

Practical Ministry Skills: Rest and Renewal for Busy Church Leaders



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Leader's Guide

How to use "Practical Ministry Skills" by BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS in your regularly scheduled meetings.

Welcome to BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS: Your Complete Guide to Leadership Training. You've purchased an innovative resource that will help you develop leaders who can think strategically and biblically about the church. Selected by the editors of Building Church Leaders, the material comes from respected thinkers and church leaders.

"Practical Ministry Skills" is completely flexible and designed for easy use. Each theme focuses on a practical area of church ministry and offers brief handouts on specific aspects of that ministry. You may use these handouts at the beginning of a meeting to help launch a discussion, or you may hand them out as brief primers for someone new to a particular ministry.

This special theme on **Rest and Renewal for Busy Church Leaders** is designed to help church leaders consider ways to work in more opportunities for rest and renewal amid all the pressures and busyness of daily ministry. You may either use these handouts for personal development or for a group training session. Or you may choose to provide copies to the church board, staff members, or those involved with specific ministry teams at your church. Simply print the handouts you need and use them as necessary.

For help in resetting your life to the rhythm of the Sabbath, see "A Steady Rhythm" (pp. 3–6) and "A Day Off from God Stuff" (pp. 9–11). To better understand the importance and practice of solitude, see "Time Well Wasted" (pp. 7–8). In "Get a (Balanced!) Life" (pp. 12–15), you'll consider the example your life communicates to those you lead. "Staying Alive" (pp. 16–20) offers wisdom for balancing the burdens of ministry. Consider the need for seasons devoted to rest in "Time to Breathe" (pp. 21–22) and consider the key role of hope to renewal in "Hope Matters" (pp. 23–24).

We hope this training tool will guide your efforts to make rest and renewal a regular part of your ministry life.

Need more material or something on a specific topic? See our website at www.BuildingChurchLeaders.com.

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REST AND RENEWAL FOR BUSY CHURCH LEADERS



Finding a Steady Rhythm

The not-so-secret key to effective ministry and leadership.
Mark 6:30–32

At a staff meeting in a church I was serving, we were discussing how we could attract more people to join the church and increase their involvement. Someone did the math and pointed out that there were already at least five time commitments *per week* expected of those who wanted to become church members!

Outwardly I tried to be supportive of the meeting's purpose, but on the inside I was screaming, *Who would want to sign up for this?* I was already trying to combat CFS (Christian Fatigue Syndrome) in my own life and couldn't imagine willingly inflicting it on someone else.

How is it that life in and around the church often gets reduced to so much activity, so much busyness, such incessant expectations?

As I looked around the planning table that day, I realized one of the main reasons church life is full of so much activity and busyness: this is the way its leaders are living.

Most of us know only one speed: full steam ahead. And we have been stuck in that speed for a very long time. If we do not establish saner rhythms in our own lives—life patterns that curb our unbridled activism and calm our compulsive busyness—we will not make it over the long haul. And neither will the people we are leading!

Work Hard, Rest Faithfully

Jesus understood how quickly our passions, even the most noble, can wear us out if we're not careful. Early in his ministry with the disciples, he began to teach them about the importance of establishing sane rhythms of work and rest.

In Mark 6, Jesus commissioned the disciples for ministry and gave them the authority to cast out demons, to preach the gospel, and to heal the sick. They went off on their first ministry excursion and returned excited about their newfound power and influence. They crowded around Jesus to report all they had done.

But what did Jesus do? He didn't seem to have much time for their ministry reports. Immediately he instructed them "to come away with me and rest awhile." He seemed more concerned about helping them establish a rhythm that would sustain them in ministry rather than allowing them to be overly enamored by ministry success, which can lead to a compulsion to do more and more without ceasing.

When we keep pushing forward without taking adequate time for rest, our way of life may seem heroic, but there is frenetic quality to our work that lacks true effectiveness because we lose the ability to be fully present. Present to God and present to other people. And we lose the ability to discern what is really needed in our situation.

The result can be "sloppy desperation," a mental and spiritual state in which we're just trying to get it all done. And this prevents us from the quality of presence that delivers true insight and spiritual leadership.

Charles, a gifted physician, illustrates the point: "I discovered in medical school that if I saw a patient when I was tired or overworked, I would order a lot of tests. I was so exhausted, I couldn't tell exactly what was going on, so I got in the habit of ordering a battery of tests, hoping they would tell me what I was missing.

"But when I was rested, if I had the opportunity to get some sleep or go for a quiet walk, then when I saw the next patient, I could rely on my intuition and experience to give me an accurate reading of what was happening. When I could take the time to listen and be present with them and their illness, I was almost always right."

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When we are depleted, we become overly reliant on clamoring voices outside of us for direction. We react to symptoms rather than seeking to understand and respond to underlying causes. We rely on other people's ministry models because we are too tired to listen and observe our setting and craft something uniquely suited for this place.

When we are rested, we bring steady, alert attention to our leadership and are characterized by discernment of what is truly needed in our situation. And we have the energy and creativity to carry it out.

Rhythms of Engagement and Retreat

One of the most important rhythms for those of us in ministry is to establish a constant back-and-forth motion between engagement and retreat. We need regular times to engage in the battle, giving our best energy to the task. Then we need regular times when we step back to gain perspective, re-strategize, and tend our wounds—an inevitability of life in ministry.

An occupational hazard for us in Christian ministry is that it can be hard to distinguish between the times we are “on,” working *for* God, and times when we can just *be with* God to replenish our own soul. Our time with Scripture can be reduced to a textbook or a tool for ministry rather than an intimate communication from God to us personally. Even prayer can become an exhausting round of different kinds of mental activity, or a public display of our spiritual prowess.

Times of extended retreat give us a chance to come home to God's presence and to be open with God, in utter privacy, about what is true of us. This is important for us and for those we serve.

When we repress what is real in our lives and just keep soldiering on, we get weary from holding it in and eventually it leaks out in ways that are damaging to ourselves and to others.

But on retreat there is time and space to attend to what is real in our own lives—to celebrate the joys, grieve the losses, shed tears, sit with our questions, feel our anger, attend to our loneliness—and allow God to be with us in those places.

These are not times for problem solving, because not everything can be fixed or solved. On retreat we rest ourselves in God and wait on him to do what is needed, and we return to the battle with fresh energy and keener insight.

Silence and Word

“In the multitude of words there is much transgression,” the Scriptures say. This is a truth that can drive us ministry folks to despair given the incessant flow of words we feel compelled to issue from our mouths, pens, and computers. Those of us who deal in words are at great risk of misusing them and even sinning with our words due to the sheer volume of them!

I don't know about you, but sometimes I can literally feel it—deep in my bones—that if I do not shut my mouth for a while, I will get myself in trouble, because my words will be completely disconnected from the reality of God in my own life. Silence is the only cure for this desperate situation.

“Right speech comes out of silence, and right silence comes out of speech,” wrote Dietrich Bonhoeffer. In silence our speech patterns are refined because silence fosters a self-awareness that enables us to choose more truly the words that we say.

Rather than speech that issues from our subconscious needs to impress, to put others in their place, to compete, control, and manipulate, to put a good spin on things, we are able to notice our inner dynamics and make choices that are more grounded in love, trust, and God-given wisdom.

The psalmist says, “When you are disturbed, do not sin; ponder it on your bed and be silent. Offer right sacrifices (in other words, stay faithful to your spiritual practices) and put your trust in the Lord.”

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At times the most heroic thing you, as leader, can do is to remain in that private place with God for as long as it takes to consciously trust yourself to God rather than to everything else you could be doing in the moment.

Stillness and Action

Practicing rhythms of silence and words, stillness and action, helps us learn to wait on God—which doesn't come easily for those of us accustomed to busily trying to make things happen. It takes energy to be restrained, to wait for the work of God in our lives and in the situations we face.

But the more I am called upon to use words, the more distressing things are, the more active leadership that is required of me—the more silence I need.

It is an embarrassing little secret, common among leaders, and we need to be more honest about it: buried deep in the psyche of many leaders is a Superman mentality. We believe that somehow we are not like other human beings, and we can function beyond normal human limitations and save the world, or at least our little corner of the world. This is a myth that we indulge to our own peril.

Sabbath keeping is the primary discipline that helps us live within the limits of our humanity and to honor God as our Creator. It is the key to a life lived in sync with the rhythms that God himself built into our world. Yet it is the discipline that seems hardest for us to live.

Sabbath keeping honors the body's need for rest, the spirit's need for replenishment, and the soul's need to delight itself in God for God's own sake.

It begins with the willingness to acknowledge the limits of our humanness and then to take steps to begin to live more graciously within the order of things.

And the first order of things is that we are creatures and God is the creator. God is the only one who is infinite; I, on the other hand, must learn to live within the physical limits of time and space and the human limits of strength and energy.

There are limits to my relational, emotional, mental and spiritual capacities as well. I am not God. God is the only one who can be all things to all people. God is the only one who can be two places at once. God is the one who never sleeps. I am not.

This is pretty basic stuff, but many of us live as though we don't know it.

Sabbath keeping may be the most challenging rhythm for leaders to establish because Sunday, in most churches, has become a day of Christian busyness—perhaps the busiest! And, of course, the busiest person on that day is the pastor!

This just means that pastors need to set aside another day for their Sabbath. Or they might consider ordering their church's life so that everyone learns how to practice Sabbath. It could begin with worship, but then everyone goes home and rests and delights for the rest of the day because there are no other church activities. In that way, the pastor's commitment to Sabbath becomes a blessing for everyone.

Sabbath keeping is a way of ordering one's whole life to honor the rhythm of things—work and rest, fruitfulness and dormancy, giving and receiving, being and doing, activism and surrender. The day itself is set apart, devoted completely to rest, worship, and delighting in God and his good gifts. And the rest of the week must be lived in such a way as to make Sabbath possible.

There is something deeply spiritual about honoring the limitations of our human existence. We are physical and spiritual beings in a world of time and space. A peace descends upon us when we accept what is real rather than always pushing beyond our limits. By being gracious, accepting, and gentle with ourselves at least once a week, we're enabled to be gracious, accepting, and gentle with others.

There is a freedom that comes from being who we are in God and resting into God. This eventually enables us to bring something truer to the world than all of our striving.

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Sabbath keeping helps us to live within our limits because on the Sabbath, in so many different ways, we allow ourselves to be the creature in the presence of our Creator. We touch something more real than what we are able to produce on our own. We touch our very being in God.

Surely that is what the people around us need most.

For details about spiritual retreats for pastors led by Ruth Barton, visit www.nationalpastorsconvention.com.

—RUTH HALEY BARTON is author of *Sacred Rhythms* and co-founder of www.thetransformingcenter.org; adapted from our sister publication *Leadership Journal*, © 2007 Christianity Today. For more articles like this, visit www.LeadershipJournal.net.

Discuss

1. How would you define the rhythm of your life? Is this a sustainable rhythm? What would a sustainable rhythm look like?
2. When has busyness or lack of energy affected your response in a ministry situation? What are the signs that you have reached this state? How could you avoid reaching it in the future?
3. How does your current pace reflect your understanding of your own limits? To what extent have you been trying to fill roles that only God can fill in people's lives?



Time Well Wasted

Why you need downtime, and how to spend it.

Luke 5:15–16

Most pastors don't waste enough time.

At least that's my conviction. But wasting time well is an acquired skill, because there is good wasting and there is bad wasting. Bad time wasting is the "hang around/watch TV/perform random online search" kind that leaves you with less life than you started with. You may be doing it right now. I don't need to say any more about that, except to stop.

The good kind of time-wasting will actually lead you to be more connected with God and more full of life. But it's hard to engage in this kind, because there are always more pressing matters. This isn't really wasting time, of course, but our culture makes it feel as though it is.

There are three categories for these well-wasted times:

1. The Discipline of Solitude

I used to think that solitude would involve pure, unadulterated prayer and intense spiritual activity; and because it is not, I never do solitude without a sense of wasting time. I have learned that wasting time is fundamental to solitude. People often want to know what you're supposed to do when you go into solitude. But this is the wrong question. The point of solitude is what you don't do.

Spiritual disciplines can be categorized as practices of abstinence and practices of engagement. In abstinence, I refrain from doing what I normally do. In engagement, I practice what I normally do not do.

Solitude is essentially a discipline of abstinence. In solitude I withdraw from relationships and noise and stimulation and see what there is when I am alone with God. The point of solitude is not what I *do*—it is what I *don't* do. I get away from all the voices and demands of my life and find out about what my little life is like when all the distractions are removed.

The primary gift I find in solitude is freedom. After time alone, I begin to remember that what other people think of me matters very little. Those people all have their own lives; they will all die one day and take their applause and criticisms with them. I'm always aware of this, but in solitude I come to feel it deeply. I feel a sense of peace that I treasure. A Bible or a journal may be fine for solitude, but they are not necessary. The primary thing to remember about solitude is just: don't do anything.

(Interestingly enough, the Sabbath was described in Exodus in terms of "not-doing"—"on it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals ...")

2. Musing

A second form of time-wasting is musing, or listening. Here I bring before God my concerns. Often for me this involves either family or ministry. I am worried about one of my children. I am concerned about the health of my team. I am unsure about whether our ministry is functioning well.

I spread these out before God, and then I listen. This listening is a form of prayer, but it is prayer that involves thinking and imagination and asking questions. Often I will ask God at the beginning for wisdom regarding next steps. I might write down some ideas. It will often lead to plans.

It's important not to mix up the discipline of solitude with planning or musing. When I plan, I am hoping for an outcome. But by its nature, solitude as a practice requires letting go of all outcomes. When I am engaging in solitude for God's sake, I am not trying to get anything out of it; the pressure of wanting something keeps me from the very freedom God wants to give. But when I am musing over a concern, I am very much hoping for some next step to take.

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3. Production Enhancement

The best example of this third kind of time wasting is a cow. A cow is a miracle on four legs, producing milk that fuels all kinds of people. But if you look carefully at a cow throughout the day, it looks remarkably unproductive. It spends hours chewing and then re-chewing. It takes less than five minutes to get the milk that it took 24 hours to produce.

But when you're creating milk, you just can't make it go any faster. There are limits in the creativity game.

If you are going to create, you need some time to chew the grass and stare into space.

In my experience, the more creative the person, the more space-staring they need to do. You can make instant coffee. But milk takes time.

For me, production-enhancement time wasting usually involves some activity that I love just for its own sake. I read history. I go to the ocean and stare at the waves. I do a crossword puzzle. I call up a friend. I put a fire in the fire pit outside. I play the piano.

How do you waste time badly? How do you waste time well? Are you wasting time adequately? If you find yourself feeling inwardly free, if you find yourself with all the ideas you need for planning, if you find yourself in a creative ferment, then you should probably stick to your current schedule. If not, you might want to re-think how you're wasting time.

Enough for today; time to go back to work.

—JOHN ORTBERG is editor at large of *LeadershipJournal*, and senior pastor of Menlo Park Presbyterian Church in California; adapted from our sister publication *Leadership Journal*, © 2009 Christianity Today. For more articles like this, visit www.LeadershipJournal.net.

Discuss

1. Which of these three types of “time wasters” is most natural for you? Which is most difficult? What are you missing out on by not making time for each type in your schedule?
2. Do you feel you have the freedom to “waste time” in these ways? Who could help keep you accountable as you seek to incorporate some of these practices into your routine?
3. What are reasons you would not be able to fit these practices into your schedule? Are any of these reasons simply excuses?

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A Day Off from God Stuff

What is a Sabbath rest for pastors, when you handle holy things all week long?

Mark 2:27

Some pastors observe Sabbath well. Their day away from work is markedly different from the other six, and there is something special and holy about what they do—and don't do—on that day. For others, the Sabbath feels like another work day, another day of handling holy things that—even with the best of intentions—seems to have nothing particularly holy about it. It isn't set apart. It isn't even restful.

When you work with holy things all week long, what is it you are resting from when Sabbath finally arrives?

Ben, the pastor of a small urban congregation in Seattle, keeps a Sunday Sabbath. He is alone quite a bit during the week, so he relishes his time with people on Sunday mornings at church and with his wife's extended family in the afternoon.

For Ben, the heart of the Sabbath is appreciating what God has given him. He makes an effort to walk slowly around the church building on Sundays in order to be present to the gift of the moment and the place. At coffee hour, he tries not to talk church business with parishioners. Instead, he tries to enjoy them. He does the same with his children. He figures six days a week is enough to try to shape his children and teach them. On Sundays, he simply enjoys who they are and how they are growing. He tries to do small household tasks like emptying the dishwasher so his wife can also have a Sabbath.

Marva Dawn, a Christian theologian, writer and speaker, has described a Sunday Sabbath pattern similar to Ben's. She is willing to engage in ministry on Sundays in the form of speaking or preaching, but she will not do any work of preparation on that day. A Sunday Sabbath affirms the connection between corporate worship and resting in God, but for many pastors, Sunday morning is such hard work that it doesn't provide the rest God intends.

Ann, another pastor of a church in the Seattle area, keeps a Friday Sabbath. She has been a faithful Sabbath keeper for more than 30 years. She found as she entered her 50s that she needed longer than 24 hours in order to feel rested. So she begins her Sabbath at dinnertime on Thursday and usually continues her Sabbath until bedtime on Friday.

For Ann, the heart of the Sabbath is taking off all the roles she wears during the week: pastor, teacher, building administrator, worship planner, etc. On the Sabbath, she slides gratefully into the role of beloved child of God—and nothing else. She describes it as comfortable clothes that she looks forward to wearing each week. She spends the time largely alone, reading fiction, walking on a beach, riding a ferry.

Over the years, Ann has negotiated Sabbath practices with several roommates and vacation partners. Ann doesn't want questions or comments about work on her Sabbath day. Abraham Heschel, in [The Sabbath](#), suggests that we should cease from work and also from thoughts of work on this day of rest. Ann would agree.

Ann's Sabbath is similar to the pattern Eugene Peterson describes in several of his books, a day of rest not connected to a Sunday worship service. When Peterson was a pastor, he and his wife, Jan, spent Mondays hiking. On the first half of the hike, they kept silent, and on the way back, they talked with each other.

Two Sabbath Commands

Ben and Ann have adopted practices that dovetail with the two versions of the Sabbath command in the Ten Commandments. The nine other commands are very similar in the two versions of the commandments in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, but the fourth commandment differs significantly, beginning with the opening imperative verb. "Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy" (Ex. 20:8, NRSV). The second version begins with "observe" (Deut. 5:12). These two verbs capture significant aspects of the Sabbath challenge. A healthy, obedient, and life-giving Sabbath involves habits of observance as well as a commitment to remember.

The pastors mentioned earlier have built patterns of observance into their lives, as well as the spiritual discipline of remembering. Ben remembers God's blessings and abundance by taking the time to notice them.

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By stepping out of her many roles, Ann remembers that she is God's child, loved quite apart from what she does.

The two Sabbath commands give different reasons for keeping the Sabbath. In the Exodus version, Sabbath is commanded because "in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day" (Ex. 20:11). In the second version, God wants the Israelites to remember that they were slaves in Egypt and "the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm" (Deut. 5:15).

These two commands reflect the two central acts of God in human history: God as Creator and God as Redeemer. A helpful reflection for Sabbath observance begins here.

What practices help you experience God as Creator? Perhaps walking, hiking, biking, gardening, painting, or reading poetry? What practices help you experience the freedom God has given us in Christ, our redemption from slavery? Turning off the computer, the phone, or the TV? Putting away the Blackberry or calendar? Turning off worry or the temptation to obsess with ministry issues? These are practices to consider for a Sabbath observance.

For people whose life revolves around ministry, these two reasons for Sabbath observance can be helpful in another way too. Christians are called to partner with God in sustaining the creation and redeeming the world. Our profession is heavily weighted on the redemption side. We spend our days creating structures and working with individuals to help people grasp the great gift of redemption and eternal life we have in Jesus Christ.

On the Sabbath, then, those of us in ministry professions may benefit most and honor God most by engaging with God as Creator. We rest from our partnership with God in redeeming the world by acknowledging God is Creator as well as Redeemer.

One pastor spends the first few hours after the Sunday worship service riding his bike or gardening. Another man who works in student ministry enjoys working out at the gym on Sundays, exercising his body, a part of the physical creation. Ann walks on the beach on her Sabbath. When I drive somewhere on my Sabbath, I drive more slowly and try to notice clouds, trees, and flowers. When I cook on the Sabbath, I pay attention to the color and texture of the vegetables as I cut them, and I pause to enjoy the smells coming from the pans.

In Jewish tradition, prayers of intercession are too much work for the Sabbath, and prayers of gratitude are encouraged. Thankfulness prayers help us remember God our Creator.

One of my favorite Sabbath activities is to sit on the sofa in our living room staring into space, idly watching the big tree outside the window. I find myself expressing wordless thanks to God for the beauty of the tree and the squirrels that run along its branches, and for the warmth and comfort of the room.

Sometimes those prayers of thanks grow larger, and I remember people I love and the joys of the work I do, and I thank God for them as well. But often the prayers of thanks remain focused on the tree, the squirrels, and my contentment at that moment. God made them, and I rest in gratitude for those gifts.

In the same way that Ann relishes her role as God's beloved child on the Sabbath day, so I relish my place as a creature lovingly made by my Creator. The tree and the squirrels were wondrously and beautifully fashioned by God. As I rest in my role as creature, I remember that I too receive the same careful attention from my Creator.

I am beloved as God's creature.

Resting from Our Families?

One of the challenges for people in ministry involves family members. If our ministry leaves us fatigued from contact with people, how can we then embrace time with family members on our Sabbath?

A husband and wife who both work with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship take a two-day Sabbath if at all possible. They spend Sunday with their young children doing family activities. Then on Monday they take turns spending time with the kids and time alone. In the morning, one of them will pray, journal, read, and think while the other takes care of the children. In the afternoon, they switch.

Two keys to happy Sabbaths with young children are to eliminate multi-tasking and to reduce expectations of a profound spiritual experience with the children. Simply enjoying them, without trying to get something else done at the same time, can be quite refreshing and honors the gift from God that comes to us in children. A

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short Bible story, an easy craft activity, or a brief prayer time can help to keep the focus on God, but too much stress on those activities can turn the day of rest into work.

Time with a spouse also needs to be considered. In my early years as an associate pastor, before the congregation added a Sunday evening service, I considered my Sabbath to be 2 p.m. Sunday until 2 p.m. Monday. I spent Sunday afternoon in a vegetative state, reading or napping after the demands of Sunday morning. My husband would usually do something physical with our sons, who were then in their late teens. We would have a simple dinner, soup or a casserole that I had prepared the day before.

In those years, my husband didn't work on Mondays, so we spent Monday mornings together, usually walking in a park. We ate lunch together, often in a restaurant, and by mid-afternoon I would re-enter my work world, checking e-mail and planning the events of the week. The time alone and with my husband had given a sense of balance.

Single people in ministry also need to consider the place of time alone and time with others on the Sabbath day. Adam, an associate pastor who is single, keeps a Monday Sabbath. He likes to spend time alone during the day, reading and going for a long run. Then in the evening he usually has dinner with friends, enjoying relaxed conversation.

Another key to healthy Sabbaths for people in ministry comes from the root meaning of the word Sabbath: stop, pause, cease, desist, or rest. The heart of Sabbath is stopping, not finding more things to do. Several ministers I know observe a Sabbath discipline of journaling, and they record prayers and thoughts, using journaling as a way to listen to God. The center of this discipline is stopping long enough to listen and pray.

Vital to the "success" of such Sabbath devotion is, frankly, keeping expectations low and the activities quite simple. When we expect our Sabbath to be highly "spiritual," it becomes one more thing to do, continuing the addiction to productivity that is so common in our culture.

Be Still

Over time, the Sabbath inscribes important truths on our hearts. Primarily, God is the Creator and Redeemer. Those of us called to full-time ministry are invited to partner with God in sustaining creation and bringing redemption. We spend six days a week focusing on our partnership in this ministry.

But the work is God's.

Sabbath reveals that redemption comes through Jesus Christ, not through our hard labor. The Holy Spirit is the source of power. We are God's beloved children, utterly dependent on God, receiving everything good from the hand of God. Because we are so easily addicted to taking ourselves too seriously, because we so easily fall into patterns of idolatry that elevate our own significance, we need the Sabbath, stopping productivity, so we can remember that God is God and we are not.

For people in ministry, stopping on the Sabbath is a gift of rhythm, like a heartbeat, that keeps our hearts in the right place.

—LYNNE BAAB is an editorial advisor for BuildingChurchLeaders.com and is the author of six books, including *Sabbath Keeping* and *Fasting: Spiritual Freedom Beyond Our Appetites* (InterVarsity Press). www.lynnebaab.com; adapted from our sister publication *Leadership Journal*, © 2007 Christianity Today. For more articles like this, visit www.LeadershipJournal.net.

Discuss

1. How do you currently observe Sabbath? How do your practices help you experience God as Creator? How do they help you experience God as Redeemer? What could you do to make these truths even more of a reality in your Sabbath worship?
2. What keeps you from observing Sabbath as you would like? How could you improve your Sabbath-keeping?
3. Is it healthy to think of Sabbath as a time to be "spiritually productive"? Why or why not?

REST AND RENEWAL FOR BUSY CHURCH LEADERS**How Much is “Enough”?**

Set the example for those in your congregation.

Colossians 3:23

It had been months since I felt so refreshed. The time spent with my wife and two teenage sons during the summer had been some of the best in recent memory:

A week at a ranch in the mountains, a family reunion at the “YMCA of the Rockies,” camping, canoeing, and cookouts—all added up to a summer filled with memories and much needed renewal.

As the summer ended, I anticipated our next church board meeting, when our church leaders could renew our fellowship and refocus for the fall.

Our meeting began as refreshing as I had anticipated. However, I noticed an unusual item on the agenda: Member Concerns. After our fellowship, prayer time, review of the minutes, and a financial update, the board chairman introduced a member who had some concerns.

For the next few minutes, this person complained about the amount of summer vacation the board had approved for me. This member said, “We need our pastor to be here during summer weekends because new people visiting the church want to hear the pastor, not some second stringer they’ll never see again.”

After our guest left, the board discussed his concerns. I explained my commitment to a well-balanced life. That led to a discussion about what it means to lead a balanced life. Most board members admitted they would hardly be guilty of that.

Then a board member put the complaint in a different light.

“I guess it’s no surprise that we would have some complaints about the pastor’s schedule,” he said. “When you try to live a balanced life, there will probably be those who think you aren’t working hard enough.”

Among our people, there is no uniform picture of what a balanced life looks like. If I am to give leadership in this area, I must think specifically about a healthy, biblical lifestyle.

A Philosophy of Really Living

I define a balanced life as a life lived according to biblical priorities.

Usually we think of priorities as a list, ranked from most important to least, which implies that we must fulfill our first priority before we can move on to the second.

But I have found another analogy more helpful: I see my priorities as pieces of a pie. Each piece is important (or else they would not be priorities!); the challenge is not to keep them in order but to serve each area an appropriate portion of my life.

For example, listing my first priority as “God” suggests I need to fulfill my obligation to God so I can get on to the other priorities of my wife, family, ministry, and, finally, community. Instead, in slicing the pie, I’m aware

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of all of these priorities at the same time. Attempting to maintain equilibrium allows me to adjust the degree of focus I give my priorities at various times.

When I communicated that to the board, I used the discussion of my summer schedule to illustrate. I knew no one on the board doubted that pastoral ministry was a priority for me. I said, “I have an equal commitment to my wife and children and to my personal well being, as well as to my relationship with God, and with my neighbors. The summer was an opportunity to focus more intently on my priorities of my wife and children rather than on the priority of church ministry.”

One board member joked, “I guess the best way to discern whether your life is in balance is by the number of people who complain that you’re not at the church enough!”

There may be more truth to that statement than we are willing to admit. Pastors often follow an unwritten law that says we have to put in enough hours so that no one will ever doubt our commitment to sacrificial ministry. The last thing most of us want to hear is “I don’t think you’re working hard enough, Pastor.”

How Much is “Enough”?

In seeking the specifics of a balanced life, I developed two criteria for the hours I spend at church:

1. Are my working hours compatible with my current family situation?

Eighteen years ago, when I began my first pastorate, I asked my wife to help me be accountable for living a balanced life. She has exercised that right many times. Usually it comes as, “The boys sure miss you when you’re gone this much.” Or, “I miss taking our morning walks together.” That is my cue that I may need to slice the pie a bit differently.

When our two boys were preschoolers, I spent fewer hours at the church than I do now that they are teenagers. I arrived at the office earlier in the morning to compensate for an early departure; I was almost always home by 4:30 in the afternoon. By then my wife needed a break from the kids, so I played with the boys. She not only appreciated some time for herself, she also expressed how much she appreciated that I put her needs on a par with ministry.

2. Does my work schedule set a positive example?

Or does it reinforce the imbalanced work priority of the men and women in the church?

Pastors dare not model laziness, but often laziness shows up as putting in long hours at the office while neglecting the other important priorities.

If I regularly work 7 days a week and put in 60 or 70 hours a week, how can I challenge someone who’s doing the same to the detriment of his or her family?

A man in my congregation, who works *at least* 70 hours a week, has had numerous conversations with me about his work habits. His wife has talked to my wife about how to handle his work schedule, which is creating pressure on their marriage and family.

Last week he told me, “If you can find some balance in life with all the demands on you as pastor of this church, then with God’s help so can I. I’m making plans to back off at work after the first of the year.” He has hired a new assistant to cover some of his responsibilities and is training two other people to assist him with other phases of his job. He even asked me if I would hold him accountable.

I can hear the objection of some: “But what about getting your work done? How can you possibly get *enough* accomplished if you only spend 50–55 hours a week in ministry?”

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My response is simple: “Would you mind defining ‘enough’ for me?”

While I know my work is never done, I’ve discovered I need the discipline to say, “I’m finished.” Knowing when to finish each workday is crucial to a balanced life.

Schooling the Church

A pastor’s work is much more like a traveling salesman or consultant than like an engineer in an office all day. Yes, I work when I’m at my desk, but I am also working when I visit a child in the hospital or eat lunch with a new couple in the church or spend the day in prayer at a mountain retreat or have folks over for dessert on Sunday evening. I’m working even though my car may not be in the church parking lot.

A pastor-friend came up with a creative way to remind people of this by posting this sign on his door. It reads:

OFFICE HOURS

I’m here most days about 8 or 9 a.m. Occasionally I arrive as early as 7 a.m., but some days I get here as late as 10 or 11 a.m. I usually leave about 4 or 5 p.m., but occasionally I’m out of here around 6 or 8 p.m. Sometimes I leave as late as 11 p.m. Some days or afternoons or mornings I’m not here at all, and lately I’ve been here just about all the time, except when I’m someplace else, but I should be here then, too.

Helping our church recognize I work differently than most professionals is an ongoing challenge. The way pastors work will never be fully understood by everyone. I have had countless discussions with boards, staff, and church members about living a balanced life. Only once was I chastised for attempting to keep work in balance with the rest of life’s priorities. All the other times people have appreciated my openness and honesty.

The good from these work-ethic discussions has been enormous. Regularly I print a summary of my work schedule in our church bulletin or newsletter so people will know when I am available to meet with them for routine issues. (Emergencies, of course, don’t need to fit the schedule.)

My secretary submits a simple announcement for the bulletin that runs once a month. It reads:

For your convenience in meeting with the pastor, his schedule is as follows (please call the church office to schedule an appointment as his “office” hours are not always spent “in” the office):

MONDAY: Office in morning; staff meeting 11:30 a.m.–2 p.m.; office in afternoon

TUESDAY: Office all day

WEDNESDAY: Study/prayer day

THURSDAY: Sermon work in morning; office in afternoon

FRIDAY: Day off (please call the church office with any emergencies)

SATURDAY & SUNDAY: Available by appointment; Saturday evening reserved for Sunday preparations

WEEKDAY EVENINGS: Available by appointment, though limited to three evenings for meetings or appointments.

I want people to know my work schedule is their business, too, and I gladly share it with them. I give them the right to address my priorities, but I also tell them that assumes I have the same right with them.

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I discuss my schedule with the church board at least twice a year: at the beginning of the fall and again at the onset of summer. My schedule changes the most at these two times. I solicit input about their priorities and lifestyle.

Exception to the Rule

Some pastors, of course, might be tempted to work too little, but in my experience and conversations with them, that is the exception.

One time, some in our church began to question the work ethic of a staff pastor.

I asked him directly about it. After calculating his hours, I said that to me they seemed a little light. I usually expect staff to work 42–45 hours per week. He explained his concern about being home for his wife and their three young children. That was legitimate. I explored with him alternate work hours that would not place such a burden on his family.

We finally arrived at a plan that was balanced yet provided for five more hours of work each week.

The next step was to communicate that plan to those concerned as well as to the segment of the church he ministered to directly. I addressed those who raised the issue by writing them a letter saying that the stage of this pastor's family required that he spend more time at home. I then detailed how he would compensate for that by revising his schedule to work at other times. I thanked them for their concern, assuring them I would monitor his schedule for the near future.

The staff pastor then printed his schedule in the next newsletter and posted it on his office door. For the next month, he provided me with a weekly review of how he was managing his schedule.

Strong in All Events

There will always be those who question any definition of balance. But in the final analysis, I want to be a person and pastor who can say, "I have finished the race in all the events where God had me entered."

—GARY D. PRESTON is executive pastor of Rock Creek Church in Louisville, Colorado; adapted from our sister publication *Leadership Journal*, © 1998 Christianity Today. For more articles like this, visit www.LeadershipJournal.net.

Discuss

1. How much of your schedule is dictated by pressures from others—the board, congregation members—to put in long hours? How much of your schedule is dictated by pressure you put on yourself?
2. How do you communicate your hours and availability to those you minister to? How could you do this better?
3. Are you living life with the balance you would advise for others? If not, what is keeping you from this?

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Staying Alive

A Leadership Journal forum on sustaining spiritual vitality.

Romans 8:26

One of *Leadership Journal's* advisors confessed to us: "When I was young, I was filled with energy and joy, but now I have to work on stimulating them both." What is it about ministry that sometimes works against spiritual vitality? At the 2002 National Pastors Convention, our sister publication *Leadership Journal* gathered a panel to explore the mysteries of sustaining spiritual vigor amid ministry.

Erwin McManus is pastor of Mosaic, an innovative and international church in Los Angeles.

Ben Patterson is campus pastor at Westmont College in Santa Barbara, California. Previously he planted a Presbyterian church in Irvine, California, and pastored in New Jersey.

Sheila Walsh is a singer and author, a former co-host of The 700 Club, and now a speaker with Women of Faith.

Should ministry carry a warning label: *Caution, this vocation may be hazardous to your spiritual health?*

Ben: It's easy to have false expectations. Probably the biggest is the assumption that the closer I get to the center of the church the more cozy, more sweet, more friendly it will be.

But the closer you get to the center, well, you get all that church is. It can be sweet, but it can also be dark. At the center you see people in all the ways they present themselves.

Does your role as an upfront Christian living the faith publicly present a challenge to spiritual vitality?

Sheila: The five years I was co-hosting The 700 Club were probably the five loneliest years of my life. I discovered the ministry is a very, very effective place to hide. If you're the kind of person who doesn't really want to deal with what's going on in your own life, if you don't really want to listen to the distant rumble in your own soul, the more you immerse yourself in helping other people, the easier it is to hide.

Everyone at CBN knew I had an open door policy, and people could come in and tell me anything. And we would cry, laugh, and pray about it together. But I never did that with anyone. There was no one that I reached out to and said, "I'm struggling here" or "I don't want to do this anymore." So I kept struggling with this huge inner turmoil, while the audience thought I was the embodiment of godliness. It was a very strange struggle.

But God loves us enough that he doesn't want us just to survive. He wants us to live.

Erwin: I don't think I could survive if I had to pretend I was perfect. I try to lead out of the joy and grace of imperfection. Our church took the name Mosaic because we know we're broken and fragmented people, brought together by the hand of the Master artist to reflect his glory, especially when his light strikes through us.

And so right up front we say, "Look, we're all a mess. The only reason you're here is because you're a mess." And then you work from that point.

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That takes a lot of pressure off. People do not look at you and say, “Well, he leads because he’s different than us,” but rather, “He leads because God is amazing. And if he can use somebody like him, God can work with anyone through Jesus Christ.”

Why do some people, after years in ministry, become worn down, resentful, jaded, and cynical, and others become more tender, shining, discerning, and useful to God? What makes the difference?

Ben: As I think about what has given vitality to my own spiritual life, it’s always been—I hate to say—the really hard things: people or circumstances that made me face my limitations, my mortality, my weakness.

And if a few individuals—equally weak and broken—are there to walk with us, and if we can receive the grace to let that press us closer to God, to be more humble, God seems to delight in raising up people like that.

Yes, there’s still some bitterness in me, to be sure. But it’s hard to be bitter when you’ve been humbled. And if we have the grace to let things drive us to our knees, bitterness just has to go.

Sheila: Our paradigm of what a Christian life is supposed to be hugely affects whether we become bitter or not. So many of the people I work with are dealing with disappointment. Disappointment with themselves—and I sure understand that—disappointment with other people, and disappointment with God because he doesn’t do what we think he’s going to do.

I got one of the most interesting letters at The 700 Club from a young woman in her mid-20s who had cancer and MS. She said, “Sometimes I watch your program and I’m helped, and sometimes I want to take my shoe off and throw it through the screen.”

I was so fascinated by her honesty, I called her. And we became friends. One day she said, “One of the things I hate about what you do is you always present people whose marriages get better in ten minutes, people who get healed, people who have the nice, packaged answers.” She said, “What about people like me who are dying and still love God? What about people who take very few steps, but every step leaves a big impression in the snow because it cost every ounce of strength they have left?”

She changed my perspective. Christianity is not this nice “everything’s going to work out okay” attitude. When you think of Christ at the tomb of Lazarus, he wept because it wasn’t supposed to be like this. He had spoken this beautiful world into existence and it was so broken, so messed up. I think one of the greatest gifts we can give is just a dose of reality that life down here is disappointing, that God doesn’t always give us answers, but he does always give us himself.

Sheila, you had to step away from ministry for a while, hospitalized for severe depression. What did it take for you to come to spiritual health?

Sheila: In 1992 my life hit the wall. One morning I was sitting on national television with my nice suit and my inflatable hairdo and that night I was in the locked ward of a psychiatric hospital. It was the kindest thing God could have done to me.

The very first day in the hospital, the psychiatrist asked me “Who are you?”

“I’m the co-host of The 700 Club.”

“That’s not what I meant,” he said.

“Well, I’m a writer. I’m a singer.”

“That’s not what I meant. Who are you?”

“I don’t have a clue,” I said, and he replied, “Now that’s right, and that’s why you’re here.”

And the greatest thing I discovered there is sometimes some of God’s most precious gifts come in packets that make your hand bleed when you open them, but inside that’s what you’ve been longing for all your life—to be fully known and fully loved.

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I measured myself by what other people thought of me. That was slowly killing me.

Before I entered the hospital, some of The 700 Club staff said to me, “Don’t do this. You will never regain any kind of platform. If people know you were in a mental institution and on medication, it’s over.”

I said, “You know what? It’s over anyway. So I can’t think about that.”

I really thought I had lost everything. My house. My salary. My job. Everything. But I found my life.

I discovered at the lowest moment of my life that everything that was true about me, God knew. After I’d been there about three weeks, I remember asking the doctor if I could go to a church service. Two nurses went with me, and I sat at the back of this little Episcopal church in Washington D.C. God spoke to me through a priest I’d never met before, hymns I’d never sung before, passages I don’t remember reading before. But the words of that old hymn described me perfectly: *Nothing in my hands I bring. Simply to thy cross I cling.*

Jesus knew the worst, and he loved me. What a relief to know the worst about yourself and at the same moment to be embraced by God. It’s so liberating to reach the end of yourself.

What does spiritual vitality look like? What are some of the marks of a healthy, vital spirit?

Erwin: I was in a psychiatrist’s chair when I was 12 years old, and I knew that wasn’t normal. So I know God can fix messed up and broken pieces.

While going through some pretty hard times in ministry, for six months I had a twitch in my right eye that I didn’t know would ever go away. Yet, in the midst of all that, I had to ask, “Can I enjoy God and enjoy the world around me in the midst of the worst times in my life? Am I experiencing even now the pleasure God has for me?”

So one of the ways I evaluate my own vitality is what is bringing me pleasure. Can I find something in life to enjoy?

That perhaps is what’s driven me to be an aesthetic. I love life and beauty. I struggle with disciplines, with structure. I don’t do anything twice in the same way. What I do know is that I can enjoy God every minute of my life no matter what comes.

Ben: A sense of humor is a sign of a healthy spirit. Not the bitter, hard-edged stuff. But rooted in the huge gap between what I am now and what I will be in Christ.

When I stop laughing, I’m in trouble. And I tend not to trust people who won’t laugh, because I think there’s no hope there.

Erwin: The other key word is passion. I measure my spiritual vitality by the intensity of my passions for God and the things of God. And when my heart is broken for the things that are on God’s heart, I know that I’m tracking. I love that verse in Jeremiah (20:9): “If I say I will not mention him or speak any more in his name, his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot.” When I am connected to God and I am moving with God, there is a fire inside of me that I cannot put out.

So spiritual vitality takes different forms. In whatever form, what’s the price you pay for spiritual health?

Ben: Less is more. I think almost without exception that if I want to go deeper with God, to be more spiritually alive, I probably need to do less of something. For so many years I saw being more spiritually alive as throwing one more duty on top of the pile.

I spoke to a class last semester on vocation and work. I told the students, “One of the most radical things you might do as a student here is start keeping the Sabbath.” Not only did they not get it, but some were actually angry that I suggested that they should do something as irresponsible as stopping for a day a week.

But maybe the quickest route to health is to just stop doing some things.

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Ben: And make sure you get to play. Everyone has their own way of defining how they enjoy their life. But find ways to enjoy the life that God's given you.

What is the place of creativity in keeping yourself spiritually vital?

Erwin: There are always new things to learn about who you are in Jesus Christ. There are things hidden away inside of you that only God knows. I mean, we're not even aware of all of our own sinfulness, but we're also not aware of all of our potential and capacity in the image of Christ.

At Mosaic, I've had people say, "Look, not everyone is creative." I say, "I disagree." Not everyone is, perhaps, artistic, but everyone is created by the creative God, and a creative juice is placed in each one of us. We all have a capacity to dream.

In fact, the whole movement of the church was young visionaries and old dreamers exploding on the face of this planet and shaping history by the power of Jesus Christ. A person will shrivel if he or she believes there's nothing else to discover, nothing else to become.

As long as you wake up in the morning and go, "God, I know you have more to do with me, more to bring out, more to develop," you can face that day with anticipation and vitality.

Holiness is not about just getting rid of sin. If it's about just getting rid of sin, you're simply going back to the zero point. Adam and Eve had no sin in the Garden. Did God have anything more planned for their future?

Holiness is getting back to what God intended when he created us in his image and going on the journey with him from that point forward.

— adapted from our sister publication *Leadership Journal*, © 2002 Christianity Today. For more articles like this, visit www.LeadershipJournal.net.

Discuss

1. In what ways has your ministry work threatened your spiritual health and vitality? How has your spiritual state developed or changed since you began?
2. How can you keep the really hard things from destroying your spiritual health, but rather turn them into opportunities for growth?
3. How are you exercising creativity in your spiritual life and ministry? How could you make this more of a priority?

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A Time for Rest

Take a season to regroup.

1 Kings 19:1–8

It's summer time, and the living is easy! Well, not exactly. Not in ministry. But for many church leaders, the pace is somewhat slower. Over the summer small groups regroup. Fall initiatives are planned. We may even begin to plan for Christmas. There's work to be done, but generally speaking, it's not as intense. Not as "hands-on."

I worked through a long series of challenging end-of-the-ministry-year commitments in the month of May. All of them were energizing to me personally, and successful according to participants. Just what we prayed for.

But amid those ministry moments lurked additional challenges: medical drama, end-of-school complexities, relatives visiting, siblings in crisis, and even the sudden death of a close co-worker's father. Behind-the-scenes chaos.

Why am I dumping all of this? One simple reason: I suspect your life is no different. You too have made it through the end of the ministry season. And in the midst of the high-fives, "only God" victories, and great joys, you've also experienced bewildering challenges at home and among friends. Maybe you've even had a few medical glitches to keep you on your toes.

And, by God's grace, we persevere. We show up and serve and lead and give and nurture and guide and support and rearrange. We pray. We ask others to pray. We fast. We encounter God in his word and in snippets of silence and solitude while it's still dark outside and before the figurative gun goes off heralding the start of a new day.

And then it's done. There is time to slow down. Space to breathe.

Some of us have hit this finish line without any elation at all. Instead we've died to dreams we thought would be. We're tempted to give up on people we had hoped would join our cause, and we're strapped for lack of resources we prayed for but that never arrived. Rather than elation, we feel the hot breath of failure on our necks. And we sense the soul-deep fatigue of chronic disappointment dogging us.

Even still, we know a season has changed. It is time to breathe.

We putter in the garden. We go to a game. We throw out the piles of accumulated paper in our office. We dive to the bottom of the e-mail inbox. We put our dusty running shoes back on, work out more, set long-term goals, and relax with friends and family. Ah, summer.

And then it hits. Sadness. Discontentedness. Somehow, even after a great ministry season, I find myself adrift. Confused about my value, questioning my identity, my purpose.

A psychologist might say it's just part of getting used to life without adrenaline pumping through my veins. Perhaps. I know often our lows have chemical causes. As I shared my deep fatigue, confusion, and general malaise last week with a close spiritual friend, she commented that I actually sounded like Elijah. That seemed a bit melodramatic, but I did recognize some similarities.

What was her prescription? A nourishing meal. A good night's sleep. And more sleep.

Sometimes the most important ways to care for our souls are so obvious that we might miss them: healthy food and sleep.

The physical healing that our bodies undergo during deep sleep is the "third shift" of a factory—a shift entirely devoted to repairing the equipment and clearing out the clutter. When we lose sleep over long periods of time,

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the repair crew that sweeps the house at night can't do its God-given work. Do I need to say much about the need for healthy foods in the right amounts at the right times? I think we all know, but do we live it out? What would it look like for us to honor our bodies this summer?

As you cross the ministry-year finish line, with either a runner's high or an after-race letdown, my invitation is simple: pay attention to your soul.

Are you fatigued? Get rest. Are you hungry? Eat well. Are you wondering if your efforts really matter? Plant something (not a church!). Are you doubting your calling? Let God meet you in your angst. Turn to him in silence. Let go of your words. Let your shoulders relax. Take a walk outside. Pay attention to the birds of the air. Breathe.

Beware of the sneaky self-doubt or the grandiose visions that seek to undermine you during a season of rest. Remember the words from [Isaiah 26:3](#): "You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you."

This peace is available to us in crises of exertion, as well as in all other crises, and the lulls after strenuous exertion.

Today, my challenge is to rest in God in the lull. Take time to meet your needs. Oh sure, you can invent something to make your schedule and your life crazy again and go for the adrenaline buzz.

But if long-term impact and Kingdom life is what you're after, please give your body what it needs: Rest.

And remember to breathe.

—MINDY CALIGUIRE is the founder of Soul Care, a spiritual formation ministry, and Director of Transformation Ministry for the Willow Creek Association; adapted from our sister publication *Leadership Journal*, © 2002 Christianity Today . For more articles like this, visit www.LeadershipJournal.net.

Discuss

1. When was a time you made it to a period of rest and felt the deep fatigue and discontentedness described here? What made that experience different from the typical tiredness of a long and demanding week or month?
2. How does attention to your physical needs factor into your daily priorities?
3. How often does your church discuss physical care in the context of the Christian life? Is this something that could (or should) be addressed more often, or more directly?

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The Importance of Hope

Rediscover a powerful source of energy and rest.

Romans 15:13

Psychologist Neil Clark Warren used to say that when he did therapy with married couples, his primary goal was simply to see a 10 percent improvement in their relationships. It doesn't sound like much, but he found it made a tremendous difference for one reason. It gave them hope. And hope is the great difference-maker.

Warren always believed in hope, even before he started eHarmony and made millions. He found that if people have hope, it provides a tremendous reservoir of energy. Hope will keep people moving when they would otherwise quit. Hope is the single most indispensable, non-negotiable, irreplaceable resource required for big challenges and noble battles.

So, how's your supply? How are you doing at hope-management?

I suppose pastors and church leaders have always needed hope, but I have been reflecting on why in particular it is needed in our day. It seems to me that hope matters uniquely in our day because many of the social structures that used to prop up what we do are fading. Pastors used to be honored as educated thought leaders in their communities. Historian and Pastor Jim Singleton told me that as recently as 1950, 10 percent of all Phi Beta Kappa's went into church ministry. Today it is 0.01 percent.

Another friend, John Huffman, recently retired as pastor of St. Andrews Presbyterian Church in Newport Beach. If you've ever visited Newport Beach, you might think anyone who lives there doesn't need hope, since they've pretty much arrived at God's favorite location. But as John was reflecting on half a century in pastoral ministry, he listed some of the most frequent complaints he would hear over the years—every one of them a hope-stabber. I'll paraphrase a few. You've probably never heard any of these about your own ministry; I share them simply so you can pray more intelligently for your less gifted pastoral friends.

"I'm just not getting fed." I always find this one a helpful constructive criticism, because it is both clear and easily corrected.

"Why can't you preach like ...?" John notes that there is always the nearby "church of what's happening now." He says what he did not realize for many years was that there will always be another more popular preacher within 20 minutes of your church. The important thing is to accept this truth. That way you can find who he is, track him down, hurt him, and then *you'll* be the most popular pastor within 20 minutes of your church.

"Why don't we pay more attention to ..." (fill in the blank: foreign missions, prayer, spiritual warfare, the Kardashians)?

But complaints are not the only hope-robbers. Those of us in church ministry also face the reality of our own inadequacy, family pressures, financial crises in difficult economic times, an increasingly polarized culture where faith often seems to be perceived as nothing more than a proxy for political conflict, people we love who slide away from the faith or whose marriages wind up in a ditch. We wrestle with disappointment when people don't come to church—and complacency when they do. We wrestle with being defined by our successes and self-condemned if we are not successful enough.

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A very wise person suggested a great image to our staff recently. I asked him what he thought is the primary barrier people in church ministry face to finding spiritual health. I thought he would speak about how hard church leadership is, but he immediately said that our challenge is no different than anyone else's: "Learning to depend fully on God for every moment of your life, right where you are."

The image was this: Remember Atlas, that old character from Greek mythology who carried the world on his shoulder? Put it down. Refuse to carry the weight of the world anymore. Rely on God's love this moment for your identity and well-being, so that they no longer hinge on outcomes.

I am a recovering Atlas.

When I remember to do this, when I take the world off my shoulders, it always results in life and hope. Hope, after all, is very different from getting myself to believe that things will turn out the way that I want them to. Hope means, among other things, a joyful dying to my need to have my life turn out any particular way at all. Hope comes when I live in the reality that the world is in better, larger, more capable hands than mine.

The ancient Greeks loved virtue, and believed deeply that suffering would produce character. But in the ancient world, only a Paul would top this list (suffering, perseverance, character) with "hope." The Greeks were not big on hope; they did not believe the universe was kindly disposed to humanity. Paul did, because Jesus did. So Paul said hope "does not disappoint."

Hope-management may be the single most important thing you do today. No circumstance or person is allowed to siphon it from you. When you took this job, when you answered this call—you signed on for hope. It's much bigger than you are. Rest in it a little while.

—JOHN ORTBERG is editor at large of *Leadership Journal*, and senior pastor of Menlo Park Presbyterian Church in California; adapted from our sister publication *Leadership Journal*, © 2012 Christianity Today Inc. For more articles like this, visit www.LeadershipJournal.net.

Discuss

1. What are some of the "hope-stabbers" you have heard in your own ministry?
2. When was the last time an outcome impacted your sense of identity or well-being? How often does this happen? How could you counteract this?
3. How can you tap into the reservoirs of hope when you have run dry?

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Further Exploration

Books and other resources for finding rest and renewal.

- 📖 BuildingChurchLeaders.com: Leadership training resources from Christianity Today:
 - “[Soul Care](#)” *Practical Ministry Skills*
 - “[Spiritual Disciplines for Busy Church Leaders](#)” *Practical Ministry Skills*
 - “[How to Prevent Ministry Burnout](#)” *Survival Guide*
 - “[Soul Health for Spiritual Leaders](#)” *Survival Guide*

- 📖 ChristianBibleStudies.com: Adult Bible studies and teaching tools from Christianity Today:
 - “[Looking for Rest](#)”
 - “[From Dawn to Dusk](#)”
 - “[Rest for the Weary](#)”

- 📖 LeadershipJournal.net. This website owned by Christianity Today offers practical advice and articles for church leaders.

- 📖 [CareGivers Forum](http://CareGiversForum.com). This website offers alphabetical, geographical, and categorical listings for conferences, counseling centers, and retreats geared toward restoring and refreshing ministry leaders.

[Sabbath Keeping: Finding Freedom in the Rhythms of Rest](#) by *Lynne Baab*. With collected insights from Christian history and Sabbath keepers of all ages and backgrounds, *Sabbath Keeping* offers a practical and hopeful guidebook for all of us to slow down and enjoy our relationship with the God of the universe. (InterVarsity Press, 2005; ISBN: 9780830832583)

[Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation](#) by *Ruth Haley Barton*. Picking up on the monastic tradition of creating a “rule of life” that allows for regular space for the practice of the spiritual disciplines, *Sacred Rhythms* takes you more deeply into understanding seven key disciplines along with practical ideas for weaving them into everyday life. Each chapter includes exercises to help you begin the practices—individually and in a group context. The final chapter puts it all together in a way that will help you arrange your life for spiritual transformation. (InterVarsity Press, 2006; ISBN: 9780830833337)

[Spiritual Rhythm: Being with Jesus Every Season of Your Soul](#) by *Mark Buchanan*. How do you measure your spiritual growth? By how much time you spend in prayer? How often you read the Bible? How many times you share your testimony? Rather than becoming frustrated trying to keep track of your Christian “to-do” list, Mark Buchanan believes that your spirit grows depending on what season you’re in. Using the four seasons—winter, spring, summer and fall as living parables, Buchanan explores what each has to offer with biblical insight and pastoral experience. Discover what season your heart is in, and find the rhythm in your spiritual walk. (Zondervan, 2010; ISBN: 9780310293651)