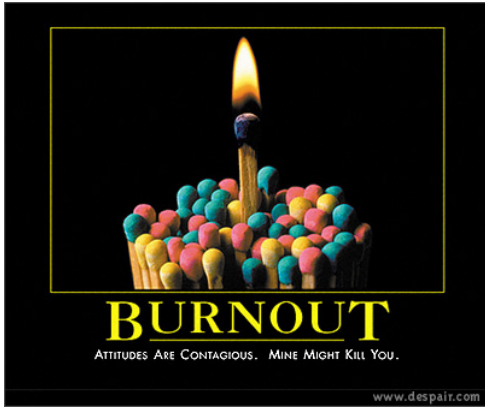


When Burnout Becomes a Broken Promise



My daughter (5) has been learning a tremendous amount in kindergarten this year. It has been amazing to watch her grow, and I am so proud of my little girl. What has surprised me most about her year so far is the amount of time that her teachers spend teaching the kids about proper behavior. Along with reading, math, and all the normal subjects, the kids are also learning how to interact with one another in a civilized manner and to 'stop and think' before they act.

One of my favorite things that her teacher has mentioned to us in parent meetings is the way she deals with discipline in the classroom. The children are taught from day one that there are two types of problems: small problems and big problems. A small problem might be that one child is using a toy that another child wants to use, or a child 'cutting' in line. A big problem would be when a child gets sick, has an accident, or hurts another child. But the teacher also talks about allowing a small problem to become a big problem, such as when a child who has been cut in line retaliates by pushing, hitting, or throwing a fit.

Our daughter's teacher allows the children to solve small problems for themselves, teaching them to be self-reliant and learn to reason through problems together. When a problem becomes a big problem, though, the teacher immediately steps in.

I have come to discover that kindergarten teachers can teach us a lot about the way that God relates to his children as a

loving Father.

This summer has, quite frankly, been a very tough one for me. I traveled to Manchester, England in June for my annual research trip. During my stay I worked an average of 12-14 hours in the library, researching and writing a paper on Christology in the Hymns of John Wesley, and preparing for my academic review. For the six months leading up to this trip, my days were consumed with work on one of my thesis chapters and transitions happening at my 'day job'. By the time I came home from England I had developed both a sense of accomplishment for all that I achieved during the spring term and my summer trip, and also a profound sense of burnout. I was simply exhausted, mentally.

I thought that I would take a couple of weeks off of my research to overcome my mental fatigue, and then jump right back in where I left off. I have rarely been so profoundly wrong.

Shortly after returning home I had to begin looking for new work, as my current contract is coming to a close soon. I began taking on some additional side projects to 'make up' for any time that I might not be employed as I am looking for new work. I began spending research time applying for jobs and brushing up on my skill set. In essence, I began finding things to do that would fill my time. That way, I had a legitimate excuse for not getting research done. In all honesty, it has taken me until just a couple of weeks ago to recover to the point that I am able to think about doing research without getting a headache. Even then, I was still making excuses rather than putting in solid study time.

It is not uncommon to experience momentary periods of burnout while doing research. Think about it. A PhD student spends YEARS of his/her life writing what amounts to a very long paper about a very detailed subject, which very few people will care to read (at least until it is rewritten for

publication).

However, there comes a tipping point when temporary burnout goes from being a small problem to a big one. When burnout becomes a broken promise.

I never considered my bout of burnout to be anything but a minor issue that I would overcome in time. I never expected it to spiral out of control in any way. I had it under control, you see. And then my pastor made a comment in his Sunday sermon on [Jeremiah 2:2-9](#) that caused my world of self-reliance to come crashing down around my ears.



But you **promised!** :(

He said that if we are not careful, if we do not rely upon God as our source of strength, **“time and cost will whittle down your promise to God.”**

When the pastor spoke those words, they hit me like a ton of bricks. I had allowed the time and cost of a research degree to get in the way of keeping my promise to Him, that I would go where he leads our family, no matter the sacrifice. In other words, what started out as a small problem had very quickly morphed into a big problem. **My burnout was threatening to become a broken promise.**

And then God spoke to my heart. He reminded me that, when I begin to believe that I can deal with the small problems of life on my own, they very quickly grow into big problems. Fortunately, like a good kindergarten teacher, my Father in heaven takes control when the problem starts to grow. While I could choose to refuse his help and allow a big problem to get even bigger, I have come to trust Him over the years. You see, He has never failed me. He has never left me alone to my self-destructive ends. He is a God who loves me, who has rescued me, and I have come to love and trust Him deeply in return.

And so I have turned to God in my time of need. By his power

my burnout has not become a broken promise. For the first time in more than two months, I am energized and excited about my research, I am looking forward to the plans that he has for our family, and I am profoundly grateful for God's abundant blessings and grace.

Do you have a small problem that you are trying to conquer on your own? Is your small problem threatening to become a big problem? Has it already become a big problem?

Our society would tell us that self-reliance is a virtue. I say that our society is aligned with the father of lies. God calls us out of sinful self-reliance into the freedom that can only be lived with the help of the Holy Spirit. He calls us to cross over from death to life in the name of his only begotten Son, Jesus, who died that we might become children of the Almighty God.

So I urge you not to go back to your self-reliant ways once you have tasted freedom. Give all of your small problems over to God the Father, who loves you, before they become big problems from which you need to be rescued once again.