

Personal Refreshment

By Pastor Alan Utting



'Joy is an essential ingredient of leadership. Leaders are obligated to provide it.'

Max DePree

Life in an imperfect world presents significant challenges and can be exhausting. Accepting the cross of Jesus entails experiencing suffering, yet he approached it with joy (Hebrews 12:2). Rather than attempting to meet every need, Jesus chose at times to withdraw from the crowds. His primary investment of time and energy was with his twelve disciples, whom he instructed and modelled by example in His ministry. Jesus often refreshed Himself by spending time alone with the Father, either during the day or early in the morning. Travelling between villages on dusty roads also provided Him with physical exercise.

Biblical Perspective

'In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world' (John 16:33).

'In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength....' (Isaiah 30:15).

'But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed' (Luke 5:16).

'Whoever believes in me... rivers of living water will flow from within them' (John 7:37-39).

'David encouraged himself in the Lord' (1 Samuel 30:6).

Observation

In exploring ways for personal refreshment here are some suggestions:

1. At the commencement of my ministry my church leaders endorsed my suggestion of attending a three-day time management course for pastors and church leaders. They obviously felt that I needed to improve in that area! It was one of the most worthwhile courses I had attended and have since run leadership seminars on church management. However, the downside with that teaching was that I was taught to make each 15 minutes of my working day productive. This meant I worked more efficiently, but it also meant that I didn't know how to slow down and enjoy life more. The point is, getting that balance between work and rest is difficult. Work without rest means you don't have the stillness of heart to hear from God.

Many senior leaders have found greater ministry success by delegating administrative tasks, allowing them more time to seek God. Find out whether delegating would help you.

2. Maintain regular working hours. Overworking due to cultural bondages or upbringing can be incredibly difficult to change, but it's important to establish healthy routines. I have a close pastor friend from Asia who now lives in Australia who finds it very difficult to retire to bed before midnight because of his workload. Pastoring can be the busiest of jobs or the laziest depending on the

person and their personality and outlook.

3. Be gentle with yourself and guard against negative thoughts, which can easily distort your perspective, especially at night. When I wake during the night, I find that slowly reciting a verse of Scripture helps to steady my mind and keep it from wandering into negative territory.
Get exercise and find encouragement in the promises of God. Appreciate the beauty of nature. Technology if controlled can bless you by providing great music, inspiring messages, laughter, training and growth.
4. Try not to make issues out of things that in the long term do not really matter. Learn to let them go quickly. Ask God for much grace and wisdom. Ask yourself the question 'in the light of eternity does this issue really matter?' Most times it doesn't.
5. When I used to work from home, I had a ritual for when I finished work for the day. I did not look at work related emails after the evening meal and on Sundays I would not clear emails. This enabled me to remain fresh. Another form of ritual for finishing the day may suit you better for example by simply closing a door to the room you work in if you have a room set aside for that purpose. Put a sign on the door if needed 'no entry'.
6. Ask yourself 'what refreshes you'? It could be reading a good book, writing, completing unfinished tasks around the home, taking up some hobby, going for a run, catching up on sleep, watching a good film, phoning a dear friend, gardening, house maintenance, or do an online study course etc. When did you last do a hobby? It needn't cost money.
7. Reach out to others. Unchurched historians in the days of the early church noticed how they really did care for each other, including those outside of the church. It is good sometimes to get our mind of ourselves by serving others. Why not make a list of contacts of people you can support even if it is simply a phone call to someone every day.
8. Craig Grocsehel sums it up nicely, 'But just as your body needs sleep, your soul needs time to rest in the Lord. To learn more about him. To talk to Him. To worship Him and praise Him. To fellowship with other brothers and sisters'.
9. Lastly, we need to learn to rest in God's presence. I do that often in the morning and evening by stilling my mind and meditate thoughtfully and slowly on God the Father, then Son and then the Holy Spirit. From there I slowly reflect on some of my favourite Bible passages. This is very refreshing and keeps things in perspective.

Resources

Gordon MacDonald, *A Resilient Life*

Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spiritually*

Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*

Tim Chester, *Enjoying God*