

Life Story: The Bubble Effect

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by Joel Garcia

Have you ever felt like you are trapped in a bubble, like your daily routine has become predictable and dull, and that there was no way out? That is exactly how I felt recently. I have been working at one of the fastest growing churches in America. It has been a great privilege to minister to hurting people, teach the saints, heal the sick, restore broken relationships and fulfill my role as a pastor. However, as time passed, I started feeling like the drag and monotony of ministry was increasing in my life. I felt like I needed a personal breakthrough of some kind. For 15 years, I have been consigned to one location, the church. I was putting in fifty hours or more each week, and for my spiritual nurturing, guess where I attended? My whole world was wrapped around one place. To add to this, I had been going through some personal transitions such as experiencing the empty nest syndrome, some long-standing challenges with a family member and middle-age blues.

I know what you are thinking at this point, “Would someone please give this guy a vacation.” I did not need a vacation at this point. I needed to figure out how to break out of this bubble. Then I thought about Jesus and wondered how He managed His life during His ministry time on earth. Can you imagine the demands that people must have placed on His time?

Jesus was able to manage Himself and His ministry well in the midst of all of this and lead others to new dimensions of spiritual vitality. I needed to know His secrets for staying fresh, productive and fruitful during times of great demand in the ministry. As I researched the life of Jesus, I discovered five sound strategies that He employed to revitalize Himself. The following five principles are rejuvenating strategies for personal breakthrough. I have personally employed some of them and my life has been radically changed as a result.

Bursting the “Bubble Effect”: Rejuvenating Strategies for Breakthrough

1. Jesus prioritized a lifestyle of prayer and fasting

“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing” (John 6:63). A daily, personal connection with God was the single most important aspect that kept Jesus from experiencing burnout and stress. Prayerlessness opens the door to significant burnout, because you depend more on your own strength and abilities to produce results that can only be produced by spiritual means. Without prayer, we weaken and spiral into spiritual lethargy.

Prayer and fasting are spiritual disciplines that bring the flesh into subjection and at the same time replenish and reignite our spiritual vitality to produce supernatural results, without all the striving that leads to burnout. The Holy Spirit rejuvenates body, soul and spirit while the flesh zaps vital energy in all three areas.

2. Jesus took periodic retreats

“Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed” (Luke 5:15, 16). The Scriptures never allude to a scheduled day of the week that Jesus took off. On many occasions, He worked on the Sabbath, healing the sick. Instead, Jesus took periodic retreats whenever he felt tired or needed spiritual nourishment. It was during these sporadic retreats that His vigor and strength were rejuvenated.

During my “bubble effect” experience, I was fortunate enough to have a caring and compassionate employer and pastor who recommended a 30-day leave of absence so I could get away to recover my passions and recalibrate my sanity. It was to be a time to connect with God and replenish spiritually, emotionally and mentally. Pastors and church leaders often neglect to take time away from ministry, but these times of solitude, reconnecting with God at a deeper level and renewing your sense of purpose, are essential to your wellbeing as a person and pastor.

3. Jesus spent considerable time with the lost

The Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them” (Luke 15:2). I knew I needed a change in perspective or personal transformation, but how? So many times, those who give spiritual advice cannot seem to

find any themselves. I needed to find an outlet somewhere outside of this “bubble.” It is interesting that Jesus found a niche among “sinners.” He spent a considerable amount of time around them. It was the religious crowd, the Sadducees and Pharisees, who created most of the problems for Him. Jesus was refreshed when He was around the unchurched or those who were short-circuited by a religious Pharisaic mindset.

There is something about the lost that refreshes me. During the first four years of my ministry experience, I coached my son’s little league team. I enjoyed every moment of it. I soon discovered that spending time with the “unchurched” refreshed me in ways that regular churchgoers could not. Being around the lost reminded me of my calling and mission and kept me focused on the right priorities. I love my church family, but knew that I needed to go back and find my place among the sinners, like Jesus did.

4. Jesus was energized and engaged by purpose

“I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent” (Luke 4:43). Purpose gives our lives meaning and ignites our motivation to change things in our chaotic world. Jesus had a purpose and it drove Him to the cross on Calvary. There are three significant offerings that contributed to His life purpose:

- **Jesus deeply felt His purpose:** “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost” (Luke 19:10). Jesus not only felt His purpose deeply, He often vocalized His mission statement. He was not sent to the sacred but to the sinner, the lost sheep of Israel. He often made this public knowledge and openly demonstrated it by loving the unlovable, healing the sick and spending time with sinners. Jesus knew His purpose in life.
- **Jesus was fueled by purpose:** “My food,” said Jesus “is to do the will of Him who sent me and to finish his work” (John 4:34). The purpose of food is to provide nourishment, to fuel our bodies to exert energy for optimum output. Jesus said that His food was to do the will of His Father in heaven. He was determined to complete the mission assigned to Him. His final words on the cross of shame were simply, “It is finished.” God’s agenda gave Jesus purpose and fueled Him each day until He fulfilled the purpose of His life on earth.

- **Jesus passionately forecast His purpose:** “I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent” (Luke 4:43). We can learn a valuable principle from this passage of Scripture. We should forecast our purpose and not be ashamed of it. If I am embarrassed of my purpose, it might not be an authentic design for my life. Purpose gives us a cause; something worth fighting and sacrificing for. The apostle Paul said, “I am not ashamed of the gospel.” He was not embarrassed of Jesus and His message and forecast it passionately throughout his life. Paul, like Jesus, ignited the passions of his generation as he forecast, pursued and finished the purposes for his life.

5. Catharsis: Jesus released pent-up emotions in a healthy way

“And being in anguish, He prayed more earnestly, and His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground (Luke 22:44); “Jesus wept” (2 John 11:35). We can deduce from these passages of Scripture that Jesus released His emotions in a healthy way. He did not hold back tears in times of deep personal loss, nor did He hide His intense feelings in the garden. One of the keys to staying sound in ministry seems to be the healthy release of emotions. We can see that Jesus understood this by the way that He employed the principle of catharsis. Catharsis is a term that simply means emotional cleansing or purging. Dictionary.com defines catharsis as:

- “The purging of the emotions or relieving of emotional tensions, esp. through certain kinds of art, like tragedy or music, etc.” Jesus enjoyed nature and often took retreats alone. At one point, He relieved tension by overturning tables and chasing the moneychangers away from the Temple.
- “Psychotherapy that encourages or permits the discharge of pent-up, socially unacceptable affects.” We can do this by praying, seeking repentance and going for counseling.
- “The discharge of pent-up emotions so as to result in the alleviation of symptoms or the permanent relief of the condition.” Jesus confessed His struggle in the garden and exercised regularly by walking long distances.

Emotional management is crucial in today's chaotic world. We can manage our emotions by proactively dealing with issues of the heart. Our emotions are powerful and if we do not manage them correctly, we can feel depleted and lethargic. God shows us throughout Scripture that the "issues of the heart" have to be dealt with in an appropriate and expeditious manner. All the issues of life flow from the heart. The condition of our hearts establishes the quality of our lives. Proverbs 4:23 admonishes, "Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life."

If you can manage your emotions properly you have what is called self-mastery, the ability to govern yourself. You will be able to control yourself from talking foolishly and hurting those you love with your words and actions. A daily purging (repentance) and cleansing (forgiving and receiving forgiveness) of the issues pent up in our heart, will relieve stress and reduce burnout significantly. Unforgiveness, bitterness, anger, envy, and jealousy produces "drag" if left festering in our hearts. Drag is like carrying extra weight on your shoulders. Imagine a marathon runner carrying a backpack with twenty-five extra pounds on his shoulder. How far do you think he will go with that extra weight? Can he compete with others who are not carrying a loaded backpack? The answers are obvious. Catharsis is simply a way of taking care of the emotional side of your life. It is the process of letting go and venting in a healthy way, releasing the pent-up issues stored up in our hearts.

Conclusion

It has been one month since I completed my 30-day leave of absence. I have returned to the helm of ministry and feel so refreshed and invigorated that I am ready to tackle life and ministry at full steam.

As a result of my extended leave of absence, some personal issues were uncovered that were hidden beneath a hardening heart. I knew I had to apply the principle of catharsis by dealing with a pent-up issue in my heart concerning a colleague I had offended. When I got back to the office, we went out to lunch. I asked for forgiveness and broke down crying. The hidden issue bubbled up from within me and spilled out. My apology was accepted immediately and I felt the burden lift off me. After this incident, a co-worker commented, "You seem different, like a load has been taken from you." I did not realize that a simple, unresolved issue had so much power over me.

Since applying two of the five strategies for breakthrough (a personal retreat and catharsis), doors have been opened for me to publish three articles, an offer to occupy a position as treasurer on a board for Latino politics was extended to me and a publisher offered me a contract agreement for my next book. All at once, everything just seems to fall out of heaven. I attribute my personal recovery, peace of mind and recent successes to identifying and applying Jesus' strategies for breakthrough.

About the Author

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