

Galatians 6:[1-6] 7-16

Paul is writing to the church in Galatia; he has a few essentials he wants to deliver and then he gets down to business telling us that we must not mock God. However I want to talk about becoming weary when we're doing the best we can and it doesn't seem to be making any difference.

Paul starts out by letting us know we are to be gentle with those who have sinned. That may sound like a difficult thing to do when you are the one who has been wronged, but isn't that what you would want when you are the one caught doing the wrong? Do unto others as you would want them to do unto you. And Christ has told us to bear one another's burdens, I don't know why, but this brings to mind a choir anthem we learned at my home church... Love one another, care for each other, and bring each other home. Love is more than caring for each other, it is bearing one another's burdens, not because it will bring us any closer to God, but because Jesus has told us to do so.

Paul then tells us that we shouldn't think too much of ourselves and get proud. As humans it is an easy thing to do, to think that we have everything we need to accomplish the task and not even consider asking God if the task is what he wants us to do in the first place. Then, after we've done what we think needed to be done, and done a good job at it, we pat ourselves on the back and let everyone know what a good job we have done. In actuality, we don't accomplish too much on our own. If it were not for God's presence in our lives anything we have accomplished is for naught, or in the words of King Solomon, the writer of Ecclesiastes, for vanity,

When we cling to the cross of Christ, when we empty ourselves of everything that pulls us down, all the greed, envy, jealousy, hate, pride, and self-sufficiency, when we empty ourselves, God comes in to fill us with the fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22), This is what Paul means when he says we are to sow in the Spirit, not in the flesh. Paul says it is then that we do not get weary of doing good and working for the good of all.

When we are immersed in a project that is bigger than ourselves, according to Daniel Amen in *Change Your Brain, Change your Life*, dopamine, the feel-good neurotransmitter that the brain secretes, leads to happiness. The work of the Spirit allows the dopamine to flow, and we feel good, do good to others, and have energy.

However, we can also have an overextension of our being good, doing good, working for the good that leads to emotional exhaustion if we are not careful. Emotional exhaustion is a state of feeling emotionally worn-out and drained because of the stress that accumulates as a natural part of living in a stressful situation, or by doing more than we should be doing by ourselves. Emotional exhaustion can be recognized by feelings of being powerless over the events of your life, feeling exhausted, not sleeping well, irritability, absentmindedness, apathy, headaches, a change in appetite, difficulty concentrating, irrational anger, a sense of dread or feelings of hopelessness, having no motivation. And if this isn't treated it can permanently damage your health. The thing about emotional exhaustion is that it can sneak up on you but it can be recognized by a lack of dedication to a project you once cared very much about, by not meeting deadlines, or by simply failing to show up.

The best way to treat emotional exhaustion is first of all to not let it happen. If at all possible, don't overextend yourself. Ask people to help you with a project. It may mean a slower completion time because you have to share your knowledge with another person or people, but in the long run it makes sense. Not only are you helping yourself from overextending, but you are also teaching another person the skill necessary to do this project at a future time, and it may be fun to be working in community.

If you haven't managed to avoid emotional exhaustion, once you recognize that you have it there are a few things you can do to revive yourself. If you absolutely need to get away, ask someone else to take over the project and step away. If you believe you are just beginning to become exhausted and want to see the project to completion, or if it isn't something you can walk away from, then you can recover by taking these steps: Eat healthy. Eating healthy means a balanced diet including a few fruits, lots of vegetables, some whole grains and lean meats avoiding sugary and/or processed foods. When we're stressed our eating habits tend to decline, and improving our food intake will help get vitamins and minerals into our system, as well as improving digestion, sleep, and energy levels, which can have a domino effect on your emotional state.

Remember to exercise. Exercising gets the mind off our problems and strengthens our brain as well. This isn't to be confused with taking time to play... play with your dog, or do a puzzle, play Words with Friends,... find something that you enjoy doing, but don't get caught up in spending too much time playing or the advantage of play will be lost. Limit the amount of alcohol consumed because it interferes with sleep, and eventually the feel good numbing sensation that comes from overindulging wears off and leaves a person feeling worse. It's also important to take time to simply relax and think about nothing, and when those pesky thoughts jump into the brain, write them down to address later. Enjoy the natural surroundings, taking time to be in a park or near water is reviving to the soul. Take time to appreciate the people in your life, connect with them either with a phone call or in person. And speaking of connecting, take time to meditate on God's word and pray. Even though I waited until last to list it, it is the most important step we can take.

You may think that the steps I've listed are going to cause more stress because they take time away from what is trying to be accomplished within a time frame, however, none of the steps (other than sleeping and meal preparation) need to be more than 20 minutes. A 20 minute break from a project can revive us and give us a clearer focus. Especially if that time is spent in prayer and allowing the Holy Spirit to fill us, and remembering we are not to lean on ourselves, no matter what message our culture leads us to believe.

Living in the power of the Holy Spirit takes away our need to work hard all by ourselves. Living in the power of the Holy Spirit gives us time to renew and refresh. Knowing that we don't have to succeed on our own is freeing, liberating us from the things that bring us down, pride, envy, jealousy, etc. I can't help but interject that when we are succeeding at something for Jesus the Devil is going to try to do his best to stop us. Emotional exhaustion may be one of the ways he tries; and living a balanced, healthy life that includes leaning into Jesus, will help us conquer that demon.

All glory be to God.