

BURN-OUT ... MID-LIFE CRISIS ... SPIRITUAL DRYNESS

or

How to Recover From Any Emotionally Depressive Downward Spiral!

In our present society where there is such a confusion of values, standards, philosophies, priorities, and absolutes, there come different times in our lives where we may lose perspective, and our evaluation of life hits bottom. Now, it's been my observation that these concepts (revealed in the titles) have three things that are pretty much in common: the characteristics, the causes, and the cures! No matter which one you would be struggling with, I'm sure you'll identify with at least some of the same characteristics.

I. Characteristics:

- mentally dull - "shot", unable to give out anymore, "out of it", distant, stagnant, not quick on the trigger to think sharply and creatively. confusion and questioning. Who? What? When? Where? How? Why? What for?
- spiritually apathetic - unmotivated, indifferent, lukewarm, just going through the motions, barren, dry, lost enjoyment of salvation, and "first love"? It's drudgery to pray, reading Scripture is just words, you don't even want "spiritual" counsel or answers!
- physically - tired, exhausted, fatigued, run down, out of resources, out of energy.
- emotionally - drained, numb, "everything's a chore" attitude, "nobody cares". A nagging inner frustration, discontentment and dissatisfaction, distress, discouragement, any little thing triggers anger, a lonely, empty, void feeling, despondent, depressed, defeated, confused, "floating", guilt feelings, or no feelings at all!
- personally - self introspection, self pity, self doubt, self image problems - "Who am I?" Unsatisfied, unfulfilled, empty, no motivation, excitement or enthusiasm - loss of interest, reality becomes a rude awakening and "takes the heart out of living", burning the candle at both ends, spread too thin, overworked, overweight, overwhelmed, just spinning wheels - not getting anywhere, a lack of confidence - can't do anything - excellently or even "well", a subtle desire to escape, get away, quit, or give up, a feeling of being boxed in and at the end of the rope, trapped, running on "E", the reservoirs have been empty for the last 900 miles!
Psalm 31:10 "My years are spent with sighing" becomes your "life-verse"!
- mid-life crisis does reflect more physiological changes, aging, deteriorating health, menopause (hormonal and chemical imbalances), bodily limitations. The empty nest syndrome - "my children have grown up and leaving home." Also, mid-life has a greater intensity of questioning one's worth, place in society, achievement, success, sexuality, early life choices which bring a real sense of hurt, guilt, regret and hopelessness toward the future, "What have I accomplished"? "What's the use"? "Who cares"? "Half my life is over".

II. CAUSES - What sends us into these emotional tailspins?

1. Sin - don't ever overlook or minimize failure areas or unresolved sin issues (Ps.32:3-4; Ps.51; Prov.28:13).
2. Slothfulness - being lazy and irresponsible, unscheduled, undisciplined, priorities out of balance, no goals or clear direction.
3. Satan - Job 1 and 2; Eph.6:12; 1 Pet.5:8 - the devil is diabolically creative to attack our weak points and tear us down.
4. Sickness - chemical imbalance, illness, disease, lack of proper vitamins, nutrients, poor dietary habits.
5. Stress - trying to do too much increases the amount of pressure that one is under. Over involvement, too much activity and "busyness" create an unnecessary struggle and strain. The tendency to have an imbalanced perspective of "work" (and no leisure R and R) can cause one to lose sight of one's limitations thus compounding frustration(s).
6. Success - Yes! Sometimes when one finally achieves specific goals and reaches what they've perceived to be the point of "true happiness" There can be a real sense of "Is that all there is?" Even, after highly benefiting from a significant spiritual experience (seminar, conference, Bible study) or having a great spiritual victory or "high", when coming down from the "mountain top" to normal Christian living one can easily begin to emotionally plummet down the ladder. (Elijah - 1 Kings 18-19).
7. Self-Concept/Image - one's evaluation of their performance/ behavior (always by some "standard") can easily lead to "depression", if the "standard" is not met and failure to change persists - one experiences morbid self-introspection and self-pity to the point of guilt. Any negative, self-centered, problem-oriented thinking will effect the way one views themselves and will inevitably bring one to the "end of their rope".
8. Situational Changes - changing jobs, schools, houses, location... all such transition periods that radically effect our circumstances in which we've found security also tend to create emotional turmoil (uprootings from entrenched securities).
9. Separation - obviously deaths and divorces are two of the most difficult trials to face. Also, lack of friends and fellowship, loneliness, or any type of alienation, breakdown, or loss, within the realm of relationships can create "dry periods" in people lives.
10. Stagnation - staleness, lack of spiritual and mental stimulation can create a significant loss of interest in "life".

All of the above can certainly trigger emotional downward spirals, dryness, burn-out, and I'm sure the list could go on even to cover some areas that don't all begin with "S"! However, no matter what you identify as the cause(s) for such "tailspins" I'm sure that some of the following "cures" as suggested here will serve as practical positive solutions as well as a checklist to maintaining a balanced Christian life.

III. CURES

Begin by thanking God for this "teaching trial" designed for your spiritual growth (1 Thess.5:18; Js.1:2) and the specific lessons you will learn, as well as spiritual character He wants to benefit your life with. Remember, it's temporary (2 Cor.4:17) and He will not allow you to suffer beyond what you are able (1 Cor.10:13).

1. Be humbled and honest before God and even others about your struggles, weakness, failure, and sin (Prov.28:13; 1 Jn.1:7-10; Js.5:16; Js.4:6-10).
2. Define and identify what's happening (or not happening) spiritually, emotionally, mentally, physically, personally ... Talk it out, write it out, in order to crystalize your thinking to understand factors that have triggered the present conflicts. Acknowledge what is in or out of your control. Know your limitations!
3. Get Godly counsel from others who can help you to evaluate things more objectively and provide spiritual and practical direction regarding changes that may be needed (Prov.11:14; 12:15; 15:22).
4. Don't overlook the following spiritual priorities: daily meditation and study of the Word, cultivation of your personal relationship with the Lord, prayer, praise, and worship to God, personal confession and repentance, and daily commitment to God's Spirit's control and dependence on Him to discipline your life for the purpose of godliness. You must make time in your daily schedule for this). (Matt.4:4; Eph.5:18; 1 Tim.4:7; Lk.10:38-42).
5. Also, maintain a clear conscience/forgiveness toward others in order to build loving accountable relationships in the fellowship of the Body of Christ. Local church attendance and involvement through developing your spiritual gifts enables you to have significant ministry to others as well as personal fulfillment. (Heb. 10:24-25; 1 Cor.12-14; Heb.3:13).
6. Maintain marriage and family priorities. You must make time in your daily schedule for your spouse and children. At least one night a week for you and your spouse alone and a fun-family night for the kids, as well as meaningful daily communication and personal attention (1 Tim.3:4-5; 1 Tim.5:8; 1 Cor.7:2-5).
7. Get on a regular balanced schedule with God and Family priorities first, and proper rest, exercise, leisure, and "think-time" scheduled in. Consider what activities must be eliminated and say, "No" to outside demands. Start trying together some of the loose ends and half-done projects in a specially blocked out time frame. Be content with 24 hours a day!
8. Go to a physician for regular check-ups (other tests may be needed).
9. Maintain a balanced diet - proper nutrition and vitamins may be all that's needed.
10. Take up a special hobby, a new challenge or interest that adds variety (sports, games, a course at a local college ...). At least try to do one new fun thing a week.
11. Develop musical interests and tastes - play edifying music during the day or learn (or relearn) an instrument.
12. Cultivate friendships with older couples or younger couples - have "friends" of all ages.

13. Get away for a change of scenery, plan weekend get-aways, day trips and regular vacations with and without children, maybe even get away by yourself, alone (Mark 6:31)!
14. Get away to a special Seminar or Bible Conference to soak in some concentrated Biblical input.
15. Get your eyes off yourself and serve others in need (Phil.2:3-5).

REMEMBER

- * Beware of the barrenness of a busy life!
- * Go against your feelings ... the power comes in the doing.
- * The more you make the right choice the easier it becomes.
- * Our concept of God effects the way we live - so seek to truly know Him and make Him known - because that glorifies God and fulfills the purpose for our existence!

HELPFUL RESOURCES

- "The Psalms" and the rest of the Bible
- "Mid-Life: The Best Half of Life" - Dr. Ray and Ann Ortland (tape)
- "Comprehensive Guide to Christian Counseling" Mid-Life and Depression - Dr. Gary Collins
- "Women in Mid-Life Crisis" and "Men in Mid-Life Crisis" - Jim and Sally Conway
- "Christians in Mid-Life" - Jerry and Mary White
- "Mid-Life Crisis, Job Dissatisfaction and Depression, Menopause" - Dr. James Dobson
- "Change Points" - Joyce Landorf
- "Spiritual Dryness" - Walter Trobisch
- "How to Prevent Dryness" - Kurt DeHaan
- "How to Beat Burn-Out" - Minirth and Meier
- "Ordering Your Private World" - Gordon MacDonald

BIBLE STUDIES

- "Regrets and Guilt Trips"
- "How to Study the Bible and Pray"
- "Basic Factors for Effective Living"
- "Biblical Perspective on Sickness and Healing"
- "God's Perspective on Trials"
- "Worship"
- "Praise"
- "Glory"