

We can choose to evaluate our lives by human standards, or we can choose to see things God's way. Will you hear the question, "What are you doing here?" as a challenge to begin to see things from God's point of view?

I invite you to tell God how you have come to be where you are at this moment. Events and experiences may have knocked you down or exhausted you. Disappointments and failures may have robbed you of energy. Tell God about these things. Be quiet and try to hear what God is saying to you through them. From God's point of view, faithfulness matters more than success; quality matters more than quantity; the long term matters more than the short term; and people matter more than things.

I would like to conclude with Jesus' invitation in Matthew 11:28-30 taken from the MESSAGE Bible: "Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly." Let's respond from our heart to this invitation. God wants to give us the rest as we travel on the journey of life.

Questions for Reflection

1. When have you experienced exhaustion or the crisis of burnout?
2. When do you take time to stop?
3. How does God speak to you? How do you know it is God who is speaking?
4. What would it mean for you to look at your present life from God's perspective?

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Questions God Asks Us (3)
What Are You Doing Here?
1 King 19:11-13
Rev. Dr. Charles Yoon

Sometimes we are exhausted or burned out. Thankfully, we have warning lights that come on when our emotional and spiritual reserves are dangerously low. What are these warning lights? There are many: We may have difficulty sleeping or lose interest in food. We may get constant headaches. We may experience chronic tiredness that is not helped by sleep or ordinary rest. We might frequently show outbursts of anger or resentment or self-pity. Are any of these lights flashing at the moment for you? If you or your friends have one of those warning lights, I would like to invite you to reflect on Elijah's experience of exhaustion and burnout and the question that came to him in the midst of his crisis.

We can find this part of Elijah's story in 1 Kings 18 and 19. After his great victory over the Baal's prophets on Mt. Carmel, everything came to a complete standstill and he ran away, deep into the desert. In a lonely cave on a mountain God asked him, "*What are you doing here, Elijah?*" (19:13). This God question opened up a number of new opportunities for him. If you are in a similar state of exhaustion and burnout right now, Elijah's experience could lead you toward new opportunities for yourself as well.

Many high school kids get their driver's license during their sophomore or junior year. Getting a driver's license makes them excited and opens new adventures for them, while it makes their parents nervous and adds new worries. Do you know what is the most important skill in driving? The first thing we need to know about driving a car is how to stop it.

Exactly the same principle applies to our daily lives. As we drive along the highway of life, we need to develop many skills and

competencies. We must learn how to communicate, how to get along with others, how to plan, how to delegate, how to strategize, how to raise our children, how to do our jobs effectively, and so on. Yet one basic skill over all these things is how to stop in life. Unless we learn how to do this, we shall also eventually crash and burn out in one way or another.

There are many good reasons to stop. Stopping gives us time to renew our energy and to replenish our emotional and spiritual resources. It gives us time when we can gather ourselves together, relax, and become calmer within. Stopping for a while enables us to recognize those destructive patterns of living and then to make clear choices to live in a more healthy and life-giving way.

Experiencing exhaustion and burnout forces us to stop. Certainly we can see this happening in Elijah's life in his time of crisis. When he took refuge in the cave, he experienced the benefit of stopping. He became quiet and could listen to what God was trying to say to him. His depleted energy levels started to be replenished. God asked him, *"What are you doing here?"* (19:13) He was able to open up to God his anxiety, worry, and concern.

It may be a good idea to check and see whether we can stop before we end up in the exhausted state. We can do this right now. Just stop and do nothing for the next five minutes. Sit still. Become aware of your breathing and notice what is happening in your body. We find it very difficult to sit still and be present to God and to ourselves. Learning to stop can save us from crashing!

Once we have learned to stop we can begin listening. When Elijah ran away and hid in the cave on Mount Horeb, he had a chance to hear God. Significantly, when God spoke to him, it was not through the great wind or the violent earthquake or the blazing fire. Rather the voice of the Lord came as a *"gentle whisper"* (1 Kings 19:12).

When Elijah heard it he realized he needed to focus on what God was trying to say to him. He pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave and tried to listen. Then a quiet voice asked him, *"What are you doing here, Elijah?"* Listening to God means getting closer so that we can hear the Divine Whisper.

Usually a time of burnout and exhaustion forces us to find the time and space to move closer to God. Like Elijah's experience, God usually prefers to speak quietly in a gentle whisper. We need to move much closer and to become much more still and sensitive if we want to hear what God may be whispering to us.

You may be wondering how the Divine Whisper comes to us. God's whisperings draw us into a closer walk with God. Learning to discern the Divine Whisper in our thoughts and minds can become one of the greatest adventures in life. But, like Elijah, we must stop and listen.

When we are exhausted and burned out, it is also easy to lose perspective. Negative thoughts and feelings begin to dominate us. Elijah experienced many of these feelings and thoughts. When God asked, *"What are you doing here, Elijah?"* he said, *"I have had enough, Lord. Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors"* (1 Kings 19:4). Elijah believed he was now the only one left on God's side and that his former allies wanted to kill him. A deep sense of failure had permeated his thinking, draining him of energy and leaving him utterly depleted.

However, God saw Elijah from a different perspective. From God's point of view Elijah's failures had not made him unfit for God's use. God also told Elijah that seven thousand people remained in Israel who had not bent their knees to the pagan god Baal. In effect, God was saying to Elijah something like, *"What are you doing here, Elijah? See things from a new perspective. Your work has not been completed. I still have faith in you. I still want to use you."* In our moments of exhaustion and burnout, we have a choice to make.