

Red Lights on the Dashboard of Our Souls

By Steve Stuckey



It was a hot muggy day in August. I was driving home from the airport in my pickup. As I approached the freeway off ramp to Pasadena, I happened to glance at the temperature gage. To my horror the needle was all the way to the “H” for hot. My mind instantly imagined buckets of boiling water spewing from the radiator and the engine bursting into flames. Since my office was only a short distance away, I decided to nurse the truck down the road a few more blocks. When I reached the office I pulled the truck underneath a shady tree. I went inside, found a pail of cold water to cool things down, and then I called my mechanic.

Inter Varsity staff lead hectic, fast paced lives. We work with college students who are among the most high-energy humans on the planet. We deal with the weighty subjects of spiritual life and death. We are required to serve, listen, and lead in an ambiguous environment. Over time the work can take its toll on the souls of those who minister in the name of Christ. Spiritual fatigue and depression can settle over our hearts like a dark rainy cloud. Doubt and despair can overtake and sideline us from our journey. Our relationship with God can become empty drudgery. It would be nice if there were warning indicators to alert us when our spiritual engines were becoming overheated. Maybe there are. Before you are reduced to a weepy, drooling puddle of bones, or explode in a fiery rage and join the local Hare Krishna group, consider these red lights on the dashboard of your soul.

It’s an impossible job- The Lord Jesus invites us to partner with him in the human transformation business. He wants to change hearts- ours and those we serve- so that we think, feel and act as he would if he were us. I can think of no task more daunting. The roots of pride, lust, anger, and self-deception grip our souls like crabgrass in June. On our own, we are powerless to pull them out of our own lives much less out of any one else’s heart. And that is the point. Jesus simply said, *Apart from me you can do nothing... No branch can bear fruit by itself.* John 15:4-5 If we lose the sense that the work we are called to is impossible, it’s times to pull our selves off the road of life for a while, cool down and call for help. We were never meant to carry the load alone.

When you stop praying- When you take time to pray, you will not have time to do something else. Something practical on your to-do-list will not get checked off for the day. In addition, to pray and listen to the Spirit usually requires a peaceful heart. If we are stirred up inside by a whirlwind of distractions we will not be able to settle our bodies down long enough to connect with the one who loves us. So there are lots of reasons not to pray but they are all nullified by this one fact. The resources of our heaven, which we must have to do the Father’s impossible work, are only released when we ask. Jesus said, *“If you abide in me and I abide in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be given to you”.* John 15:7 If you find that you have stopped praying for yourself and your students on a consistent basis, stop the car and take time for a spiritual tune up.

Sinners in need of healing- I am a people pleaser and affirmation from those I serve is the elixir my heart longs for. InterVarsity staff are the people I work with most of the time. They tend to be a more critical audience than most so I have learned to adjust my expectations. Recently I met with a group of

young students to discuss beginning a chapter on their campus. They were eager for help. They believed and wrote down everything I said. They gushed with appreciation over my suggestions. When the meeting was over, I walked back to the parking lot thinking, "I am a God." I was drunk on their praise. My stupor lasted twenty minutes until I got home and met the people who know the real me. There are no saints sleeping on my side of the bed, only a sinner in need of God's grace. If you find yourself losing a sense of your sin, a red light is blinking and the needle is moving to "H". Stop what you are doing.

Disintegration- Luke tells the story of Martha.(Luke 10: 38-42) She owned a home along with her sister Mary and her brother Lazarus in the town of Bethany. Jesus enjoyed staying with the family on his visits to the area. Martha was a skilled hostess. She probably had the cleanest house and served the most delicious meals of anyone in the town. She loved making things just right for her guests. On one occasion she had a houseful of disciples staying for a couple of days. The hours spent cooking and cleaning wore her out. The text says that she was *distracted* by all of her work. The Greek word used means *torn or pulled apart*. The experience left her raw and angry. Her "lazy" sister sat at the feet of Jesus and refused to lift a finger to help out. Martha then demanded that Jesus do something to resolve her crisis but he refused, instead defending Mary's choice. Martha was falling apart, coming unglued, and fragmenting into little pieces. Her will was driving her in one direction, her tired emotions and body going in another. The red lights of her soul were burning brightly. In the midst of her disintegration, Jesus speaks the integrating word, "one. " Only one thing was really needed. When we are in the presence of Jesus, wholeness and unity of mind, body, and spirit become ours. The process is not immediate but it does happen. If your consistent experience of life is one of being pulled apart by all that you have to do, slow down and seek help. You were not meant to live a hurried, frantic, distracted existence according to Jesus.

The Joy of Heaven- Our relationship with Jesus, of being connected to him, joined to him, at one with him is at the core of our identity as Christians. Jesus compared it to that of branches that were organically connected to the vine. The union is so close that the life giving sap from the vine sustains and produces fruit on the branches. It is a relationship that will affect us at all levels of our being. How we feel, what we think about, the decisions we make, and how we make them will transform us from the inside out. One byproduct of an intimate relationship with God the Father, Son, and Spirit is joy. The eternal joy that they share with one another is shared with us. It is a joy that is tied not to accomplishment and checking things off on our to-do-list but to love. We are known and loved by the most wonderful being in the universe. He is watching over us moment by moment. He has prepared a place for us to be with him at the end of time. His joy brings deep satisfaction to our hungry souls. If you begin to sense a waning of that joy, slow down. Spend a day in silent retreat. Ask yourself these questions. Who has God become for me? What words and images would I use to describe him? When did I last spend an extended time in his presence? What has been my pace of life? What am I carrying that is his alone to carry?

The Lord Jesus calls us to a life filled with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness, goodness, and self-control. He will supply us with what we need to run like a well-tuned car down the road of life. But keep an eye on your dashboard. If a red light starts to blink or the needle moves to the "H", stop for a while and let the master mechanic of your saintly soul look under your hood.

