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Our Sense of Call

Driving the Bus: A Reflection on Self-Care

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Our 12-ton school bus rocked and groaned at the edge of a narrow Haitian mountain pass. With each waddle of the monstrous frame, the passengers' conversations were brought to fearful hushes. Although frightened, I began to watch our driver and his methods.

He had a rear-view mirror, but most of his attention was directed toward the road. Distraction would have led to disaster, but he was focused. His eyes reminded me of the importance of focus in ministry.

I must remain focused on the Word of God. There are distractions in the life of the church that lead to disaster. My preaching and teaching ought to be powered by the Bible. I must also keep my focus on the words that aren't meant to be preached or taught. There are some things God has to say only to me, for me, about me. By cultivating personal devotion, I am able to better equip myself for ministry. Our driver was focused on the road; I must focus on the Word for my public and private ministry.

I continued watching our driver and saw that he had a pillow beneath him. In the midst of danger and uncertainty, he understood the value of self-care. As we traveled on thinly padded steel benches and over pothole after pothole, the driver understood that his well-being was intricately tied to the well-being of his passengers. His preparation reminded me of the importance of self-care in ministry.

My effectiveness as a leader is directly linked to my overall satisfaction. I have learned that the cushions of laughter and time shared with family help dull the barbs of church life. Intentional cultivation of my marriage and my relationship with our children help me sit in a seat of leadership more confidently. When the day's activities or evening's demands are over, I know I have somewhere to go.

Many hug their position and title because they don't have anywhere else to go for fulfillment. By nurturing my home life, I become a better minister for others.

As the driver ministered to me, other passengers familiar with the route began to block my view. Our school-bus rocked from 2 wheels to 4 wheels to 2 wheels and the veteran riders threw their weight to the side of the bus being lifted off the ground. Balance became crucial to our safe arrival and the driver's success. Their actions reminded me of the importance of balance in ministry.

To maximize self-care in ministry, I need to maintain balance in my life. I need to learn how to play as hard as I work. I need to learn how to say 'no' as easily as I say 'yes'. I need to make caring for myself a habit, not a response to crisis. I need to remember my personal Sabbath, and to keep it holy. By maintaining balance, I am able to minister more effectively.

I was learning to care for myself as our driver drove. We made it to our Haitian destination safely, and I learned valuable lessons for ministry. Though tried and challenged, I must remain focused on the Word, faithful to my family and frequent in my efforts to find balance.

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The Ministers Council is the professional association of ministerial leaders within the American Baptist Churches USA. We are working together to:

- Connect colleagues through Together in Ministry groups and Communities of Practice
- Establish and maintain professional and ethical standards of the Christian ministry
- Give support to the members of this body and be an advocate for them in their professional relations
- Resource ministry through our web site at www.ministerscouncil.org
- Interpret the appropriate roles of professional ministerial leadership to the constituent parts of our denomination, and to our local American Baptist Churches
- Encourage the recruitment and nurture of candidates for the various church vocations
- Provide a means of expression and debate by members of this body on issues that affect the professional ministerial leadership of the American Baptist Churches USA
- Cooperate with the appropriate units of the American Baptist Churches USA in matters of mutual interest and concern, including recruitment, placement, compensation, continuing education, and counseling

