

Persevering in Ministry for the Long Haul
New Life Dresher Leaders Training
February 1, 2020

- I. Introduction
 - a. The parable of the porch
 - b. Spiritual decline happens by degrees rather than all at once. All too easy for our relationship with God to suffer in the context of ministry to others.
 - c. 1 Timothy 4:6-16. Integral connection between our personal walk with God and our ministry
 - d. To paraphrase Jesus, “Leaders, it’s possible to gain a church but lose your soul.”
 - e. Self-care vs. Self-stewardship
- II. Warning Signs of decline
 - a. Decreasing prayer life
 - b. Living on “pious rehash”
 - c. Growing gap between public life and private life
 - d. No “reserve power”
 - e. Smoldering anger or cynicism
 - f. Increase in “escape” behaviors
- III. Unique temptations and pressures in pastoral ministry
 - a. We can traffic in truth without being impacted ourselves.
 - i. Having a lively ministry does not equate to a vital relationship with God.
 - ii. Too often we can study for information rather than seeking transformation
 - iii. “Never trust a skinny cook!”
 - iv. Jeremiah 15:16
 - b. We struggle to admit weakness or need
 - i. F.I.N.E
 - ii. Open vs. vulnerable
 - iii. 2 Corinthians 1:8-11
 - iv. Zack Eswine’s categories: Ever since the fall we are tempted to be . . .
 - 1. Everywhere-for-all—grasping at omnipresence
 - 2. A fix-it-all—grasping at omnipotence
 - 3. A know-it-all—grasping at omniscience
 - c. Relentless exposure to evil and suffering
 - i. Inevitable that you will be impacted by stories of sin and suffering
 - ii. Diane Langberg: “They bring you their stories. A perfect stranger walks into your room with a story unknown to you. They will take you to places you have never been and perhaps do not want to go. They will force you

to be present to abuse, violence, death, deceit, brokenness and darkness. You sit surrounded by all of this stuff day after day, hour after hour, and you are an image bearer. You *will* be impacted or shaped. . . . Make no mistake, the work of therapy [or ministry!] means sitting with evil and suffering. To think otherwise is to be deceived. . . . What am I to do so that I do not end up in the very shape of that death and darkness?"

- iii. 2 Corinthians 11:28—"And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches"

- d. Increased spiritual warfare

- i. Target on your back. 1 Peter 5:8
 - ii. John Newton—"On the Snares and Difficulties Attending the Ministry of the Gospel"—"You have known something of Satan's devices while you were in private life...But you may now expect to hear from him, and to be beset by his power and subtlety in a different manner. You are now to be placed in the forefront of the battle, and to stand as it were as his main target. So far as he can prevail against you now, not yourself only, but many others will be affected...The work of ministry is truly honorable; but, like the post of honor in a battle, it is attended with peculiar dangers."

- e. Busyness (will cover this separately later; this is both a temptation arising from within *and* an external pressure)

IV. Cultivating your spiritual life

- a. General observations

- i. Apart from Jesus we can do nothing—John 15:5
 - ii. No single approach or practice will make or break your spiritual life.
 - 1. Life is principally a series of ordinary moments. "How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives" (Annie Dillard)
 - 2. "There is no life hack for the soul" (John Mark Comer)
 - iii. The importance of habits in spiritual formation
 - 1. Practice-based vs. proposition-based models
 - a. Hearing doesn't automatically translate into doing.
 - b. Our habits are formative of our beliefs and affections, for better and for worse. Habits/rituals/life liturgies form and aim our hearts toward the kingdom or away from it (James K. A. Smith)

2. “Rule of Life”—the basic rhythms and practices that define your life both individually and corporately.
- b. Formational practices. Overall theme here—“Slow down.” Psalm 46:10, “Be still and know that I am God.”
- i. Don’t sleepwalk through your Christian life
 1. Brene Brown—“What a lot of us do is that we stay so busy, and so out in front of our life, that the truth of how we’re feeling and what we really need can’t catch up with us.”
 2. Cultivate an awareness of what you are experiencing in the moment and use it as an opportunity to engage God in the moment.
 - ii. Taste and see that the Lord is good
 1. Psalm 34:8
 2. “Whatever wins our affections will control our lives” (Ed Welch)
 3. How to do this?
 - a. Pay attention to metaphor in Scripture
 - b. Pay attention to beauty
 - c. Use your whole body to engage God—in private devotion and corporate worship
 - iii. Cultivate thankfulness for the day and be ruthless with discontent
 1. Psalm 118:24
 2. Ignatian Prayer of Examen
 - a. Consolations and Desolations
 - b. Five Stages (see Jim Manney, *A Simple Life-Changing Prayer*)
 - iv. Share your heart regularly with a trusted friend or mentor
 1. Proverbs 14:10—“The heart knows its own bitterness, and no stranger shares its joy”
 2. A friend is someone who helps you re-narrate your life in light of the good news of Jesus Christ (Stephen Fowl)
 - v. Treat your body like you really need it.
 1. Sleep.
 - a. “Few things are as theological as sleep. Show me your sleep pattern and I’ll show you your theology because we all preach a sermon in and by our sleep” (David Murray, *ReSet*, 54)

- b. “It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep” (Psalm 127:2). Will we receive his gift?
 - 2. Exercise
 - 3. Food
- vi. Sabbath-keeping (will talk about this later under the busyness section)
- vii. Silence, Solitude, and Centering prayer
 - 1. “Prayer is a posture I enter into before it is something I say”
 - 2. Centering prayer—traditional practices
 - a. It’s not *emptying* our minds but a *focusing* of our minds.
 - b. Repeating a phrase
 - c. Jesus prayer/breath prayer
 - d. A single word that helps anchor your mind in God—love, mercy, grace, etc.
 - 3. *Lectio divina*
 - a. *Lectio* (Read)
 - b. *Meditatio* (Think/Meditate)
 - c. *Oratio* (Pray)
 - d. *Contemplatio* (Be)
- viii. Regular 360 degree (Four Quadrant) assessment (Tuck Bartholomew; overlaps with Jamie Smith’s “Practices Audit”)
 - 1. Rule of Life/Formation Practices—Scripture, prayer, silence, feasts/fasts, etc.
 - 2. Christian imagination
 - a. What are you reading?
 - b. What are you watching/listening to?
 - c. How do these things shape the way you think about God’s kingdom?
 - 3. Texture of life in the Spirit
 - a. What do you think the Spirit is doing in your life?
 - b. What themes is he bringing up?
 - 4. Relational/vocational callings
 - a. Family relationships
 - b. Friendships
 - c. Work/Ministry
 - d. Neighbors

- V. That's all fine and good but . . . (Addressing the Challenge of Busyness)
- a. Busyness—curse or blessing?
 - i. Binge working alternating with binge resting doesn't align us with God's intended rhythms of work and rest that are intended to bring nourishment to our lives.
 - ii. "Hurry squeezes life out of the present moment" (Alan Fadling, 181).
 - iii. So how do we move out of the fast lane? How do we make space for the kinds of spiritual practices we've been talking about?
 - b. Assessing the "species" of your busyness
 - i. Two species of busyness: unchosen busyness and chosen busyness. Usually our lives are a mix of both.
 - ii. Unchosen busyness—thrust upon you by no choice or fault of your own.
 - 1. Season of life
 - 2. Significant suffering in your own life
 - 3. Work/ministry responsibilities, especially crises
 - 4. Responding to unchosen busyness
 - a. Attitude vs. Situation Change? Usually both
 - b. Attitude
 - i. Faithfulness and perseverance. 1 Peter 4:19.
 - ii. Look for and lean into God's mercies. Hebrews 4:15-16.
 - c. Situation
 - i. Actively and creatively seek ways to lessen your burdens while entrusting your days to the Lord.
 - ii. Contentment "is not opposed to all lawful seeking for help in different circumstances, nor to endeavoring simply to be delivered out of present afflictions by the use of lawful means." (Jeremiah Burroughs, *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*)
 - iii. Chosen busyness
 - 1. This is the busyness we create for ourselves.
 - 2. Responding to chosen busyness—repentance and submission to the true time Lord
 - 3. Why is there often so much "chosen" busyness in our lives?
 - a. Fear
 - b. Pride

- c. Works over grace orientation
- d. An unwillingness to separate work from rest. “Many of us are less busy than we think, but life feels constantly overwhelming because our days and weeks and years have no rhythm . . . We have no routine, no order to our days. We are never completely ‘on’ and never totally ‘off’” (DeYoung, *Crazy Busy*).
- e. Poor prioritizing and planning
- f. The creep of technology

c. Biblical-theological framework

- i. The issue is not simply, “how do we manage our time better so we are less busy?” But rather, “How do we steward this gift from God in a way that honors him and others, and humbly recognizes our limitations as creatures?”

ii. Biblical Perspectives

- 1. Time is not our own; it’s a gift to be stewarded. Psalm 90:12
- 2. We live with kingdom urgency.
 - a. “So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” (1 Cor 10:31)
 - b. Jesus’ life
 - c. The apostles’ ministry--
 - i. Ephesians 5:15-16
 - ii. Colossians 4:5
 - d. The goal is the right kind of busyness
 - i. The goal is not a *balanced* life per se but rather a *submitted* life
 - ii. The antidote to busyness is what Alan Fadling calls, a “grace paced life”
- 3. The importance of Sabbath
 - a. The Sabbath is “the way in which God’s kingdom reclaims us, revitalizes us, and renews us so that it can reign through us.” (Marva Dawn, *The Sense of the Call*, 33)
 - b. Sabbath is the day that helps us press meaning into the other six days of the week (Gordon MacDonald, *Ordering Your Private World*)
 - c. Creation pattern (Genesis 2:1-3). God himself rested on the 7th day. Why?

- d. Pattern also prescribed for human beings (Exodus 20:8-11, Exodus 31:12-18, Deut 5:12-15)
- e. Why did God prescribe Sabbath?
 - i. Sabbath reminds us that we are creatures, not the Creator. Resting one day a week is an exercise in trust. Psalm 4:8; Psalm 121.
 - ii. Sabbath reminds us that our lives begin with grace.
 - iii. The Sabbath is a foretaste of eternal rest.
 - iv. “The cultural cycle of drivenness and escape is a counterfeit of the more biblical rhythm of work and Sabbath” (Fadling, 116).
 - v. It takes work to rest well.

d. Living in Time

- i. Not “managing busyness” or “conquering busyness” but addressing both unchosen and chosen busyness as humble stewards of the gift of time.
- ii. Be aware of resistance to change—“One of the barriers that hinders our growth is that we learn something and then just try to make it happen in our lives without much reflection on the resistance such ideas can stir within us. Within me are hidden, if not ignored, resistances to the good practice, behavior, or habit that I’m trying to establish, and that is one reason why behavioral changes don’t stick” (Fadling, 146).
- iii. Start small

VI. Conclusion—

- a. “I used to want to do great things for God. Now I want to be faithful to the end.”
- b. 2 Timothy 4:7—“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”

VII. Resources to read (in your copious spare time!)

- a. John Burgess, Jerry Andrews, and Joseph Small, *A Pastoral Rule for Today: Reviving an Ancient Practice*
- b. John Mark Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*
- c. Marva Dawn, *The Sense of the Call: A Sabbath Way of Life for Those Who Serve God, the Church, and the World*
- d. Kevin DeYoung, *Crazy Busy: A (Mercifully) Short Book about a (Really) Big Problem*
- e. Justin Whitmel Earley, *The Common Rule: Habits of Purpose for An Age of Distraction*
- f. Zack Eswine, *The Imperfect Pastor: Discovering Joy in Our Limitations through A Daily Apprenticeship with Jesus*
- g. Zack Eswine, *Sensing Jesus: Life and Ministry as a Human Being* (out of print)
- h. Alan Fadling, *An Unhurried Life: Following Jesus’ Rhythms of Work and Rest*
- i. James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*