



minister

MAGAZINE

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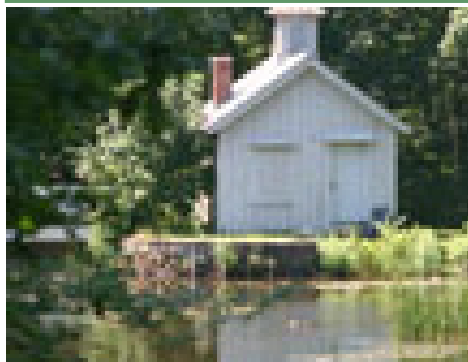


Photo Credit: Michael Sayer

Self-care

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Staying Healthy

Michael Sayer, Editor



I want to express my appreciation to the writers who have contributed to this issue of Minister Magazine. The topic of “self-care” was suggested by the Ministers Council Senate Committee on Spiritual and Personal Wholeness. The initial focus was to be on physical self-care, but it quickly became evident that this topic included spiritual, emotional, and intellectual care as well. Each writer brings a unique perspective to a challenging theme.

Self-care is a challenge for those of us who struggle to keep rhythm and balance in our personal and professional lives. Like many clergy, I find it difficult to maintain a regimen of exercise and prayer. I let the time escape. I also have a compulsion to take care of others, often at my own expense. I was roundly scolded by my moderator recently. She told me that I was too quick to “do it all myself.” Her point was that this detracted not only from my personal well-being, but from the long-term health of the church as well. They couldn’t learn to do what needed to be done if I kept doing it for them. A well-deserved come-uppance. I’m certain our colleagues have some constructive advice!

Discussing self-care has also been a challenge for our writers. They have allowed us entry into some very private thoughts and experiences about their personal journeys; the risk and vulnerability involved in doing so can’t be overstated. My hope is that their openness will benefit not only those of us in ministerial leadership, but those to whom we minister as well.

Comments, suggestions, and letters to Minister Magazine are welcome. Please include your name, email, and a contact phone number.

Send to: pastor@firstbaptist-cs.org

Changing Habits

Margaret J. Marcuson



How can we live healthier, happier lives as clergy leaders? Sometimes that vision seems like nothing more than a pipe dream. Ministry is a stressful line of work. The constant pressure of a Sunday sermon, endless pastoral needs, church conflicts both big and small, community obligations – all can conspire to keep us

from taking care of ourselves, physically, emotionally and spiritually. Working hard is not a bad thing at all. Ministry is hard work. But if it's compulsive, then it's a spiritual problem. If you can never let go, you will not be able to sustain yourself over time.

So what are some ways we can find greater health in our lives? You'll see some examples described by our colleagues in this issue. This is also a matter that the Spiritual and Personal Wholeness Committee of the national Ministers Council is committed to engaging. The ABC General Executive Committee (GEC), comprised of executive leaders from the national, regional and affiliated organizations of ABCUSA, likewise has taken an interest, and invited the Ministers Council to work together with them.

Larry Greenfield, Executive Minister of ABC Metro Chicago, has taken leadership on the GEC initiative. He talks about his own journey elsewhere in this issue. Greenfield says, "We don't take very good care of ourselves in any of the essential ways of self-care. We don't eat right, we don't exercise, and we don't sleep enough. We are irregular in the task of spiritual self-care." And he suggests that we lead institutions that aren't too good at it, either. "Look at the church suppers we pray over, or what we serve in the fellowship hour." We could start with any number of areas: diet, exercise, prayer, Bible study we don't undertake as part of sermon preparation, spending time with family.

My own experience and that of the many clergy with whom I coach and consult suggest most clergy are over-functioners – we take too much responsibility for others and for the life of the church. This can lead to burnout, and to not enough time for family and for self-care. Asking clear questions such as, "Whose responsibility is this? Is it really mine? When do I need to let go?" help create time and energy for the rest of life.

I love the passage from Mark where Jesus and the disciples "had no leisure even to eat," and he takes them away from everything (Mark 7:31-32). Of course they immedi-

ately get sucked in when people follow after Jesus. But it says that Jesus at least made the effort to get away when the workload was overwhelming. To me a great deal of this has to do with personal boundaries: setting boundaries around our time so we can get enough prayer, rest and exercise.

We will never find greater health and wellness if we only think we "should" do it. More and more I'm working on receiving God's love and acceptance for myself just as I am. It is out of that place of living in love that I am able to make incremental changes. I'm starting to think of the voices of judgment and self-criticism and self-hatred as demonic. Can we take care of ourselves without making "self-care" yet another weapon to use to beat ourselves up? Remember, God loves us more than we can imagine, and has compassion for us, more than we often have for ourselves. Change comes slowly! What would a grace-filled approach to self-care and fitness look like? Perhaps some baby steps, a five minute walk, one minute of prayer.

I'm always interested in how our family story impacts our functioning in ministry. We might look at who in our family know how to take care of themselves. Many clergy are oldest children which often results in being highly responsible, even over-responsible. Perhaps a younger brother or sister can be a resource for learning how to have a good time!

Here are some areas I'm working on:

Turning off electronic access as a spiritual discipline. I typically don't check email on Sundays (that's possible in the work I do, coaching and consulting, since I don't always work on those days). But I notice that I do access the Internet on Sundays. Completely fasting from electronic connections is a practice I want to experiment with more.

Paying attention to my hunger. I'm trying to learn to ask more questions of myself. Am I hungry? Am I full? Or am I simply tired or bored? It's so easy to get caught up in a conversation over a meal that I don't even notice that I'm full and so I keep eating. Or I'm writing something and to avoid working on it I get a snack. Or I come home at night, and I'm really tired, but instead of resting I eat something. For some people (not me!) they get so busy they forget to eat.

Starting up exercise (yet again...). I do love to walk and have for years, but I have been less regular in recent months. I also started using free weights a couple of times a week. I hate the weights, but I feel and look better when I can keep that up. I remind myself that just because I've stopped exercising doesn't mean I can't start again.

People are very different in this regard. I do really well with steady daily habits. One mentor of mine would spend several hours in prayer once a week rather than every day.

I don't think there's one right way to do it. People have different levels of tolerance for workload. Balance may be unachievable, but life with a certain rhythm over time is better. Living with the tension of work undone, or work unfinished, is an inevitable part of ministry. If you have small children, life has a different quality than if you have no children or an empty nest. Here's how I'm inclined to think about self-care: learn to know yourself better and do what works best for you, and see if you can develop your repertoire and include some areas that are a stretch.

Larry Greenfield suggests we together develop a covenant approach to this area of our ministerial life, just as we've done with the Together in Ministry approach. We frequently try to work on these areas alone, often not very successfully. It might make a difference, he says, if we had a partner who would say, "How are you doing?" Here's an example: I know of two pastors who lift weights together regularly. They are exercise partners as well as spiritual partners. And there is mutual accountability for showing up at the gym.

My spiritual director suggests addressing one habit at a time. Don't try to take on everything at once. But what might God be calling you to do right now? Walk for ten minutes? Pray for five minutes? Eat one more vegetable a day? Eat one more meal with your family this week? Pick one, and see what God might do with small steps.

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Growing and Learning Through a Health Crisis

Carol McVetty



I always thought I was pretty good at self-care. I guard my day off the way a dog guards a bone. I eat my fruits and veggies...even enjoy them! I take a walk most mornings. Before that, I spend a half-hour praying and journaling. And for years, ever since my kids stopped waking me in the night, I have gotten my recommended eight hours of sleep. But in recent years I struggled with a growing realization that the pace of my ministry was unsustainable. The preoccupations and worries of my work took up an ever larger space in my life and psyche. Especially with the children out of the house, there didn't seem to be much left beyond work and rest. I was often weary and anxious.

So when my husband and I were granted a sabbatical for the fall of 2008, I knew what my goal was: to figure out a better work/life balance. That three month sabbatical proved to be a blessed gift. It was a time of rest, prayer, study, travel, reflection and delight. I got reacquainted with myself outside of the role of pastor. Today, I am in a profoundly different place. I have found a sustainable pace and a significantly less stressed approach to ministry. The sabbatical surely cleared away the debris and laid a solid foundation for that new approach. But I am convinced that the profound inner shift I have experienced came about as the result of a health crisis.

We returned from our sabbatical just in time for Advent and Christmas. It was January by the time I began to integrate and apply my sabbatical learnings. I was just beginning to plan for the coming months, and to consider how I would do things differently, when I got sick. It was simply an upper respiratory virus. But then it didn't go away. February was lost to a serious case of pneumonia. Throughout March and most of April I was functioning, doing whatever most needed to get done, but distracted by a series of ever more invasive tests and moving up the chain of medical specialists at my hospital. It gradually became apparent through those weeks that while I felt okay, something was definitely wrong with my lungs. I was diagnosed with a very rare carcinoid tumor blocking a bronchial tube. Treatment was surgery to remove one third of my right lung. Recovery took three months of medi-

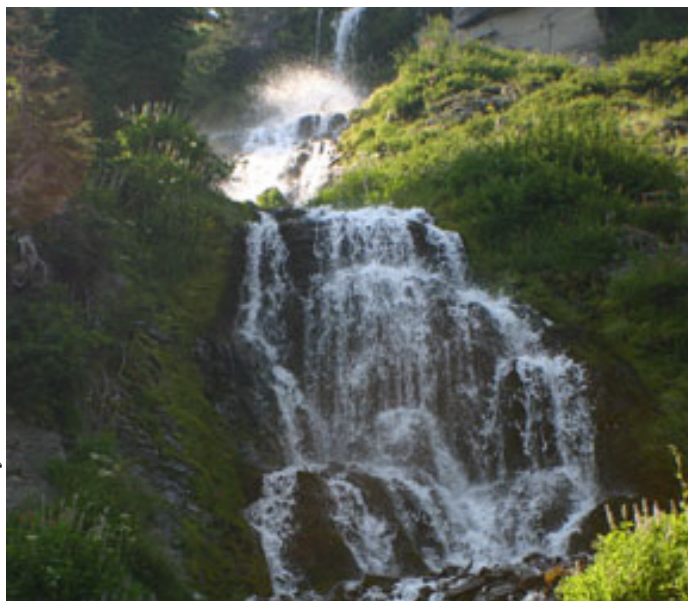


Photo Credit: Jennifer Whitmore

cal leave and vacation. (Although I'm being followed carefully for a number of years, this low grade cancer is unlikely to return. My prognosis is excellent.)

When I returned to work at full capacity in mid-summer, I was surprised to see significant changes in my work life. My attitudes and feelings were different as well, significantly so. And yet, the changes were subtle. They were not easy to pinpoint. Eventually I decided that the changes I could see were the result of a deep, hidden transformation that had occurred, without my awareness, as a result of my illness. It isn't easy to articulate exactly what happened, but I will try.

First, I felt less driven to perform and achieve, and therefore able to keep a better balance between work and life. I realized I had often taken a perverse kind of pride in racking up more and more hours. My approach to ministry now feels less like constant striving. I am more often able, even while hard at work, to rest in God's blessing. Of course while I was weak and recovering from cancer surgery, that was my only option. Throughout that time I had a palpable sense of being held and cradled in God's grace. It was a definite physical sensation that emerged as an image in my mind: I was curled up in a nest created by the prayers of God's people, a nest that held me up in the warm light of God's loving care.

Of course the members of the congregation did all the things church folk are good at, with cards and emailed words of support, casseroles and help with chores. These acts of love became truly sacramental for me, outward evidence of the grace through which I was being sustained. We had even more opportunity to welcome these gifts of kindness since our daughter's wedding was just six weeks after surgery. I had to let others do things the mother of the bride enjoys doing (but that also usually leads to a lot of stress and overwork)...things like planting flowers in the yard, decorating the sanctuary, preparing a morning-after brunch for out-of-town relatives, even buying my husband's tie.

The wedding became what perhaps all weddings should be, a celebration created with joy by a whole community of family, friends, neighbors, and the congregation. I guess I learned on a deeper level a lesson I've been working on my whole life: it's not all up to me. Second, I am now more focused. I find it easier to identify priorities and see them through. I have always had a tendency to take on too much at once and become overwhelmed. Now my lists are shorter, and I get through them more often. Perhaps this comes from crashing hard against the reality of my limits. Not having enough lung capacity to walk up a flight of stairs, or even sing a hymn, dispels for good one's delusions of invincibility. Even now that I am fit and energetic again,

I can't forget that my energy is limited. I know in my gut, not just in my head, that I can't do everything there is to do, or even everything I'd like to do. So I am able to let go of things with less inner wrestling. As a result, I find I'm actually getting more done. I spend less time and energy spinning my wheels.

Finally, I believe my preaching and teaching come from a deeper and more centered place than ever before. I do the biblical study I need to do, but I spend less time reading up on how a half-dozen others have applied a particular passage, and more on simply "marinating" in the text until my own message (or rather the Spirit's message for me) comes bubbling up. Surely this is growth that occurs gradually in the course of all our ministries. It just seems that I got pushed into fast forward for a time. I identify with Job when he said, "I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you." (Job 42:5) Facing life-threatening illness grants a rather large chunk of first hand spiritual experience. With that comes greater confidence that one has legitimate truth to share. Preparing for sermons and Bible studies is still hard work, but it is accompanied by more ease and less angst. My family finds me less crabby and distracted in the course of that work. And I find the work less draining, more sustainable.

Obviously, the message here for clergy longing for more ease and balance in their work is not "get sick!" Perhaps it is this: real and lasting change starts on the inside. If you want to work differently, do whatever it takes to give your mind and heart room to change. Give priority to opportunities to breathe and grow. Pay attention to your life. Didn't Frederick Beuchner say something like that? Look to your life for the lessons God has to teach you. Listen. Be present. God will stretch your heart so that you have the capacity to live in more life-giving ways.

Carol McVetty serves as English Language Pastor and Minister of Discipleship at the North Shore Baptist Church, Chicago. Her husband, Rev. Douglas Harris, is also a part of North Shore's multi-cultural Pastoral Team. Since it's June, while you are reading this article, Carol is likely to be outside gardening.



Photo Credit: Jennifer Whitmore

Demanding Sabbath

Forrest Cornelius



A few years ago, after almost two decades in the pastorate, I realized I was having a Sabbath crisis. Sundays were moving along smoothly, but my personal Sabbath practice was nearly non-existent. Although a proponent of the concept of Sabbath in my ministry, I had allowed the churches I pastored to limit my own Sabbath opportunities and had failed to be an advocate for my own well-being. The churches I pastored were full of good people who believed they were advocates for pastoral time off and rest, but the reality often fell short of the good intentions. The common refrain from a caller on my day off was, “I know it’s your day off, but . . .” Because of my wife’s Monday-Friday job, we were having trouble finding quality time together as well.

I decided I needed to revisit the issue of Sabbath for myself, so I turned to Scripture to refresh my perspective. The Decalogue is central to the faith of Israel, and central to these foundational words is the command to keep the Sabbath. The Sabbath is, therefore, not just to be seen as an opportunity or gift from God, but as an integral part of the creative design that we ignore at our peril in becoming holistic beings. We must maintain a discipline of rest and balance-keeping in our lives in order to function as whole, complete and fulfilled persons before God. The very meaning of Sabbath is rest from or cessation of those activities that otherwise occupy our lives.

The use of Sabbath for the ancient Israelites as rest from physical labor was appropriate for a people whose daily work was very intense physically. But what about us? Most ministers are not involved in physical labor so much as we are in relational immersion. Our work days are full of communications, meetings, counseling, planning with others, leading and advising. This is especially true of the day we set aside to model and practice Sabbath. In fact, we who make up the clergy are not at rest on this day, but most fully immersed in our profession. On Sunday we preach and teach, we interact with those we haven’t spoken with since last Sunday in many cases, and we lead the worship experience which, by its design, is to be a refuge from the concerns and obsessions of the world we face every day. But for us, the worship event is not a refuge; instead it is a responsibility to complete. So on this day that we provide

Sabbath for others we cannot fully model the discipline of Sabbath in a personal fashion.

There was another who had this dilemma, a spiritual leader who found such immense pressure to minister to the needs of others that it threatened his own spirit and the balance in his life. As ministers we often model ourselves on Jesus, trying to be the spiritual warrior for others, always available and ever attentive to others’ needs. But we forget about those times when Jesus simply refused to respond. When the iron was hot and the crowds were responsive and eager, Jesus might ignore them to go and pray. Or else he would shift the responsibility of feeding the hungry crowd by telling his disciples, “You feed them.”

What my biblical survey of Sabbath left me with was two pressing truths. First, Sabbath is not optional for those who seek to be whole before God. It is indeed as urgent a command as God could give. Sabbath rest is at least as critical as protecting life (“Thou shalt not kill”) or any other primary principle in the Decalogue. Second, the life of Jesus teaches the truth that Sabbath must be demanded, not just encouraged. For Jesus there was no debate — he did what he had to do to maintain balance and spiritual integrity, even if it meant the crowds and even the disciples were left grumbling over his apparent nonchalance toward pressing matters.

These were the challenges I faced several years ago. I had allowed the press of ministry and my responsibilities as pastor of a local church to fully occupy my life. Even when I took time off my cell phone was ready to ring, and my mind was often obsessed with the issues of the church.

In addition, the balance that Sabbath was designed to restore in one’s life was badly missing in mine. Whereas the ancient Sabbath was meant primarily for rest from physical labors, a time to meditate and think, my Sabbath needed to incorporate a return to physical well-being. I needed to break away from the issues of ministry and pay attention to my physical health.

When my wife and I discovered cycling as a recreational pastime most of my sabbatical issues began to be addressed. We were able to steal precious hours together on the trails and achieve a level of physical fitness neither of us had known previously. The trails in our county are some of the best around (when they are not flooded out), and we began to take advantage of these almost daily as soon as spring arrived. In addition to the adrenaline rush of exercise that renews the spirit, bicycling was my way of escaping, going to a different place, experiencing nature and the rush of the wind as I rode. It became my Sabbath (or at least a vital part of my Sabbath).

What our new activity also meant for me and my ministry was that for a couple of hours at the end of each day and even longer on the weekends, I would essentially

find myself unavailable. Like a good pastor I would pack my cell phone in my belt pack, but I soon realized that I could neither hear it ring or feel it vibrate while riding. Once during a water break on a trail bench my phone rang and I fished it out of my pack. As I looked to see who was calling I realized it was either a true emergency I couldn't respond to immediately (the car was an hour away), or else it was nothing that couldn't be handled by taking a message. So, without looking at the display, I let it ring and go to voice mail.

By riding and escaping, I learned the art of demanding Sabbath. No longer would I let my cell phone ring "when-ever." I began turning it off while focusing on Sabbath activities, whether for a day off or for just a few hours. I also began "turning it off" on my days off, meaning that, unlike before, I began to more fully turn away from the issues of the church while taking Sabbath time. I turned away intentionally, as a demand I forced on myself because of the crucial role of Sabbath in creating wholeness before God. As a result I have also become a better minister, approaching my professional duties refreshed and renewed.

There are times when cycling is not possible in Iowa. Winter is out, of course, unless you want to try to invent a new extreme sport: ice-biking. Recently my wife had surgery and now cannot cycle for several weeks. She urges me to go out on my own, but there is an element that is lost when we do not experience it together. Nevertheless, what I learned about Sabbath through cycling will guide my Sabbath activities — most notably that it is essential, and that only I can demand it and advocate for it.

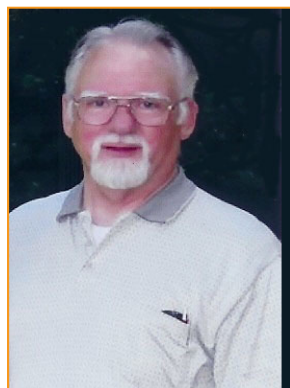
Forrest Cornelius has pastored two ABC churches in Iowa since 1995, and is now "on sabbatical" between ministry assignments, living in Waterloo, Iowa. He presently serves as Secretary/Treasurer for Ministers Council Senate.



Photo Credit: Jennifer Whitmore

In Demanding Times

George Nye



On August 6, 1986, a phone call came. Our son had been seriously injured up near Mt. Hood. He was heading into surgery. Would we be making the 275 mile trip up to the Portland area to be with him? Just to let us know: "He's now a quadriplegic." So began an eight month descent into numerous life and death decisions at three Portland area hospitals,

with attempts at repair and rehabilitation, small victories and huge setbacks. At the same time I had to continue my full-time service as pastor down in Medford.

It should not be! A mother should not have to, every three hours, irrigate and re-pack a surgical wound in her son's neck so deep she can see the outside of his esophagus. A father should not have to learn to irrigate a groshong tube into his son's heart with the stern warning that one mistake could be fatal.

Amidst the anger and the tears, the struggles and the encouragements, our son Mike worked hard through his routines of occupational and physical therapies to reach his goal of coming home for Christmas. That was the goal that kept him going. Then, a week before the journey south, his infection flared up again. He'd not be home for Christmas. And so, on this sad evening, I was learning how to insert a catheter into my eighteen year old son, who by now was discouraged beyond words. Down the hall came the Christmas carolers: "Deck the halls with bows of holly,... 'tis the season to be jolly, fa la la la la la la la...." "We wish you a merry Christmas...." I went over and closed the door against their joyous sounds, and returned to my dreary work. I couldn't stand their singing.

After my task was completed and my son had disappeared somewhere into another world, I stood at the window of that dark room and stared out into the foggy night. The faint rays of the colored Christmas lights on the building across the street made their way through the gloom. Where was that Christmas joy that I usually celebrated? How could a heart so filled with fatigue and grief over a son's broken body make sense of the happy Christmas tunes and the jingling bells? Even worse, how could I return to Medford in a couple of days and lead a celebrative Christmas Eve service?

Then, as quietly as the night mist, the Savior came to me and said, "They didn't have any snowmen when I was born on that first Christmas. There were no festive lights decorating the walls in Jerusalem, and no wandering carolers in the streets of Bethlehem, singing about silver bells and mistletoe, when My mother lay down on the straw, wracked with pain, weariness and fear. Utterly alone save for her faithful husband, who knew nothing about being a midwife, she delivered Me to a dark and despairing world."

What I learned on that darkest Christmas night was that wherever we are in life, Christmas begins in the shadows, sometimes in the spiritually coldest moments of our weary existence, and the Savior says, "There am I, born again in your midst to give you hope and healing, to hear your cries of frustration and despair, to give you the balm of peace, and refreshment for your soul." We need to be reminded that that promise holds fast in every season of the year.

There is no doubt that I am an unregenerate type A personality. Into my seventh year of retirement, I have taken on a temporary job that, along with two other obligations, has me working close to sixty hours per week. The number of hours are partly of my own doing, since I insist on giving my best effort to every project I undertake. But, like the illustration I shared above, there have been occasions in my life when events coming at me have been beyond my control. I could not take time away for extended R & R until the crises were reduced to manageable problems.

I have always planned regular annual vacations that did not involve weekly guest preaching or developing year-long preaching plans and study guides. Nevertheless my experience has been that the most crucial times for finding refreshment and relaxation come in the midst of the battles, confrontations, and deadlines. I find refreshment in the celebrations of tasks accomplished well, projects completed that bring great satisfaction, and times of taking a break to check bases with the Lord on what's appropriate to address and what is not. Weariness especially washes over me when I have broken my connection with the Holy Presence.

A turn of phrase that has been helpful to me in times of greater demands is found in a poem by Walter Rauschenbusch. It reads in part,

In the castle of my soul is a little garden gate
Whereat, when I enter, I am in the presence of
God.

In a moment, in the turning of a thought,
I am where God is, this is a fact...

All life has a meaning without asking, I know;
My desires are even now fulfilled,
my fever is gone.
In the great quiet of God

My troubles are but pebbles on the road,
My joys are like the everlasting hills...

So it is when my soul steps through the postern
gate
Into the presence of God.
Big things become small and small things be-
come great. ¹

A "postern gate" is the small gate next to the main gate of a fortress, designed to allow a person to flee to safety inside the walls when an enemy on horseback or in full battle regalia is in pursuit. The gate is big enough for the unprotected one being pursued to gain entrance, but too small for the armed pursuer to get through. (If you've been to the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, you know that you must stoop to gain entrance through a passage designed to keep out the warrior horsemen.)

We might suppose that Walter Rauschenbusch, the author of that poem, was a monkish recluse who enjoyed a spacious gated garden of tranquility and days of rest and meditative reflection. But we would be wrong. Rauschenbusch was an early 20th century Baptist social gospel advocate struggling against injustice in the Bowery in lower Manhattan, fighting for the rights of the disinherited. His frustrations, disillusionment and persecutions were non-stop. On the streets of that slum he had to find his "little postern gate" in the midst of constant misery and challenge. Rauschenbusch's spiritual refreshment and physical restoration had to come in the milieu of conflict and unrelenting challenges. He had no idyllic island paradise to which he could run. But when his soul stepped through the postern gate he found himself in the presence of God, where all things were put into perspective, he was reassured and redirected as needed, and he found again his joy in the "great quiet of God."

The twenty third Psalm speaks of two forms of refreshment. Both are legitimate. The first is the refreshment that comes through a place of physical retreat located in the midst of the green pastures and still waters, where the Good Shepherd refreshes and restores us. It's the place to which we all dream of escaping when busyness and demands and stress seem to rule our lives. The second form of restoration is found at the table set before us in "the presence of my enemies..." However much we yearn for those green pastures and still waters, they are often unavailable to us because ours is presently a place and an engagement which we cannot leave nor abandon. But the Good Shepherd is there, nevertheless, to replenish and anoint us for the challenges we face. Though the setting is dramatically different, the nourishing presence of our

Comforter is no less effective. I find great solace in this latter promise of restoration and reinforcement.

I look forward to the times in the near future when I will once again occupy those pastures green for a season. But in the meantime, I am thankful beyond measure that Walter Rauschenbusch's "little postern gate" is nearby, through which I may step into the holy presence of the Most High to be refreshed, reassured, and equipped to enter the fray once more, just as I was one very dark night in foggy Portland town, on a dreary Advent evening.

Notes:

¹ Rauschenbusch, W., "The Little Gate of God." **Walter Rauschenbusch, Selected Writings.** Paulist Press, 1985.

George Nye has been an American Baptist pastor for 48 years. He retired from his position as Senior Pastor of Eastwood Baptist Church in Medford, Oregon in 2003; he was Interim Senior Pastor at Westminster Presbyterian Church, Medford, and currently serves as President, American Baptist Churches of Oregon.

Taking Turns

Ken Whitt



Growing up in a family of 5 boys, I had to learn to take turns. We were a game playing family—I especially loved "Monopoly" and was a vicious world conquerer in "Risk." I was so competitive at "Scrabble" that by age 10 my mom would no longer play with me. But no matter how competitive I was, I always had to respect the necessity of taking turns. My dad was generous and kind, almost to a fault. He insisted, as my little league baseball coach, that I learn to give other team members a turn at pitching, even though we almost never won if I was not on the mound. I was forced to learn, against my will, that some things mattered more than winning, and one of them was taking turns.

The benefits of taking turns became so ingrained in me that when I found myself having to solve one of the most difficult life problems I, without a conscious thought, adopted taking turns as the solution. I still solve this critical dilemma the same way and I still do it automatically. I expect I would have continued to handle this extreme



Photo Credit: Jennifer Whitmore

challenge to a good life without reflection, except that I was asked to write this article. And writing will require consciousness.

So first let me list as many of the ways as I can think of that I bring wholeness to my life. Abundant living requires, for me, all of the following: Strong friendships. Romance. Life affirming work. Joyful parenting and grandparenting. Attention to diet. Spiritual direction. Photography. Creative woodworking. Prayer. Reading. Spiritual retreats. Stunning vacations. Clergy support. Earning a living. Daily exercise. Playing family games. Cooking spicy food. Coaching soccer. Playing the guitar. Learning new creative skills, like, right now, making picture frames. Changing the world. Creative writing. Playing pool. Graphic design. Camping and hiking. Preventive medical care.

How in the world can I possibly accomplish and experience and be committed to all of these ways of taking care of myself? The only possible answer is, "Taking turns." Last week, devoted to learning the new skill of making picture frames and intending to give some of those frames as wedding presents soon, I spent a lot of time in my woodworking shop. There have been months and even years when I have completely neglected this joyful aspect of my life. But as I approached the end of last week I became aware of other ways I balance my life that I had been neglecting; most notably exercise and prayer. So today began with a deep and lengthy experience of prayer—and the

remembrance that without a close bond to Jesus everything else loses its vibrancy in my life. I also spent 45 minutes on the treadmill, walking at 3 miles per hour. Tonight, for the first time in months, I am going to cook one of our favorite Indian foods, a kind of chicken curry, for Kathy, my wife. Oh, and I am taking time to write this article. One value to me personally of such writing is that as I write I remember that God's presence and inspiration are always available.

Last night I did some planning related to a family vacation this summer in the Adirondack Mountains. It is difficult to find the words to describe how excited I am about this trip. On Friday I am taking my wife camping for the first time in her life. This adventure will celebrate—I hope it doesn't rain—our second wedding anniversary. In April I took my first mission trip in ten years. I went to El Salvador. What an amazing and life-changing and congregation-shaking venture. But a few months before this trip I resigned from my position as coach of a boys select soccer team. It just seemed to come down to taking turns. I had to let go of one way I experience joy to take hold of another. And Kathy and I have a gorgeous pool table. She said last night, "We haven't played a game of pool in months." Good grief! Before the table had been covered for months with all of the stuff we were taking to El Salvador and now it's covered with all the photographs from the trip. Unfortunately, it's necessary to take turns.

There's a sermon I want to write for this Sunday. During my prayer time today, I felt compelled to write and preach this message. However, it's an extremely difficult theme and will require careful research and meticulous writing in order to avoid coming across as judgmental or self-serving. Over the years I have written many carefully crafted sermons, most recently one on abortion that was extremely well received by the church. Sometimes the preacher just has to do the hard and long work of exceptional ethical writing. But, can I do it this week? Not only do I have to take into account what I know about competing personal and ministerial demands, I also have to be aware of the element of surprise. If I decide that this week it is the turn of a disciplined ethical sermon it will not be the turn for something else, and I may not be able to give what happens to come along my best effort.

Over the long haul, how does this practice of taking turns work out? When our third child, Micah, was born, my wife and I immediately noticed the intense additional demands upon our lives. BM (before Micah) we had worked out a pretty good system for taking turns with each other, our two girls and our vocations. But a third child blew all of that away. For me, in particular, holding all of this in prayer quickly convinced me that I could not and must not continue pursuing my Doctor of Ministry

program. I let it go with no regrets. It was no longer my turn. The circle of life goes around, however, and about 10 years later it was my turn for another try. Then the Doctor of Ministry program became a critical and healthy part of my life, and within the next two years I completed it.

In taking turns you have to be extremely careful, exercising the same care a father extends when deciding which child to spend time with on a particular evening after work. A couple of these children are demanding and a couple of them are soft spoken. One is definitely more needy, and another shows a great deal of promise if given sufficient encouragement. You have to keep all of this in mind. Above all, you have to keep all of these children and their various needs before God. Which brings me to an extremely important conclusion.

Review my list above. Then ask the question: "Does Ken take turns with all of the items on this list?" My personal answer is, "Absolutely yes." All of them get a turn and all of them are sometimes in the background for awhile. That is the way it is in my life. But, is that OK? Not quite. The reason it is not OK to take turns with prayer is that this priority is required—absolutely required—in order to make good choices with all the other priorities.

Go back through this article and note—as I did while writing it—how often I needed to pray for the wisdom required by this process of taking turns. In ministry, as in all aspects of life-like relationships and physical health, prayer is indispensable when you are trying to balance the many parts that are required for wholeness. I feel deep loss when I take no time for woodworking or photography for weeks at a time. My life becomes more shallow when I don't invite friends over for dinner, and when I dodge exercise I begin feeling lethargic. But when I postpone prayer day-after-day I begin to lose the capacity to live well and wisely. It is always God's turn.

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Soul Care

Monica Rikli



For me, the best place to address soul care is to look at the way Jesus cared for his own soul. Jesus was in tune with or had the same nature as His Father (John 10:30), whether he was in a crowd, with his trusted friends or alone. Jesus used imagery and other poetic devices to describe how He saw the world around him. He taught the people then and continues to teach us now through his example of how to use all of our senses to care for our own souls.

One of my favorite ways to encounter the Trinity is in nature. Jesus said, “Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, or reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. ... Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin.” (Matthew 6:26, 28) Jesus teaches us that we do not have to be anxious about what we will eat or what we will wear. The lesson about anxiety is important, but the imagery he uses to teach the lesson is also worth noting. He is telling us to pay attention to the way God takes care of His creation. We are His creation.

I have three dogs that give me no peace until I have taken them for their morning hike. We hike up and down the hills, and then I find a boulder to sit on to pray or meditate while they hunt. Many mornings I wish I could skip the routine, but there has never been a morning when I have regretted my time to enjoy the beauty of His creation. The Lord sustains and renews my soul through the sounds of His singing birds and the breeze rushing through the trees.

Lectio divina and the Jesus Prayer are two more ways I find rest for my soul. When practicing lectio divina, “we read to hear the voice of God personally, and the words of Scripture become to us spirit and life (John 6:63).”¹ When I read a portion of Scripture slowly and repeatedly I am not only reading; I am hearing the Word. This invites the Word to penetrate my heart and mind. Using our senses we can become characters in the story. We practiced lectio divina during class one day using Luke 10:38-42, the story of Martha and Mary. The first time I listened to the Scripture, I related closely with Martha because I have an older sister who can be counted on to take the reins of any task while I typically prefer to sit and listen to a story. As it was read another time I realized

that as a wife and mom, I have a tendency to rush around to tie-up all the loose ends before I stop to listen to Jesus. There is a time to be Martha and a time to be Mary. I need to be attentive to the times when Jesus is beckoning me to come sit at His feet, as well as when to be about His business. Pick a portion of Scripture, read it slowly, out loud, or slowly, to yourself, or listen to the passage on tape or online; take the time to absorb each word individually. Visualize the story as it unfolds. Think about the setting in which the story is told; was it by the water, in the desert; in the morning or at night? Were there crowds of people pushing in or was there only one other person present? Use your imagination to allow the story to saturate your mind and soul.

The Jesus Prayer is a breath prayer. As you say the Jesus Prayer, “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner,” you meter your breathing to the words. You silently say, “Jesus Christ, Son of God,” as you inhale; then you say, “have mercy on me, a sinner,” as you exhale. This practice traces its roots to the sixth century when Diadochos taught “repetition of the prayer leads to inner stillness.”²

The Jesus Prayer can be shortened and other words can be substituted. A breath prayer is designed to bring inner quiet, so choose a portion of Scripture that brings life to your soul; find a natural rhythm of breathing as you say it. I like John 14:27, “Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you,” and sometimes I shorten it to “Peace.” As a seminary student, wife, and mom I frequently ask for His peace.

Mentors have been a recent addition to my routine. It is not that I have not had people who have spoken love and truth into my life before but, as a Denver Seminary student, it is now a requirement. With too many things on my plate already I was not sure that mentoring was all that necessary. I already had a great spiritual director to talk to; what more could I gain? And yet I have been so blessed by the people He has brought into my life to speak, truth, wisdom, and love to my spirit. It only took one meeting with each of them to trust that they were going to love me like the sister in Christ that I am to them.

I have learned lessons about: women in leadership, and leadership in general. The American Baptist Churches: the history, traditions, and practices that I have become a part of within the past year. I have grappled with some very challenging issues with the help and honesty of my mentors. I admit to some bumps and bruises, but I have grown much stronger in my calling and in my faith. “In consolation I experience new depths of communion with Christ. In desolation I am challenged to greater humility, surrender, and obedience, and I am transformed in soul to be more like Christ.”³

Although the valleys are never fun to navigate I believe we all learn more during the times of trial. I have enjoyed the privilege of learning from others who have passed this way before me. I accepted my mentor's challenge to look deep within myself to find my strengths and weaknesses.

I encourage you to find one or two people you trust to speak that kind of truth into your life, people who will care for your soul. Because I realized the importance of being mentored I have become more aware of the opportunities to invest in others as they journey along their way. "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked." (Luke 12:48) It is important to spend time in silence and solitude in order to receive all from the Lord we will need to give to the others He puts into our path to love. A trusted spouse, friends, mentors, family, and a spiritual director are people a healthy soul cannot do without.

The soul care practices I have mentioned are disciplines I must employ regularly to maintain spiritual health, but exercise is important to focus my mind and condition my body (see 1 Corinthians 9:26-27). We need stamina to effectively care for ourselves and others. Listening to praise and worship music is also an easy way to come near the Lord. I often listen to the music as I am showering and preparing for the day, or while doing a daily devotion.

Humor is another important tool in healthy soul keeping. The writer of Ecclesiastes 3:4 says there is "a time to weep and a time to laugh." We all know there is a lot of sorrow in our world, but there are also a lot of very funny things that happen. Take the opportunity to laugh when something is funny. Be ready to laugh at yourself too. When my mentor/pastor told me one day that I was still "fussing" about something I went home and told my husband. He got the biggest kick out of it because it was true, but he could not say that to me. Now we laugh about my "fussing" and it relieves tension. I also hear my father's voice in my head as I am walking along the trail irritated about an issue. He used to say to me, "It sounds like you've got your nose out of joint." I am reminded that I am called to love unconditionally, to forgive quickly, and not to take myself too seriously.

Jesus' promise is the most important message. "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you." (John 14:18) "The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you." (John 14:26) Jesus prayed for His followers then, and still intercedes for us today: "The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and love

them, even as you have loved Me." (John 17:21ff) No one or nothing else is capable of caring for my soul better than Jesus.

Notes

¹ Baker, Howard, *Soul Keeping; Ancient Paths of Spiritual Direction*. Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1998, p. 139.

² St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary home page, *Saying the Jesus Prayer*, <http://www.svots.edu/>.

³ Baker, Howard, *Soul Keeping; Ancient Paths of Spiritual Direction*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1998, p. 69.

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A Way to Relate

"When you draw, you become a channel, a midwife, a vehicle, if you will, expressing things in life that are real yet they are not completely or fully present until you see them. ...No one looks through your eyes but you! With awareness you can make changes, see things more clearly, see what is really there.

"You can see the grace and weight of a tree or person. You can see that it has a place in the world. You also notice other things, like the way it thrusts up out of the ground. You notice the pain in (a) man's eyes and the tilt of his head.

"Drawing helps you open your heart and develop a deep, loving, and lasting relationship with what you are looking at. This relationship, like all relationships, asks something of you. It asks that you accept it as it is."

Williams, Heather C. Drawing as a Sacred Activity. 2002: New World Library, Novato, CA, p. 30.



Photo Credit: Jennifer Whitmore

1000 Days in Ministry: The Prayer of Play

Alex Pickens III



Kirk Byron Jones, in his book *Rest in the Storm* introduces the idea of the minister seeking renewal in a place he calls the “Back of the Boat”. His image is lifted from the Mark 4 passage that finds the disciples in a deadly storm while Jesus sleeps on a cushion in the “back of the boat.”

Jones distills his message to the minister in his/her “first 1,000 days” by stating, “If I were limited to a single message of advice to aspiring pastors, it would be this: Set aside at least one day per week for prayer and play, or the prayer of play.”¹ Aspiring pastors of all ages can find great benefit in the purposeful consideration of their first 1,000 days in a ministerial position.

The habits formed and disciplines adopted during the first 1,000 days will benefit the minister for the balance of his/her career. Conversely, the points of compromise and stumbling experienced by the minister in the first 1,000 days in a position will, without intervention, worsen over time.

Jones’ introduction of the term “prayer of play” elevates play by the minister from a space of furtive indulgence to a place of holy necessity. Prayer is communication with God.² Play is activity for amusement or recreation.³ According to Jones, when we take the time to play, God speaks to us.

Play may seem foreign to many professionals in ministry. Jones describes play as that thing that make your heart sing. What are the things you enjoy doing but feel unable to experience because of the pressures of ministry? For Jones play includes listening to jazz, drawing, video games and time spent with family. What does play mean for you? Take the time to write a list to help prepare you to experience the prayer of play.

During the first 1,000 days, our lists are often concerned with generating growth, preaching the Word, making disciples and serving the community. There are also lists of expectations leveled against ministers that have little to do with what are believed to be the essentials of pastoral responsibility, but that nonetheless require attention.

These expectations differ in each church. Norman Shawchuck, in *Leading the Congregation*, calls a pastor’s response to churches’ expectations ‘paying the rent.’ Shawchuck states that a pastor can choose to pay or not to pay. Paying the rent may involve using the King James Version of Scripture, shaking hands at the front instead of the back of church, delivering communion to sick and shut-in members or posting office hours on your door. If a pastor wants to thrive in the first 1,000 days, he or she either ‘pays the rent’ or trains others to do so.

Shawchuck goes on to state that once the rent has been paid, the pastor has more flexibility to pursue ministry priorities that are important to him or her. A priority critical to the success of a minister is the habit of setting aside at least one day per week for the prayer of play. The habits formed and disciplines adopted during the first 1,000 days will benefit the minister for the balance of his/her pastorate. Conversely, the points of compromise and stumbling experienced by the minister in the first 1,000 days will, without intervention, repeat themselves over time.

During the first 1,000 days of ministry, establishing an appreciation for and commitment to the prayer of play can produce an environment that combats burnout and dejection. By forming the habit of the prayer of play, a minister can open a space for renewal and encouragement.

To do so:

- Plan a weekly Sabbath day for the prayer of play;
- Make a list of the things that make the heart sing;
- Believe that the Sabbath day is as sacred as the Bible teaches;⁴
- Communicate clearly to members and leadership the need for a Sabbath day.

Notes:

¹ Jones, Kirk Byron, *Rest in the Storm*, page 43

² <http://eastonsbibledictionary.com/search--prayer>

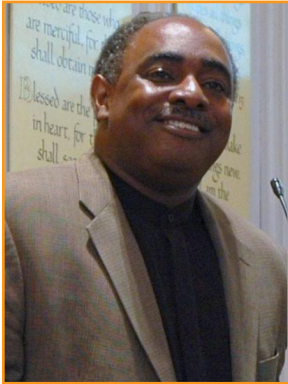
³ <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/play>

⁴ Shawchuck and Heuser, *Leading the Congregation: Caring for Yourself While Serving Others*, page 83.

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Peace, Be Still: Claiming Your Calm in a Crazy Busy World

Kirk Byron Jones



The summer had come and gone and I felt frustrated and restless. In just a few weeks it would be time to begin another academic year of teaching and another season of speaking on the road. The summer, my 50th, was to be my time of deeper than usual respite and reflection. I planned accordingly, but then life and a lack of insistence on my part undid it. Before I knew it, an extended period of relaxation had become a broken break. In a last bid to salvage what I could from my lost Sabbath, I thought to take advantage of an opportunity to spend a week alone at a retreat center. The little yellow house on the backside of the center's forested grounds and the lake next to it saved me.

Stillness: A Sweet Summer Surprise

Sometimes thirst is enough. I received a blessing of deep peace during my few days on the lake, maybe because I wanted it so. Mornings were spent walking along the small sandy beach and wading in the water. Afternoons saw me seated on rocks in the forest looking around and within. Evenings, I lounged in the house in utter silence, broken only by the soft jazz I brought to join me. It was a time of emptying all burdens of worry, and abiding in spaces the poet Mary Oliver calls, "not thinking, not remembering, and not wanting." In the 11th hour, my summer Sabbath had been salvaged. I had touched what a great disciple of stillness, Howard Thurman, called "the physical and mental cessation of inner churning."

Just as I was about to break out into full grief for my having to go away from my get-away, I discovered that God had saved the best for last. I sought to chronicle the surprise blessing in my final journal entry of that week:

Stillness, inner peace, is not a vacation. Peace is a life-style. You have a lake, trails, a forest within you that you can go to anytime you desire. You do not have to go away to go away; just go within.

In that moment, I felt that I didn't have to leave the most important thing I had discovered at the lake, deep inner calm, behind; I could take it with me. Suddenly, a new awareness had hold of me: I could carry my calm inside of me all the time. This knowledge caused me to recall words

that had fallen into my consciousness during a personal morning devotional moment earlier in the year:

Where Love Lives

If you can be
still enough
long enough
there is a place within
on the other side of silence
where love lives.

Overcoming our Suspicion of Stillness

In order to observe more inner calm and peace, we must come to terms with our conscious and unconscious negative valuations of stillness. For example, we associate stillness with mischief. If younger children are too quiet in a home, an alarm may go off inside of us: "What in the world are they up to?" At other times, stillness is used as a punishment: "Sit down and don't you move a muscle!" Sometimes we punish persons who have offended us by giving them "the silent treatment." Another example of a negative perception of stillness is our discomfort with extended pauses in conversation. Finally, we may associate quiet with trying personal life situations. I remember a seminary student linking her uneasiness with stillness with "the calm just before the storm" of another abusive assault from her father.

Though sometimes painful, identifying ways in which stillness has been negatively experienced is a way of preparing stillness to wear new garments, to take on greater positive meaning and value.

Cultivating Stillness-Desire

We receive what we deeply desire; what we focus on is what expands in our lives. Consequently, you will not realize more stillness and the resulting peace of mind and soul in your life unless you truly want it. Warning: Given that our society promotes noise and busyness, you will have to develop your desirability in a hostile environment. It is possible to increase your "want-ability factor" by periodically reminding yourself of the amazing life-transforming benefits of stillness.

Here are a few such benefits attested to by, not only writers and religious leaders, but persons in varying walks of life I have encountered in seminars and workshops around the country:

Calm
Soul Refreshing
Hearing God's Voice
Acceptance
Release

Insight
Clarity
Soulfulness
Surprises
Originality
Connection to God, Self, Nature, and Others
Contentment
Elation
Lavish Grace
Inner Spaciousness
Courage to Face Fear
Creative Energy
Noticing More
Patience
Stretching

Take a moment to reflect on each stillness-blessing and its meaning for you, past, present, and future.

Peace-Pockets: A New Stillness Ritual

Peace-pockets are 5-15 minute intentional intervals throughout the day for spiritual, mental and spiritual respite and renewal. During your peace-pocket time, you may listen to soft music, watch a burning candle, pay attention to your breathing, allow your mind to wander free, or give it the freedom to not wander anywhere or think of anything at all. The goal is to be “off” for a moment. The more experience you build, the better you will become at observing your peace-pockets. Here are four things to remember as you create your unique and soulfully refreshing peace-pockets:

1. *Permission.* If you don't value your calm, no one else will. You have to become convinced of the meaning and value for peace in your own life. You have to become persuaded that you are a better person with peace than without peace. Convince yourself that stillness leads to peace, peace leads to clarity, and clarity leads to creativity. Should you begin to feel guilty and selfish about making more time for nothing, dare to believe that the deeper selfishness is not giving you such time. As long as you remain “crazy busy” you insure that the world, including those nearest and dearest to you, will never behold you at your finest. That would be selfish.

2. *Planning.* Schedule daily and weekly times of stillness, and be open to the unscheduled graces of free time to simply be. Planning them with the same intent that you plan your work signals to your conscious, and just as importantly your unconscious mind, that claiming your inner calm is as important to you as anything else in your life.

3. *Practice.* Don't just plan your mini-respite, live it. Real change involves more than knowing you need to change, wanting to, and planning to. As valuable as they are, authentic change transcends awareness and desire. Real change is actually choosing to be different, to live differently. In addition, sustaining true change involves trusting your transformation beyond all fear and suffering.

4. *Personhood.* Know that having regular periods of stillness helps you to remember that you are infinitely more than what you do. You are God's “fabulous you” apart from any accomplishment or achievement. God cannot love you any more than God loves you right now, despite anything you have done or will do.

You Are Already in Peace; Peace is Already in You

If you don't mind, please take a deep breath. Go ahead; breathe in deeply. Hold it. Now, exhale. Do it again. Breathe in deeply; hold; release your breath. And, just one more time, completely inhale; exhale completely.

Hopefully, you have just experienced several seconds of inner calm, a piece of peace.

I am guessing that you were so focused on taking, holding, and releasing air that you were unable to think about anything else. Not thinking about anything allowed you to be free of everything, including all anxiety, fear, and worry. Inner peace is not an elusive blissful state achievable only by the highly spiritual. It is all around you all the time. You're standing in it; it is standing in you. The arduous effort of stillness is simple awareness.

Because inner peace is God and God is everywhere, all the peace you will ever want or need is already present around and inside of you. Similarly, all the love you will ever want or need is already present around and inside of you.

One of the biggest impediments to experiencing inner peace is the perception that we are always so far from it. Always, you are much closer to peace than you think. Always, peace within is never more than a small still moment away.

Excerpted from Dr. Jones's forthcoming new book, **Say Yes to Grace: How to Burn Bright without Burning Out.**

A pastor for over twenty years, Rev. Jones was the founding minister of Beacon Light Baptist Church in New Orleans, and Senior Minister at Calvary Baptist Church, Chester, PA; Ebenezer Baptist Church, Boston, MA; and the First Baptist Churches of Randolph and Whitman, MA. He is currently pastor of First Baptist Church, Tewksbury, MA.

Remember the Sabbath or Let Your Heart Sing or ...???

Heather Entrekin



My first acquaintance with serious depression came well into mid-life. I was almost 50, a new pastor of a busy, vigorous church dealing with the complexities and emotions of transition, high expectations, conflict, and the relentless, daily responsibilities of ministry when disabling

depression struck. Emotionally, I sensed myself moving toward the edge of an abyss. Physically, it was a struggle to eat or to sleep. I had no sense of humor or curiosity. Every ounce of energy went toward appearing normal and continuing to function, adding isolation and loneliness to the burden. Long after it was over, I referred to this experience in a sermon to which the church moderator responded, "I had no idea." I had put so much effort into hiding the symptoms that even my husband commented, "I had no idea."

Having told this story to clergy groups a few times, I know that my experience is not an anomaly. Clergy often fall short of the mental and physical health we teach and preach. First of all, it is a reality of our culture. Studies show that about one-third of American adults are obese and about one in four suffer from a diagnosable mental disorder in a given year. A recent telling headline in *The Kansas City Star* read, "Study: Misery Rules Midlife."

But for clergy, the statistics are even more ominous. National research has found that mainline Protestant ministers tend to be more overweight, stressed and depressed than the general population, a finding that conversation and observation at the average clergy conference would confirm.

There are multiple causes. A success-driven church culture that would have us "grow spiritual redwoods," "transform church boards" and advance from "good to great" promotes a chronic, uneasy sense of "not enoughness." Phyllis Tickle describes the era in which we live as a "semi-millennial eruption," a shift of seismic proportions of which drowning in information overload, correspondence, and endless "to-do" lists are signs. One pastor, Larry Loughhead, who kept a firm grasp on his own sense of humor while confronting the vicissitudes of ministry, warned, "Life can never be so complicated that it can't be more so." In the race to do more and better, we forget Gandhi's wisdom: "There is more to life than increasing its speed."

The dangers of our unbalanced, overstressed, fragmented lives are not only personal but ecclesial as well. The Los Angeles diocese is settling a sexual abuse lawsuit in excess of \$660 million. Protestants may have fewer headlines but one does not have to look far to find Baptist colleagues, with unhappy marriages and unhealthy lifestyles, who have harmed those they were called to shepherd, nurture and serve.

Parker J. Palmer identifies the problem as losing touch with oneself. Confronted with demands of adulthood, the pastorate, and the times, we are in danger of losing the ability to be fully ourselves. We "stifle the imagination that journey [of the soul] requires...because imagining other possibilities for our lives would remind us of the painful gap between who we most truly are and the role we play in the so-called real world." (*A Hidden Wholeness*, 15) We get obsessed with succeeding, or at least surviving, at considerable cost to self, others and the world at large.

The Body of Christ is ill served by leaders who absorb the destructive ways of the world. As Thomas Merton states in "Conjectures of a Busy Bystander,"

To allow oneself to be carried away by a multitude of conflicting concerns,
to surrender to too many demands,
to commit oneself to too many projects,
to want to help everyone in everything,
is to succumb to the violence of our times.

All of this, along with a perfect storm of ministry events and a family history of depression, contributed to my own disabling experience. Recovery from depression and associated physical symptoms involved professional help. Overcoming the stigma of therapy prolonged my distress, but once the call for an appointment had been made and my need shared with another human being, the cloud began to lift. In addition to self-understanding, she offered the simplest of prescriptions: healthy food and regular exercise. Instead of potato chips, choose an apple. Walk every day. Step by step, apple by apple, I got well.

But the challenge to love and care for oneself in order to love others continues. I discovered that I was further from the abundant life than I thought upon application to the Lilly Foundation for a clergy renewal sabbatical grant. The question posed to applicants was, "What will make your heart sing?" It was a difficult question to answer. In fact, it brought tears. When I shared it with others, it often tripped tears in them as well. One friend commented, "Who ever asks that question?"

It was as if I could only dare to consider it with a Lilly grant dangling over my head. But why? Am I not created in the image of God? Am I not God's own beloved

daughter? Would I not want this for the ones I love? For the church? For the world?

The genius of the question is its ability to remind us that caring for oneself is one of God's commandments and the beginning point for care of others. As Joan Chittister writes, "What we do not nourish within ourselves cannot exist in the world around us because we are its microcosm." Palmer reminds us that the world does not need better pastors, teachers, presidents as much as it needs human beings fully alive (**Let Your Life Speak**).

In the end, it was my husband who best answered the question of how to be healthy and whole. He, who sees pastoral over-functioning from the inside and bears some of the consequences, said simply, "Keep Sabbath." Again, a commandment.

To make a spacious place within for the presence of God, the one true source of abundant life, requires Sabbath. Excellent guides and resources abound, many written by clergy who came to true Sabbath-keeping via heart attack, cancer or mental breakdown. The command is given by God, who does not live as if the world were a place of endless productivity, ambition and worry. God is not a workaholic and does not need to be more secure, more in control or more noticed (**The New Interpreter's Bible**). The letting go, stepping aside, and playfulness of Sabbath forms us in this beautiful image.

Recently, I had a difficult meeting to prepare for. It demanded time-consuming study and preparation on top of an impossibly full week. The only available day was Friday, my scheduled day off, so I plunged in that morning, reading and taking notes with a sense of mild desperation. At noon, I closed the books and began Sabbath, a half day of letting the world move on without my effort and remembering my appropriate place within it. My breathing relaxed, my heart began to hum a little. The next day, trusting more in God than myself, having rested, having watched a dragonfly in the garden, the meeting went well.

Wholeness is a choice and our faith teaches us that its seed is within us. Our loving God provides the commandment that leads a heart to sing.

Notes:

The New Interpreter's Bible, Vol. I. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1999)

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The Ministers Council Provides a Community for its Members:

- To assume responsibility for the faithful practice of the ministerial calling;
- To develop and promote ethical standards that both guide and shape the way in which the vocation of ministry is performed;
- To assume personal responsibility for and to encourage physical and emotional well-being in the practice of ministry;
- To inform, support and encourage one another in the deepening of personal and communal spiritual life;
- To work together to develop the skills necessary to become effective servants of Christ's church
- To encourage growing friendships that inform and correct the leader as she or he seeks to faithfully respond to the call of God in Christ Jesus.

The Ministers Council is that Unique Place within the National Structure of the ABCUSA which:

- Offers leaders opportunities to articulate a distinct ministerial viewpoint, among the many denominational perspectives that need to be voiced and heard, as we work together for the growth of Christ's kingdom;
- Serves as an advocate for its members in times of difficulty and conflict;
- Is solely focused on the well-being of clergy as they engage in the ministerial calling in all of its dimensions.

www.ministerscouncil.org

Vegetarianism by Faith

Don Ng



Growing up in a Chinese-American home, there was always some kind of meat dish. Even if there wasn't enough money to buy a prime cut of beef, there was always *lop-cheung*, sausages that came tied in bunches with the string used to dry them in the butcher shop. After a pot of white rice was washed and the water had been

boiled off, you put a *lop-cheung* in the pot for each person eating that night and covered it. After a few minutes, the rice was fully soaked in the fat of the *lop-cheung* and the aroma filled the house. Then it was time to eat. It is said that Chinese eat anything with four legs except the kitchen table.

In 1998 I was called to serve as the Senior Pastor of the historic First Chinese Baptist Church in San Francisco. At the other end of our street stood a restaurant, Uncle's Café, that still serves one of the best tasting ox tail stews in town. Instead of *lop-cheung* over rice, the ox tail stew, mixed with potatoes, carrots, onions, and celery in a thick gravy, is poured over the rice. This is a big step from what I had at home. For about \$5, you get the stew over rice, a dinner roll, a cup of coffee, and a piece of apple pie. I ate with no guilt or self-consciousness. And for such a price, it's cheaper than a Big Mac!

As Senior Pastor my weekly responsibilities included preparing a sermon and a Bible study. Every week, I sought to interpret the Scriptures in a way that had relevancy for our congregation. During one season my personal study led me to read Genesis 2, and I learned how in the original creation God planned for us to eat food that grew from the ground. I read Isaiah 11 and discovered how, in the future, God wants us to live peaceably with all living things, including cattle, pigs, chickens, turkeys, fish, and shellfish. I began to experience an inner struggle that questioned why God's plan for creation was not being made evident in my personal lifestyle.

Every time I stood behind the pulpit I called people to be more giving knowing that they would still hold some back. I called people to be more kind knowing that they still had prejudices. I called them to act and live as the Body of Christ knowing very well that there were still gossip, backbiting and squabbles in our church. I began to understand that I would always be calling people to be more than they are able to be until the age of Christ's reign. I

came to the realization and then the conviction that I am a vegetarian not by birth in a Chinese-American home, but by faith, so that I may model for the *not yet* and for the *is to come*. For me, being a vegetarian is a matter of personal and spiritual integrity.

My eating decision opens discussions about other lifestyle issues. It's no longer possible for me to eat vegetarian and not look into every other aspect of living more holistically. Physical exercise becomes important and essential and now occupies two time slots for playing tennis in my weekly day-timer planner. When tennis is not possible, I substitute gardening and housework as alternative forms of physical exertion. Following recommended physical check-ups and taking vitamin supplements provide the confidence that my health is on the right track.

As the result of my conviction, multiple circles of life and relationships are also affected. While my wife is not a vegetarian, when we eat at home together we both eat vegetable-based meals. We shop at markets that have more vegetarian products and fresh fruits and vegetables. Last year I even started a small planter-box garden that has yielded heirloom tomatoes, string beans, and strawberries.

Perhaps the most significant transformation of what started as my rediscovering the meaning of Scriptures and how that has affected my lifestyle is how my church has responded to my decision. While I haven't converted as many to vegetarianism as God has transformed lives to believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior in the past 11 years, I have made a small impact. Our congregation is more aware of having a vegetarian option when I come over for dinner. They make the dish and try it for themselves and on many occasions, they even like it.

When I was first called into Christian ministry way back in 1975, I never thought that I would not be eating anything with four legs except the kitchen table. But what I do know now is that God has called me to be faithful, both when I stand behind the pulpit and when I pick up a fork.

Don Ng is the Senior Pastor of the First Chinese Baptist Church in San Francisco since 1998. Previously, he was on the staff of American Baptist Educational Ministries in Valley Forge for over 20 years and grew up at another historic church, the First Baptist Church of Boston.

Conversion

Larry Greenfield



When she came back in the room after reviewing my blood work, the first words from the nutritionist at the University of Chicago Medical center were, “Well, Dean Greenfield, would you prefer changing your diet and life style before or after the heart attack?”

I didn’t follow my normal procedure of mulling over the pros and cons of the topic in question. Instead, I told my quite un-grand but serious inquisitor, “I’m pretty sure, before.”

It was, I realized later, a conversion experience, almost religious in character: how would I decide what to do with God’s offer to make the best use of the resources entrusted to me? Would I choose self-indulgence or, I think it is fair to say in the best sense, self-love – which is another way of talking about “self-care.”

More was at stake, of course, than myself. I had a spouse and two children entrusted to my love and care, and their love and care to me, along with a surviving parent and wider family.

And then there was the calling to a particular kind of Christian ministry that so many others had invested in besides my family. There was that local First Baptist Church in Sioux Falls, South Dakota that had loved me, cared for me, invested in me. There were Sunday school teachers, youth workers, pastors and directors of Christian education, and a whole host of lay people who had kept on encouraging me as a child, in BYF (Baptist Youth Fellowship), and BSM (Baptist Student Movement).

There were those directors and pastors and counselors at Camp Judson and speakers and advisors at the American Baptist Assembly at Green Lake.

Faculty and administrators at ABC-related Sioux Falls College had invested in me also, in addition to all who had contributed to my professional and graduate education at the Baptist-founded University of Chicago, where I now had the unexpected opportunity to teach and administer.

This wasn’t just a decision about me alone. It was a decision about how I would treat others in my past, present and future. It was a decision about how I would treat the God who continued to create and transform me for some purpose other than myself.

Yes, yes, it certainly was a decision about the physical body that was a gift from God, but it was also a decision about how this physical body entrusted to me could be the vehicle for my calling in ministry.

So, right there in that small room at the University of Chicago Medical Center, with the nutritionist as the means of grace, I experienced a conversion into a new way of life – a new way of life that I increasingly realized was according to God’s will.

She (the nutritionist) and I, along with my family and close understanding friends, started on my new way of life gradually. Since cholesterol and triglycerides were the major presenting problem, we began with diet: first eliminating red meat and eggs and whole milk and most cheeses, then moving to the removal of fowl and virtually all dairy products, then later fish and foodstuffs with egg and milk ingredients. You get the picture: over three and a half decades I increasingly became a vegan, eating only vegetables, fruits, cereals, and nuts.

Over those years, people have asked why I did it. Was it a moral decision, they wanted to know? For a long time I joked in response: “No, I did it for selfish health reasons first and then got self-righteous about it later.”

But more recently, I’ve had to confess that it was ethics from the beginning, at least in small and then ever-increasing doses, for the reasons I’ve mentioned above – about the stewardship of the body given me, the continuing love and care of those entrusted to me, and trying to make good on the investment that others (and the Other) had made in me.

In terms of ethics, however, my moral vision has indeed widened because of the discipline I’ve embraced – I hope without becoming self-righteous and pharisaic. It isn’t just my body that is at stake, it is the bodies and callings and purposes of others. By “others” I don’t mean only other human beings, many (not all) of whom need a lot less meat protein and useless fats than are the standard dietary fare, but also “the fish of the sea, and the birds of the air, and every living thing that moves upon the earth.” And then there’s the whole matter of the way animals and birds and fish are now treated and mistreated so that humans can indulge themselves at the expense of those “others.” So that means that I’m increasingly less apt to keep quiet when I see fellow human beings preying on those other creatures of God’s creation, and more evangelical in my theoretical and practical ethics. As a matter of fact, I do believe the Good News that Jesus revealed about the in-breaking reign of God has to do with not just a human “beloved community” but one that embraces all of creation.

I formerly made biblical reference to the passages in the first chapter of Genesis, vs. 29 - 31, and the ninth, vs.

1- 7, to suggest both God's intent for what humans are to eat and how that intent is relative to new circumstances (i.e, pre-fall and post-flood). That's not so much the case any more. Instead, because I understand that the law of love is always preeminent over every other law, I'm much more prone to make relative my self-imposed norm about not eating products derived from any animal by referring to Paul's first letter to the Corinthian church on matters relating to food (chapter 8): it's all about not causing a sister or brother to stumble. But I tend to think that I'm more likely, in most instances, lovingly to keep the sisters and brothers upright by encouraging them to abstain from imbibing animal products these days.

My conversion to self love/care and the love and care of others, broadly understood, also included other bodily disciplines, which, in turn, had implications for emotional and spiritual disciplines. Primary among them was and continues to be daily physical exercise. For a long time I had to do that by myself: running, jumping rope, climbing stairs for at least thirty minutes a day. The virtue of jumping rope, by the way, is that you can do it virtually any place in the world if you simply remember to bring the rope along with you.

But now, as a gift of grace, I have a dog who needs daily exercise as well and loves to run with me along the lake-front on the south side of Chicago and at our country place in east-central Illinois. I can't speak for the dog, of course, but keeping to this daily routine (most of the time only three miles in a half hour and, less often, five miles in the whole hour) has redemptive and re-creative qualities not just for the body but also the mind, spirit and soul – as if those dimensions of our humanity could be separated!

Deal (the dog) and I have a commitment to picking up trash and litter along the path, which is, we hope, our contribution to sustaining and re-creating the beauty of God's handiwork along Lake Michigan and the Illinois countryside. But the daily exercise serves also to rid of us of the garbage (in the form of sweat) in our physical bodies, and the mental and emotional garbage (in the form of resentment and anger) in our brains/minds, and the spiritual garbage (in the form of excessive self-interest and self-love) in our hearts and souls, and provides us with the opportunity to confirm that we are new creatures in Christ. (My apologies to those readers who don't appreciate the emotional, moral and spiritual lives of animals, but I have to be true to my own understandings of God's comprehensive work in the lives of all of God's creatures.)

My personal testimony is that physical disciplines of these sorts make me better prepared daily to engage in the emotional disciplines of release and embrace and the spiritual disciplines of biblical reflection and devotional meditation related always to contemporary events – an imperative

if one believes that God is always and everywhere active in the world.

And, again personally, I've found that the physical, mental, and spiritual disciplines are directly connected – how could it be otherwise for the Christ we follow and the God we serve? – to the discipleship of being evangelists of the Evangel who leads us and the world into God's reign.

The conversion in that conversation with the nutritionist wasn't a one-time thing. It has proven to be an on-going transformation -- a work in progress, as we often say. My guess is that this kind of self-love and self-care could be even better if we, as ministers, did it together.

Larry Greenfield is the Executive Minister of the American Baptist Churches of Metro Chicago and theologian-in-residence of Protestants for the Common Good. He earlier served as a member of the administrative staff and faculty of the University of Chicago Divinity School and president of the Divinity School in Rochester, NY.



Photo Credit: Jennifer Whitmore

Letters and Notes

Thank you very much for sending the latest copy of *Minister*. I read most of that issue and recognized many of the names of those who wrote articles for this publication.

I feel bad that the ABC continues to remind itself that there are women in ministry who suffer from lack of support. That has been true since my days at Princeton Seminary with the class of 1979. Linda Hart and I were classmates.

But these women should be aware that the doors are not open wide for them in the profession of the ministry. Given that they make that career choice knowing full well that they are sure to meet resistance from males active in nearly any congregation.

I know a lot about such resistance since I am one of the very few disabled clergy active and participating in the ABC. I, like the women in the *Minister* just published, must be wise enough to wait for the right doors to open for each of them. We still live in a male-dominated society whose older members think that ministry is a male only profession. Things will change in time. Would the ABC offer the same level of support to those nearing retirement age?

Thanks again

Rev Robert A Wendel

With all respect, many of us are deeply committed to opening doors now - for women, those nearing retirement, retirees, and the differently-abled. We believe things will change when we change them. -ed

Hi,

I received the *Minister* email. Very interesting and thanks for sending. I am a Navy Chaplain and deployed in the Arabian Gulf with the Marines. This is great to enjoy over a cup of coffee in the morning.

Blessings,

Cdr Lee Axtell

11th MEU CE Chaplain

Just a quick line to say, well done *Minister* magazine! I appreciated this issue very much and all the work and thoughtful effort that went into it!

Pastor Karen Helton

Cincinnati, Ohio

Hello,

My name is Rev. Ruth Martinez. I am an American Baptist minister in Puerto Rico. I just finished my thesis dissertation for a DMin degree and I want to tell you that the spring issue of the *Minister* magazine was of great help for me because my thesis investigation was on the attitude of a sample of church members towards women in ministry. To our knowledge this is the first investigation on this theme in Puerto Rico and among Hispanics. The investigation was done comparing a Baptist church pastored by a man, a Methodist church pastored by a woman and a church that does not recognize female ministry pastored by a man. Anyway, I wish to thank you for dedicating this issue to women's ministry because there is still a lot to accomplish.

In Jesus Christ,

Rev. Ruth Martinez

Puerto Rico

Our Christian sympathy and condolences are extended to Debbie Kamm, former editor of Minister magazine, and her family following the recent death of her father, Rev. Albert H. Kamm. Rev. Kamm, a graduate of Colgate Rochester Divinity School, served as Pastor of First Baptist Church of Clifton Springs, NY, and later became Pastor Emeritus there. He also served as Chaplain of the Clifton Springs Hospital and Clinic until his retirement, in 2006, at the age of 90. Prior to entering the ministry Rev. Kamm, a Staff Sergeant in the US Army, was a Chaplain's Assistant during WWII in Europe. - ed



Photo Credit: Jennifer Whitmore



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mission

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

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