

Chapter 1

Living the Burned-Out Life

There should be a “Get Out of Your Responsibilities” card you can play on those days when life is just too difficult, days when everything within you wants a moment simply to be still. That thought flittered through my mind as I lay stretched out on the foyer floor.

The weight of an unexamined life lies heavy against the heart of the weary. Pushing and pushing until it nudges you right past sanity into the pits. Thankfully, lying supine on a hardwood floor can be therapeutic for the soul.

I never knew how hauntingly healing cold wooden planks could be for the body. I never realized the many facets of peace and rest available when you lay yourself down on purpose. Peace comes in many forms. On this day it came in a ten-minute reprieve in the middle of the chaos that had become my life. There was no time to break away and do it right. No time for any long, drawn-out me-time ritualistic activities. No mani-pedi. No hot tea and biscuits. No caramel macchiato. No Dead Sea salt-infused bath.

No, on this day, time would not allow me to bury my exhaustion in any of my normal vices. So, I did what any sane burned-out human

would do after picking up the kids from day care. I set them in front of the TV with a snack, and I lay on the floor. I stretched out my back against the boards, palms down, and closed my eyes. In that moment of focused ceasing, I felt the beginning of peace stir within my body.

Peace came slowly. It was as if God himself breathed a divine exhalation, releasing new strength into me. I inhaled it. I clung to the moment, needing it to last just a little longer. I needed even more to satisfy my *longing* for rest. Not a desire for more sleep, but a yearning to be soul-free. Come to think of it, maybe it wasn't that I needed to be filled, but rather, I needed to pour out. Regardless of which direction the energy was flowing, something powerful was happening on that floor.

The voices of my children rang out with laughter as they delighted over the antics of the cartoon they watched. Inwardly I laughed along with them. The smile creeping on my lips was only mildly disturbed by the dog licking my face and the toddler crawling over my leg. It was sloppy peace, but it was mine. It was peace in the middle of a mental storm.

I could complain, but it would be futile. If I'm completely honest, I'm to blame for this storm. I created it. I fueled it. I continually recruit and pull others into it with me. I didn't mean to do it. It is just a reality of the life I created.

You see, I'm a doer. If I'm not doing something, I'm wasting my time. At least that is what I thought, until a few years ago when I found myself looking up from a compromising position into the face of my smug husband asking, "What in the world are you doing on the floor?"

Only one answer came to mind—*burning*. A single thought that, at the time, seemed so misplaced and irrelevant I almost didn't say it out loud. At times I wish I hadn't.

His smirk faltered when the first tear fell. I came undone. He kneeled by my side when the floodgates broke. Me. The strong one. The one with the to-do list for her to-do list. The organizer. The planner. When my husband asked what I was doing there on the floor, the image that came to mind was that of kindling being consumed by fire. I was the kindling.

I was burned out, and the life I had created was consuming all I held valuable. But on this day, I was kindling being consumed by an eternal fire. A fire with the power to destroy the heaviness of busyness and ignite a hunger to tap into the source of this strange, sloppy rest I found. Hunger to draw nearer to the sacred sanctuary of rest. I desperately needed to find that place.

Let's be honest; we are all just too busy. I'm too busy to write this book, and you are probably too busy to read this book. Both of us are being pulled by our busy lives when all we want is to have a good life. And so we find ourselves in the inevitable predicament of much activity and little enjoyment. Our wheels spin as we shove more to do in a day with no available daylight hours left, only to find ourselves wanting in the end. Not wanting more to do. No, we have plenty to do. We find ourselves wanting more time to do the things we enjoy doing.

We want time to enjoy our kids. We want time to make love to our spouses. We want time to linger over a good meal. We want time to use the bathroom without interruptions. We want more time.

But there is no more time. Time is. It is both infinite and finite. It goes on and on. With or without us it will continue. Our number of days are known by God alone. Time chimes in loudly over the roar of our anxious minds, initiating a battle between warring fears and courageous rest.

Aborting rest empties me of everything holy. It strips me of the ability to treasure life and peels away the value of being. I feel I'm

nothing if I'm doing nothing. My worth is wrapped tight around my endless activity. So I keep going round and round, each time becoming more short-tempered, more disgruntled, and more discontented.

A life without periods of rest will not endure the daily grind.

Rest is not for weaklings. Hollowing out space for rest is work. Finding time for rest is the hands and feet of the promises we long to claim. It means saying no. It means having limits with ourselves. It means having limits with others. It takes courage to rest in the midst of an outcome-driven society. It takes strength to walk away from good in the pursuit of better.

The people-pleaser in me would rather say yes and omit the rest. I've found through the years that I can't please anyone including myself when I'm burned out. Funny how everyone can smell the char of your slow burn except the one standing in the fire.

Sleep Is Not Rest

Have you ever tried to fix your chronically tired self by purposely sleeping a few extra hours on the weekend, only to wake up feeling like you've never rested at all? You had great intentions, but missed one vital piece of the puzzle: Sleep is not rest. As different parts of an intricate system, sleep and rest are designed to work together to ensure every part of you has a way to regenerate and be restored.

If I were sitting across from you right now, our conversation might go something like the one I had with a friend many years ago. It was early one morning, and we were preparing to start a long shift as interns at the hospital: "I'm so tired," lamented my red-eyed friend. Her hair was in a messy ponytail, and her scrubs were wrinkled in all

the wrong places. It looked like she had rolled out of bed and stumbled into work on accident.

“What time did you turn in last night?” I asked.

“That’s the thing!” she exclaimed. “It’s pointless! It doesn’t matter if I sleep five hours or ten. I always wake up exhausted. I need a double espresso latte. You want anything?”

Twenty minutes later she returned with two steaming cups of java goodness. I’m convinced heaven must smell like hazelnut coffee. We sipped and reenergized as we discussed each patient’s case. I don’t know what she had the barista put in those cups, but it was more like liquid octane than percolated ground beans. My heart skipped a beat trying to catch the rhythm of this potent brew. We tackled our hospital rounds that day as if our life soundtrack were shouting, “This girl is on fire!”

A few hours later, we crashed hard, and I do mean hard. I’m pretty sure I was drooling on the student-lounge couch when I awoke. I slept but woke even more drained.

“We need more coffee,” my friend declared.

I wasn’t sure I could handle another round of her coffee, so I opted to chat.

“Why do you think sleep isn’t helping our fatigue? I’m more tired now than I was before we fell asleep.”

“I wish I knew. When I was in college, I could sleep like a baby. The second my head hit the pillow I’d be out. In medical school, I started having trouble falling asleep. At first, it took five to ten minutes before I could go to sleep. Now it can take up to an hour when I lie down at night.”

“Wow, an hour. As tired as you are at the end of a shift, I would have thought you’d fall asleep quickly,” I mused.

“I know, right? But that’s the thing; good sleep is gentle. It comes in quietly, descends upon you, and replenishes you. Bad sleep comes in like a flood, overtakes you, and leaves you feeling spent. It’s the good I’m missing.”

Sleep is a biological necessity. Trying to omit it will slow your productivity and eventually kill you. In an attempt to check this life function off our to-do list every night, many of us have settled for sleep at any cost and of any quality. Our problem isn’t simply a need for more sleep. Our problem is that we are missing the good.

Sleep is different from rest, but good-quality sleep trickles down from a life well rested. We may sleep in response to rest, but resting doesn’t require us to be in a state of sleep. Sometimes as my friend confessed, sleep is not restful at all. Then there are also those times when even with a lack of sleep, we surprisingly feel rested and ready to tackle the day. The deciding factor is the difference between good sleep and bad sleep.

Nightly we attempt to enter into the four stages of sleep, non-REM stages one to three and stage-four REM. High-quality sleep begins in stage three of non-REM sleep when your brain ceases active processing. You lose your conscious awareness about your surroundings. Your brain and body both enter a quiet state. Bad sleep is fitful and devoid of calm. The mind may wander sporadically over the events of the day, and you may find your legs restlessly moving in response to the pent-up tension in your muscles.

There has to be a bridge between good and bad sleep, and that bridge is rest. Sleep is solely a physical activity. Rest, however, penetrates into the spiritual. Rest speaks peace into the daily storms your mind, body, and spirit encounter. Rest is what makes sleep sweet.

You may pride yourself on your ability to accomplish much each day, but when your natural strengths are taken to the extreme, they

can become a liability. Sadly, many of us spend too much of our days doing and not enough of our days being. We have decided rest is not necessary and replaced it with even more activity. I don't have a problem with productive people. I have a problem with worn-out productive people. These are the majority of the faces that grace my medical office, including homeschooling moms, business executives, shift workers, and young professionals. They present me with a list of symptoms, demanding answers and wanting quick fixes to problems that require slowing down.

It may sound like I'm judging, but be assured I am not. I'm part of the same tribe. I've burned the candle at both ends enough for us both and have seen its destructive effects in my life as well as that of thousands of others.

Can you be 100 percent honest with me? With yourself? How is your maxed-out, stressed-out, multitasking life working for you? Is all your activity getting the results you desire?

Since you picked up this book, I would guess your answer to my last question is a resounding no. Let me share a little medical secret with you. The most underused chemical-free, safe, effective, alternative medicine is spelled R-E-S-T: **R**ecognize your risk, **E**valuate your current position, **S**cience and research, **T**oday's application. I'll explain the R-E-S-T method further in chapter 3.