

1000 Days in Ministry: The Prayer of Play

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 slept on a cushion in the “back of the boat”.

He 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 find great benefit in the purposed consideration of their first 1,000 Days in a ministerial position.

The habits formed and disciplines adopted during the first 1,000 Days in a position 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.

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 those things 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 is 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 the rent.

Paying the rent may be use of 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 is interested in thriving in the first 1,000 Days, he or she either ‘pays the rent’ or trains others to ‘pay the rent’.

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

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

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

Shawchuck goes on to state that once the rent has been paid, the pastor has some flexibility to more fully pursue ministry priorities that are important to him or her.

A ministry priority that is 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.

The 1000 Day Minister should:

- 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 teaches⁴;
- Communicate clearly to members and leadership his/her need for a Sabbath day.

⁴ Exodus 20:8

⁴ Shawchuck and Heuser. [Leading the Congregation: Caring for Yourself While Serving Others](#) page 83