

Dead Man Walking, Sermon 1
How a Burned-Out Prophet Came Back to Life
I Kings 19

Introduction to Series

[Notes: We use a projection system during worship. Throughout these sermons you'll see the notes we used to communicate with the media team. Also, a worship outline for this series can be found at the end of the series.]

Several months ago I ate lunch with one of my pastor friends. After a few minutes of small talk, things quickly got serious. In a rare moment of vulnerability, he said to me, “I’m so tired of ministry.” ***[slide: church facility in background with caption, “I’m so tired of ministry.”]*** I’ve been in this business long enough to know what he meant. Pastoring a church can be an extremely stressful job, just as many of you have stressful jobs. Supervising staff, constantly dealing with people in crisis, worrying about church finances, preparing yet another sermon week after week, dealing with constant criticism, navigating the inevitable conflicts that arise in churches—it all takes a toll. So I was not surprised to hear him say, “I’m so tired of ministry.” In short he was saying: “I’m burned out. I’ve had all I can take. I’m ready to throw in the towel.” ***[end slide]*** Sadly, large numbers of clergy in America are burned out. In fact, it’s almost an epidemic. I know all about clergy burnout. Many years ago, when I was much younger, I had my own burnout experience, which I’ll share later in this series.

But I want to be clear: clergy don’t have a monopoly on burnout. Lots of people are burned out—from all professions and all walks of life, including doctors, nurses, teachers, accountants, salespeople, waitresses, stay-at-home moms, students, and even retirees. Huge numbers of people in America are struggling with burnout, especially in these recessionary times. The past few years have been tough in America. In fact, the past decade has been tough. Not long ago, the front cover of Time Magazine called the past ten years in America ***[slide of Time Magazine cover: “The Decade from Hell.”]*** It started with 9–11, ended with the Great Recession, and had plenty of struggles in between. A lot of people today feel stressed out and burned out. ***[end slide]***

All this talk of stress and burnout reminds me of one of my favorite cartoons. It's been years since I saw it so I don't know the exact words. But in the cartoon a man said something like: "At age eighteen I was married. As my bride walked down the aisle, I remember crying out to myself, "But I'm not ready!" When I was twenty the government drafted me into the army. I remember screaming out, "But I'm not ready!" At age twenty-four I had my first child, and I remember saying, "But I'm not ready!" At age twenty-six and age twenty-nine two more children came along, and I screamed out, "But I'm not ready!" At age thirty-five I became vice president of my company. I was not ready. At age forty-five I became president, and I said, "But I'm not ready." Finally, in the last frame of the cartoon, you see this man hiding in an underground cave. His children, his wife, and his business associates are looking for him and calling out his name. He said, "At age fifty I ran away from home and work and came to this cave, and I'm not coming out until I'm ready!"

This fellow reminds me a lot of a prophet named Elijah. Like the cartoon character, Elijah was stressed out and burned out. Like the cartoon character, Elijah ran away to a cave. And like the cartoon character, Elijah didn't come out until he was ready.

Elijah didn't start out stressed out and burned out. If you look just one chapter earlier in 1 Kings, you see Elijah at his peak. Elijah had just come off a major victory over the false prophets of Baal at a place called Mount Carmel. It was the greatest moment of Elijah's life. On Mount Carmel we see an Elijah who is strong and gifted and articulate and powerful and successful. If Elijah lived in the twenty-first century, he would have been elected "Man of the Year" by the Rotary Club. He was at the top of his game. But then things dramatically changed. Elijah's victory over the prophets of Baal angered wicked Queen Jezebel, and she vowed to do him in. In fact, she promised to kill him within twenty-four hours. Listen again to a few verses from the story: ***[slide: background image of Elijah under the tree: "Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, while he himself went a day's journey into the desert. He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life." (1 Kings 19:3-4)]***

So here we find Elijah—in the wilderness—sitting under a tree—tired and depressed and ready to throw in the towel. A man who, just days before, had been so strong, so healthy, and so vibrant, is now a stressed-out, burned-out shell of a man. ***[end slide]***

I wonder. Is anybody here sitting under a tree of your own? Tired. Stressed. Burned out. Ready to call it quits? Some of you are sitting right there under the tree with Elijah. And if you aren't sitting there today, sooner or later you will be. That's just life. But the good news is that Elijah's despair and burnout are not the end of story. The fact is, Elijah eventually recovered. Over the next several weeks we are going to travel Elijah's journey from burnout to recovery. We will explore, in depth, the six steps that God led Elijah to follow in his journey toward wholeness. Steps that can help all of us either to overcome burnout, or else to prevent burnout. Today I want to give you an overview of where we are headed in the weeks to come. We'll look at the big picture of Elijah's journey toward renewal, and then we will come back and look at each step individually. So let's quickly walk through the six steps God led Elijah to take in his journey from burnout to revitalization. ***(Note: a detailed listening guide with Scripture references is provided at the end of the series along with a series worship outline.)***

[slide: same Elijah image in background, minus the verses above. Please add these 6 points as I get to them, all on one screen]

[1. Elijah took some time off.] Human beings cannot push full-court press all of the time. Every person needs to take time off, to withdraw from the battle, and to recoup. It may not sound very spiritual to you, but Elijah's first step toward renewal was simply to stop for awhile, to take some time off.

[2. Elijah took care of his body.] If you look carefully at this text, you will see that Elijah slept, ate, and exercised. Stewardship of the body is critical to becoming whole, and we will explore this in depth in a couple of weeks.

[3. Elijah found strength from God.] Regardless of how strong we think we are, none of us are self-sufficient; we all need spiritual resources to live our lives. We need God's help to grow toward wholeness.

[4. Elijah got help from others.] Elijah realized that he could not do the job alone. He needed help from other people so he enlisted the support of another prophet named Elisha. To be whole, all of us need strength from our relationships with others.

[5. Elijah adjusted his attitude.] In this story Elijah was far too negative. He said, “Lord, I’m the only faithful person in Israel.” God said, “Elijah, your math is off by 6,999. Quit being so negative, see the positives, and adjust your attitude.”

[6. Elijah returned to service.] After being renewed physically, spiritually, relationally, mentally, and emotionally, Elijah went back to service. And in his service he found further healing.

As I said, this is just an overview, a skeleton, of where we are headed in the weeks head. We’ll spend time looking at each step in depth. But I thought it would be good to begin the series by getting a glimpse of the big picture first. **[end slide]**

I once read about a monastery in Portugal that is perched on a three-thousand-foot-high cliff. To get to the monastery, visitors climb aboard a swaying basket that is pulled up the mountainside by several strong monks. One American tourist became quite nervous halfway up the cliff when he noticed the rope was old and frayed. **[slide: image of old fraying rope]** Trying to find comfort for his fears, he asked the attending monk, “How often do you replace the rope?” The monk replied, “Whenever it breaks.”

For some here today the rope has broken. If so, Elijah’s journey will help you move from brokenness to wholeness. For others here today the rope is only frayed, or perhaps the rope is in good shape. If so, Elijah’s journey will help you prevent the rope from breaking. Either way, Elijah’s journey toward renewal can teach all of us some important lessons. May it be so in my life and in yours.

(Listening Guide for the Introduction to the series begins on next page)

LISTENING GUIDE
Dead Man Walking, Sermon 1
Introduction to Series
1 Kings 19

1. Elijah _____.

“He got up and fled for his life. . . . He . . . went . . . into the wilderness. . . . He went . . . to Horeb the mount of God. At that place he came to a cave.” (vv. 3-4, 8-9 NRSV)

2. Elijah _____.

“Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, ‘Get up and eat.’ . . . He got up, and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God.” (vv. 5, 8 NRSV)

3. Elijah _____.

“Then the word of the LORD came to him. . . . [God] said, ‘Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD, for the Lord is about to pass by.’” (vv. 9, 11 NRSV)

4. Elijah _____.

“Then the word of the LORD came to him. . . . [God] said, ‘Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD, for the Lord is about to pass by.’” (vv. 9, 11 NRSV)

5. Elijah _____.

“He answered, ‘I have been very zealous for the LORD. . . . I alone am left. . . . Then the Lord said, . . . ‘Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have now bowed to Baal.’” (vv. 14-15, 18 NRSV)

6. Elijah _____.

“Then the Lord said to him, ‘Go, return.’ . . . So [Elijah] set out from there.” (vv. 15, 19 NRSV)

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Dead Man Walking, Sermon 2 Elijah Took Some Time Off

1 Kings 19:3-9; Mark 6:30-31

Like many of you, I was a huge fan of the television comedy *Seinfeld*. **[slide: *Seinfeld TV show image*]** One of my favorite *Seinfeld* episodes was called “*The Dealership*.” In this episode Kramer goes to a car dealership for a test drive. The gas tank of the test car is nearly empty so Kramer and the salesman decide to see how far they can drive without adding gas. It becomes a quest for them. They want to know just how far they can push the empty line on the gas gauge. **(Note: if you have projection capabilities and want to show a clip from this episode, you can find it at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TuEdU_lrtZk. The clip is three minutes long but can be edited down.)** It’s a funny episode. But what’s not funny is that a lot of Americans live like that. In the words of Jackson Browne’s classic song, a lot of people in American are “*Running on Empty*.” We push and push our calendars and schedules, never stopping along the way to fill up. We don’t take a day off every week. We don’t take all our vacation time. We constantly work overtime. We keep ourselves and often our kids in hyper-drive activity. We don’t take time to pause and rest and play and pray and renew our batteries. And the end result is burnout. We run out of gas—physically, mentally, emotionally, relationally, and spiritually.

That’s what happened to the prophet Elijah. Elijah lived his life on full-court press. He never stopped working. He was busy for God. But in the end it almost did him in. As we saw last week, the end result was Elijah sitting under a tree in the wilderness, stressed out, burned out, ready to throw in the towel. Thankfully, Elijah recovered from his burnout. In this series we’re calling *Dead Man Walking: How a Burned-Out Prophet Came Back to Life*, we are exploring the six steps that Elijah took on his journey from burnout to renewal. Today we look at step number one.

I wish I could tell you that Elijah’s first step toward renewal was novel and exciting, but that’s not the case. The fact is, when Elijah found himself stressed out, burned out, discouraged, and spent, he followed a simple and mundane strategy: he took some time off. Let’s look again from today’s text. **[slide: (same image of Elijah we’ve been using) “Elijah went into the wilderness. . . . Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep.” (1 Kings 19:5 NRSV)]** If you follow the text, you will see that Elijah took off for forty days. Elijah left his

work, walked into the wilderness, and then holed up in a cave to rest, to think, and to pray—in short, to recharge his batteries. That may not sound very spiritual to you, but it is. Sometimes the most spiritual thing we can do is take a day off or take a vacation. **[end slide]**

Jesus understood this truth. When things got too hectic or stressful, Jesus took some time off. You can see that throughout the New Testament, as today's New Testament reading illustrated. Let's look at that again. **[slide: (image of Jesus sitting with his disciples, restful image, maybe on the Sea of Galilee or a mountainside) Jesus said to his disciples, "Come away to a deserted place . . . and rest a while." (Mark 6:31 NRSV)]** Jesus often withdrew from his work to regroup and recharge himself. Although Jesus was a busy man, he regularly disengaged from his responsibilities in order to recuperate and rejuvenate, including weekly observance of the Sabbath. Jesus knew how to slow down, how to disengage, how to take some time off. And that was one of the keys to his physical, mental, emotional, relational, and spiritual health. **[end slide]**

I want to share personally with you today. That's always a risk. I don't want to overdo personal stories. Worship is about God—not me. But in this case I felt led to share a personal story I've not shared with you before. Twenty-three years ago, when I was only thirty years old, I experienced serious burnout. Multiple factors contributed to that. But mostly I burned out because I pushed myself far too hard. I was pastoring a large and conflicted church, which made massive demands of my time. On top of those pastoral duties, I was also working on an extremely demanding doctor's degree. I was also leading preaching and worship workshops for clergy across the state. And, as if that wasn't enough, I was writing dozens of articles and a trilogy of books. I routinely stayed up until two in the morning researching doctoral papers, writing sermons, preparing workshops, and meeting publishing deadlines. After several years in that grueling environment, I found myself depleted—physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. At my lowest moment a concerned colleague asked me a question that rattled me to my core. He said, "Martin, **[slide: "Where is the joy?"]** It was like a javelin in my heart. His brutally honest question stunned me at first. I finally responded, "I don't know where the joy is. But if I don't find it again soon, I won't survive in this business much longer." **[end slide]**

Three weeks after admitting my vocational joy had vanished, I registered for a clergy self-care workshop. The presenter said a lot of important things that day about setting boundaries and developing support groups and eating a healthy diet and getting regular exercise. But what I most remember about the day is a cheesy quote he made. I remember it because

that quote changed my life. The workshop leader told us that if we wanted to survive and thrive as ministers and human beings, we must learn to **[slide: (put peaceful nature scene in background) 1. Divert daily. 2. Withdraw weekly. 3. Abandon annually.]** That quote saved my life. It certainly saved my life vocationally. My ministerial schedule and patterns in those days were simply not sustainable. I went to every meeting in the church. I was always available for everything. I tried to be all things to all people. I pushed 24–7 without stop. Because of that I came close to quitting the ministry. So implementing that quote saved me vocationally.

It also saved me relationally, spiritually, emotionally, and maybe even physically. As I drove home from the workshop that afternoon, I promised God and myself that I would faithfully live out that threefold challenge to divert daily, withdraw weekly, and abandon annually. Keeping that promise required significant adjustments to my workaholic lifestyle. I won't pretend those changes came easy. However, other than affirming faith in Christ, marrying my wife, having two children, and becoming a minister, it's the most life-giving decision I ever made.

Let me flesh this out for a minute. First, we must divert daily. We must take a break every day from our various duties. For me that means things like having lunch with a friend, eating dinner with my wife, keeping a daily journal, working out at Sports Village, taking a bike ride, or sitting in my La-Z-Boy recliner and reading a good book or watching an episode of *Parenthood* or *60 Minutes*. All of us must find ways to divert daily, to take a break from the demands of the day.

Second, we must withdraw weekly. Every person absolutely needs to take off one day a week. That's why God gave us the Sabbath. In fact, taking a Sabbath day off is one of the Ten Commandments. It's right up there with not committing adultery or murder. God knows we have to have a day off each week to worship and rest and enjoy family and friends and recuperate from the workweek. A day off per week is essential. Our model for this is God himself. In Genesis 2:2 we read, **[slide: "And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested." (NRSV)]** God expects us to do the same. That's why God established the Sabbath. If we are going to be healthy, we must withdraw weekly. **[slide: put back previous slide with 1. Divert daily. 2. Withdraw weekly. 3. Abandon annually.]**

Divert daily, withdraw weekly, and third, we must abandon annually. I was at a minister's meeting once when one of the pastors said, "I have not taken a vacation in four years." One

of the other pastors in the group said to him, “That’s the stupidest thing I’ve ever heard.” I agree. Everyone needs at least one extended break a year. Every July I take two or even three weeks off, and somehow the church manages to survive! I’ve never come back to find my church boarded up or bankrupt. Listen! Your business can survive your being gone two or three weeks a year.

Divert daily, withdraw weekly, abandon annually—that’s some of the best and most godly advice I ever received. I live by that, and I encourage you to do the same. It can be done if we make it a priority. Yes, there is a cost. If we live by these three guidelines, we won’t always be able to do everything we want to do or what other people think we should do. But the cost of NOT taking time off is even higher, as Elijah learned the hard way. The cost of not taking off is burning out and not being any good to God, or your family, or your employer, or yourself. Yes, there is a cost to taking time off, but the cost of not doing so is much higher. **[end slide]**

Well, Elijah began his journey from burnout toward renewal by simply taking some time off. If we want to get well, or if we want to stay well, we must follow his example, whatever it takes. Oh, I can hear the skeptics out there. “Preacher, you just don’t understand. I’m too busy to take time off on a regular basis.” Well, that reminds me of an old story that I’d like to close with.

Many years ago, before telephones were invented, a top executive with a telegraph company went on a train trip. It was extremely cold outside when he arrived at the train station. Since his train would not arrive for some time, he went next door into the local telegraph station, hoping to get warmed up. When he got inside, however, it was cold. He noticed that there was no fire in the fireplace. He said to the young telegraph operator, “Why don’t you build a fire in this place and warm it up?” The young man said, “Listen mister, I’m too busy sending telegrams to build fires.” The executive said, “Young man, I am the vice president of this company, and I have a telegram I want you to send to the home office. The message is, “Fire this young man immediately.” A few seconds later the young telegraph operator brought a load of firewood into the waiting room and frantically began to build a fire. The executive asked him, “Young man, have you sent that telegraph yet?” The young telegraph operator said, “Listen mister, I’m too busy building fires to send telegrams.” My friends, if you are too busy to divert daily, withdraw weekly, and abandon annually, you are too busy. Even God took a day off. ###

Dead Man Walking, Sermon 3 Elijah Took Care of His Body

1 Kings 19:5-8; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

We are currently in a series called *Dead Man Walking: How a Burned-Out Prophet Came Back to Life*. **[slide: image of Elijah under tree we've been using]** In this series, we are reviewing how the prophet Elijah moved from burnout to renewal. The first step, which we reviewed last week, is that **[add to slide: 1. Elijah took some time off.]** The next step in the story is that **[add to slide: 2. Elijah took care of his body.]**

As you know, we have a health crisis in America today. For example, over 60 percent of American adults today are overweight or obese. This results in billions of dollars a year in health-care costs and contributes to high rates of heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and premature death. Sadly, our children are following our example. A growing and alarming number of children in America are obese. It's getting so bad that many health experts are predicting our children will live shorter lives than their parents. Clearly, stewardship of our bodies is an important spiritual issue that we seriously need to address.

Which brings us back to the story of Elijah. **[slide: Elijah image under tree]** Elijah was in the desert, sitting under a tree, completely burned out and in despair. That being the case, it's interesting to see what God did not do. God did not preach a sermon to Elijah. God did not encourage Elijah to pray. God did not send Elijah to church. God did not refer Elijah to a counselor. What did God do? God restored Elijah's physical body. Elijah slept and ate. Then Elijah took a long walk. Elijah's journey from burnout to renewal included adequate sleep, healthy food, and vigorous exercise. Let's quickly review all three. Please take out your listening guide and follow along. **(Listening guide can be found at the end of this sermon).**

First, **[(add to slide) 1. Elijah got adequate sleep. "Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep. . . . and lay down again." (vv. 5-6 NRSV)]** Please read this text with me. . . . The first thing Elijah did was sleep. Adequate sleep is absolutely necessary to good health. Unfortunately, many Americans do not get enough sleep. For example, many children in America routinely go to school sleepy, and insurance companies report that a growing number of automobile accidents are caused by lack of sleep. Millions of Americans are sleep deprived. Elijah slept and then slept some more.

Second, **[slide (same image of Elijah): 2. Elijah ate healthy food. “There by his head was a cake of bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank. . . . He got up again and ate and drank.” (vv. 6, 8 NIV)]** Read this text with me. . . . After sleeping, Elijah ate. And he didn’t eat French fries and a cheeseburger. The Bible says he ate a “cake.” At first glance that sounds pretty good. We get images of chocolate cake with icing. But this cake was baked whole-grain bread. In other words, God gave Elijah his Wheaties! And instead of drinking Pepsi, Coke, Dr. Pepper, or sweet iced tea, Elijah drank water. This is a crucial issue. By and large Americans eat a terrible diet. Doctors refer to the **[slide: (photo of unhealthy fast-food meal, big burger, fries, and coke in background:) Standard American Diet: “SAD”]** standard American diet as “SAD.” Unfortunately, our diet is sad indeed. As one author put it, **[add to slide: “A lot of people are dying early deaths, killed by their own hands, if forks and spoons be allowed as weapons.”]** (Leonard Sweet, *The Jesus Prescription for a Healthy Life* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1996], 122.) If we want to get well or stay well, we need healthier diets. Elijah slept. Then Elijah ate nutritious food.

Finally, **[slide: (same image of Elijah) 3. Elijah engaged in vigorous exercise. “Strengthened by that food, he walked forty days . . . until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God.” (v. 8 NIV)]** Read this text with me. . . . Elijah hiked for forty days on his way to Mount Horeb. On his journey from burnout to renewal, God led Elijah to participate in robust physical activity. Speaking of exercise, I read an interesting article on that topic a few weeks ago. A fitness expert said there is good news and bad news about exercise. The good news is that if we will exercise regularly, we’ll add three more years to our life. The bad news is that we’ll spend those three years exercising! All kidding aside, regular exercise is crucial to good health. **[end slide]**

The point is clear. If we want to become healthy, or stay healthy, we like Elijah must get adequate sleep, we must eat a balanced and nutritious diet, and we must get regular exercise. **[slide: photo of couple taking a neighborhood walk]** Doing so will make a huge difference in our lives. People who keep physically fit reduce their anxiety and stress, reduce their risk of disease, improve their sleep, protect against cognitive impairments as they age, and control their weight. Keeping fit is a huge factor in our overall quality of life.

Of course, we already know all of this. **[end slide]** Everybody here knows that we need to get adequate sleep, eat a healthy diet, and get regular exercise. The problem is not lack

of information. The problem is lack of discipline. And New Year's resolutions and fad diets won't solve that problem. So how can we successfully maintain good health practices? The only way I know to do this is by making physical fitness a spiritual issue. **[slide: 4. How? By making physical fitness a spiritual issue.]** And that brings me to today's New Testament reading. Please read with me. . . . **[add to slide: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. . . . You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body." (1 Cor. 6:19-20 NIV)]**

The Bible teaches us that our bodies are the temple of God. We don't own our bodies; God does. And God expects us to take care of our bodies. That means Christians should not harm our bodies with tobacco, drugs, excessive alcohol, overeating, or poor eating habits. And it means we should care for our bodies by getting adequate sleep, eating a healthy diet, and getting regular exercise. As Wayne Oates once said, **[slide (photo of person jogging) "You can do nothing more spiritual than to maintain your own physical health. Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. You serve God well if you take care of your body as a means of worshipping God." – Wayne Oates]**

This kind of thinking is the only way I know to maintain good health habits. At least that's true for me. The only way I'm able to stick to a healthy lifestyle is to make physical fitness a spiritual discipline. Willpower alone is not enough. Instead, physical fitness needs to be framed as a spiritual priority. As Christian believers, we are called by God to practice several spiritual disciplines. For example, Christians worship God on Sunday. Christians give of their financial resources to God's work. Christians pray. Christians read the Bible. Christians belong to a small group of Christian friends for mutual support. We need to add to that list: Christians take care of their bodies. Not because we love eating broccoli or going to the gym. I don't know about you, but I'd rather eat chocolate ice cream than broccoli, and I'd rather sit in the recliner than go to the gym. But I eat broccoli and go to the gym anyway. Christians do these kinds of things because God expects us—indeed God requires us—to care for our bodies.

So practicing good health habits like getting adequate sleep, eating a healthy diet, and getting regular exercise is not about keeping a New Year's resolution or having strong willpower. Instead, stewardship of our bodies is an essential part of our Christian faith. When we make the connection between caring for our physical bodies and our Christian faith, we are far more likely to be faithful stewards of our bodies.

About six years ago I heard our very own Peggy Keel give a speech at a Kiwanis's Club meeting. She used an analogy that I have never forgotten. She asked her audience to imagine that every person in America, when they turned sixteen, got a brand-new, high-quality car. **[slide: photo of nice, brand-new mid-size car, avoid the brand name]** But there was a catch. That car would be the only car you would ever get. That car had to last your entire lifetime—fifty, sixty, maybe seventy years. If that were the case, said Peggy, we would take incredible care of the car. We would change the oil regularly, keep it clean, and maintain it carefully. **[end slide]**

Then she made the connection to our bodies. When we are born, she said, we are given a wonderful body. But there is a catch. That body is the only one we'll ever receive. It has to last a lifetime. Therefore, we need to take good care of it. Peggy was right. God has given us a wonderful body. But it has to last a lifetime. Therefore, God calls us to take good care of our bodies as a spiritual discipline. Please read today's New Testament passage with me one final time. **[slide (ancient scroll look): "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body." (1 Cor. 6:19-20 NIV)]**

May God help you, and may God help me, to honor God with our bodies.

LISTENING GUIDE
Dead Man Walking, Sermon 3
Elijah Took Care of His Body
1 Kings 19:5-8; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

1. Elijah got _____ .

"Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep. . . . and lay down again." (vv. 5-6 NRSV)

2. Elijah ate _____ .

"There by his head was a cake of bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank. . . . He got up again and ate and drank." (vv. 6, 8 NIV)

3. Elijah engaged in _____.

“Strengthened by that food, he walked forty days . . . until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God.” (v. 8 NIV)

4. How? By making physical fitness a _____.

“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. . . . You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.” (1 Cor. 6:19-20 NIV)]

###

Dead Man Walking, Sermon 4 Elijah Found Strength from God

1 Kings 19:8-13

Years ago, before coming to Lebanon, I pastored the Methodist Church in Monterey. Unfortunately, that was Monterey, Tennessee, not Monterey, California, because Monterey, California has great surfing! Well anyway, one day I came home for a late lunch at the parsonage. A fellow named Eugene Buckner was painting the parsonage that week. I talked to Eugene for a minute, then bent over to pick something up, and my back went completely out on me. I had a severe muscle spasm with excruciating pain. I fell on the floor, writhing in agony. I could barely breathe, much less walk. Poor Eugene didn't know what to do. My wife was out of town so he decided to call one of the leaders of the church, a woman named Franny. I'll never forget what he said. He called Franny on the phone and said, "Franny, the preacher is down." ***[slide: "The preacher is down."]***

Well, if Eugene Buckner had been around during the time of Elijah, he could have said the same thing: "The preacher is down." You see, Elijah the preacher was down. ***[slide: Elijah image we've been using]*** He was down physically, he was down emotionally, and he was down spiritually. Elijah was completely burned out and depleted. Thankfully, Elijah eventually recovered. We are currently exploring the six steps Elijah took on his journey from burnout to renewal. An important step in his recovery, and the one we will explore today, involved spiritual renewal. In short, Elijah found strength from God. Please turn to your listening guide in the order of worship, and let's review the four steps Elijah took on his journey toward spiritual renewal. ***(Listening guide can found at the end of this sermon.)***

[slide (with mountain background image): 1. Elijah went to a quiet place. "He . . . went a day's journey into the wilderness. . . . He came to a cave, and spent the night there. . . . [Then Elijah heard] a sound of sheer silence." (vv. 4, 9, 12 NRSV)] Elijah's journey toward God began with silence. He went to the wilderness, then walked all alone for forty days, and then camped out in a cave. It was as quiet a place as a person could find, and that is significant. You see, spiritual renewal almost always begins in solitude and in silence. Of course, this presents a major challenge to most Americans. We live in a terribly noisy world, and noise is an enemy to the spiritual life. Derek Raymond, in his autobiography *The*

Hidden File, says that “even before I get there I can see that hell is going to be a noisy place.” (Leonard Sweet, *The Jesus Prescription for a Healthy Life* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1996], 193.) If we want to tap into spiritual resources beyond ourselves, we must learn to be silent. The psalmist says, **[slide: with beautiful nature scene) “Be still, and know that I am God.” (46:10 NIV)]** Habakkuk says, **[add to slide: “The LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silent before him.” (2:20 NIV)]** In order to experience the presence of God, we need to create moments of silence in our life. We need to shut off the stereo and the television and the cell phone and seek God in silence. We may find that silence in our living room, or in our car during our commute to work, or in our garden, or during a walk or jog at the park, but we all need a quiet place to restore our souls.

[slide (same background): 2. Elijah went to a holy place. “He got up; . . . then he went . . . to Horeb the mount of God.” (v. 8 NRSV)] In his quest for spiritual renewal, Elijah went to Mount Horeb, also called Mount Sinai, which was the holiest place he knew. This was the mountain where God gave Moses the Ten Commandments. It was sacred space. In that holy place Elijah sought the presence and power of God.

Most of you are familiar with actress Sandra Bullock. **[slide of Sandra Bullock]** She won a best actress Oscar in 2010. Several years ago I saw an interview of her on TV. In the interview she mentioned that her ninety-two-year-old grandmother had died. She said, **[add to slide: “My grandmother just died, and I’ve been out searching for a church. I thought the best thing to do was to find a church and say a prayer.”]** I don’t know anything about Sandra Bullock’s spiritual life. But during a poignant moment in her life, she wanted to go to a sacred place. **[end slide]** There are times in life when we feel the need to go to a holy place to seek the face of God. Oh, we can find God anywhere, but there is something important about going to a sacred place. This beautiful sanctuary is our holy place, a place that exists for the sole purpose of helping people seek the presence of God. Well Elijah went to a quiet place and to a holy place, and then:

[slide: same background) 3. Elijah prayed an honest prayer. “It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life. . . . I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.” (vv. 4, 10)] Elijah’s prayer was not a nice, sweet, and safe prayer. Instead, Elijah’s prayer was raw and honest, from the gut. He complained to God that although he had been faithful to God,

people were trying to kill him. The fact is, Elijah was disappointed in God and even angry at God, and he openly shared his feelings.

Elijah's prayer reminds me of the prayer of one my seminary professors, Andy Lester. Andy and his wife, Carol, had tried for over a decade to have a child. After years of disappointments and endless medical procedures, Carol finally gave birth to their child. Unfortunately, the joy of birth soon gave way to the trauma of complications. Forced to leave the delivery room, Andy found himself in the hospital chapel, praying for his newborn son. However, as he prayed, something snapped. Andy was mad, and he was mad at God. "How can you do this to us?" screamed Andy. After all these years of waiting and praying, you finally give us a child. And now, as soon as he arrives, it looks like you're going to take him away!" Thankfully, Andy and Carol's son survived and eventually thrived. And so did Andy's prayer life.

That day in the hospital chapel, Andy learned that it was OK to share his deepest frustrations and anger with God. The best kind of prayer is honest, from the heart, prayer. And that's the kind of prayer Elijah prayed. He openly acknowledged that he had come to the end of his rope, that he was weak, that he could not make it on his own strength. "Dear God," said Elijah, "I need your help." Well, Elijah went to a quiet place, a holy place; he prayed an honest prayer, and then:

[slide (same background image of mountain): 4. Elijah encountered the presence of God. "Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by. . . . Then there came a voice to him." (vv. 11, 13 NRSV)] In front of that cave on Mount Horeb, Elijah encountered the presence of the Almighty and heard his voice. And through that encounter with God, Elijah found the grace and strength to carry on. Is it possible to encounter God and hear God's voice today? Yes, absolutely so. Oh, we won't hear a spoken voice. I'm not sure Elijah heard an audible voice. More likely he heard God speak to his heart and mind. But he heard God speak to him, and so can we. We do so through various spiritual disciplines—disciplines that the Bible teaches and that the church has taught for centuries. Let's review just a few.

[slide (interior sanctuary image in background). Put these up as I come to them, I'll move quickly.]

A. The discipline of silence

B. The discipline of prayer

C. The discipline of Scripture reading

D. The discipline of journaling

E. The discipline of small groups

F. The discipline of worship]

Through these spiritual disciplines we can hear the voice of God. Through these disciplines we can experience the presence and power of God. Through these disciplines we can tap into spiritual strength beyond ourselves and find renewal for our weary souls. **[end slide]**

Well Elijah's journey from burnout to renewal included spiritual renewal. Elijah knew he was not self-sufficient and invincible. Instead, Elijah knew he was weak, frail, and vulnerable; and he desperately needed the strength of someone bigger than himself. Elijah knew he needed the presence of God. So he went to a quiet place, he went to a holy place, he prayed an honest prayer, and through that Elijah encountered the presence of God. By tapping into those spiritual resources, Elijah found the strength to carry on. And by tapping into those same spiritual resources, we can find the strength to carry on.

Elijah's journey toward spiritual renewal reminds me of an experience of a forty-year-old man I once read about. I'd like to close today's sermon by reading a paragraph he wrote. He said: "I left work early after hearing that I would lose my job. I got in my car and went to my church. Unfortunately, the minister was not there. But the chapel was open. I went in and stared at the cross. I started to cry. I told God that I didn't have the strength to get through this mess. And I asked for help. I must have sat there for a couple of hours. I brushed away the tears. Suddenly a whole load went off my shoulders. I can't explain it but I went into that chapel crushed. And I came out feeling strong. I actually felt that I could make it." (*Robert Veninga, A Gift of Hope [New York: Ballantine Books, 1985], 214.*)

LISTENING GUIDE
Dead Man Walking, Sermon 4
Elijah Found Strength from God
1 Kings 19:8-13

1. Elijah went to a _____ .

He . . . went a day's journey into the wilderness. . . . He came to a cave, and spent the night there. . . . [Then Elijah heard] a sound of sheer silence." (vv. 4, 9, 12 NRSV)

2. Elijah went to a _____ .

"He got up; . . . then he went . . . to Horeb the mount of God." (v. 8 NRSV)

3. Elijah _____ .

"It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life. . . . I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away." (vv. 4, 10)

4. Elijah encountered the _____ .

"Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by. . . . Then there came a voice to him." (vv. 11, 13 NRSV)

A. The discipline of _____

B. The discipline of _____

C. The discipline of _____

D. The discipline of _____

E. The discipline of _____

F. The discipline of _____

###

Dead Man Walking, Sermon 5 Elijah Got Help from Others

1 Kings 19:15-16, 19-21

Like many of you, I've been watching the Winter Olympics (2010) this week. **[image of Olympics—interlocking circles logo]** Last Sunday evening, I watched Alexandre Bilodeau from Canada win the gold medal for Men's Moguls. **[photo of Alexandre Bilodeau getting his gold medal]** Men's Moguls is the downhill skiing event with all those bumps and jumps. It's both exciting and scary to watch. Right after he won the gold medal, he was interviewed by a reporter. Almost immediately he said, **[add to slide: "You don't get here by yourself."]** He then went on to thank all the people who helped him succeed. He began by thanking his family, including his parents and especially his brother—who has cerebral palsy and is a great inspiration to him. He also thanked his coaches, his teammates, and the people of Canada who have supported him so enthusiastically on his quest for Olympic gold. Alex Bilodeau is a young man, but he's already learned an important lesson: you cannot make it in this world without the help of other people. None of are self-sufficient. All of us desperately need others.

Which brings me back to the prophet Elijah. **[slide: same image we have been using of him in the wilderness]** If you have not been here lately, we are currently in a series called *Dead Man Walking: How a Burned-Out Preacher Came Back to Life*. During this series we are walking through the story of the prophet Elijah as found in 1 Kings 19. The story begins with Elijah in the wilderness, burned out, in despair, ready to throw in the towel. Thankfully, Elijah eventually recovered, and we have been looking at his steps towards renewal. So far we've looked at three steps in his recovery. First, **[add to slide: 1. Elijah took some time off.]** Second, **[add to slide: 2. Elijah took care of his body.]** Third, **[add to slide: 3. Elijah found strength from God.]** Today we are going to look at step 4, **[add to slide: 4. Elijah got help from others.]**

For a long time Elijah was a Lone Ranger preacher. He did his work alone, without support from others. It was just Elijah and God. But when he was broken, he learned that he could not make it alone; he desperately needed the help of other people. So God gave him a friend, a helper, a colleague in ministry, a young man named Elisha. Let's look again at the text: **[slide: "And you shall anoint Elisha. . . . Then he set out and followed Elijah, and became his**

servant.” (vv. 16, 21 NRSV)] God knew Elijah could not make it in ministry alone so he gave him a friend. **[end slide]**

I know, firsthand, how important this is. You simply cannot make it in ministry without the support of colleagues. I learned this—really learned it—when I burned out at the young age of thirty. I mentioned a little bit of that story a few weeks ago. Many factors contributed to my burnout, but the end result is that I was completely depleted and was just about to quit the ministry. I recovered from that burnout, in large measure, by the help and support of a group of pastors in my community. At my lowest point during that very hard time in my life, I was invited by the local Episcopal priest to join his clergy support group. The group consisted of an Episcopal rector, a Roman Catholic priest, a Presbyterian elder, two United Methodist ministers, and a Baptist preacher. You should have heard us talk theology! We met every Wednesday morning to share our lives, our stories, our joys, and our struggles. We laughed together and sometimes we cried together. Right after the Wednesday meetings, we all went to lunch together. Although we ate at a local meat and three, to me, it tasted like manna in the wilderness. It’s not much of an exaggeration to say—that clergy support group saved my ministry. Since then I’ve either joined or started a clergy support group every place I’ve lived, including here. I simply could not survive pastoral ministry without a group of close clergy friends.

And it’s no different for anyone else. You don’t have to be a minister to need the support of friends. The Bible makes clear that none of us are self-sufficient. We need God, and we also need other people. As Ecclesiastes says, **[slide (with photo of two children holding hands. Even better would be a picture of one child helping another get up after a fall): “Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!” (Eccl. 4:9-10 NIV)]** If we want to become whole and stay whole, we must connect ourselves to other people. That was certainly true for Elijah. Although Elijah was a strong and independent man, he still needed a helper, a comrade, a friend. Finding a comrade was a crucial step in Elijah’s journey from burnout to renewal. **[end slide]**

We see the same dynamic in the life of Jesus. We learn in the Bible that Jesus invested himself in relationships. Friendship was important to Jesus. He drew much of his strength from other people. For example, Jesus gathered around himself a group of twelve special

friends we call disciples. Jesus loved and depended on these friends. In fact, at the most difficult moment of his life, the night before he was crucified, he took his friends with him to the garden of Gethsemane to pray with him and be with him. And Jesus had other important relationships as well, like his dear friend Lazarus, and Lazarus's two sisters, Mary and Martha.

Even though Jesus was the Son of God and was closer to God than any other person on earth, he still needed friends. And if that's true for Jesus, it's even more true for us. You see, individualism doesn't play well in the Bible. The Christian religion is a religion of community. You can't be a Christian alone. It's impossible. That's one reason God created the church—so we could be comrades and friends and thus strengthen one another for the journey. That's why we talk so much around here about the importance of being in a small group. We desperately need Christian friends.

Elijah's journey toward wholeness included getting help from another person. And if you and I want to become whole and stay whole, we must follow his example. Like Elijah and like Jesus, we must make relationships a priority in our lives. We simply cannot make it in this world alone. But we CAN make it with others' help.

I once read a moving article by a woman named Stephanie Paulsell. Several years ago Stephanie miscarried a cherished pregnancy on the day after Christmas. She became deeply depressed, unable to work, read, or pray. She was, however, able to talk on the phone. Day after day she called her friends, especially her friend Kay. The year before Kay had left behind her job, her salary, and her colleagues to spend a year in prayer and silence. Stephanie felt guilty for violating Kay's solitude again and again, but she needed her friend's support. Stephanie cried on the phone, "Oh Kay, I am so depressed that I cannot even pray. I try to pray but I can't." A few days later a package arrived from Kay. It contained a simple beige jumper and a note that read, "I have prayed in this dress every day for a year. You don't have to pray. Just wear it. It is full of prayers."

Listen to what Stephanie wrote: "I did wear that dress. I wore it and wept in it, and cried out Why? to God in it. I let the prayers in that dress pray for me when my mouth was dry and full of ashes. And when I became pregnant again, I continued to wear that dress. Kay loves long, loose clothes, and her dress was spacious enough to accompany me nearly to the end of my ninth month. Her prayers were spacious enough, too, to gather up my fear and grief

and anger. And my joy, when it came. I was naked in my grief, and my friend clothed me.”
(Stephanie Paulsell, “Body Language,” *Christian Century* [January 16-23, 2002], 22-23.)

If you and I want to be whole, we, like Elijah, are going to have to get help from other people.
Even Jesus needed friends.

###

Dead Man Walking, Sermon 6
Elijah Adjusted His Attitude
1 Kings 19:13-14, 18; Philippians 4:8

Before beginning today's message, two disclaimers need to be made. That's not a very inspiring way to begin, but it needs to be done. **[slide: (at top of screen) TWO DISCLAIMERS]** First, **[add to screen: 1. Today's theme (Fostering a Positive Attitude) is NOT a topic of ultimate importance.]** It doesn't rate up there with the majesty of God or the resurrection of Jesus. However, it is an important part of Elijah's story of renewal—which we are currently reviewing—and is worth exploring. But it's not ultimate. The second disclaimer is that **[add to screen: 2. Today's theme (Fostering a Positive Attitude) does NOT deal with the problem of clinical depression.]** Clinically depressed people cannot overcome their depression with positive thinking. Clinically depressed people need professional care, and sometimes medication, to get well. So today's topic is not ultimate, and today's topic is not about clinical depression. With those disclaimers we can get started.

[slide: photo of live chicken] Which brings us to the chicken on the screen. You are probably wondering why it's there. Some time ago an article was published about a USDA food inspector. **[slide: photo of chicken processing plant, chickens (dead this time!) on a conveyor belt]** His job was to inspect seventy-five thousand chickens a week as they were processed through a local poultry company. One day he made an interesting comment to a friend. He said, **[add to slide: "I never see a good chicken."]** He went on to explain that through the years of inspecting millions of chickens, it had become necessary for him to train his eyes to see only the bad chickens, the ones that should be rejected. "I never see a good chicken." **[end slide]** Sadly, a lot of people are the same way. They never see a good chicken or a good anything. Instead of seeing the positive things around them, they focus instead on the negative. These are the pessimists, the people with bad attitudes.

Which brings us back to the story of Elijah. **[slide of Elijah under tree]** Over the past few weeks we've been following Elijah's story from burnout to recovery. If you are just about burned out on Elijah, I promise we'll finish next Sunday! Today we come to another step in Elijah's' journey from burnout to recovery—Elijah adjusted his attitude. He moved from a negative and pessimistic attitude to a more positive attitude.

Let's look again at our text. Elijah was on Mount Horeb, also called Mount Sinai. The text says, **[slide: (mountain background): "Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' He answered, 'I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.'" (vv. 9-10 NRSV)]**

Elijah said to God, "Lord, I'm the only faithful person left in all of Israel. All the other people have compromised their faith. Nobody else has been diligent in serving you. I am the only faithful believer left in the entire country." Talk about negative thinking! Elijah's view was far too pessimistic. He wasn't the only faithful person left, not by a long shot, as we'll see in a minute. Elijah was being extremely pessimistic and negative here. And that's one of the major reasons he got burned out and discouraged in the first place. You see, our attitude impacts our health—physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual—in major ways. The Bible clearly teaches this truth. As Proverbs 17:22 says, **[slide (2 photos. One of a prescription bottle of medicine, don't show what the specific medicine is. In the second photo show a dried-up bone or bones, with the caption:) "A cheerful heart is a good medicine, but a downcast spirit dries up the bones." (Prov. 17:22 NRSV)]**

Medical science teaches this same thing. Study after study shows a direct link between attitude and overall health. An optimistic attitude fosters good health: physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Like Proverbs 17 says, a good attitude is good medicine. However, a negative and pessimistic attitude takes a toll on our entire well-being. Like Proverbs 17 says, it dries up the bones. Well, Elijah's negative thinking was one of the reasons he was so discouraged and burned out. He desperately needed to change his attitude.

Let's go back to the story. Elijah said to God, "Lord, I'm the only faithful believer in all of Israel." But that was far too negative an assessment. Listen to God's response to Elijah. **[slide (image of a golden pagan idol): "The Lord said to him, . . . 'I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal.'" (vv. 15, 18 NIV)]** God said to Elijah, "Elijah, your math is off by 6,999. Thousands of faithful people have not bowed down and worshipped the false god of Baal. You are NOT the only one." In short, God said to Elijah, "Elijah, I love you, but you are being far too negative, far too pessimistic. Elijah, you need to adjust your attitude." **[end slide]**

Our attitude makes a huge impact on our lives, positively or negatively. It impacts our work, our marriage, our friendships, our health, even our faith. If time permitted, hundreds of examples could be given on the power of attitude. Let's consider just one recent example from the Olympics.

Most of you are familiar with the incredibly gifted American skier, Bode Miller. **[slide: photo of Bode Miller]** Four years ago, at the Torino Olympics in 2006, Miller had a terrible attitude. He didn't take the competition seriously. He partied every night. He drank a lot. And he skied without any passion. In fact, before the Olympics, he boasted on *60 Minutes* that he often skied drunk, and he told a TV interviewer for HBO Real Sports that winning an Olympic medal meant "less than nothing" to him. In short, he had a negative, slacker, smart-aleck, "I don't care" attitude. Do you remember how many medals Miller won at Torino in 2006? Zero!

This year Bode had a different attitude. I'm not saying he has dramatically changed his personality. But his attitude has been the polar opposite of the last Olympics. He's been disciplined, he's skied with passion, and he's had a hunger to make it to the medals podium. The end result has been three Olympic medals, including a gold medal. **[slide of Bode getting his gold medal]** As Bode Miller's story reminds us, our attitude, positive or negative, impacts everything we do. **[end slide]**

The apostle Paul knew about the importance of a positive attitude. In today's New Testament reading Paul says, **[slide: "Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things." (Phil. 4:8 NRSV)]** Does anybody know where Paul was when he wrote these words? In prison! Yet even in those difficult circumstances, Paul chose to think on the positive things in his life, and he encourages us to do the same. Paul was no Pollyanna. He knew all about suffering. But he was able to keep a positive attitude because of his faith in the resurrection of Christ. If God could raise Jesus from the cold clutches of the grave, no place or circumstance is without hope. Paul knew that nothing could separate us from the love of God so he was able to maintain a positive outlook.

Throughout our lives you and I must constantly choose our attitude. Life will always be a mix of good and bad. So we have to choose whether to focus primarily on the positive things

around us or to focus primarily on the negative things. It's our choice. But as we see in this text, the Bible encourages us to focus on the positive things. If you are looking for a practical way to live out this verse, let me give you two options. The first and best option is to get a pad of paper and write this verse from Philippians 4 on the front page. Then every day for at least a month, write down one or two or three positive things from the day that you are grateful for. If you can't stand writing things down, then try this. At the end of the day, as you get into bed, think back on the day's events, and come up with one or two or three positive things you are grateful for, and thank God for them. Doing one or both of these simple practices will make a big difference in your attitude and in your life. ***[end slide]***

Elijah's journey from burnout to renewal involved an attitude adjustment. God told Elijah to quit his negative thinking and to look around at the positives. When he did, he took a major step toward recovery. If you and I want to get well and stay well, we, like Elijah and like the apostle Paul, must decrease our negative thinking and increase our positive thinking.

As the son of an air force pilot and as a minister, I've made a lot of moves in my life and seen a lot of other people make moves. ***[slide: moving van in front of a house with a mover loading stuff]*** By making numerous moves and watching others do the same, I've learned an important lesson. I've learned that people's attitude about their move makes a dramatic difference in how that move goes. There's no question that moving is a difficult and stressful experience. But a positive attitude goes a huge way in navigating that move. Whether it's a military family or a ministry family, the dynamics are the same. People who have a negative attitude—who focus only on their losses, who think they won't like the new place—tend to be miserable when they get to the new place. On the other hand, people who have a positive attitude—who decide even before they get there that they are going to like the new place and the new people—tend to be happy there. Attitude makes a huge difference when people have to navigate a move, which reminds me of an old story. ***[end slide]***

Many years ago out West, an old farmer was sitting on the porch of a general store in a frontier town. A family drove up in a horse-drawn wagon loaded with all their earthly belongings. The father of the family told the old farmer that they were looking for a new place to live. He asked the farmer, "Are the folks in this town friendly?" The old farmer said, "How were the folks back where you came from?" The man in the wagon replied, "They were not friendly at all. That's why we left." The old farmer said, "Well, I'm sorry to tell you, but the folks

here are just the same—they are not friendly at all.” With not even a thank-you, the man and his family drove off. Shortly thereafter, the same scene was repeated. Another family came in a covered wagon with all their belongings. They stopped at the general store, and the father said to the old farmer, “We are looking for a new place to live. Are the folks friendly in this town?” The old farmer shot back the question, “How were the folks in the town you came from?” The man in the wagon smiled and said, “Oh, they were the best folks in the world. We hated to leave them.” The old farmer smiled and said, “You’re in luck, mister; the folks in this town are the just like the folks where you came from.”

###

Dead Man Walking, Sermon 7 Elijah Returned to Service

1 Kings 19:15-16, 19a; Matthew 25:31-40

Many of you have seen the movie **[book cover of *The Prince of Tides*]** starring Nick Nolte and Barbara Streisand. The movie was based on the novel by Pat Conroy. *The Prince of Tides* tells the story of a high school teacher and football coach named Tom Wingo, who had completely burned out. **[slide: picture of Nick Nolte (from the movie if possible)]** The beginning of the movie finds Tom struggling with unemployment, grief over his brother's death, serious marital problems, and overall burnout. However, after a long and painful process of healing, Tom reunited with his wife and children, returned to his vocation as a teacher and coach, worked through much of his grief over the death of his brother, and came to grips with a terrible trauma from his childhood that haunted him and his family for decades. In the process of that healing, Tom found renewed contentment and joy in his life. In the final scene of the film, we see Tom mowing the grass of his high school football field. In voiceover narration Tom says, **[add to slide: "I am a teacher and a coach and a well-loved man, and it is more than enough."]**

The Prince of Tides is a powerful and moving story about a man who moved from total burnout to new life and recovery. We see that same story played out in the life of the prophet Elijah. **[slide: same one of Elijah in wilderness]** In recent weeks we've been walking with Elijah on his journey from burnout to renewal. Before looking at Elijah's sixth and final step of recovery, please get out your listening guide and let's quickly review the first five steps he took in his recovery. **(Listening guide can be found at the end of this sermon.)**

[slides: (with same Elijah image in background). Put these six slides up, one at a time, as I quickly move through them with a few comments]

[slide: 1. Elijah took some time off.

"He got up and fled for his life. . . . He . . . went . . . into the wilderness. . . . He went . . . to Horeb the mount of God. At that place he came to a cave." (vv. 3-4, 8-9 NRSV)]

[slide: 2. Elijah took care of his body.

“Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, ‘Get up and eat.’ . . . He got up, and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God.” (vv. 5, 8 NRSV)

[slide: 3. Elijah found strength from God.

“Then the word of the LORD came to him. . . . [God] said, ‘Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD, for the Lord is about to pass by.’” (vv. 9, 11 NRSV)

[slide: 4. Elijah got help from others.

“Then the LORD said to him. . . . ‘Anoint Elisha . . . as prophet in your place.’ . . . Then [Elisha] followed Elijah, and became his servant.” (vv. 15-16, 21 NRSV)

[slide: 5. Elijah adjusted his attitude.

“He answered, ‘I have been very zealous for the LORD. . . . I alone am left. . . . Then the Lord said, . . . ‘Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have now bowed to Baal.’” (vv. 14-15, 18 NRSV)

Today we come to the sixth and final step in Elijah’s journey toward renewal:

[slide: 6. Elijah returned to service.

“Then the Lord said to him, ‘Go, return.’ . . . So [Elijah] set out from there.” (vv. 15, 19 NRSV)

We need to see two sides of the coin concerning step 6. First, Elijah had been restored and was ready to go back to service. He had been renewed physically, spiritually, relationally, and in his attitude. Oh, he was not completely whole; we never are fully whole this side of heaven; we always have some wounds. But he was now well enough to go back to work. You see, the whole point of Elijah’s recovery was that he be sent back to service. Elijah’s journey toward wholeness was not an end in itself. He was made whole again in order to better serve God and neighbor. All of us, from time to time, like Elijah, need healing and restoration. But restoration is not only for our own benefit; it is also for the benefit of others. In the Bible, people are always saved to serve.

However, there is another side to this story. The other side of the coin is that Elijah's return to service was part of his therapy, part of his healing. For when we serve others, we find healing for ourselves. Many of you have probably heard of the late Dr. Karl Menninger, the famous psychiatrist. **[slide: photo of Menninger]** Dr. Menninger once gave a speech on mental health and then opened it up for questions. A man asked him, "What would you advise a person to do if that person felt a nervous breakdown coming on?" Most people in the crowd expected Menninger to say, "Consult a psychiatrist." To their astonishment, he replied, **[add to slide: "Lock up your house, go across the railway track, find someone in need, and do something to help that person."]**

Karl Menninger understood that when we help heal other people, we find healing for ourselves. That's what Jesus meant when he told us that when we lose our life in service for others, that's when we find our life. **[end slide]** As St. Francis of Assisi said in his famous prayer, "For it is in giving that we receive." As one person said, "Love is the ultimate therapy." So an important part of Elijah's recovery was his return to service. It's no different for us. When we help other people find healing, a part of us is also healed. So, if we want to get well and stay well, we must learn to serve others.

That was true for a man named Gus Kirzinski. Dying with inoperable cancer, Gus went to a hospice facility. Upon arrival Gus felt fearful and angry. "Why did I get cancer?" he asked, as if for some strange reason he should be exempt from the disease. "What does God have against me?"

One day Gus stomped down the corridor of the hospice unit, angry that he had not received the service he demanded. An event then happened that transformed his remaining months of life. As he walked down the hall, Gus saw a five-year-old kid. He couldn't believe his eyes—a five-year-old in hospice care. He went to a nurse and said, "What is that kid doing here? This is a place where old people die, not little kids." The nurse explained that the child had fallen off a tractor, temporarily cutting off oxygen to her brain. The accident resulted in paralysis. She could not talk or see. However, she was able to hear and respond to simple instructions. Gus stared at her through the doorway. He couldn't fathom how something like this could happen. "She's only five years old," he said repeatedly. He later learned that her parents lived six hundred miles away and could visit only on weekends.

The next morning Gus again walked by the child's room. "Who's taking care of that kid?" he shouted at the nurses. After his outburst a nurse replied, "Maybe you ought to do it." Shocked at the thought, he went back to his room. But he couldn't shake the question from his mind, Who's taking care of that kid? Later that evening Gus put on his slippers and went into her room. He said hello to her, but she made no response. He tried speaking to her a second time but again, nothing. Finally he reached out, touched her hand, and took hold of one of her fingers. As he did, the little girl squeezed his hand. And in that moment Gus was transformed from a bitter, fearful, angry person to one who could love and serve a five-year-old child.

For weeks Gus and the little girl "talked" to each other through handshakes. He read her stories and played her favorite music. He found a little red wagon, propped her safely in it, and took her on trips around the hospital. As time passed, they developed an intricate language of communication as they snapped their fingers back and forth. "When Gus died," said a nurse, "he died smiling. He was no longer Gus the fearful patient. Now he was Gus—the friend of a five year old." (*Robert Veninga, A Gift of Hope: How We Survive Our Tragedies* [New York: Ballantine Books, 1985], 277-78.)

LISTENING GUIDE
Dead Man Walking, Sermon 7
Elijah Returned to Service

1 Kings 19:15-16, 19a; Matthew 25:31-40

1. Elijah _____.

"He got up and fled for his life. . . . He . . . went . . . into the wilderness. . . . He went . . . to Horeb the mount of God. At that place he came to a cave." (vv. 3-4, 8-9 NRSV)

2. Elijah _____.

"Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, 'Get up and eat.' . . . He got up, and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God." (vv. 5, 8 NRSV)

3. Elijah _____.

"Then the word of the LORD came to him. . . . [God] said, 'Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD, for the Lord is about to pass by.'" (vv. 9, 11 NRSV)

4. Elijah _____.

“Then the word of the LORD came to him. . . . [God] said, ‘Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD, for the Lord is about to pass by.’” (vv. 9, 11 NRSV)

5. Elijah _____.

“He answered, ‘I have been very zealous for the LORD. . . . I alone am left. . . . Then the Lord said, . . . ‘Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have now bowed to Baal.’” (vv. 14-15, 18 NRSV)

6. Elijah _____.

“Then the Lord said to him, ‘Go, return.’ . . . So [Elijah] set out from there.” (vv. 15, 19 NRSV)

WORSHIP OUTLINE FOR THE DEAD MAN WALKING SERIES

“The people . . . fell on their faces and said, ‘The LORD indeed is God.’” (1 Kings 18:39 NRSV)
(Opening segment of worship, including a call to worship, songs of praise, passing of the peace, invocation, etc.)

“Then the word of the LORD came to [Elijah], saying . . .” (1 Kings 19:9 NRSV)
(Scripture, any special music, drama, sermon, etc.)

“Stand on the mountain . . . for the LORD is about to pass by.” (1 Kings 19:11 NRSV)
(Song of response [We used “Healer of Our Every Ill” as the series theme song.], affirmation of faith, morning prayer, offering, etc.)

“[Elijah] . . . ate and drank, then he went in the strength of that food.” (1 Kings 19:8 NRSV)
(The celebration of Holy Communion goes here. At Lebanon First, we celebrate Communion on the first and third Sunday of every month.)

“The LORD said to him, ‘Go, return.’ . . . So he set out from there.” (1 Kings 19:15, 19 NRSV)
(Benediction and closing song)

