

March Madness: Beating Burnout

Not Going Down Without a Fight

March is a euphoric time of the year for sports fans in the United States. The champions of the Super Bowl haven't quite de-muddied their cleats. The boys of summer are warming up in Spring Training. And college basketball is in full momentum as March Madness sweeps the nation.

As opposed to slower-paced sports like baseball, one of the most important aspects of basketball is the speed and constant attention required during a 40-minute game. There is no time to let up or hold back. In order to win, there is no doubt that all players must be at 100% constantly when games are played up to the very last second.

Something we can all learn from basketball, that gets little attention when it comes to our relationship with God, is the importance of an offense *and* defense. The players are expected to perform at the top of their game week after week, not only athletically, but also academically, while often only getting a fraction of compensation, if anything, for their contribution. With all this going on, there are bound to be feelings of frustration, apathy, and quitting. But how do they keep going?

Luke 18:1 NLT

[1] One day Jesus told his disciples a story to show that they should always pray and never give up.

It's unquestionable that we all reach points in our relationship with God where we feel like we need a break or want to quit. When we reach that spot, we've hit burnout. God knows that to be in the spiritual fight, we are going to need times of revival.

- What parts of your life are you feeling burnout? (Family relationships, dating, marriage, work life, academics, health)
- Where do you feel disappointment or obstacles are getting in your way?

Open Your Eyes

2 Kings 6:14-17 NLT

[14] So one night the king of Aram sent a great army with many chariots and horses to surround the city. [15] When the servant of the man of God got up early the next morning and went outside, there were troops, horses, and chariots everywhere. "Oh, sir, what will we do now?" the

young man cried to Elisha. [16] "Don't be afraid!" Elisha told him. "For there are more on our side than on theirs!" [17] Then Elisha prayed, "O LORD, open his eyes and let him see!" The LORD opened the young man's eyes, and when he looked up, he saw that the hillside around Elisha was filled with horses and chariots of fire.

When we are in the thick of the struggle, it can be easy to see the seemingly impossible and want to give up. We need God to show us what can't be seen.

Upsets in basketball are one of the best examples of seeing "what can't be seen". One of the greatest upsets in March Madness history was UMBC versus Virginia in 2018. UMBC was number 16, Virginia, number 1, it was irrational that UMBC would outplay the Cavaliers, but they would not let up and they held on for the win! UMBC was relentless. They saw an opportunity while Virginia got too comfortable. People love Cinderella stories like this one, because it inspires them that anyone is capable of making a comeback, and college basketball is full of them.

Watch UMBC vs. Virginia highlights here. (Video: <https://youtu.be/-ckfno5hIIM>)

In 2 Kings, Elisha knew the circumstances were impossible from his perspective, but sometimes we need God to help us see what IS possible. We burn out because we look at our life, our personality, our situations from our own point of view instead of God's.

- What is God trying to show you?
- Are you willing to see God's plan?
- How can you look beyond the "now"?

Have a Strong Defense

Psalm 32:4-6 MSG

[4] The pressure never let up; all the juices of my life dried up. [5] Then I let it all out; I said, "I'll make a clean breast of my failures to GOD." Suddenly the pressure was gone- my guilt dissolved, my sin disappeared. [6] These things add up. Every one of us needs to pray; when all hell breaks loose and the dam bursts we'll be on high ground, untouched.

The pressures of fitting in, meeting the expectations of people around us, and being weighed down by our own guilt can feel like they never let up. The less we address these pressures, the more they build up, and, as the scripture says, all hell breaks loose. Like in basketball, our spiritual defense needs to be just as strong as our offense, and this means not underestimating the opposing team.

What is your "opposing team"? Do you get taken out by envy, pride, or selfishness? When we see friends getting promotions, taking vacations and posting 50 photos of the same beach on

Facebook, it can be easy to ask ourselves, "What about me?". When we get in this spot, we are susceptible of burning out, unable to handle the burden of being something we are not.

God wants to strengthen our defense. When we admit where we are really at to ourselves and to God, we gain true strength, so that when "all hell breaks loose," we can keep moving forward.

- What pressures (insecurities, selfishness, jealousy, pride, etc.) are stopping you from moving forward?
- What can you be honest about with God today so that you aren't weighed down by those pressures?

When We Lose Heart

Anyone will tell you that games in any sport are all part of the bigger picture. In any sport, each game is part of the bigger season. In life, each day is part of a longer spiritual journey. Sometimes we need to get back to a few principles in order to keep our focus.

1) The Playbook - The Word

1 Samuel 3:1 NIV

[1] The boy Samuel ministered before the Lord under Eli. In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions.

It's easy to get distracted in life, one area you can never go wrong is sticking to the playbook. God provides a spiritual playbook; it provides answers, direction, and vision. Without the Bible ("the word of the Lord"), we will not be able to anticipate what is ahead. Without vision we can begin to lose faith and burn out.

- How have you drifted from reading and obeying the Bible?
- How can you start applying what you learn to your daily life?

2) Power of Overtime - Prayer

Luke 18:6-8 NLT

[6] Then the Lord said, "Learn a lesson from this unjust judge. [7] Even he rendered a just decision in the end. So don't you think God will surely give justice to his chosen people who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? [8] I tell you, he will grant justice to them quickly! But when the Son of Man returns, how many will he find on the earth who have faith?"

In this scripture, Jesus emphasizes the importance of using the power of prayer. There's no doubt that sometimes you are just going to need a little extra time on your side when you're in

the fight. LSU knows a little about that right now as they have won in overtime in their last three games of their dominant conference match-ups. If you watch players after a game goes into overtime, there's a clear sense of relief for some. It's just a moment, but in that moment they know they have an extra fighting chance! (Source: <https://www.ncaa.com/news/basketball-men/2019-03-03/college-basketball-conference-races-lsu-texas-tech>)

Jesus reminds us that prayer is supposed to be our spiritual overtime. Sometimes we need a moment to recover, recompose, and reassess. When we pray we can ask God for help and to see his great power that can strengthen us through any situation.

- Are you going to God in prayer for refreshment or has it become another to-do list item?
- How might your prayers be a time for you to “get back up again”?

3) Be a Team - Do Your Part

1 Corinthians 3:7-9 NLT

[7] It's not important who does the planting, or who does the watering. What's important is that God makes the seed grow. [8] The one who plants and the one who waters work together with the same purpose. And both will be rewarded for their own hard work. [9] For we are both God's workers. And you are God's field. You are God's building.

We burn out when we are trying to do too much on our own. This can leave some of us over-worked and spiritually worn out or overwhelmed and neglectful of our spiritual condition. Either way we aren't doing our part.

(To possibly hit a sore point for some) Duke hasn't quite been the same without their star, Zion Williamson. There's no doubt that the boy has extreme talent, but what you see is a team that's lost part of itself, they don't quite know how to keep the momentum without their friend and teammate. Without him, something is missing. Christianity is the same way, it's a team sport, with each part equally as necessary.

- What purpose are you and your friends working towards? How are you supporting each other?
- What relationships do you need to resolve so you can be a team?

Listen to Williamson and R.J. Barrett talk about their teamwork on the court at the very beginning of the season. Williamson can't help but smile when he talks about supporting his teammates. (Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RaWPKpB_k3k)

Decide: Choose one of the three areas where you feel you've stopped growing. How can you change that area this week?

Further Study:

The Word - Romans 10:17 NLT

Power of Prayer - James 5:16-18 NLT

Do Your Part - Acts 2:42-45 NLT

Begin listening to this 3-part podcast on Spiritual Burnout. (Video: <https://deepspirituality.net/spiritual-burnout-part-one/>)