

SERMON SERIES

# Sermon Series: Rebuilding After Burnout

*4-week series for leaders and congregations recovering from burnout. Covers Elijah's collapse, the Sabbath principle, returning to first love, and living in God's daily mercies.*

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*Equipping pastors and leaders to serve with excellence, integrity, and lasting Kingdom impact.*



# Rebuilding After Burnout -- Series Overview

Burnout among pastors and ministry leaders has reached a level that can only be described as epidemic. A 2022 Barna study found that 42% of pastors had seriously considered quitting full-time ministry in the previous year -- the highest figure ever recorded. The evangelical church is losing its leaders to exhaustion, disillusionment, and the accumulated weight of caring for others without adequate care for themselves. This series is designed for two simultaneous audiences: the leaders who are burned out and need a pastoral word that tells them the truth about their condition and the path forward, and the congregations who need to understand their role in preventing and healing burnout in those who serve them.

## Week 1: Elijah Under the Broom Tree -- The Anatomy of Burnout

### Text: 1 Kings 19:1-18

First Kings 19 is the most psychologically realistic portrait of burnout in all of Scripture. Elijah has just experienced his greatest ministry victory: the confrontation with the 450 prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, the miraculous fire from heaven, the return of rain after three years of drought. And immediately following -- before the adrenaline of the victory has even dissipated -- he collapses under a broom tree in the wilderness and prays to die: "It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers" (1 Kings 19:4).

The burnout sequence in this passage is clinically recognizable: a period of extraordinary output (Carmel), followed by a threat that triggers the flight response (Jezebel's death threat), followed by collapse -- physical, emotional, and spiritual. The characteristics of Elijah's burnout: exhaustion that sleep cannot fully resolve, the desire to escape or die, cognitive distortions ("I alone am left"), loss of perspective, withdrawal from relationship. Any pastor who has experienced burnout will recognize themselves in this portrait.

What is most instructive is God's response. There is no lecture. No rebuke. No spiritual assignment. No therapy session. An angel touches Elijah twice and says, both times, the same thing: "Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you" (1 Kings 19:7). Rest. Nourishment. The acknowledgment that what is being asked of Elijah is genuinely too much for him in his current state. God does not minimize the exhaustion. He meets it with the most basic forms of care: sleep and food. The recovery of spiritual vitality begins with honoring the body God gave us.

## Week 2: The Sabbath Is Not Optional

### Text: Genesis 2:1-3; Mark 2:23-28; Hebrews 4:9-11

The Sabbath is built into the structure of creation. God rested on the seventh day not because he was tired -- the one who "neither slumbers nor sleeps" (Psalm 121:4) does not need physical recovery. He rested as an act of completion, satisfaction, and provision: modeling for humanity the rhythm of work and rest that sustains the creature. When God embedded the Sabbath in creation, he was not providing an optional spiritual practice for those with adequate margin in their schedules. He was describing the architecture of human flourishing.

The pastor who consistently violates this architecture -- who has no genuine Sabbath, who cannot cease from ministry activity, who is unable to rest without guilt -- is not more faithful than the pastor who keeps Sabbath. He is less obedient. And eventually, he will be less effective. The body keeps the score. The soul that is never given genuine rest becomes a soul that has nothing to offer.

## Week 3: Return to Your First Love

### Text: Revelation 2:1-7

The church at Ephesus is one of the most impressive in the New Testament: doctrinally sound, behaviorally consistent, resistant to false apostles, persevering under difficulty. By every external metric, it is a healthy, successful church. And Jesus's first word to it is a rebuke: "But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first" (Revelation 2:4). The warning to Ephesus is a warning to every pastor and every congregation that has allowed ministry activity to become a substitute for genuine love of God. You can do all the right things, believe all the right things, resist all the wrong things, and still have missed the one thing that gives all the activity its meaning.

The path of return is deliberately simple: "Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first" (Revelation 2:5). Remember -- recall what it felt like when your faith was fresh, when prayer was delight rather than discipline, when worship was encounter rather than performance. Repent -- acknowledge the drift and turn. Do the first works -- not as a program, but as the natural expression of a love that has been rekindled.

## Week 4: New Every Morning -- Living in the Mercies of God

### Text: Lamentations 3:19-26

The most extraordinary declaration of hope in the entire Old Testament appears in the exact center of the most despairing book in the canon. Lamentations is Jeremiah's extended cry over the destruction of Jerusalem -- a sustained, unrelenting description of total loss. And right in the middle of it: "The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:22-23). This is not a triumphant declaration from a place of security. It is a desperate act of faith from the rubble of everything that gave stability.

The mercy that is new every morning is not the mercy that resolves the crisis. It is the mercy that sustains through it. For the burned-out pastor or leader, the promise of Lamentations 3 is not that tomorrow the burnout will be over. It is that tomorrow, God will still be faithful. His mercy will be sufficient for that day. Not for the rest of the year, not for the recovery of the career, not for the restoration of the vision. For tomorrow.

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## Discussion and Application

1. On a scale of 1-10, where would you rate your current ministry energy? What is the most significant factor contributing to your current state?
2. What is your actual Sabbath practice? Not what you believe about Sabbath but what you actually do? What stands between you and genuine rest?
3. When did you last experience ministry as joy rather than obligation? What was different about that season? What would it take to recover something of that quality?

(continued)

*God is not surprised by your exhaustion. He is not disappointed in your limitations. He made you finite, and the finite creature needs rest. The invitation of every burnout season is the same one the angel brought to Elijah: arise and eat, the journey is too great for you. Let the God who knows your capacity feed you for the journey ahead.*

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