that the Lord has set apart the godly for Himself!"* (Psalm 4:3) In Deuteronomy 7:9, Moses said, *"Know therefore that the Lord your God is God! He is the faithful God that keeps His covenant and steadfast love!"* He promises to do it! You can shelter your soul in the promises of God and the security of who He is! That's what we know! Peter confesses his faith in John 6:69, *"And we have believed and have come to know that You are the holy One of God."* 1 John 3:2 states, *"We know that when He appears we will be like Him."*

He's coming again! We believe that! You know that *"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, so that through His poverty you might become rich."* John 8:32, *"And you will know the truth and the truth will set you free!"*

A blind man came to faith in Jesus, when questioned by those who were opposed to Jesus, he said, *"I don't know, but one thing I know; I was blind but now I see! I know whom I believe!"* Sometimes we misquote that verse. We say, *"I know in whom I have believed."* It doesn't say, *"I know in whom."* Paul didn't want even a preposition between himself and Jesus. He said, *"I know Him! I know Jesus!"* You need to know that you're a believer.

1 John 5:13 *“These things are written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.”* Proverbs 30:5-6 says, *“Every word of God proves true. He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. Do not add to His word lest He rebuke you and you be found a liar.”*

God's promises are true. Don't trust in your feelings. Don't wait until you get this all figured out. These things were written in the Word of God which is pure and perfect, that you may know that you have eternal life. If you wait till you get it all figured out, you'll never come to Christ. For some, faith may be an easy thing, a simple thing. For some, it is harder. We recognize that. Maybe your temperament or your personality drives you to doubt, but don't wait until you have every question resolved to give your life to Christ. You come as you are by faith in His grace, and let God work those things out in your heart and your mind.

The Word of God will guide you and instruct into more faith. For some, the first step of faith is to follow Christ for your lifetime that leads eternity with Him. Choose faith!

365 times the Bible tells us, *“Do not fear.”* Fear is a human emotion. We all confront it. Even the psalmist said, *“When I am afraid, I put my trust in you.”* Psalm 56:3

There are times that we are all afraid. They're real fears. The fear of the doctor's report, the fear of not being able to pay your bills because you've lost your job, the fear of knowing that you may not be able to take good care of yourself when you're a senior adult because your retirement may be running out. We all face our common denominators of fear.

Proverbs 24:10 says, *“If you falter in a time of trouble, how small is your strength!”*

God knows when we practice cowardice rather than courage, apathy rather than taking action. If you act in fearlessness in the face of adversity, God knows, and God will sustain you and strengthen you! When you stand for truth and righteousness, God will reward you, and He will repay you!

How do we choose courage over fear?

Andy Stanley said, “God often uses a single act of courage as the tipping point for something extraordinary! A single act of courage in your home, in your family, on your street, at your workplace. A single act of courage can be the tipping point to change everything.” Are you a courageous dad to your children? Courageous mom to your family? Are you a courageous student that will stand for Jesus Christ against all odds?

Moses had the courage to face Pharaoh, the most powerful man on earth and demand, “Let My people go!” That's courage! Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego said, *“Our God is able to deliver us, but if not, we will still stand for our God and not bow down to your idol.”* They stood strong and wouldn't bow down. Daniel took lion and turned it into a pillow, because he knew that even in the lion's den God would preserve him. Peter had the courage to get out of the boat and walk on the water to Jesus. Paul faced the sword of execution, but had the boldness to preach Christ, and Him crucified against all odds.

The Bible is a book of courage, and if you want courage, saturate your soul in the stories and the sermons of the Bible. It will change the way you look at things. The Israelite spies who came to the Promised Land saw giants in the land and obstacles that made them look like grasshoppers, so they became cowards in the face of opposition and turned around. But Joshua and Caleb came back with the same report but a different perspective, *“Yes, there are giants, but we can overcome!”* They said, *“We are well able to defeat the giants.”* The majority report was no, and the majority is not always right. So often the majority takes the easy way, and as a result, the children of Israel spent forty years dying in the desert. It was the world's longest, largest funeral march in history as an entire generation of cowards died in the desert.

Gideon was called by God to rout the Midianites. He had 30,000 in his army against an unprecedented force of hundreds of thousands of warriors, and God said, “Your army's too big!” God said, “Tell all the ones that are afraid to

go home.” Twenty thousand left because they were afraid, and Gideon was down to 10,000. Then God took it down to three hundred, removing those who were careless and thoughtless in view of the battle. He only had three hundred men, but with the power of God, they won that great victory.

Perhaps the most disobeyed verse in the Bible could be Proverbs 3:5-6. *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Do not lean unto your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your path.”* That is really easy to put on a coffee mug. It's really hard to do. It is way easier to worry than it is to trust in the Lord with all your heart. This is the key to moving us from self-reliance to divine direction.

1. The Priority of Trust

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart.” Proverbs 3:5

The Hebrew name used for Lord is *Yahweh*—the eternal, all-powerful, covenant-keeping God who never breaks a promise. Trusting God means focusing on His unchanging character rather than your changing circumstances.

In ancient Hebrew culture, the heart was the control center of a person's thoughts, wills, and choices. God demands the whole heart. Total surrender requires undivided attention and affection. We often give God our leftovers instead of our priority. Place God at the center of your daily life.

2. The Pitfall of Self-Reliance

“And lean not on your own understanding” Proverbs 3:5

The word “lean” means to support your entire physical weight on a crutch or staff. Relying on human intellect or limited sight is like leaning on a broken stick that will pierce your hand when life collapses. Our human understanding tells us to panic when resources are low, but faith reminds us that God is our provider.

3. The Pursuit of His Presence

“In all your ways acknowledge Him” Proverbs 3:6

“Acknowledge” in the Hebrew, *“Yada,”* is not a casual word. It means “to know intimately by firsthand experience.” To acknowledge Him in *“all your ways”* means inviting His Lordship into our marriage, our parenting, our business transactions, our hidden thought life, and our daily habits. It means choosing His path over our personal or cultural preferences.

4. The Promise of Guidance

“And He shall direct your paths” Proverbs 3:6

The word *“direct”* is the Hebrew word *“Yâshar”* and means “to make a road straight, smooth, or right.” It does not guarantee a life free of storms, financial wealth, or easy trials, but it does mean a life of His constant presence and provision. The promise means that despite the winding, confusing detours of life, God clears away the spiritual obstacles. His timing is perfect, even when the path bends. We can walk in peace because we know the Creator leads us.

Psalm 3:5-6 says, *“I laid me down and slept; I awaked; for the LORD sustained me. I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people, that have set themselves against me round about.”*

What are you afraid of? What's holding you back? What's keeping you from standing for truth and living in righteousness? We can face our fears and live courageously.

Romans 15:13 says, *“May the God of hope fill you with all peace and joy in believing, that by the power of the Holy Spirit may overflow, may abound in hope.”*

To illustrate the Biblical principle, we could read about Hannah’s pain in a cruel season. Hannah lived during that time when it was thought that a woman's primary value was from childbearing, and she couldn't conceive.

1 Samuel 1:2 says, *“Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none.”* She lived with a painful and embarrassing reality. If you were a woman who couldn't have children, the culture would say, “She did something wrong. She sinned, and God is punishing her. She is cursed by God.”

She probably felt very ashamed for something that wasn't her fault. You may be in a similar place right now. You may be in the middle of a trial and you're wondering, “Is God punishing me for this?” You're praying that God would deliver you, heal you, or help you, and He hasn't. You may wonder, “Did I do something wrong? Is God even real? If He is, does He care?”

1 Samuel 1:3 says, *“Year after year this man went up from his town to worship and sacrifice to the Lord Almighty at Shiloh.”*

Hannah is consistently praying for it, and God doesn't give her a child. Year after year, she prays and waits and hopes. And year after year, it was the same. How do you think she kept her faith in God? How do you think she handled it when people were cruelly criticizing her, and when God seemed unfair? She made it because she had pre-decided that no matter what she sees, no matter what happens in her life, no matter what God does or what God does not do, she pre-decided to trust in God, and her trust and her faith grew. Why? Because our trust in God does not grow in good times. When does our trust grow? We learn to trust God in the trials. We learn to trust God when things aren't going the way we want them to go.

- Trust Grows In The Hard Places.

“Because the Lord had closed Hannah’s womb, her rival kept provoking her in order to irritate her. This went on year after year. Whenever Hannah went up to the house of the Lord, her rival provoked her till she wept and would not eat. Her husband Elkanah would say to her, ‘Hannah, why are you weeping? Why don’t you eat? Why are you downhearted? Don’t I mean more to you than ten sons?’” 1 Samuel 1:6-8

Year after year, you've prayed and believed this would be the year that God would bring supernatural healing, and year after year, it remains the same. Year after year, you ask God to deliver you from depression, and you still find it difficult to make it through the day. Year after year, you're worried about money, and you believe that this would be the year that you finally would get ahead, and this is the year you fall even further behind. Year after year, you believe God is going to bring you someone special to spend the rest of your life with, and year after year, you have no good prospects, and you're wondering if there's anybody out there at all. Can you imagine how Hannah would've felt because she's asking God to do what he does for almost everybody else? Hannah continues to choose to trust God.

- Crying Out – The Honest Path to Trust

Instead of turning away from God, she chooses to turn to Him.

“Once when they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh, Hannah stood up. Now Eli the priest was sitting on his chair by the doorpost of the Lord’s house. In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the Lord, weeping bitterly. And she made a vow, saying, ‘Lord Almighty, if you will only look on your servant’s misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head.’” 1 Samuel 1:9-11

She's crying out to God in deep and honest anguish. Crying out is often a reflection of our desire to keep trusting Him. God can handle our honesty. He can handle our emotion. He would rather we run to Him in honest pain than turn our back on Him when you don't understand. She's crying out in the middle of her pain.

- Worship When Nothing Has Changed Yet.

Eli the priest talks to her in this unusual interaction and he says to her, *“Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him.” 1 Samuel 1:17*

What's actually happened? Nothing has changed, but the priest says, *“God will grant your request.”*

“Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast. Early the next morning they arose and worshiped before the Lord and then went back to their home at Ramah.” 1 Samuel 1:19

She was no longer sad. She still didn't have a baby. She still didn't have her prayer answered, but she was no longer sad. Why? She's still in the same exact place, just like some of us, year after year. And you walk into church one way and you're sad, and you may walk out with the exact same situation, but you're no longer sad.

How is that possible? She had pre-decided to trust God, and in that moment, she reaffirmed with everything in her that, no matter what happens, she's going to trust in the Lord with every bit of her heart and lean not on her own understanding of what she thinks should happen and what she would do if she were God, lean not to... But in everything, in all her ways, she would surrender to Him, acknowledge Him, cry out to Him, and He would do what a faithful God will do. What does she do? She cried out to God and was sad no longer. That's trust.

- Hannah's Circumstances Did Not Change, But Her Heart Changed.

She put her faith in God.

“Early the next morning they arose and worshiped before the Lord and then went back to their home at Ramah. And the Lord remembered her. So in the course of time Hannah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, saying, ‘Because I asked the Lord for him.’” 1 Samuel 1:19-20

She named him Samuel. Samuel means “heard by God.” Every time she would say her son's name, she was saying, “God heard.” She's remembering her trial and remembering the faithfulness of God, that God heard her prayer and answered it.

It raises the question, “Why didn't God do it years earlier?” God's ways are higher than our ways. She dedicated her son, her unborn son, to the Lord. Sometimes God needs to do something in me long before He does something for me. Sometimes He has to teach me something. He's got to do something in me to change my heart. If I'm going to trust in the Lord God with all of my heart, sometimes it needs healing, because my heart's wicked on its own. Maybe there's somebody today that God wants to do something in you before He does something for you. If you're waiting or if you're sobbing, and you go back and worship the Lord one more time. How well do you wait?

That whole process led to a point of deeper trust where she could surrender her son and dedicate him faithfully to the work in the ministry of God. She learned to trust in the Lord with all of her heart and lean not on her own understanding, but in every single way to acknowledge Him, to submit to Him, to surrender to Him, and He would make her path straight. What do you think God might do through you if you choose to trust Him in your trial? We must trust Him in every bit of our hearts because He's good. His promises are true, and He's always faithful.