

Solving burnout: A (very) Old Solution

Here's a few things I want:

A thriving career. Strong relationships. Great health. Time for hobbies. Financial stability. And inner peace.

It's exhausting.

Most often, what I'm describing shows up as obligations: I have to succeed at work or else I'll fail myself or my family, I have to work out or else I won't be attractive, I have to make time for my family or else I'm a bad adult.

All of those things started out as things we wanted: a family. A dream career. Deep friendships. But they become obligations.

Trying to excel at everything at once, I realized, led to mediocrity in all of them.

Life's too short. The moment you focus on one thing, an unshakable guilt for not doing another rears its ugly head.

The pursuit of having it all simultaneously leads to burnout. This made me question, what if I've been approaching life wrong . . .

What if balance isn't about juggling everything all the balls?

That there is a way to have it all. Just not all at once.

The secret lies in embracing seasons. Focused periods of intensity followed by deliberate shifts. Like nature itself, our lives need rhythm. Work and rest. Doing and being. Acceleration and recovery.

This approach isn't about sacrifice. It's about sequence. Not limitation, but liberation.

Let me show you how to stop drowning in overwhelm and start thriving through seasonal living.

The silent creep of stuff

I got back from Mexico last Saturday. Was there for four months with the family.

On Sunday, Alison and I cleaned the cupboards of our house. Being away made us look at our home with fresh eyes. What we saw was a whole lot of junk that no longer served us.

Here's an incomplete list of what we threw out, recycled, or donated:

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- 34 water bottles.
- User manuals left behind by the previous owners of our house for appliances we no longer own.
- An entire drawer full of used batteries and burned out lightbulbs.

In addition, I've delegated all of my social media in preparation for my third child, due May 15th.

I've left Toronto for four months every year over the last 13 years. The real reason isn't a chase for year-round sun. I do it because leaving and coming back marks a stop and a start. A change of seasons.

And yeah, I know that seasons change in Toronto. But do you change your schedule with the changing seasons?

Broken ancestral rhythms

There's a spot 20 minutes from where we live in Mexico called [Punta Monterrey](#). It's unique in that the entire bay is owned by the same family. They've built a little eco-resort. Alison and I love to go. It's nothing fancy.

There's nothing to do there.

It resets our natural rhythms.

No internet. Nothing to do. The ocean laps back and forth and the sun sets and the stars come out and it gets dark and we go to bed.

I don't like going there for just one night.

The first night feels weird. Like, awkward. We don't quite know what to do with ourselves. But then we settle into it.

Alison brings some art or knitting, I bring a few books. We play card games. There's no frenetic escape like reaching for a phone just to "check in," flip on social media, whatever. After the initial dopamine drop, we both feel like our bodies completely relax. It doesn't take long. Two days or so. Our bodies respond almost instantly.

That's because we're remembering something our ancestors never forgot.

Before the lightbulb was invented, it got dark, people stubbed their toe, and took their ass to bed. Spring, summer, and fall were more active times (hunting, gathering, whatever), and in the winter people chilled with their family. I'm sure it was harsh. But it was natural.

The lightbulb and clock forced natural time to surrender to artificial time. Every day the same. No stops. No starts. The same jobs year-round, ignoring the seasonal rhythms our bodies crave.

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In our pursuit of efficiency, we've become more machine, less human. It's mechanical. Unnatural.

No wonder we burn out.

Goethe once said, "Wherever a man may happen to turn, whatever a man may undertake, he will always end up by returning to that path which nature has marked out for him." We're wired for the world we evolved in. How the world was. Not how the world is.

We're wired to have seasons.

Stops.

Starts.

Periods of work followed by periods of rest.

Without contrast, we are blind. The dark is how we see the light.

The power of endpoints

Each end is a new beginning; a time to review and reassess your priorities.

Over the course of a season, we add, but rarely subtract. We add tasks, commitments, responsibilities, meetings, and even physical things. These additions are never-ending unless we define an end. Like a spring cleaning, the start of a new season is a time to refresh. To subtract.

Whenever I'd leave Toronto, I packed my backpack, cleared my calendar, tidied up my things, and set off. Once it was time to return home, I went through the same process. This duality gave me an opportunity to do a reset—a spring cleaning of sorts—with what I own, my calendar, and my commitments.

Every time that I leave one place, I find myself excited for the next. If I'd felt burned out in Toronto before I left, I was excited to return—not just excited to sleep in my bed again, but excited to reset my schedule, reprioritize my commitments, and start over.

Renewal. The restoring of freshness. When something ends, even for a short period of time, and restarts, you feel invigorated and revitalized. Excited. There's no limit for how often you can repeat this cycle. A new project at work. A weekend away from your family. The beginning of a baseball season (even if your team is perennially disappointing).

The Slinky Effect: When absurdity becomes invisible

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This reminds me of the time we got home after four months in Nicaragua and Mexico. The kids were playing, happy to see their toys again. Alison and I went upstairs to put our backpacks down.

We walked into our bedroom and start laughing.

Our bed has four pillars. Over a year earlier, Calvin made a giant spiderweb across the top of it with Alison's yarn. In the middle of the web, hanging down, I kid you not, was a slinky.

That thing hung there for a year. My wife and I slept under a spiderweb that caught a slinky for over a year. It was cute when Calvin did that when he was five. He would be turning seven in a week. Maybe it shouldn't exist anymore.



It's easy to fall into patterns. To lazily accept even the silliest additions to our lives. To never ask whether something helps us, hurts us, takes up space, or, in this case, makes any freaking sense. To keep things how they are because that's how they were.

How much stuff exists in your home or life that any outsider would tell you needs to go?

How many things are you currently doing that you don't need to do but have always done and so you blindly keep doing it?

What is it in your life that's "just there", that no longer needs to be there?

I call this **The Slinky Effect**—when we get so used to the weird and silly things in our lives that we don't even notice them anymore. These "slinkys" accumulate in our careers, relationships, possessions, and daily routines until we live lives we never consciously chose.

And that's the problem.

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In a modern world designed to distract us, we don't actively architect our lives. We default into them.

Breaking out of burnout by reclaiming seasonality

Ask not whether you should have seasons, but how to create them.

Here's a few ideas:

For Parents with Young Children

Try taking a micro-seasons approach: Test out 6:2 week cycles or maybe even 30:10 day sprints. For example, try dedicating 30 days to intensely focus on a career project while maintaining baseline parenting duties, then shift focus to family enrichment for the next 10 days with special outings or quality time.

Synchronize your seasons with your partner: Coordinate complementary seasons, where one takes on more household/childcare responsibilities while the other intensifies focus on personal development or career advancement. This creates a fair rhythm where both partners get opportunities for focused growth. Just make sure that you also do a season focused on one another.

Seasonal Childcare Investments: For a defined 8-12 week season, invest in additional childcare specifically allocated to your focus area. The temporary nature makes the expense more manageable, and the clear time boundary helps manage guilt. Three months of additional childcare might yield years of benefits from your focused progress.

For Those with Demanding Careers

Project-Based Seasons: Corporate professionals can align seasonal focus with natural business cycles. Schedule an intensive relationship or health season during quieter business periods, for example.

Weekend Intensity: Dedicate entire weekends to seasonal focus on a side-hustle or relationship over the weekend in a concentrated time-frame, while maintaining career demands during weekdays.

Vacation Season Intensives: Instead of taking a day-off here, and a day-off there, batch your time off and take longer breaks for 1-2 weeks of complete immersion. Use accumulated time off for transformation rather than relaxation—a fitness camp, writing retreat, or relationship reconnection—creating compressed seasons of growth.

For Those with Financial Constraints

Investment Seasons vs. Harvest Seasons: Alternate between seasons that require financial investment (education, equipment, coaching) and seasons focused on monetizing those

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investments. This creates a sustainable cycle where each investment season is funded by the previous harvest season.

Community-Based Seasons: Partner with others in similar situations to share resources during intensive seasons—childcare swaps, skill exchanges, or accountability groups that multiply individual capacity without additional cost.

Bartering Seasons: Dedicate a season to leveraging what you already have to get what you need. Trade your existing skills, time, or assets for the resources necessary for your transformation. For example, offer social media management to a fitness coach in exchange for training.

These seasonal approaches all share one powerful truth:

Focused intensity beats scattered consistency.

By dedicating specific periods to different priorities, you make real progress instead of treading water in everything.

Finding your rhythm

The specifics don't matter as much as the commitment to focused seasons. Whatever your circumstances, find the approach that works for you. The alternative—remaining perpetually scattered across all priorities—guarantees stagnation.

Heck, you could build in a seasonal rhythm by spending part of your day going fast. Crush a workout. Dive deep into your work. Then spend the rest of your day going slow. Walk. Read. Get coffee with a friend. Avoid the anxious middle, never fully on, never fully off.

Stop chasing balance. Embrace the power of seasons. They're your escape from perpetual mediocrity. From stagnation. From burnout.

The only way to live an extraordinary life is to surrender the need to be everything, everywhere, all at once.

So, take a moment today to identify your first 'season' and one priority to focus on.

Then look around for the slinkys hanging in your life—those accumulated obligations that no longer serve you.

Cut them down.

Stop chasing balance and embrace the power of seasons.

-Jon

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