**“Burnout and Recovery”**

**Sunday June 27, 2021… I got up, shaved, showered, dressed & ate breakfast…**but could not come in and do what I’ve been doing for 40 years, preaching God’s Word. **I alerted my staff that they needed to play the recording…,** crawled back into bed and told a surprised Karen that **I’d hit a wall** and couldn’t go in to church.

My kids all showed up at our apartment…

**At first all I knew was that I was exhausted,** but after talking to my doctor, reading about my symptoms, seeing a counselor…

**I realized that I’d walked through a perfect storm of personal and ministry challenges… hit a wall and it spilled out in my life. After leading COD through some tough situations + a pandemic, a divided political season and some personal challenges,** **I was wrestling with burnout.** I never thought it would happen to me, and it began a journey of self-discovery and healing, **that continues to this day.**

**I’m a firm believer that God doesn’t approve of everything He allows,** but I also believe that **God allows suffering, hardship and pain because they are His instruments to deepen us and teach us lessons we don’t learn anywhere else!**

**My counselor says to me, “Bob this is the best thing that ever happened to you!” To which, I: “Shut up!” 😊 But he is right, I’ve learned so much. I’m a better person, husband, father, grandfather, pastor**

**By God’s grace I’m on the other side of my dark night of the soul.** One of my missions for the rest of my life will be to **help others, especially those who serve Christ,** to get out and stay out of burnout and exhaustion… **What did I learn and put in place…?**

1. **Difficulties happen even to people of faith,**

**We struggle here but Peter says it this way…** **“In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.” 1 Peter 1:6-7**

**Of all the words Peter used to describe what God is doing in our lives, he uses “suffering, grief, trials.”** None of us got up this week and said, **“Lord, send some more testing in my life😊!”** **While we see trials as God being inattentive, even unfaithful,** Peter says they are **sure signs** that **God is at work leading us where we didn’t plan to go in order to produce in us what we couldn’t achieve on our own!** **Learning to see God’s goodness in your challenges will be very important!**

1. **Difficulties break us so we experience God more fully.**

**We see this often in Scripture. We see it Moses…,** raised in the home of Pharoah with the best education, deciding to leave the trappings of Egypt and follow the Lord. **And what did God do? He drove him to the desert to live in humility and obscurity for 40** **years!** **There God broke him** and when he emerged he was totally different, **handpicked by God** to lead his people to the Promised Land.

**We see this in Job’s life,** when he lost everything, his house, business, even his family, **only to meet God in the mess, and rise up out of it to experience His blessing in ways he’d NEVER experienced it before! 2x!!!**

**We see this in David’s life,** how brokenness was used to refine and shape him. **We see it in Peter’s life** when he was broken by pride, only to rise up as the leader of the 1st century church! **We even see it in Jesus’ life** where He **“learned obedience through the things He suffered!”**

**Before he was broken, Evangelist D.L. Moody had the largest church in Chicago,** and his ministries were busting at the seams. Then the great Chicago fire hit in 1871…, his YMCA building burned down, his churches burned down, offices burned down, even his house. **He lost everything and found himself alone in a room in NYC, a broken man.** There God helped him realize much of his work had been propelled by his own energy. **He rose up out of this time and God used him to start Moody Bible Institute,** and begin a worldwide evangelistic ministry that **“kept 1 million souls out of hell!”**

**We could add the reformer Martin Luther, John Wesley, Billy Graham, even people like Louie Giglio, Craig Groeschel, Jennie Allen...** **All these were tested and refined and changed by hardship,** and wouldn’t want to go back to what they were before apart from it!

**I’ve sensed a similar thing in my own life,** **I often say that I wouldn’t wish this time on anyone, AND YET** I also wouldn’t want to not experience it, b/c of the profound way God has met me... Honestly, I don’t really care about **“ministry success”,** numbers, preaching great sermons anymore…, **I just want Jesus to minister through me and Christ be formed in people!**  Success never refined me like this, but brokenness has, **and so I say, “Bless you brokenness…”**

1. **We are never, ever alone when we suffer, Isaiah 43:1-3a, 5a.**

**Where do we find hope in the midst of our troubles?** Right here with these 5 words **“I WILL BE WITH YOU.”** God said it to Isaiah, Joshua, David…and He says it to each of us. When you follow Jesus, **He fights for you, gives courage, wraps His powerful arms around you! YOU will never again have to just depend on YOU!**

**Jesus met me in such a beautiful way!!!**

1. **We are incredibly loved even when we suffer, Ps. 18:16-19**

**For the past 40+ years I’ve preached countless times about the love of God,** sung with great gusto about the love of God, affirmed God’s love for others…, **but honestly I never really thought a lot about the love of God FOR ME,** until I hit my challenges, and it became a lifeline and tremendous comfort.

**I believe Tim Keller was spot on** when they said that **Nothing changes us like a deep understanding of the love of God.** “What matters most is the radical awareness that you’ve totally accepted and loved by the God who is at peace with you.” **“Behold the One beholding you… and smiling.”**

**And what’s crazy is that it was tough times that led me to really grapple with the depth of God’s love for me.** You’d think difficulties would make us question God’s love, but **it drew me to His love in a powerful way.** And I want the same for you!

1. **God’s grace is sufficient to get us through, 2 Cor 12: 7b-10**

**There are many times in the midst of suffering where we pray and ask God to remove it and He does.** But then there are those times like with Paul here, when we pray and pray and pray and He says **“No, I want you to walk though this and see how powerful my grace is to get you through.”**

**For me that “grace” meant putting into practice a few disciplines…**

1. **Spending extended time alone still before God… reading Scripture slowly and asking “What is the invitation of God in this?” Practicing contemplative prayer… My Declarations**
2. **Learning to put limits on my time and energy… I had no limits on my time and energy, I was always “on” and never really disengaged. Most productive leaders engage fully and disengage fully…**
3. **Going to my doctor and getting some medicine… “Jesus loves me…Lexapro”**
4. **Going to a counselor… one of the most transformative things I did**
5. **The importance of good sleep…**
6. **Deepening my friendships with key people, being seen and honesty … my counselor told me “You have crap Bob and the problem with you as a pastor is that you have nowhere to go with your crap…so you get creamed by shame…” Shame is lifted when someone knows our issues and loves/accepts us**
7. **Taking more time to do things that fill me… Pray 2 times a day, exercise, walk, SABBATH, no work after 5pm,**
8. **Flooding my mind with God’s goodness and gratefulness to Him... Every morning it’s the 1st thing I do and each night it’s the last thing I do…**
9. **Learning to TRUST GOD and SURRENDER everyone and everything to Him… anxiety came in like a flood when I got exhausted and fear started to rule me when it hit me what happened. The trauma of hitting a wall and not being myself stayed in my body, mind and heart… I read everything I could on anxiety, My Declarations, 40 Day Declarations**
10. **Not making the church about me… I was preaching way too much, had my hand in too many things that I thought if I’m not there it won’t get handled right… ☹**

**Someone:** **When God wants to do a great work He takes an impossible person and crushes them.** **The Old Testament** patriarch **Jacob** was an impossible person who needed to be broken by God. **He and God wrestled all night and at the end Jacob said, “I’m not letting go until you bless me”,** and God **“blessed”** him by injuring his hip. **Jacob would LIMP for the rest of his life.**

**Anyone God breaks will possess a limp of some sort.** God will allow some thing, weakness in that person’s life that makes them realize how much they need to lean on/depend on Him. **We want God to work through our strengths, power… but God chooses to use our weaknesses/difficulties…,** this is the way of Jesus.

**And where would we be without the Gospel?** I learned to preach the gospel to myself and what a blessing it is!

**The best news we can ever hear** is that there is a **Living God** who cared enough about us to **become one of us,** who dealt at great personal cost with the **sin, evil, suffering of this world when He died for us and rose again** to make us into a renewed community, and who **invites us to share His home** when we die!