

## Avoiding Spiritual Burnout

Stress

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Given 16-Sep-95; Sermon #201

Attached to our company in Korea was a medic by the name of Shanty Horrigan. Shanty was from the Bronx. He had lied about his age, and he had enlisted at 17 years old, and became a combat medic.

Combat medics were a special type of person. They were like a cross between a loving mother and a raging female tiger that would protect her cubs.

As we all know, the infantry moves on its feet. After a long march, the soldiers were required to take off their boots and check their feet for blisters and things of that nature. I have seen some soldiers decide not to take off their boots, and I have seen the medics go up to them, and get down on their knees, and tell them, “Here, let me do it.” They would unlace the boots, take off the socks, and check their feet. I know that every year during the foot washing ceremony, I always remember those medics who did that. They were just wonderful people!

Medics were always assigned (well at least during the Korean War) local laborers to help them with those who were wounded. And these gentle medics, I have seen them curse and swear with every fiber of their being, forcing their laborers out into the minefields along with them, or during an artillery attack to bring somebody in.

This kind gentleman would make those laborers more afraid of him than they would be of the danger or the enemy.

Shanty was the kind of medic who did his best to take care of everybody he could. But then, one day they found Shanty sitting on a bald ridge with tears running down his cheeks, mucous running down his face and chin; he was unable to move and speak. Shanty had seen too much—too many torn bodies, and too much that he just could not take care of. He could not get the

war to stop and left him catch up with his feelings and emotions. He could not get his life in order to even catch his breath. And the war just kept coming and coming for him. He had a heart that wanted to do it all, but he just could not keep up with it. He was struck hard with *burnout*. Shanty had to be sent home.

I had not thought of him for years. In fact, I doubt if there are more than four or five names that I could remember of the events of 40 years ago. But the other morning, while I was praying, the thought of Shanty came into my mind, because of an attitude that was developing in me.

There seems to be so many things taking place that I could not solve; so many things happening in the world that were out of my control. I started to find myself becoming calloused and uncaring. And I remembered how calloused and uncaring I had been toward the end of my tour in the Far East. I thought about an incident that I had been involved with just before I rotated home, and how hard-heartedly I conducted myself.

I had gone to the southern extreme of our flank to check a position, and they put together a quad-30 to deny the enemy the use of a pass. While I was there, I noticed that a company of troops was marching in from the rear toward the front. And of course, when they march in toward the front, they are spread out, 20 feet between men, so an artillery round could not get them all. But as they came to the front line, there was no place to go. So, they started to bunch up. And two men were talking, and I had my back to them, and all of a sudden I heard a swoosh, and a whomp, and I turned around—these men had been about three feet apart, and a small Chinese mortar had come in and landed right between them, and had turned their feet into clubs. They did not have feet any longer. It was grisly.

The thing that struck me was I remember that I had no feeling toward them at all. I did not know their names; I did not know where they came from. I just said, “Pick ‘em up and take them to the aid station,” and I just went coldly back about my job that I was doing, and my position.

I did not stop to consider that they were going to lose their feet; that they had to walk on something other than their feet for the rest of their lives. I was totally cold; I was totally calloused. And the reason this came back was

because the attitude seemed to be developing in me again. I seemed to be getting that “I don’t care” attitude; I was thinking of myself and the problems that I have.

There are two parts of what we call burnout. One would be just total collapse. And the second would be to become callous and uncaring.

But there is a third part too. I will relate an article that I read several years ago about AIDS research. The author recorded that at the beginning of the AIDS epidemic, people in the research development areas said, “We can lick this thing in about a year.” They were all enthusiastic, they were high, they were up on their toes, they were confident.

But after they started to work with it, and as the people who were in the research facilities started to contract AIDS themselves, depression set in because they realized it was going to be a long haul. They watched their fellow workers get the disease and die. They knew that the war on AIDS was not going to go away quickly and depression set in. And many were affected by burnout.

Now, giving up, becoming calloused, and being depressed are results and symptoms pointing to burnout. There is nothing that Satan would like us to do more than for God’s people to become weary, to feel helpless, to become depressed, and to give up on the wonderful calling that they have been given. Events have taken place around us that can produce burnout.

What is burnout?

It is the cessation of burning in a jet- or rocket-engine, especially when caused by the stoppage or exhaustion of fuel. In simple terms, we run out of gas. All of us from time to time feel the stress of these times resulting in the awareness that we cannot control events and the conditions confronting us. We just cannot do it. But it is the environment around us that applies the pressure. More importantly, our perception of the environment can cause us to stand or fall. It is what we *perceive*.

We all know that we have more to do than we can do. We are constantly faced with a country filled with unsolvable problems, and a generally uncertain future.

In putting this message together, I will list what I feel are three areas of life that put the most stress on us. And these areas, if not looked at and understood, can lead us to falter and possibly burnout.

Some people in the world say, “What problems? There aren’t any problems! Things are fine!” Newt Gingrich wrote an article in the *LA Times* that I would like to read to you. “Nothing is Wrong!” In this recent article on America, he stated the following:

I am amazed every time I hear reports of teen suicide, or stories about people who have despaired because of boredom, or because they have nothing left to look forward to. We are on the verge of enormous frontiers of knowledge, and opportunity, although our elite and entertainment cultures are so negative, and cynical, and so scientifically and technologically ignorant, that you would never know it. They fail to energize the sense of excitement that is potentially available to all of us.

From exploring space to plumbing the ocean’s depths, to discoveries of molecular medicine and unexplored worlds of computers and virtual reality, we are on the threshold of great achievements. Our lives are being enriched and expanded by inventors and discoveries of which we have only the vaguest of ideas. Our generation is still seeking its Jules Verne or H. G. Wells to dazzle our imaginations with hope and optimism.

[He goes on to say] “Why not build a real Jurassic Park? That would be the most spectacular of accomplishments in human history.”

And then he lists some of the changes that we have lived through: Laptop computers, cellular phones, molecular medicine, new discoveries about the dinosaurs, home security systems that talk, composite materials that make

cars lighter, micro-engineering, manufacturing in space, high-definition television, and of all things, the video store. I thought that was interesting.

He goes on to say,

We are entering a great era of change—the transformation from the industrial age to the information age. There is every reason to believe that this new era will see a revolution in goods and services that will empower and enhance most people. Imagine a morning in just a decade or so from now [2005-ish] you wake up to a wall-sized high-definition feed of the surf from Maui. Or, if you are sick, you will sit in your diagnostic chair and communicate with your local health clinic; sensors take your blood pressure, and analyze your blood samples, or do a throat culture. The only time you would visit a hospital or doctor's office is if there was something seriously wrong.

Your livelihood and security are likely to come from you becoming an expert, maybe the world's greatest expert, on some small corner of the vast info-sphere. You might know more than anyone else does on the incorporation laws of Zaire and offer advice over the internet to anyone attempting to set up a business in that country. Or you may become the foremost authority on some obscure medical principle or accounting procedure.

The next time that people tell you they are bored, ask if they had thought about these opportunities, and see if you can get them to join us on the great adventure of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Well, I do not know that a wall-sized television screen showing the current beach on Maui would be satisfying; I do not know how many technical experts the world can handle. In America if 50 million got on the Internet, what would the other 200 million that are having problems . . .

The question is: how will we feed the 7 to 8 billion people who are on the earth, and deal with crime, unemployment, education, transportation, smog, sanitation, and other things of this nature?

For all of us older members (and maybe those who are not so old), we can remember when the world was considerably more stable and predictable. We worked five days a week and our salaries seemed to stretch, we were able to afford our house. I remember in old Oakland, on Sundays the entire city shut down. Everything was shut down on Sunday except for one drug store. It was a quiet day. Homes were affordable, our streets were basically safe. There were no such things as gangs to speak of.

For most of society, though not perfect, their actions were based on right ethics; the standard was not too bad. There were no X-rated movies or magazines. Teenage pregnancies were almost unheard of. I can remember when I was 14 years old, in all of Oakland, California we heard of one pregnancy. It was the buzz of the school. A girl got pregnant. Today, we do not consider that worth mentioning. It is just too common.

Contrasting all this with what we have today with all the glitz and technology, the fast pace of life, the high cost of living, the list of things we are told we must have if we are going to be happy. You see the talk shows parade perverted lifestyles that conflict with our morals and ethics.

It all takes a toll on us because we belong to God. We live in a society that is not going to improve, because it will become further and further from God. It is going to become more frantic every day with all sorts of problems.

In the July 10 (1995) *U.S. News and World Report* the lead article on the cover was, “Divided We Stand—America’s New Cultural Landscape.” There is even confusion here.

Today America is divided in new and different ways. There are scraps of evidence everywhere. Old ties are frayed, and loose new ones are being woven. Democrats are now becoming Republicans; there is a gulf between women who work and those who stay home; our leaders fight over whether economic issues should take precedence over moral issues. Nobody really knows what to do.

This is part of why we feel the pressure. And then this article pointed out that there was a brand new book coming out, *The Next American Nation*. And the opening sentence was,

Are we a nation today? Are we united?" [The article went on to say] An individual's local culture is more important than politics, race, geography, or ideology—just his local culture. The politicians are going crazy. They do not know how to appeal to these people.

We have seven tribes in our nation. [That is the term they used.] The populist traditionalist; the blue-collar workers who are afraid of computers, seeing their jobs being threatened, their economy going away; the stewards who watch over inherited wealth, and want things to remain as they are; the conservative activists on the religious right who wants to bring [return] morals into the classroom, into politics; the ethnic conservatives who see gangs and gang warfare threatening America and themselves; the agnostics who are the former hippies of the 1960s who like things the way they are; the dowagers and retirees who are the thrifty class that we have; the liberal activists who want to make sure the economic progress achieved by women and minorities continue.

So the country is divided, the article said, into these seven groups. And they want the government to satisfy all their needs. They want things done their way.

And aside from that confusion, we have the militia who is ready to fight if the government takes away any more of their rights; we have the deficit that never seems to go away; we have warring factions all over the world; we have crime in schools where students have to pass through metal detectors; and the teachers ask for a burial package as part of their salary contract. Schools were formerly the safest place in the world to be; but in many parts of our country, they are now the most dangerous.

The inability to solve these problems and many more is what has placed the stress and strain upon the country and the world. And it is also what places that same stress and strain, and the feeling of hopelessness on us, the church.

And just as Shanty Horrigan longed for the war to stop so he could just catch his breath, each one of us, from time to time, longs for a space of peace so we can catch our breath as well. “Stop the world so I can get off!”

What to do?

The truth of the matter is that we cannot really help the world right now. It does not want our input, and it does not want our lifestyle, and for the most part, it does not want anything at all to do with God. The world is concerned. I know that probably your neighbors have talked to you, and mine have talked to me. They see great disaster coming. They do not know what to do about it.

We have an advantage. Turn to John 8. I think that sometimes when we get blue, and we get down, we forget this advantage that we have.

**John 8:31-32** Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

There is something we have that the rest of the world does not. It is the truth. Let us go to John 15.

**John 15:15** “No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.”

We do know who we are! We have been called by God. We know who this nation is. We know the overall plan of God. We know that the end of this age is on the horizon. So, these things that have happened should not be all that unusual to us. Knowing what is in store in the future truly helps us to understand why our world is changing as it is, and why we feel the stress that we do. What is taking place may not be what would wish, but you see, it is normal for the end time. The world must get to be like this.

What is the end time going to be like?



**Matthew 24:36-37** "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be."

So we know it is going to be like the days of Noah, as you see in Genesis 6:

**Genesis 6:5-6** Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.

I do not know if every intent of the heart of every man on the earth right now is totally evil, but this is what the world will continue to slide into before it concludes. So, when we feel the pressure of these types of things on us, we know where it is coming from.

What happens when a nation forgets God? What happened when Israel forgot God? This is the question.

Israel, as you can tell by the culture in the movies and other entertainments, books, and everything along those lines, the name of God is going further and further from our people. God's character and what God thinks is very far from our people.

Here in the first six verses Isaiah gives the sense of the beginning of what is taking place. And then the following verses tell what is coming.

**Isaiah 1:1-6** The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth! For the LORD has spoken: "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me; the ox knows its owner and the donkey its master's crib; but Israel does not know, My people do not consider." Alas, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a brood of evildoers, children who are corrupters! They have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked to anger the Holy One of Israel, they have turned away backward.

Why should you be stricken again? You will revolt more and more. The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faints. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores; they have not been closed or bound up, or soothed with ointment.

God expresses this with great depth of feeling. He says, “O Earth! Look at this! The people I have chosen I made great, and I caused to grow, and I blessed them, and they have rebelled against Me! They have forgotten Me, and they have taken Me out of their thoughts. Even the dumb ox and the dumb ass, devoid of understanding, knows where their sustenance and support comes from. They have more sense than My people who do not even stop to consider Me. They have a stupidity greater than the brute beasts!”

God’s people have forgotten that He gave them their life, their creative ability, and they have just pushed it out of their mind. It is just, “Look at what I have done!” They have despised God so much that He has been provoked to anger. They have gone away backwards and have turned their backs on Him. They are a sinful nation. Punishment will come because they are heavy laden with the weight of sin.

“Why should you be stricken?” (vs. 5) Look at the world around you. Look at the poverty, the war, the crime, the sexual perversions, the child abuse, the fear and stress and the strain. He says, “Why do you keep asking for more? Wake up! Look at what you are causing!” And then to add to your sin, He says, “you add revolt. When I bring punishment and calamity, you revolt more and more.”

He says, “If your heart was right when this calamity came upon you, you’d get on your knees, and search for what you have done, and you would turn around, and humble yourself. But your heart is evil, and you become more obstinate, more stubborn, and more rebellious.”

He says, “The whole head is sick.” Not just the leaders, but all the population as well.

He said, “From the sole of your foot to the top of your head.” Every part of society from top to bottom is affected. There is nothing sound and in good condition. There are only wounds that cannot be healed.

Turn to Jeremiah 8.

**Jeremiah 8:4-6** "Moreover you shall say to them, 'Thus says the LORD: "Will they fall and not rise? Will one turn away and not return? Why has this people slidden back, Jerusalem, in a perpetual backsliding? They hold fast to deceit, they refuse to return. I listened and heard, but they do not speak aright. No man repented of his wickedness, saying, 'What have I done?' Everyone turned to his own course, as the horse rushes into the battle.'"

A horse, indeed, charges into battle. Israel returned to his course, returned to his sins, returned to his way of life, as he wanted to do it, and did not give a thought about God.

And then He says something that is just amazing:

**Jeremiah 8:7** "Even the stork in the heavens knows her appointed times; and the turtledove [just ‘turtle’ in the King James Version], the swift, and the swallow observe the time of their coming. But My people do not know the judgment of the LORD."

I do not know how many of you have ever had a pet turtle. To me, there is nothing dumber on the face of the earth than a pet turtle. And here God compare Israel to a dumb turtle. He says, “The dumb turtle knows what it is doing, but you do not.”

**Jeremiah 8:12** “Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No! They were not at all ashamed, nor did they know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; in the time of their punishment they shall be cast down," says the LORD.

In this whole passage, God is saying that when a people forget God, this will come upon them. This is what is coming upon this nation, brethren.

I think we have to ask also in this understanding of the environment we live in, where was all this hatred coming from? Where is all the perversion, the craze for power, and the dissolving of moral ethics coming from?

You all know the answer but turn to Ephesians 2.

**Ephesians 2:1-2** And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience.

You see brethren, this should not be a big shock to us. Satan is the prince of the power of the air. He is in charge of this world right now. This is why you have the hatred, the killing, the anger, and the development of atomic bombs, and bacterial warfare; this is why the world is filled with hatred. This is the world that God has called you out of, and this is world that you are in.

Turn to Revelation 12.

**Revelation 12:7-12** And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, "Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time."

Now the question is sort of eternal, here. Has Satan been cast down? I do not know. I was talking with another minister, and he sort of figures that he has been cast down or will be cast down when the whole world goes crazy. Maybe in a last fit of anger, frustration, perversion, and hatred, that is when he is going to be cast down.

I do not know when Satan is going to be cast down, but I do know that Satan is aware that his time is short and he wants to destroy God's people as best he can.

Lastly in this section of the sermon, turn to Romans 8. We have to realize that we are part of the world that is suffering as well.

**Romans 8:22** For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.

I was watching a program on television about our islands off the California coast, the Catalina islands. We have eagles over there. They have to bring eagles in from other parts of the country and put them on the island because the eagles are fish eaters, and they eat the fish out of the sea, and the fish are poisoned still with DDT, and find the eagles laying on the shore quivering and dying. So they have to bring new eggs and put them under the nesting eagles to continue the flock of eagles on Catalina island. Other sea birds lay their eggs there, and the eggshells crumble.

So, the entire creation does groan, and does travail.

**Romans 8:23** Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.

The whole creation groans. The poor of the world groans. The animal kingdoms groan. The seas are being filled with pollution. The whole world groans, brethren, and you are just part of it.

Is there any one of us who would not like to stop what we see taking place, and start to heal this tired world? We also groan at what we see, and that in

turn places great stress and pressure on us. And the reason is because we carry the values of God. And when we measure the world against the values of God, we hurt because we cannot stop what is going on; we cannot help the people.

So the first area that puts stress on us is the world that we live in.

The second area is the church that we used to belong to; the changes in the church. The demise of the Worldwide Church of God has caused each of us great individual stress and strain. I think in our house, and in our family, it caused probably the toughest decision we have ever had to make—to stay or leave.

We have seen a church that was about 125,000 strong, we now see it forming into smaller groups of anywhere from 5,000 to 15,000 people. Totaling all of those who have left you will see sums somewhere around 35,000 people who are going to someplace where it is organized. There are probably 40,000 to 50,000 members left, and that means there are probably 35,000 to 40,000 floating around loose, just giving up. Some are going back to churches in the world, blaming God for what took place, and forgetting church altogether.

When this all happened, questions came to our mind. Where is God in all of this? That was the first question. What is God doing? Why cannot we all be together? And we all felt alone, perhaps, as if God had gone off somewhere.

I talked to one man last week, and he said, “What happened to the people that used to go to the WATS line with me; where we did things together; we rode to church together; and we all thought the same things?” Now these sorts of folks are rushing to work on the Sabbath, and to eat unclean foods.

Our church-world that seemed so stable has collapsed out from under us. We feel lost and abandoned. Nothing is normal any longer. Or is it?

Is it normal? Could what has taken place in the light of church history be considered normal? And if this is the normal way that God has always worked with His church, then in fact everything is really alright, and God is

in charge working with His people. It all has to do with your perception of the environment we are in. This is what can calm the mind or cause us to lose our mind.

Let us take a look at church history based on Revelation 2 and 3. Now, in looking at Revelation 2 and 3, we know that three applications to the church eras mentioned there: 1) Actual churches on a mail route having a variety of characteristics and problems. 2) Those same church characteristics and attitudes will be reflected in those being called today. 3) It is used as a general method of following church history since its start.

We are going to follow church history, starting in 31 <sup>AD</sup>, and will end up in 1995, and we will see how God has always dealt with His church. Maybe we will see that things are not as abnormal, based on history, as they seem.

The New Testament church of God started in 31 <sup>AD</sup> right after the 3½ year ministry of Jesus Christ. It started small and grew quickly. Thousands were taught by Him, and everywhere He went He was pressed by crowds. As was said awhile back (in a sermonette), His fame went throughout the land, and He rattled the doors of the establishment as it had never been rattled before. The approbation peaked when Jesus rode into Jerusalem. According to Matthew 11, people came to Him; they were shouting “Hosanna;” they threw their robes down with palm leaves; the town went wild. If ever there was a time that it would appear that Jesus Christ could take over and rule the world, that was it!

But then came the crucifixion. Where were all the people? In Acts 1:15 we find there were about 120 left who believed. Maybe there were some elsewhere, but at least the number had shrunk, dropping drastically.

Then came the giving of the Holy Spirit. And again, we see great miracles taking place. Three thousand, five thousand were baptized in one day. And the church, by the love of God, in excitement, began to turn the world upside down. They held all things in common—sold their homes, gave the money—it was a marvelous thing to behold!

But did the church continue to grow into a powerful organization exerting great influence to change the world? No, it did not. What we see is great

growth, but then as the numbers grew, the establishment panicked, and persecution set in. In tracing the history of God's church, we find great growth at times, but other times the church was barely able to hang on.

In Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, he states,

The scanty materials of the ecclesiastical history seldom enable us to dispel the cloud that hangs over the first age of the church. For nearly a century, church history is blank. Of all the periods of church history, this is the one about which we know the least. For 50 years after St. Paul's life, a curtain hangs over the church, through which we strive vainly to look. And, when at last the curtain rises about 120 AD with the writings of the earliest church fathers, we find the church in many aspects very different from that of the days of St. Peter, and St. Paul. Something had happened to the church.

For the first 38-40 years in the Ephesian era, the church grew, and conversions were great for a period. Then came a long period of declining zeal. The headquarters of the church was moved from Pella to Ephesus, and that was where the last survivor of the apostles—John—died. But, prior to John's death, which was about 95 AD, Emperor Domitian began a second imperial persecution. This was the period when John was imprisoned and sent to the island of Patmos. Here he wrote the final parts to the New Testament. He was finally released after this. Once he was released, he trained Polycarp, who was to carry out the work. Polycarp and Polycrates are the last leaders from that part of the world of which there is record.

After them, God's ministry let down, and wolves came in and devoured those who were lukewarm. God removed His candlestick from Ephesus, even moved the city.

In neighboring Smyrna, Polycarp watched over the church for 50 years after John's death. He could not hold it together. He was burned to death in 155 AD, at about 85 years old.

Smyrna was comprised of a group called by the world, Ebionites, which means "the poor people." They were no longer part of the Ephesian era. This



small group of paupers clung to the Word of God, even though they were laughed at by the world. And they had several small congregations.

Eusebius was a historian who favored the emperor and false Christianity. He wrote that the Ebionites did not believe in the virgin birth, the pre-existence of Christ, or the writings of Paul. This was not true—they did!

The church revived again in the location where the Ebionites disappeared. And this new group was known as the Paulicians.

The next era of the church was Pergamos, which was the original seat of the Roman civil government in the province of Asia. Constantine also had buildings transferred to the eastern part of the empire from Rome to Constantinople. This was where the Eastern Roman Empire was ruled from. This [Pergamos] is where Satan's seat was. In this environment, God's people again started to compromise, and let down, and let slip the truth that was given.

About 650 AD (we are coming closer to 19915), God raised up Constantine Manganelli, the Antipas, which means 'anti-pope,' to try and strengthen the church that was compromising. For 27 years Constantine tried to do this, but was stoned in 684 AD. These members of God's church of the Pergamos era were called Paulicians, an Armenian term for "followers of wretched little Paul," a name of great disdain and dishonor. Paulicians rejected praying to the saints, or to Mary. They rejected the idea of purgatory. They rejected the religious uses of images, pictures, crosses, incense, and candles. And they rejected infant baptism. It was God's church.

Paulicianism became an accepted faith in the vast region along the Taurus Mountains, and made great inroads into Armenia, Albania, and the regions around the Caspian Sea. But now, with many, it was only a form of religion. And true believers probably only numbered in the tens of thousands. God was spreading His people out.

Again, persecution set in, and many began to compromise. Splits and divisions occurred in the church. Does that not have a familiar ring? Does that sound perhaps current?

God raised up a man named Tergius who tried for 34 years to bring the church together. But finally exhausted, he had to admit he failed. This was in about 835 <sup>AD</sup>.

The church spread to western Europe before the year 1000. Here the church found fertile ground. You might find this interesting. In the Middle Ages in the geographical areas of southern France where the Thyatira era was to begin, was the very center of the textile industry—they made cloth. Many of the merchants carried silk of Byzantium from the east to the markets in the west. They were also missionaries who propagated the region of Paulicians and the Bogomils. The reason we call our scriptures “text,” is because these people that did the weaving of the cloth were known as textors. So when someone says to turn to a “text,” it is because these people carried parts of the Bible with them to spread in the area of the Bogomils.

The Thyatira period began about 1096 <sup>AD</sup>. The pope described the Valley of Louise Dauphine in France as being infested with heresy. Paulician and Bogomil evangelists preached repentance throughout the region. In essence, they preached against all the wrong things the Catholics taught. The church gathered around a man by the name of Pierre De Bruys or Peter de Bruis, and again the church started to grow. And for about twenty years Peter preached the truth until the false church could no longer stand it, and he was burned alive at the stake.

Henry of Lausanne, one of his followers, took charge, so the followers were now known as Henricans. While these men were leading, the ranks of the church swelled. As soon as these men died, the church was lost sight of again. It faded out.

The church was very small, and then God called Peter Waldo, a wealthy man of good ability, and God blessed the church with growth. They had a college in the Alps to train God’s people. As it was before the advent of the printing press, little books and articles were hand-copied and given away free to reach the people. Waldo appointed leaders in France, who were later burned at the stake. Waldo himself died about 1217 <sup>AD</sup>, and the church, again, went into decline, and many began to compromise what they had been taught. The remaining six church leaders from Leon and six from Lombard met, but they could not agree on doctrine. That sounds so familiar.

Starting about 1199AD Pope Innocent made a series of moves to pervert and seduce God's church. When the Lateran Council of 1215 forbade the reading of the Bible in the vernacular (in the common tongue), it virtually closed the door to the evangelistic work of God's church. Jesus Christ allowed it.

The Waldensians were greatly pressed upon starting about 1310 AD through about 1330 AD. Again 1375 AD leaders were martyred, and God's people were scattered—some to Hungary, Transylvania, and even to Poland. They were scattered everywhere, and lost contact. But these scattered Waldensians also took the gospel to England too. Prior to this time, they were also known as Lards, meaning they sort of mumbled and spoke softly, because they had to memorize scriptures of the Bible because there were not any Bibles available.

You see, a Bible was hand copied and took 10 months to do, and cost as much as a landed estate. And we sit here as fat cats with our Bible. We can go down and buy one for \$5 if we need to, new or used. But then it cost as much as a landed estate and took ten months to copy. And they memorized the Bible so they could have it with them, and take it around and teach others. What a wonderful thing they were doing!

Then a scholar named John Wycliffe translated the Bible into English. Then came several more translations. This brought more persecution. And God's people survived two centuries scattered throughout England. The Bible was translated into German, too. God's people were scattered everywhere with little strength. There were groups in Norway, Russia, Moravia, Finland, Sweden, England, and elsewhere in Europe. And again, God's church was brought down till it was almost nonexistent.

Another group was raised up in the 1600s. They printed hymn books and psalms; keeping the holy days. And the church increased. And again, persecution set in, and the church declined. By 1668, there were nine or ten congregations in England, plus smaller groups in other areas. Persecution set in, compromise with the religions around them, some were even keeping both Sabbath and Sunday, and attending both to keep from persecution. But that did not pay, because after a while compromising set in. You cannot do both. Eventually they left the church. That is what happens. By the 1800s Sabbath keepers became almost extinct again in Europe.

Prior to this in 1644 Stephen Mumford was sent from England to Newport, Rhode Island. After seven years, a small congregation was raised with seven members. Sometimes we feel like we are really small. We are small, but this was smaller. Seven years he had seven members faithfully hanging on to God's words. It is a true example for us.

The church grew slowly for about 30 years, and in 1708 the church was large enough to split into two congregations.

Time passed, and there were other Sabbath keeping churches that came along, Seventh Day Adventists (1860s) and Seventh Day Baptists (1700).

From about 1861 until the 1890s the church of God sent out ministers Mexico, Chile, Argentina, and the Philippines. This might be why Mr. Armstrong had such a great response from the Philippines. There was a pioneer group already there.

In spite of all this, the church of God was spiritually dead. It was weak. And God's church was again going downhill. This was the church that Mr. Armstrong was called into about 1927.

Again, the church grew under God's guidance and a great warning went out into the world. Many were called during this time. In my mind's eye, I have no doubt that this was probably the greatest warning that has ever gone out to the world. It was just absolutely awesome. Leaders of all nations were talked to, and publications went out in different languages. What a tremendous work it was. And you and I were called into that work.

Then Mr. Armstrong died in 1986; apostasy set in; and as a result, as in the past, the church broke apart into smaller groups, trying to hold fast to the truth they had been given. Each of us felt threatened just as God's people who had gone before us by what had taken place. The decisions were frightening and put great strain upon us.

See, brethren? We are not that different from the church that has gone on before us. We think, "Wouldn't it be great to be all together? Why can't we do this? Why can't we do that?" We long for things to be as they were. And

yet, the history of the church shows us that the church at this time will not be as it was unless Jesus Christ decides to do it.

What is taking place is not all that unusual. And yet, because we do not reflect upon church history, we become stressed and fearful.

What should we be fearful of at this time? There is a fear that we have to have! It is not from the New World Order. It is not from an economic crash. And it is not from persecution. The fear is that we need is not to fall away from the truth we have been given. That is the fear we should have. The truth is where our safety is. Many people have given up and gone right back into the world, which is what we have to be afraid of. Do not be afraid of the breakup. Do not be afraid of the world around us. Be afraid of losing the crown that is set aside for you.

We have been given the truth, and we understand what the trunk of the tree is. And yet, as we look around, we see people leaving the trunk because of twigs—new moons, this and that.

Realize that what is taking place in the church, in light of church history, is not all that unusual. God has not left us at all but is carefully working with His people in the way that is best for them to learn at this time. This should urge each of us to work harder at hanging on to the truth we have been given. That will lessen the chance of burnout.

The third area that produces tremendous strain is sin. What can happen when a church comes apart when the world is already coming apart, it can cause us to let down in the important areas—*the important areas*—of Bible study, prayer, fasting, and meditation.

You hear ministers say that all the time. And you might keep saying to yourself, “Isn’t there something new?” No, there is not. That is the nuts and bolts of the calling that we have been given. You do not want to pray, you do not want to study, you are going to go away. That is all there is to it. If you draw close to God, things will be fine. This causes us to not want to let down.

Turn to Proverbs 29 to see what I am talking about.

**Proverbs 29:18** Where there is no revelation [from God as to what your life and future is about], the people cast off restraint; but happy is he who keeps the law.

What he is saying is that when you lose the revelation that you have been given, when you forget who you are and what your destiny is, you cast off restraint. You start giving in to the ways of this world again, and you start giving up on God and His teaching. He says, “Blessed and happy is he who keeps the law!”

There is no doubt that many other areas produce stress in our lives that can cause burnout. But sinning puts a great deal of pressure on us. All of us old-timers realize that sinning cuts us off from God. Persecution from the world you can take, and it too puts pressure on you. But continuing to sin causes us to feel like we are trying to run through deep snow or mud—it just wears us out, tires us out. It saps our strength. Then we want to give up.

When we do not have a right relationship with God through prayer and study; if we have homes that are not happy; relationships with each other that are not right; if we compromise with, break, or try to circumvent God’s laws and teachings, the end result is going to be stress. And, as long as we continue in wrong practices in what we are doing or not doing, without working to come into alignment with God, we will be living in an environment that will produce indifference, despair, and at the very least burnout.

As God talks to us plainly about this, He does not pull any punches. He spells it out for us to understand. If we have been sinning or if we have been letting down, or if we have not been attending church services, or if we are wondering around what to do, God says:

**Isaiah 1:18-19** "Come now, and let us reason together," says the LORD, "though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land."

God is saying, “I don’t care what you have done, I could not care less, but if you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land. Turn it all

around and come and sit down and talk to Me about your problem(s), I will make your sins white as snow.”

The way to relieve this stressful lifestyle is to admit we have a problem, to counsel about it, to set a plan to work it over, address what is wrong. Once you do that, peace will come back into your life because positive action is being taken to overcome and draw closer to God.

One more verse in this area. Turn to James 4.

**James 4:7-9** Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.

Take your calling seriously. Do not take this lightly. If you are letting down, do not you do it. Get serious about your calling.

**James 4:10** Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.

God’s promises are sure. He is faithful. He will not let us down.

Now, one thing we have to realize also when we are feeling down, when we are feeling blue, calloused, or just wanting to let go, is that we are not the only generation to have gone through this. We tend to focus on ourselves and our problems—I know I do. As we become closer to being burned out, we feel alone, as if no one understands a thing; no one has ever had to go through what I am going through. As difficult as it is to take our minds off ourselves to see what others have had to go through, it is extremely important to do so. Frankly, if others have gone through it, and have come out the other side correct, then you can do the same thing.

Let us see a few examples of a man who almost gave up:

**Psalm 73:1-7** Truly God is good to Israel, to such as are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; my steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no pangs in their death, but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men, nor are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride serves as their necklace; violence covers them like a garment. Their eyes bulge with abundance; they have more than heart could wish.

They had the Mercedes Benz; they had a girl on each arm; the whole nine yards, they were fat cats.

**Psalm 73:8-9** They scoff and speak wickedly concerning oppression; they speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walks through the earth.

They spoke ill of God, His laws, and His ways.

**Psalm 73:10-11** Therefore his people return here, and waters of a full cup are drained by them. And they say, "How does God know? And is there knowledge in the Most High?"

The people were beginning to fret. "Look at what is going on in the earth! Where is God? Why is He not watching the store? Look at these sinners! They are crooks! Look at what they are doing!" Where is God in all this?

**Psalm 73:12-13** Behold, these are the ungodly, who are always at ease; they increase in riches. Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocence.

In other words, "Why have I tried to keep God's laws? Why have I tried to be honest? Why have I tried to be moral? It is useless! It is just in vain."



**Psalm 73:14-15** For all day long I have been plagued, and chastened every morning. If I had said, "I will speak thus," behold, I would have been untrue to the generation of Your children.

“If I told the congregation what I thought, they would be offended; it would hurt them.”

**Psalm 73:16-22** When I thought how to understand this, it was too painful for me—until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I understood their end. Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction. Oh, how they are brought to desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awakes, so, Lord, when You awake, You shall despise their image. Thus my heart was grieved, and I was vexed in my mind. I was so foolish and ignorant; I was like a beast before You.

In other words, “Father! Here You have called me, and You promised me the Kingdom of God; to become a spirit being; to be another of Your very sons; and I complained in the sense of how You are running things, until I stopped to think about it.”

**Psalm 73:23-28** Nevertheless I am continually with You; You hold me by my right hand. You will guide me with Your counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You. My flesh and my heart fail; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. For indeed, those who are far from You shall perish; You have destroyed all those who desert You for harlotry. But it is good for me to draw near to God; I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all Your works.

Here again was a man who almost slipped from the pressures of society. He had a difficult time. We always think of King David as king. In our foolishness, we think that the king always had it made. The king could do no

wrong; what he said was done. Is that not wonderful? We do not have any idea of the intrigue of the court that the king had to deal with. In the case of King David there was probably only one or two more who had God's Spirit. We do not have any idea what King David had to go through: the intrigue; the plots to take over the country; the gossip.

Here are some of David's thoughts. Do you think this too?

**Psalms 55:1-7** Give ear to my prayer, O God, and do not hide Yourself from my supplication. Attend to me, and hear me; I am restless in my complaint, and moan noisily, because of the voice of the enemy, because of the oppression of the wicked; for they bring down trouble upon me, and in wrath they hate me. My heart is severely pained within me, and the terrors of death have fallen upon me. Fearfulness and trembling have come upon me, and horror has overwhelmed me. So I said, "Oh, that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest. Indeed, I would wander far off, and remain in the wilderness. Selah

Anyone wish they were in the mountains with the trees and a creek, the sweet sounds of birds, and the smell of pine trees in the air, and the beautiful sunset to view from your front porch? Of course! We all feel this way from time to time. And so did King David. He was under tremendous stress.

Sometimes we think that the pastor of a church has it made too! He just sits there as pastor. Is that not wonderful? That is not the case at all! He has to answer all manner of questions, prepare so many sermons; and do so many more things. Heavy is the head that wears the crown.

We will not turn to these, but I Corinthians 11 is where Paul talked about the pressures that he was under. He had been shipwrecked in sea; he was bitten by a snake; he had been stoned; he was left for dead; he was hated; he was in prison.

We also find in Matthew 23, where Jesus Christ was looking over Jerusalem, almost with tears in His eyes, "Would that you had listened to Me! You hate

Me. I have always wanted to take you under My wings like a hen takes her chicks.” He was hated, too, and He could not do it. He felt great stress just as you and I do.

And finally, at His crucifixion, when He perspired blood, He asked, “Let this cup pass from Me.” But He kept His eyes where they belonged, the goal of the plan of God.

Turn to John 15, because this has to do with the calling that you and I have been given.

**John 15:18-21** "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me.”

Jesus Christ and all those called by God have had to face discouragement, trial, pressure, and stress. All those found listed in Hebrews 11 had to also. It comes with the territory. It comes with being called. It is not unusual. It is normal.

How do we cope?

John Ritenbaugh said years ago that his dad told him to find a comfortable rut and stay in it. There is a lot of truth to that. Do not spread yourself too thin.

**Hebrews 10:24-25** And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

*Barnes' Notes:*

Let us all regard the welfare of others as to endeavor to excite them to persevere in their Christian life. That is what the assembling of ourselves is for. The idea is that much might be done in securing perseverance and fidelity by mutual kind exhortation. We are not to be selfish, we are not to regard our own interests only, but we should have kind sympathy in the concerns of each other.

If anybody should be able to encourage and help each other, it should be us. We all have to look to the same standards, we all suffer trials, we know what it feels like. If anybody should be able to encourage the Family of God, it should be us.

We are to provoke each other to good works. Provoke usually means to incite, or to incense, or to irritate. But here, it means to arouse and excite others to the call to action that they might produce good works and stand fast in the truth. Not forsake the assembling means to actively assemble together for the worship of God. It is inferred that to not assemble is wrong, as the manner of some is. We should not be deterred from coming together.

*Barnes':*

Why should we come together then? To be with those of like mind to worship, to exhort, to help, encourage, and comfort our church family.

As we see the day approaching—no one who is watching world events thinks we have long to go. But the essence of what is said here in Hebrews 10 is that it is more important to be drawing close to God with love and good works, than it is just to see what is on the horizon. The important thing is to change.

How can we assemble with each other when we are all so far apart? We do it partially by the live-stream, or audio hook-up, by the tape program. But could we be doing more in the light of verse Hebrews 10:24? We can keep in contact with each other by cards, letters, emails, texts, and phone calls. After the Feast of Tabernacles this year it would be good to get a pen-pal. Find someone who is by themselves, get to know them, and figure out how to remain in contact with them throughout the year. That is encouraging if you

provoke them to love, and good works, strengthening them. There is not any substitute for good friends to talk to.

Spiritually, what should we do?

Just like at the first, we should never forsake the assembling with God. As we draw close to some burnout, we tend to pull back from friends, from the church, and most unfortunately from God. Adam and Eve hid. God asked them why they were hiding.

The beautiful thing about worshipping God is that God knows what is going on with you between your ears. You are no big secret to Him. And Adam and Eve were not either. He knew. He knows what is going on. You may as well get on your knees and say, “Father, I’m having a problem. I’m pulling far from You.” When we get closer to burnout, everything seems hopeless and lost, we pull back from God. As I have said, when we start losing our contact with God, study, and prayer, we slowly close off the fuel to our spiritual engine. If we do not change, the result will be spiritual burnout. That is a fact.

Staying close to God, especially in times of trial and trouble, is essential because of the strength and encouragement He gives.

One of the laws of success is to have the right goal. What is the goal we have? What is our goal to be?

Not to break your heart, but the goal is not the Place of Safety. Those who go to the Place of Safety will be by God’s choice. God will make up His mind as to who He chooses to place there.

The goal is also not the return of Jesus Christ. If that happens while we are alive, that is wonderful.

Our goal is the Kingdom of God. That is where our focus has to be.

**Matthew 6:33** “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”

This means to change ourselves—make the change within us—and God will add everything else. God will take care of the world, and He will take care of us too. God is faithful.

James 5, verses 1-6 talks of the rich men who persecute the poor of the world; the powerful who persecute the poor. As we understand the definition of poor, it is not necessarily poverty stricken, but those who are without power. Those who have power oppress the poor who have no power.

**James 5:1-6** Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you! Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days. Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter. You have condemned, you have murdered the just; he does not resist you.

That put great stress on the people of God. Starting in verse 7 is James' message to God's people:

**James 5:7-11** Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door! My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.

What is James saying here?

Be patient in the presence of trial and suffering. Even though you are ill-treated at times, and picked on, you be patient without resistance.

They were all in God's hands as were their problems and complaints. Despite all the problems that they faced, God was in charge. He was their Husbandman. He is the one who is raising the crop, and working in their lives, for their good.

*Barnes' Notes:* The sense in the original Greek was,

Suffer with long patience. Let not your patience be exhausted. Your courage, vigor, and forbearance is not to be short-lived, but to be enduring. Let it continue until the return of Jesus Christ when you will be relieved from these sufferings.

Do not give up! We cannot turn this world around, we cannot put the church back together. That is how it is, whether we like it or not. Our job is to stay true to what we have been taught. God will do the rest.

James is telling us that just like the farmer, it requires time for his crop to mature, and he does not become impatient. Therefore, we should wait as well for things to develop in their proper season. We know the crop will be produced. The farmer cannot control the weather, and we cannot control the events taking place in the world around us, or in the church. That is God's job. We must be patient for the development of God's will, both for us and for the world. Just like the farmer anticipates the former and latter rains, we can anticipate relief from the trials at the return of Jesus Christ.

Our part is to set our hearts on the Kingdom of God, and to have our faith firm, unwavering in patience, relying on and trusting in God. He does not want us to become fearful, but to stand steadfast trusting Him until the return of Jesus Christ, which is near.

Then James points toward the prophets who had a much rougher time than we have had, and they all stood steadfast.

In verse 11 he says, “Behold.” This means to stop and consider. James said, “Stop and think about what I am saying.” He says to look at it from all different angles.

“Behold, we count them happy who endure.” This means that those who endure should be blessed. They are commended for their patience. There is a reward for those who endure.

And then he says, “Look at Job’s trial.” There is a real lesson here for us. Look at what Job went through. But also look at the goal—the end—that God had in store for him. God had in mind all through the trial to bless Job. He opened Job’s mind, He gave him new understanding, He developed him, so that he could be a marvelous leader. He restored all he had and then more.

God is tender and merciful toward as well! He knows the whole creation groans and puts stress and pressure upon us, and He knows that the environment we live in produces weariness. But He also wants us to know that He is developing each one of us as He did Job for a wonderful future. Do not give up!

So, when callousness and despair and hopelessness start to affect you, as it will from time to time, remember all those who have gone before you, and have made it. Get on your knees before God and bring Him your problems. Tell Him if you are getting weak.

And if you have someone to call or write to, do it! Remember, God promises that He will not test you beyond what you are able to bear, He promises a way of escape. And He will never, never, never, never, never leave you. That should be encouraging.

The interesting thing about stress and strain in this end time is that Satan would like us to give up and to have us think that things are hopeless, when just the opposite is true. It is Satan who is frantic. He is the one whose time is short. Our time is long. We have the whole Kingdom of God in front of us, if we hold fast the profession we have been called to. But Satan is the one running scared. We should not be caught up in his fear. His time is short.



The truth of the matter is, Jesus Christ is completely in charge. Our deliverance is sure. And it is nearer than when we started. It may very well be just around the corner!

Let us hold our confidence in God, faithfully. Do not give in to the trials around us.

**Romans 8:18** For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.