

## Choosing Health

In the fall of 2010, at the age of 56, I went through a difficult time. I lost my mother in mid-September, and a little less than a month later, had a heart attack. The malady was partly the product of too many double-cheeseburgers eaten on the run as we balanced two houses, three churches, and ministry life of a clergy couple with children part-time. We had not slowed down in years, ignoring warning signs until it caught up with me. I surmise that my grief over my mother's death was the proverbial "last straw."

As I lay in the recovery room after my catheterization, the doctor told me that I could follow his instructions, or repeat my "emergent heart issue" (as he called it) again at some time in the future. He prescribed me a panel of cardiac medicines, instructions for a healthy diet, and an exercise plan. At that point, I had a choice. I could follow his instructions for diet and exercise and take my medicine, or I could risk an even worse experience in the not-too-distant future.

What he told me made sense. The things he prescribed have been shown time and again to help people with cardiac issues. I knew people who were alive because they followed similar instructions. I also knew people who were no longer living because they didn't follow those instructions.

So, I needed to make a choice.

Our lives as we seek to follow God's call can be similar. All too often, we Christian leaders won't slow down. We keep the pedal to the metal, frequently ignoring scriptural admonitions and common sense. Then, when we go through difficult circumstances, we begin to struggle in our spiritual, emotional, moral, or physical health. Perhaps we are doing too many good things all at once. Perhaps we have encountered grief on many levels and have not taken the opportunity to recover because our lives are busy. Regardless, continued disregard can result in soul-level catastrophe.

We need to make choices.

I am happy to say that I chose to follow my doctor's directions. I did what was prescribed, and I am here, with a healthier heart than I had before. Jesus offers Christians prescribed advice, so that we can live in vibrant fellowship with him and have continued vitality in our ministry – having healthy souls. We can choose to follow his advice, or not. We ignore him to our peril.

Jesus' prescription begins with Sabbath, and includes regular times alone with him in prayer and study of his word. Worship and fellowship when we're not in a leadership role is also good medicine. On occasion, there is value in taking contemplative time away to assess our lives and renew our spirits. When we wait too

long to follow Jesus' prescription, more intensive solutions may be required. Renewal leave can be either preventative or restorative. It is up to us to choose which.

Either way, the health of our souls depend on it.