

# “Running on Empty”

(Luke 7:1-10)

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## I. Introduction

### A. The Lions and NFL

1. Now that we've given up on the Tigers
2. Could this be the year of the Lions?
3. The Green Bay dynasty
4. Bart Starr said about Vince Lombardi

I wasn't mentally tough before I met Coach Lombardi. I hadn't reached the point where I refused to accept second best. I was too nice at times. I don't believe that nice guys necessarily finish last. I think what Leo Durocher really meant is that nice guys don't finish first. To win, you have to have a certain amount of mental toughness. Coach Lombardi gave me that. *He taught me that you must have a flaming desire to win. It's got to dominate all your waking hours. It can't ever wane. It's got to glow in you all the time.* (Kramer, Lombardi, p. 86, emphasis mine).

### B. What glows in you?

1. Gordon MacDonald

*“That was the day I learned that the people in our world who rise to the top of business, sports, academia, science, and politics usually do it because they are fueled by passion”*

2. Passion and the successful Christian

- a. It glows in them
- b. True passion is what attracts the unsaved to certain followers of Christ

### C. When the glow dims

1. My years as a Superintendent
  - a. The two happiest days for parents?
    1. The day the kids get out of school for the summer
    2. ...and the day they go back to school
  - b. Even the students are excited....for two days

2. The excitement of a new Christian
  - a. “Don’t worry, she’ll settle down”

3. For many the passion has died
  - a. Teens raised in the church
  - b. As opposed to a recent convert

4. The testimony of a so called “mature” Christian

*“There was a time in my younger years when it all seemed to grab my imagination, Christ and faith, I mean. I really wanted to make my Christian commitment the absolute center of everything. But I’ve lost it, and so now I perform more out of habit than anything else.”*

When asked *“What drives you to keep on with the habits?”* he replied:.

*“I suppose only the fact that I’m getting to the point in life where it’s too late to change. My family life is all centered on Christian activities, and I don’t want to hurt my wife or the kids. And besides, life has been good to me. Why upset the routines that have gotten me this far? So I just keep chugging along.”*

5. Are you here out of habit?
  - a. Are you “just chugging along?”
6. Feel like you’re “running on empty?”

## **D. The setting in Luke 7**

1. Jesus has just completed “The Sermon on the Mount” in Luke 6

2. Now He puts on display what he just taught them

## **II. Text....Luke 7:1-10**

### **A. The Request (v. 1-5)**

*(1) When Jesus had finished saying all this in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum.*

1. Finished the Sermon on the Mount
2. *“he entered Capernaum” (v. 1)*
  - a. North coast of Sea of Galilee
    1. Close to where he preached
    2. Area of great miracles
    3. People followed Him there
  - b. Capernaum today?
    1. Ideal place for a city
    2. Desolate
    3. Why!
      - a. Jesus pronounced a curse
      - b. All those miracles and they failed to believe
      - c. Never rebuilt
    4. Only the ruins of a synagogue
      - a. Where Jesus taught
    5. Originally built by the man we’re going to meet
3. The request (v. 2-5)

*(2) There a centurion’s servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. (3) The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and*

*heal his servant. (4) When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, “This man deserves to have you do this, (5) because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue.”*

4. The centurion

- a. We don't know his name
- b. Each centurion led 100 men
  - 1. There were 60 centurions in a Roman Legion
  - 2. A total of 6,000 soldiers per Legion

5. Centurions always mentioned with honor in the Bible

- a. The centurion who recognized Jesus on the Cross as the Son of God
- b. Cornelius, the first Gentile convert to the Christian Church
- c. The centurion who suddenly discovered that Paul was a Roman citizen, and who rescued him from the fury of the rioting mob
- d. The centurion who was informed that the Jews had planned to murder Paul between Jerusalem and Caesarea, and who took steps to foil their plans
- e. The centurion whom Felix ordered to look after Paul
- f. The centurion accompanying Paul on his last journey to Rome, who treated him with every courtesy, and accepted him as leader when the storm struck the ship

6. What we know about this Centurion

*a. He was respected*

*(3) The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. (4) When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, “This man deserves to have you do this, (5) because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue.”*

- 1. Because of his position
- 2. But more than that...
- 3. Respected as a man by the Jews

- a. Incredible that Jews would help a Gentile
- b. And call him worthy

4. Why?

***b. He loved God***

- 1. He loved their nation
- 2. He single-handedly built their synagogue
- 3. It appears that he loved the God of Israel

***c. He was generous***

- 1. Must have had considerable wealth
- 2. America's 400 billionaires
  - a. Bill Gates and Warren Buffet
  - b. Dropping them a phone call...asking for half
- 3. The centurion put his money where his heart was
- 4. But there was more

***d. He had compassion***

***(2) There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. (3) The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant.***

- 1. Matthew 8:6 ***“Lord, my servant lies at home paralyzed and in terrible suffering”***
- 2. Roman world treated servants (slaves) like dirt

A slave was no better than a thing. A slave had no legal rights whatsoever; his master was free to treat him, or maltreat him, as he liked. Galus, the Roman legal expert, lays it down in his *Institutes*: “We may note that it is universally accepted that the master possesses the power of life and death over the slave.” Varro, the Roman writer on agriculture, has a grim passage in which he divides the instruments of agriculture into three classes—the articulate, the inarticulate and the mute, “the articulate comprising the slaves, the inarticulate comprising the cattle, and the

mute comprising the vehicles.” The only difference between a slave and a beast or a cart was that the slave could speak.

*e. He had faith in Jesus*

1. He had heard of Jesus and believed
2. Will see what Jesus said about his faith
7. How did Jesus respond to the request to heal his servant?

**B. The Response (v. 6-8)**

*(6) So Jesus went with them. He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him: “Lord, don’t trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. (7) That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. (8) For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and that one, ‘Come,’ and he comes. I say to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.”*

1. The response of Jesus was emphatic
  - a. Matthew 8:7 *“I will go and heal him”*
2. The centurion saw Jesus and the crowd approaching
3. Sent some friends with a message
  - a. *“I am not worthy”*
  - b. *“You need not come to my house”*
    1. Jews wouldn’t go into a Gentiles house
  - c. *“Just speak the word, Lord!”*
  - d. Realized the power and authority of Jesus
4. The response when Jesus heard this

*(9) When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, “I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel.”*

5. How much faith do you have?
6. When worry dims the glow of faith

- a. When sorrows steal the joy out of your life
- 7. When faith grows cynical and cold
  - a. Why does it happen?
- 8. Feel like you're running out of gas
- 9. Watching some of you grow tired
  - a. I sense it in your spirit
- 10. As troubles keep coming
  - a. Jobless
  - b. A child
  - c. Health
  - d. A spouse with Alzheimer's
  - e. Losing a parent
  - f. Marriage
- 11. Recession
  - a. You're tired and scared
- 12. Feel like the flight attendant on Jet Blue
  - a. Where's the exit?

### **Warning Signs of Burnout**

#### ***1. You're serving out of habit or obligation***

- a. But your heart's not in it

#### ***2. You devote more time to Christian activity and less to Christ***

- a. Doing more for God and less with God

#### ***3. You feel like you're running on empty***

- a. Have been putting out for years, but have failed to refuel
- b. There is nothing left inside
- c. Pit stops in NASCAR
- d. Some of you are nearly out of gas
  - 1. Trying to coast to the finish line

**4. *You've become irritable and easily put out.***

- a. Grouchy

**5. *You're impatient with your spouse and children.***

**6. *You're starting to turn into a cynic***

- a. "Have seen too many great plans fail in the local church"
- b. You've lost the vision
- c. Always looking for the problems in a program or person

**7. *You've become critical of others***

- a. Secretly critical of others
- b. Would rather be angry with a brother or sister than pray for them
- c. Intercessory prayer
  - 1. Salvation Army ladies leaving for America in 1860
    - a. Their Commander's prayer

*"Lord, these ladies are going to America to preach the gospel. If they are fully given up to Thee, be with them and bless them and grant them success. But if they are not faithful, drown them, Lord; drown them."*

- 2. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote:

*"Christian fellowship lives and exists by the intercession of its members for one another, or it collapses."*

*I can no longer condemn or hate a brother for whom I pray, no matter how much trouble he causes me. His face, hitherto may have been strange and intolerable to me, is transformed in intercession into the countenance of a brother for whom Christ died, the face of a forgiven sinner. This is a happy discovery for the Christian who begins to pray for others. There is no dislike, no personal tension, no estrangement that cannot be overcome by intercession as far as our side of it is concerned.*

*Intercessory prayer is the purifying bath into which the individual and the fellowship must enter every day. The struggle we undergo with our brother in intercession may be a hard one, but that struggle has the promise that it will gain its goal...to make intercession means to grant our brother the same right that we have received, namely to stand before Christ and share his mercy.” (Bonhoeffer, Life Together, quoted in Benson and Benson, Disciplines of the Inner Life, p. 71).*

### **8. You’ve placed “self” above the mission**

#### a. A pastor’s lament W.E. Sangster (*P. Sangster, Dr. Sangster, p. 90*)

- 1. I’m deceitful in that I often express private annoyance when a caller is announced and pretend pleasure when I actually greet them.*
- 2. I conclude that most of my study has been crudely ambitious: that I wanted degrees more than knowledge and praise rather than equipment for service.*
- 3. Even in my preaching I fear that I am more often wondering what the people think of me, than what they think about my Lord and His word.*
- 4. I have long felt that something was hindering the effectiveness of my ministry and I must conclude that the “something” is my failure in living the truly Christian life.*
- 5. I find slight envies in my heart at the greater success of other young ministers. I seem to match myself with them in thought and am vaguely jealous when they attract more notice than I do.*

#### b. Doing it for personal ambition

1. What do others think?
2. Personal recognition

## **C. The Reaction (v. 9)**

***(9) When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, “I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel.”***

1. Jesus marveled at his faith
2. What a shocking statement
  - a. Centurion represented the army of occupation
  - b. A Gentile!
3. Matthew records what Jesus said next

(Matthew 8:11-12)

***(11) I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. (12) But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.***

4. The Great Messianic Dinner (Isa 25:6)
  - a. Jews believed it was for them alone
  - b. No Gentiles allowed
  - c. Jews were the Sons of the Kingdom—of Abraham—Isaac—Jacob
  - d. Saved by birthright
5. But Jesus said that many from East and West shall sit
  - a. Gentiles
  - b. Shock!
6. But Sons of the Kingdom cast out
  - a. Darkness
  - b. Weeping and gnashing of teeth
  - c. Hell for sons of the Kingdom
  - d. Those without faith

7. I can't imagine their shock
  - a. They've had the truth and grown cold
  - b. The centurion heard the truth and had faith

#### **D. The Result (v. 10)**

*(10) Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well.*

1. Healed the servant because of Centurion's faith

### **III. Summary**

#### **A. Restoring your passion**

##### *a. Let go of your worries*

1. Philippians 4:6-7

*(6) Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. (7) And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

##### *b. Get quiet enough to hear God's whisper*

1. Quiet Time with God
2. Pray for those you don't like

##### *c. Develop a "refueling plan"*

1. Gordon MacDonald

Convictions generated from a genuine encounter with the living God create the passion to act and the strength to carry out the action.

2. Develop a personal plan

##### *d. Let God's Spirit have control*

1. MacDonald

We have over-complicated our God and His ways of coming to us.  
We have organized Him, strategized Him, and compartmentalized

Him. We have reduced His ways of working with us to cute little formulas, and we have stood off in our own corners critical of others who seek His face in ways that differ from our own temperaments or styles of perception. But it is clear that God longs to restore a spiritual passion within us.

*e. Rededicate yourself to Christ*

1. How long has it been?