

FIRST-PERSON: Healthy habits for pastors during COVID-19 culture

by Willie McLaurin, posted Monday, March 30, 2020 (28 days ago)



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NASHVILLE (BP) -- COVID-19 will forever change the way we do life and ministry. Change is around us in every area of life. God often uses crisis to bring about changes that were overdue in our lives. Author Tony Robbins reminds us: Change happens when the pain of staying the same is greater than the pain of change.

The coronavirus did not catch God by surprise. We must not waste this season, but we must embrace it and allow God to shape our lives for His glory. Many pastors and church leaders are past due for a RESET in their regular routine. I am convinced that we must take advantage of this season to reinvent ourselves physically, spiritually and emotionally.

Physically

Let me first acknowledge that more and more pastors are taking advantage of the benefits of regular physical activity. Health professionals continue to emphasize the benefits of regular physical activity. If you are in need of a physical tune-up, then this season is perfect for you. I would encourage you to carve out time in your

calendar each day to engage in physical activities.

Activities such as running, walking, cycling and body resistance training are some options in this social distancing culture. Many home media packages offer a complimentary fitness channel with a variety of routines. Use this season to hit the "Reset" button on how you honor your temple.

The pressure of ministry was already off the charts in a pre COVID-19 culture. The demands of ministering in a social distancing culture can be a challenge. The ongoing pressure of perfecting online worship, meeting budget, caring for the flock and not gathering with your congregation face to face can be overwhelming.

The pressures can cause ministry leaders not to set boundaries in their schedule and neglect getting proper rest. God designed us as creatures that need rest. Be sure that you set healthy boundaries for yourself. I would encourage you to have a plan for each day. Spend time each day in self-care, family time, ministry engagement and a mental health block.

Be sure that your ministry engagement time includes your sermon preparation time. Some simple ways to stay connected with your congregation are writing handwritten notes, scheduling pastoral care phone calls and weekly conference calls with your church staff and key leaders.

Make sure you get proper rest. Healthcare professionals recommend you getting six to eight hours of sleep per night. Get your rest -- you will never regret it.

Spiritually

Pastors and leaders get busy, and in the midst of the busyness, their personal devotion life takes a back seat. Use this COVID-19 season to move your devotion life back to the driver's seat.

I read a church marquee that said, "Seven days without prayer makes one weak." Jesus said it best in Luke 18:1: "And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint."

Many leaders are running on empty because their spiritual devotion is on pause. Please use this COVID-19 season to reignite your passion for being in the presence of Jesus. That time could include listening to worship music on your device or reading through a book of the Bible and spending quality time talking to your Heavenly Father. This would be a great season to begin journaling. It is often during crisis that God speaks. Capturing those thoughts would be a great benefit.

Richard Baxter, the great Puritan preacher, believed ministers must be prepared for greater temptations than the average Christian. "Take heed to yourselves," he once wrote to ministers, "because the tempter will more ply you with his temptations than other men. If you will be the leader against the prince of darkness, he will spare you no further than God restraineth him. He beareth you the greatest malice to those that are

engaged to do him the greatest mischief. As he hateth Christ more than any of us, because he is the General of the field, the Captain of our salvation, and doth more than all the world besides against his kingdom; so doth he hate the leaders under him, more than the common soldier: he knows what a rout he may make among them, if the leaders fall before their eyes."

Emotionally

Much has been written about the emotional health of pastors. Mental health during a social-distancing culture is vitally important. Sitting at home can really get the best of you. I want to encourage ministry leaders and pastors to spend time engaging in a hobby. If you don't have a hobby, find one. All of us need something that occupies our mind.

Since God created us to be a whole people, what we do (our will), how we think (our mind), and how we feel (our emotions) are connected. Hobbies don't simply distract us; they can change the emotional and mental chemistry of our brains. Hobbies do not have to cost a lot of money. One of my hobbies is word-search puzzles. Those books can be purchased for as little as \$1. You can even download them on your device. Have fun and laugh a little during this COVID-19 season.

Also, every pastor and ministry leader needs to have some friends to connect with. Make sure to spend time each week to connect with friends with whom you can share life (taking care to stay six feet apart). I have three accountability partners I connect with on a regular basis. They encourage me, challenge me and refresh me. The apostle Paul points out the priority of receiving refreshment, "May the Lord show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains" (2 Timothy 1:16).

Let me encourage you to use this different season to hit the "Reset" button on your life and develop some healthy habits that will benefit you today and tomorrow.