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## Just Breathe: Unload and Refuel

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Let me start with a question: how low do you let your gas tank typically get before you refill it?

How many of you would say you fill up when your tank is half empty? Raise your hands. How about three-quarters empty? How many of you wait until you get about five miles past empty? Here's another question: how many of you have ever run out of gas? Not fun! There are reasons we run out of gas. In fact, let me give you four reasons that we tend to run out of gas. And you might want to write these down because they all have parallels to our lives.

And if you've got an electric vehicle, the same principles apply.

First, you run out of gas because you don't start the day with a full tank. You ever gotten home at the end of the day and realized as you pulled into the garage that your tank was low, but you didn't want to go back out to fill up. And so, when you started the next day, you were running on fumes? I've done that more than a few times.

We do the same thing in life, don't we? We fail to resolve an argument before we go to bed so we wake up to a still-fractured relationship. Or we can't shut down our minds at night, so we sleep poorly and get up the next morning every bit as exhausted as when we went to bed. Or we rush out of the house without feeding our bodies what they need, and we just drag until noon. Or we don't take time to fill our hearts and minds spiritually through scripture reading, prayer or meditation. We just run out the door, running on fumes, which so often leads to running out of gas.

Second, we run out of gas because we're driving too fast. Did you know that driving 55 instead of 70 will decrease your fuel consumption by a whopping 30%. Talk about fuel savings! The faster you drive, the faster you run out of gas. And the same thing is true in life. Constant hurry through life depletes our emotions, our spirit, our energy, our relationships, and our bodies. It even has a name. It's called "Hurry Sickness". It's characterized by continual rushing and anxiousness, and an overwhelming and continual sense of urgency." And over time it has damaging consequences for both our mental, physical, and spiritual health. All of which raises the question, what's the speed of your life right now?

Third, run out of gas because we're overloaded. Like this guy...



Even if this guy could get all four wheels on the ground, I'm guessing he'd get about 2 miles to the gallon. We get terrible gas mileage when we're carrying too heavy a load. That'll drain your gas tank in a hurry.

Truth is, many of our calendars and To-Do lists look a lot like that guy's truck. We fail to build any margin into our lives. Sometimes that happens because we're afraid to not be busy. But it also happens when we fail to have healthy boundaries (which we'll talk about next week) and when we don't invest our time according to our values. That's when we wind up taking on things that don't belong on the flat bed of your life.

Finally, we run out of gas when we're not watching the gauge. You know how this goes. Maybe you're talking to someone on a long road trip or listening to a book on tape. Or maybe you're alone in the car and singing your lungs out to your favorite playlist. And suddenly, out of the corner of your eye, you happen to catch your gas gauge and you notice that the arrow is beyond the red warning zone. You were so distracted that you simply didn't notice. And the same thing happens in daily life. We get so busy, so distracted, that we're not checking the gauges that tell us that we're running on empty. Gauges like the amount and quality of your sleep, the amount of exercise you're getting, the quality of your diet and your overall mood, the length or shortness of your temper. These are just a few of the gauges that indicate our "fuel" level and can warn us when we're running on empty.

Some of you are thinking to yourself right now, "How do you know so much about what's going on in my life. Have you been spying on me?" And the answer is, "No. I've been living the same way!" So, how do we refuel? And how do we stay fueled? Let's start with Jesus' words from Matthew 11: Then Jesus said, *"If you are tired from carrying heavy burdens, come*

*to me and I will give you rest. Take the yoke I give you. Put it on your shoulders and learn from me. I am gentle and humble, and you will find rest. This yoke is easy to bear, and this burden is light."*

I want to draw out three pieces of profound wisdom from those verses that can help us to stayed fueled for life.

First, before you get fueled up you need to get fed up! Rarely do things change in our lives until we decide that we're dissatisfied with how things are. As long as you're willing to live on the edge of empty, stressed out and over-extended, chances are that not much is going to happen...until your body says, "I've had enough" and finally forces you to slow down. That's happened to me more times than I care to admit. I've gone through seasons of running way too fast, taking on way more than I should, unwilling to slow down because I like the rush of it all. Until my body said, "If you won't slow down, I'll force you to lie down." And I'd be sick for a week. I sometimes wonder if that isn't what Psalm 23 means when it says, "He makes me lay down in green pastures!" But we don't need to get to that point. Jesus said, "If you are tired from carrying heavy burdens.". In other words, if you recognize that you're tired and carrying too much and you're willing to make a change, Jesus is extending an invitation. He says, "I'm here to help, when you're ready to be helped."

So, are you ready? Are you fed up? If so, here's the second thing that Jesus says, "Come to me and I will give you rest". That's Jesus' open invitation to everyone who is worn out and running on fumes. Come to me and I will give you rest. The question is, what does that mean? Obviously, we can't just drive over to Jesus' house and hang out. So, what does it mean, "Come to me and I will give you rest"?

There are probably lots of ways to answer that question but let me share two from my own experience. The first is meditation. When I sit still, focus on my breath, and allow my rushing thoughts to pass by like clouds in the sky, I can feel myself begin to unwind from within. And as I do that, I sometimes just imagine myself resting in Jesus' arms. And the second way is prayer. Prayer and meditation are different practices. In meditation I sit in silence and stillness. In prayer I tell Jesus what's weighing on me. I entrust to Jesus my burdens, my busyness, and my restlessness. I give it all to Jesus, and I try hard not to take it all back! Sometimes I even journal my prayers, which can be helpful for focus.

Both of those practices – meditation and prayer - come together for me in Psalm 131,  
*LORD, my heart is not proud; my eyes are not haughty. I don't concern myself with matters too great or tasks too overwhelming.*

*But I have learned to feel safe and satisfied, like a young child in its mother's arms.*

*People of God, put your trust the LORD now and forever.*

Prayer and meditation are how I come to Jesus, and when I do I experience peace and rest deep in my soul. Finally, Jesus says, "Take my yoke upon you." What does that mean? Well, in Jesus' day a Rabbi's teaching was called his "yoke". Disciples or followers were invited to take up the Rabbi's yoke, to live under their guidance and be obedient to their teaching.

So often when you and I are running too fast and taking too much on, we're bearing the yoke of the world. We're living by the culture's teaching that the busier you are, the more important you are, and the more you accomplish the more value you have. But that's a weight we were never meant to bear. Instead, we're invited to take on Jesus' yoke, which says that we are of infinite value because we're made in the image of God. We don't have to hustle for our worth or our identity because Jesus teaches that we are beloved children of God by grace, not by some To-Do list. That's good news indeed.

So, are you fed up? Sick and tired of being.... sick and tired? Then come to Jesus and get refueled in his presence. Take up his yoke and allow grace to guide you instead of allowing the tyranny of the urgent to drive you. It takes practice. Old habits are hard to break. But in time you'll be able to say, "I have learned to feel safe and satisfied, like a young child in its mother's arms."

Let's start that practice right now. Take a deep breath and let it out slowly. Do it again. One more time. Now take a moment to gather up all the things on your to-do list, all the thoughts swirling in your mind, all the loose ends that leave you feeling restless and weary.....and imagine yourself setting them in a box next to you. You can pick them up later, but for now, let them aside. And just breathe. Let your mind become still like a clear pool of water. And now, with a bit more space in your heart and mind, and a bit more clarity, pick back up from that box whatever is yours, and leave what isn't yours or what isn't within your control, to God. Amen.