

When
You're.
Running
Empty

CINDI
McMENAMIN



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*For every woman who has ever felt worn out
and run down...especially in ministry.
My prayer is that through this book you will be
encouraged to not grow weary in doing good.*

Galatians 6:9

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Finding a Way to Refuel

I know how you feel.

Life seems to be going in a million different directions. There are so many things for you to do in so little time. Kids are pulling at you, or your job is pushing you. Responsibilities abound. And there's only one of you.

I, too, know what it's like to feel as though you're running on empty.

I'm not sure when it happened. It must have been a gradual process. But the day I realized I was feeling drained and defeated, I knew something was wrong. I'd lost my fire, my fervor, my fuel.

I'd written books on letting God meet your emotional needs, yet emotionally I was empty. I wrote about how God strengthens us through our alone times but I was feeling weakened. I'd written a book on how to truly rest and I was feeling more overwhelmed than ever. And a year earlier I'd written a book on discovering and living out your dream and yet I was struggling with a lack of motivation.

What was wrong with me? Why was I feeling so complacent? Why did I have no motivation to continue forward?

I met with a doctor-friend of mine and his wife over lunch one day and talked about it.

“Burnout manifests itself in a certain activity you’re doing to the point that you’ve emptied the battery out,” said Dr. Jeff Birchall, who sees a new person dealing with some sort of exhaustion, anxiety, or depression every day...and follows up with about four every day.

Dr. Birchall said 50 percent of all people suffer from burnout at some point in their life, 10 percent at any given moment.

The symptoms of burnout? They sound a lot like the symptoms of running on empty:

- chronic fatigue (exhaustion, tiredness, a sense of being physically run down)
- difficulty sleeping (waking in the middle of the night and finding yourself unable to return to sleep)
- decreased concentration (can’t finish things)
- anger at those making demands
- self-criticism for putting up with the demands
- cynicism, negativity, and irritability
- a sense of being besieged
- exploding easily at seemingly inconsequential things
- frequent headaches and stomachaches
- changes in appetite resulting in weight loss or gain
- shortness of breath
- increased irritability (men tend to get angry more; women tend to cry more)
- social withdrawal
- depression
- feelings of helplessness¹

Maybe you can relate to some of those symptoms. Burnout can sometimes look like depression. Sometimes like anxiety. Some of us feel just a hint of it, as if we're merely getting our toes wet...and others of us are drowning in it.

I knew I wasn't in a state of depression. I wasn't suffering from anxiety. But I was tired, overwhelmed, and frustrated. The fire of my relationship with God that once burned brightly now seemed to be barely flickering. The juices had dried up. The motivation was lost. I was running on empty.

My friend says some cases of burnout or exhaustion require medication. Some require counseling. And many of the cases require a change of environment to get the balance they need in their life. That one was mine. I needed the balance. Too much striving, not enough trusting. Too much work, not enough rest. Too much expenditure, not enough filling. It was time for something to change.

I went to the Psalms—Scripture's songs of human emotion—and related to the songwriters. They, too, experienced seasons of weariness and emptiness. They, too, cried out for help. And I began to notice a link between their cries for help while flat on their faces, and their ability to get back up on their feet again. What I saw in there, as that link, was a shift in focus (following times of prayer and praise) and a sense of determination.

The psalmists often sang—in their songs of frustration and desperation—the words “I will” when it came to getting out of their slump.

Asaph, in Psalm 77, was disillusioned with the way life was going. But he said, “*I will meditate on all Thy works...I will remember your deeds.*”²

David, in asking God to consider his sighing and hear his cries for help, said, “*I will come into your house; in reverence will I bow down*” (Psalm 5:7). And when he felt like he was being defeated, he said “*I will know that God is for me...I will not be afraid*” (Psalm 56:9–11).

The psalmists didn't say, "I think" or, "I feel" or, "I should." It was, "I *will*." They expressed a sense of determination. In all 150 psalms in the Bible, the phrase "I will" is sung at least 140 times. That told me something. It made me realize that whether I feel empty or not, whether I am motivated or not, I need to *do* something to allow God to infuse energy into my life again. I needed to take whatever action would put me in the place where God could relight the fire in me and re-ignite the passion that once burned brightly. And I couldn't simply sit and wait until I *felt* like doing something, because the feeling might never come.

So I began to *will* to start my day right by starting it with prayer, to keep myself focused, to act on fact rather than feelings, to keep a clean heart, and to keep at whatever else God called me to. And as I began to follow a course of action, God met me where I was and infused that fuel back into my life.

I imagine you know what it's like to trudge through the day feeling you have little left to give. You, too, probably feel like you have too many obligations, too much stress, not enough energy. You feel as if you have no fuel, no fire, no way to get through the day. But you don't have to run on empty anymore.

In this book I want to share with you, chapter by chapter, how to rise above the feelings of listlessness and recharge, refuel, and replenish. I plan to do that by sharing with you the "I will" course of action that brought me—and will hopefully bring you—to that well for the life-giving water and energy-inducing fuel that you need. I can't guarantee it will happen at the same speed and in the same way that it did with me. I can't even guarantee the suggestions I offer in this book will work for you. But *God* works. He designed us and He knows how to carefully pick us up, renew us, and get us going again. And as you begin to focus on God, and get your mind, body, and soul in the place where He can

meet you, He'll get to work on what's left of you, mending you to wholeness and efficiency once again.

I will share with you practical ways that pick me—and others—up when we're too low to go any lower and too fried to go any further. We'll look at keeping focus (with your mind), keeping fit (with your body), and keeping fresh (with your soul). So that as we find ourselves renewed, we'll not only be able to soar...we'll be able to help energize others as well.

As I share with you what I had to “will” to do each and every morning, keep in mind this is not so much a book on willpower—but on “His power”—the power that our Maker infuses into us when we come to Him and seek to live the way He intended for us to live. It's a book about keeping focus, keeping fit, and keeping fresh by keeping our lives centered on Him and balanced as a whole.

So...will you give Him the burned-out remnants of your life and let Him restore the passion, re-ignite the flame, and refuel your soul?

For all the days you've wished there was a well you could go to for the energy you needed to get through the day...for all the times you've wished there was a quick fix from something pure and simple...take heart. Such a well exists. And it's not very difficult to get there.

Come, my friend...it's time to refuel, refresh, and relish your God-given life again.


Part I: Keeping Focus

I am focusing all my energies on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I strain to reach the end of the race and receive the prize...

PHILIPPIANS 3:13–14 NLT

Feeling run down is not just a physical thing. Attitude is everything. And we are what we believe. How we start our day, what we fuel ourselves with, who we're trying to please, why we do what we're doing, how we respond to our feelings, and who we're ultimately trusting all contribute to whether we're feeling determined and motivated to get it done, or whether we're dragging our feet and feeling we can't make it through the day. A good solid focus will fuel you, mentally, through what lies ahead and keep you from running on empty.

It all starts with keeping focus...



Chapter 1

Start Your Day with Prayer

*In the morning, O LORD, you hear my voice;
in the morning I lay my requests before you
and wait in expectation.*

PSALM 5:3

If you're like me, you'd rather just sleep in every morning. I wasn't always that way. I remember days in my early thirties when I eagerly rose from bed at 5:30 AM, spent some precious time in prayer and Bible study, and then showered and got on with an extremely productive day.

Where did *those* days go?

Now that I'm past 40, it's not nearly as easy to rise and shine and conquer like I used to. Seems like there's this added weight of obligations, age, physical wear and tear, and, sometimes, just plain weight!

I'd just as soon let the snooze alarm go off a few times and lay in bed thinking about what I'd do if I just had a little more energy. That's where the self-discipline comes in. I know, in my heart of hearts, that if I'm self-disciplined, from the time I get up I'll be much less sluggish

God has a way
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first honor Him.

and far more productive. That's where the "will" comes in—the will to start the day right.

As I lie in bed, I must remember that the day was not created for me and whatever I want to do. There's Someone Else in the picture. And what is His idea of why I was given one more day?

The Westminster Confession says, "The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever." You and I were created for relationship with the living God. That's an amazing concept well worth thinking about. In fact, when I remember to focus on that concept as soon as I wake up, it's enough to get me out of bed knowing that my Creator is waiting to enjoy the day with me. If it were the other way around, I'd probably wait till I felt like being with God. But He is always waiting for me...and for you. And who are *we* to make the God of the Universe wait?

Finding Your Focus

The apostle Paul said in Philippians 3:13–14, "This *one thing* I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on...." What did he *press on* toward? The prize—the relationship with God. In spite of life's many obligations and pressures, he knew the *one thing* he needed to do was to keep his relationship with God a priority.

When you first wake up and contemplate your day, can you, too, ask yourself, “What is the *one thing* I must do today?”

Maybe your answer is “I must take care of my children.” Or, “I must get that project completed.” Maybe it’s even “I must get through this day.”

Yet God tells us in the Bible “and [God] will give you all you need from day to day if you live for him and make the Kingdom of God your primary concern” (Matthew 6:33 NLT). Know the *one thing* you must do today (put your relationship with God first), and everything else will fall into place.

I’ve found this true in my life time and time again. When I take the time to start my day off right—by rising a little earlier so I have time to quiet my heart and talk to God—I am able to focus first and foremost on the *one thing*. Then all the other things I need to do fall amazingly into place.

God has a way of honoring our time and helping us be more productive in our day when we first honor Him. And by taking to Him all that we have to do that day, we are also releasing it to His control, which removes from us the weight and burden of feeling we have to control all the day’s events.

The Bible also says, “Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about what happens to you.”¹ There is a tremendous amount of refreshment that comes from handing over to God—early in the day—all that concerns us and weighs us down. Then He fills us with His peace so we can face the day without anxiety.

God knows we’re prone to becoming stressed out about things. That’s why He told us in His Word, “Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. If you do this, you will experience God’s peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.”²

Hiding Away with God

King David, who was evidently stressed and run down at times, said, “The *one thing* I ask of the LORD—the thing I seek most—is to live in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, delighting in the LORD’s perfections and meditating in his Temple. For he will conceal me there when troubles come; he will hide me in his sanctuary. He will place me out of reach on a high rock.”³

David was saying that of all the things he could have (and for a king, not too much is out of reach!), he wanted a hideaway with God—a place where he’d be concealed, hidden, *out of reach* from trouble. He found that place by meditating on the Lord, seeking His face, finding that quiet time to focus on God.

David also found that time in the morning. As busy as he was—running the kingdom of Israel, commander-in-chief of Israel’s army, husband to several wives, father to several children (and many of them quite dysfunctional)—he experienced stress at times. In one song he wrote, “Oh, how I wish I had wings like a dove; then I would fly away and rest! I would fly far away to the quiet of the wilderness. How quickly I would escape—far away from this wild storm...”⁴ Yes, David apparently faced stress and burnout, and at times must have felt he was running on empty. Yet we find throughout his songs some references to getting away with God in the morning, and starting his day right... with prayer.

“Listen to my voice in the morning, LORD,” David sang. “Each morning I bring my request to you and wait expectantly” (Psalm 5:3 NLT).

Can you meet with God for a few minutes each morning and therefore start your day right? Can you prayerfully reflect on His Word in order to compose your thoughts and prioritize your day? Can you remember that, above all things, your relationship with God is why

you're here? When that relationship is humming along, so will all the other aspects of your life.

By starting your day in quiet reflection and prayer, you are opening the channels of communication with God that will remain open throughout the day. You are ushering peace into your day, and keeping chaos from crashing into it.

Making It Happen

If you don't already have a regular plan of starting your day with prayer, here's one that has worked for me:

1. *Find a quiet place to retreat to every morning.* Do you have a “sanctuary” to which you can hide away with God? It doesn't need to be fancy...just a place where you can get away from the distractions of the morning and meet quietly with God. For example, one of my friends goes into her walk-in closet and closes the door. Maybe your place of retreat is early in the morning at the kitchen table, while the house is still quiet and before you open the newspaper. It may be your living room chair by the window, after the kids leave for school. Or it may be in your car—with the radio turned off—while you're driving to work. Find that place and make it your “sanctuary”—a regular meeting place with God. (I'll talk more in-depth about finding your “hideaway” in chapter 14.)
2. *Focus your mind in quiet prayer.* Once you've found your sanctuary, ask God to help you quiet your mind and focus your thoughts on Him. Then ask God what He'd like of you that day, rather than telling God what you want from Him. Open your Bible to a psalm and pray through it. As you do this, your prayers become guided by God and you end up seeking His will, not

your own, for the day. Therein lies the peace and the power and the fuel to get through the day. (See page 171 for instructions on “Praying Through the Psalms.”)

3. *Follow God's still, quiet voice throughout the day.* As you open the channels of communication with God in the morning, through prayer, you will be placing yourself on the “receiving end” of what He wants to say to you throughout the day. Listening for God's still, quiet voice throughout the day tunes your ears to what He wants to say and keeps you in a “quiet mode” throughout the day. This will protect you from running the pace that makes you feel you're running on empty.⁵ If you can quiet your heart first thing in the morning, then keep that quiet heart throughout the day, then you will have found a way to carry your “sanctuary” with you throughout the day and stay in a restful, quiet mode.

So, are you ready to start your day right? Those three action steps, on a daily basis, will get you out of the habit of running harried and shift you into a slower mode of *walking enjoyably through* your day so you don't find yourself *running* on empty at the *end* of the day.

Pick-Me-Up Prayer

Lord, You call me when I first arise. And how I want to be there when You call, meeting You like the dawn meets the morning sky. How many times have You waited, only for me to not show up? I don't want to be a no-show any longer.

Wake me gently and prompt me to a place where I can get alone with You while the house still sleeps. Help me to sit quietly as You bring Your rest into my soul. Remind me of the *one thing* that is most important. The one thing You want from me is written all over Your Word. You say You love me with an everlasting love (Jeremiah 31:3). You want me to live with hope and purpose (Jeremiah 29:11). And You paid the ultimate price on the cross to secure me as Your own.

May I, like David, sing in my heart, "There is one thing that I want...and it's You—to know You, to commune with You, to enjoy You forever." Give me the strength and energy to prove it by getting out of bed every morning and spending the first part of my day in prayer with You. From now on when You call in the morning, may I already be waiting for You...

*My soul waits for the Lord,
more than watchmen wait for the morning...*

(PSALM 130:6).

