

Being Emotionally Exhausted

Emotional exhaustion is defined as *“a state of feeling emotionally worn-out and drained as a result of accumulated stress from your personal or work lives, or a combination of both.”*

An article from Psychology Today lists 16 common symptoms of emotional exhaustion that include:

- Chronic fatigue.
- Insomnia.
- Forgetfulness/impaired concentration and attention.
- Physical symptoms.
- Increased illness.
- Loss of appetite.
- Anxiety.
- Depression.
- Anger.
- Loss of enjoyment.
- Pessimism.
- Isolation.
- Detachment.
- Feelings of apathy and hopelessness.
- Increased irritability.
- Lack of productivity and poor performance.

Looking at this list, I imagine that most, if not all of us, can think of a time in our lives when we've experienced one or two of these symptoms. However, these symptoms are warning signs that stress is impacting our lives, and not in a good way! If you experience several of the symptoms of emotional exhaustion, then you need to make changes in your life, pronto!

Five R's to Recovery when You're Feeling Emotionally Exhausted

Emotional exhaustion or burnout is not like getting a common cold; it doesn't just go away after a few days. There are many approaches to deal with emotional exhaustion. However, God provides a four-step approach: remove, rest & restore, release, and refocus.

We see this four-step approach play out in the life of the prophet Elijah (1 Kings 19). After a climactic victory over the priest of the Baals, Elijah received a threat on his life from Queen Jezebel. Elijah was afraid. Fleeing for his life, Elijah ran into the wilderness by himself, sat under a tree, and prayed for God just to kill him.

Elijah was emotionally exhausted. He was burned out. But God was with Elijah. God helped Elijah deal with his emotional exhaustion by removing, resting & restoring, releasing, and refocusing.

Remove the Stress

The best way to treat stress is to eliminate the stressor. It's not always possible to eliminate the stressor in the workplace. It wasn't within my control to eliminate the stress from my bad boss. So, sometimes to eliminate workplace stress, you may need to change jobs or take a new assignment. In Elijah's case, he needed to get away from his stressor by running into the wilderness. In my case, I needed to move and take on a new assignment.

Rest & Restore Your Body

Being emotionally exhausted takes a heavy toll on our physical bodies. Almost half of the list of 16 symptoms of burnout are physical! Once we get away from our stressor, we need to rest and restore our bodies. The first thing Elijah did after he settled himself under the tree in the wilderness is, he fell asleep! He was emotionally and physically drained, and he needed rest! But Elijah also needed food, so God woke Elijah up and told him to eat and drink. Elijah looked around and saw God had provided food and water for him. After he ate, Elijah fell right back to sleep. Then after he slept and ate, Elijah's strength was restored. So, we need to rest and restore our bodies when we are suffering from emotional exhaustion. We cannot function well mentally or physically until we get the rest and nutrition our bodies need.

Release Your Frustration

The next step to recover from emotional exhaustion is to release our frustrations. We need to get that emotional poison out of our systems! After Elijah woke up from his nap, he let loose on God. He told God about all his fears and frustrations about being a prophet, about the rebellious people of Israel, and about Jezebel trying to kill him. It is important to get all the emotional poison out of our system. Tell God all your fears. Express your anger and resentment. Tell Him about your loneliness, worries, and depression. Nothing you tell God will surprise Him. He already knows.

Refocus on God

Emotional exhaustion is destructive because our focus is inward. Our focus is on how we *feel* about ourselves. Elijah felt rejected by the people of Israel. He felt threatened by his adversaries. And because of all this, he even felt abandoned by God. Even if you feel like you're all alone in the wilderness like Elijah was, it's important to remember you are not really alone. God is with you through every trial. God talked to Elijah throughout this time in the desert. He provided Elijah food and water. God even demonstrated His presence by comforting him and letting him know that he was not alone. When we are in the depths of despair, we need to take our focus off our problem and onto God. God's power and presence will see you through the trials in your life.