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Wise Advice When You're Exhausted

Isaiah 40.28-31

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Watching the Olympics is incredibly humbling, isn't it? It's amazing to witness the abilities of people who are so strong, fit, and fast, with incredible stamina, balance, and hand eye coordination. Katie Ledecky won the gold medal again in the 1500 meter swim, an event for which she holds the top **20 times** in history! Yesterday in the 800 meter freestyle she became only the second swimmer to win an event at four straight Summer Games. It was the ninth gold medal of her remarkable career. Since she began competitive swimming, she has completed 23,291 miles in the pool, almost the circumference of the earth and about 10% of the distance to the moon! Vincent Hancock of the United States beat his student Conner Prince to capture his fourth Olympic gold medal in men's skeet.

On Wednesday morning before coming to church I saw a few minutes of the end of a table tennis match, and it was crazy the shots that Kanak Jha of the US and Panagiotis Gionis of Greece were hitting and returning. There are things you see in the Olympics, like Simone Biles doing a floor exercise or a vault that leave you wondering how can anyone do that?

As different as Olympic athletes are from the rest of us less gifted humans, there are many things that Olympians face that the rest of us contend with as well. Sydney McLaughlin-Levrone who is the world record holder in the 400 meter hurdles said, ***“Every Olympic athlete has two or three major struggles their Olympic year.”*** Those struggles may include physical and personal issues, injuries, setbacks, negative thoughts, doubts, and fears. None of us can run like Sydney, swim like Katie, or jump like Simone, but we are likely to have two or three major struggles a year.

When someone training for the Olympics has struggles, their response often includes keeping their purpose in mind. Being open to the insights, critique, and suggestions of their coach or coaches who seek to help them address weaknesses or areas where they can improve. The support, encouragement, and affirmation of key people can be renewing, energizing, and a source of hope. Sometimes people need to rest and recover. Several Olympians, including Simone Biles, have stepped away from

competition to reset mentally and heal physically. If people as young and strong as Olympians need to do this, we shouldn't be surprised that we need to also.

As you run your race of faith **you can expect struggles**. You're not always going to feel at your best. There are times when you'll feel tired, weary, or exhausted. One of the things experts in athletic training know much more about today than in the past is the crucial importance of rest, recovery, sleep, and nutrition to our overall health and fitness. As is often the case, the medical field is affirming something God teaches in the Bible which is the reality of weariness and exhaustion, and the need for rest and recovery. The prophet Isaiah declares to us (**40.28-31**),

"Have you not known? Have you not heard?

*The LORD is the **everlasting God, the Creator** of the ends of the earth.*

***He does not faint** or grow **weary**; **his understanding is unsearchable**.*

*He gives **power** to the **faint**, and **strengthens** the **powerless**.*

*Even youths will **faint** and be **weary**, and the young will fall **exhausted**;*

***but those who wait for the LORD** shall renew their **strength**, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be **weary**, they shall walk and not **faint**."*

This passage from Isaiah 40 is a favorite of mine. It communicates so much in just a few words. **First**, it tells us of **the Greatness of God** who is so far beyond and unlike us. Consider the attributes of God that are mentioned in these few verses. **God is everlasting** – we are mortal. The Lord is the **Creator of the ends of the earth** – I have trouble keeping my office organized. **God never gets tired or weary** – we spend about **1/3 of our entire life** sleeping because we get tired on a regular predictable basis. Without sleep, we quickly cease to function well. **God's understanding is beyond our comprehension**; there is so little we understand or comprehend in comparison. **God is the source of great power**. Our power is limited.

In contrast to God, human beings are described with these words: **faint, weary, powerless, and exhausted**. While we may not like to admit it to others or ourselves, these verses acknowledge there are times in life when we all, regardless of our age, feel **faint, weary, powerless, and exhausted**. I'm sure some of us are feeling that way today. What do you do when you're feeling that way? Isaiah suggests that's a good time **to wait on the Lord**; to look for power, strength, energy, motivation, and inspiration

from the everlasting God who never gets tired or weary and generously shares power with us to renew and strengthen us.

It's normal to have times when you feel faint and weary. It doesn't mean God has abandoned you. It doesn't mean you did something wrong or that you're being punished. Life is hard. We're finite, we're limited. We get tired. Whether it's parenting and grandparenting, maintaining important relationships, working at a job, making sure we're getting some appropriate physical movement given our age and health, you've likely had moments you felt too tired to do what you wanted and needed to do. What do you do when that happens to you?

One thing you can do in those moments is **remind yourself of your motivation or purpose for engaging in that activity or pursuit.** BBC's Paul Goodhue who is pedaling his bike this weekend as part of the Pan Mass Challenge, is motivated by the memory of his late wife Peg and many other friends. Thinking of them helps him to keep going when he may get tired on a training ride or during the Pan Mass Challenge. Linda Bowers rides with photos of her dad and mom on her shirt and a host of names on her handlebars so as she rides, she sees the names of people she's known. This year, she had added my dad's name which was special for us. When you find your motivation dropping, remind yourself of **why you're doing** what you're doing and what it will help you to accomplish. For example, if you find yourself tired as a parent or grandparent, remember how crucially important your role is in loving, nurturing, and shaping a young life that's watching you every second of every day, and learning from you how to respond to any situation including how you deal with adversity.

Watching the Olympics you hear so many stories of competitors responding to adversity. **Anna Hall** is a 23-year-old from Denver, Colorado representing the U.S. in the women's heptathlon. Anna has spoken openly about her struggle with negative thoughts, doubts, and fears in trying to renew her strength and return to health following knee surgery just this past January. Even a young Olympian can feel weary and exhausted. If we find ourselves feeling that way more often than we'd like, it can be helpful to see if you can identify any kind of pattern to when you find yourself "too tired to run?" Are there any common pieces, clues, or elements that you can identify? It's important not to keep falling into the same unhelpful patterns.

If you're feeling tired or weary, it's important to make sure you're practicing some core healthy habits including getting enough **sleep** and taking a nap if you can or feel the need. **Exercise** because physical activity can boost your energy level, improve the efficiency of your heart, lungs, and muscles, and build your endurance. **Eat** a healthy diet including high-fiber foods like oatmeal, "slow-release" foods, and foods that are high in magnesium, like almonds, hazelnuts, cashews, whole grains, and fish. **Stay hydrated** by drinking plenty of water, which can help boost your energy and overcome fatigue. Dehydration can zap your energy and impair your physical performance.

Reduce stress – this is where faith and waiting on the Lord comes in.

In his book, *Life of the Beloved*, Henri Nouwen writes about what can lead to exhaustion. When we're on the run, moving through our days in compulsive productivity and with little time and space to be fully present, we're more inclined to believe the lies of the enemy. Henri Nouwen notes that these lies often sound like:

"You are what you do. You are what you have. You are what others think about you."

Slowing down and waiting on the Lord allows us to be present, both to the things that are true as well as the things that are not. On the run, it's challenging to tell the difference.

God's word in Isaiah encourages you to slow down, care for your soul, and prioritize your own spiritual formation, discernment, and renewal. And as you do these things, may you hear the voice of the One who speaks blessing and truth: You're treasured. You're fearfully and wonderfully made. You're forgiven. You're not alone. You're loved. Nouwen concludes, *"To gently push aside and silence the many voices that question my goodness and to trust that I will hear the voice of blessing-- that demands real effort."*

So where do you turn, what do you do when you face those moments in your life? First, don't turn to negative, unhealthy behaviors like using drugs, alcohol, or pornography in an attempt to numb your weariness or exhaustion. Like drinking salt water to quench your thirst, these behaviors will make things worse, not better. Isaiah encourages us to turn to the Lord, to turn to the one who is so far beyond us in wisdom, creativity, power, and strength and yet who cares for us and comes along side us to help renew our strength and to keep going. Waiting on the Lord is not passive, it's not

like sitting slouched in a big soft chair. Waiting on the Lord is more like being a sprinter right before a race. The competitors get in starting blocks and take a position of readiness, their bodies poised and set for the sound of the starting gun to release them. They're waiting with full attentiveness for the signal to begin. Waiting for the Lord is similar in that we're attentive, alert, listening to the Lord and ready to respond.

Isaiah 40:28-31 tell us about the strong and caring nature of the God we worship and of the Lord's care and concern for us. We all face struggles and times when we're too tired to run. Could regularly "waiting on the Lord" make a difference for you? It's something to consider. Isaiah says those who wait for the Lord shall find new strength and endurance and mount up with wings like eagles. This passage speaks to the transforming power of faith, and the promise that those who put their trust in God will receive and find the strength to persevere and overcome.

In a similar invitation to Isaiah 40, Jesus says in **Matthew 11:28-29** (NIV), "*Come to me, all you **who are weary and burdened**, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, **and you will find rest for your souls.***" Paul wrote about his physical weariness and his desire for God to change his circumstances in **2 Corinthians 12:9**. "But he said to me, "*My grace is sufficient for you, **for my power is made perfect in weakness.***" Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, **so that Christ's power may rest on me.**"

Paul is affirming what Isaiah declared; mounting up with wings as eagles is a powerful symbol for the transformation and renewal that comes from putting our trust in God. Isaiah 40:28-31 is a stirring and deeply comforting passage that speaks to the unwavering strength and faithfulness of God. It offers a message of hope and renewal, encouraging us to put our trust in our everlasting God when we're tired, weary, or exhausted and to find the strength to persevere even in the most difficult of circumstances. It's a timeless reminder of the transforming power of faith and the enduring nature of God's love and care for all God's people, including you.

Prayer: Almighty, true, and incomparable God, you are present in all things, yet in no way limited by them. You remain unaffected by place, untouched by time, unperturbed by years, and undeceived by words. You are beyond all corruption and above all change. You live in unapproachable light and are invisible, yet You are known to all

those who seek You with faith and love. You are the God of the universe and of all who hope in Christ, renew our faith and our strength so that we may run the race of our life and not be weary, that we may walk and not faint. Amen.

Blessing: “Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and through grace gave us eternal comfort and good hope, comfort your hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word.”

2 Thessalonians 2:16-17

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. Have you ever been engaged in an exercise program (or any other kind of disciplined pursuit) in which you lost your energy, motivation, or focus, and you felt too tired to do what you wanted to do? What do you do when that happens to you?
2. When you find yourself struggling with personal issues, negative thoughts, doubts, and fears, where do you turn? What do you do when you face those moments?
3. Have you been able to discern any kind of pattern to when you find yourself “too tired to run?” Are there any common elements that you can identify?
4. What do you envision when you hear or read the phrase, “wait on the Lord?” How passive or active do imagine that to be?
5. What does Isaiah 40:28-31 tell us about the character of God and the Lord’s care and concern for us?
6. What would regularly “waiting on the Lord” look like for you?