

All Leader Training
PCPC, January 2015

Personal Renewal: Self-Care in Ministry

Introduction: *The Need for Healthy Leaders*

Chocolate Easter Bunnies

Robert Murray M'Cheyne

"Study universal holiness of life. Your whole usefulness depends on this, for your sermons last but an hour or two; your life preaches all the week."

"Take heed to thyself. Your own soul is your first and greatest care."

Temptations in Ministry Leadership

1. Hypocrisy: A deep bifurcation between what I say and how I live (see Keller)
2. Burn-Out: A persistent state of exhaustion, cynicism, and frustration (see Oswald)
3. Egotism: An inflated sense of self-importance when it comes to my role in helping people

"I am not the Christ." - John the Baptist (John 1:20)

The need for self-care

"What if we viewed God's call, first and foremost, as an invitation to liberation and wholeness? Our mission is not only to preach the liberating word of grace to our people, but to model a way for them to live by grace.... My first call is to be a liberated, whole human being. My first responsibility to [those I lead] is to be a joyful, redeemed human being."¹

There is a well-intentioned, but misplaced piety that says, "I need to keep giving to others until it kills me. Isn't that what Jesus did?"

Luke 5:12-16

While he was in one of the cities, there came a man full of leprosy. And when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and begged him, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean." And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I will; be clean." And immediately the leprosy left him. And he charged him to tell no one, but "go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as Moses commanded, for a proof to them." But now even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities. But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray. (cf. Matthew 14:22, Mark 3:7, Luke 6:12, 9:10)

Wholeness will feel like death, because it demands that we confront our own brokenness, and turn our backs on all the destructive ways we've used to remake ourselves.

¹ Roy Oswald, *Clergy Self-Care*, 15.

Foundations for Healthy Personhood: *Created in the Image of God*

Creation  Fall  Redemption  Fulfillment

Creation sets the stage for everything that follows. It is the basis for understanding the impact of sin (the Fall) and the trajectory of God's saving work (Redemption and Fulfillment). Redemption is total restoration, "as far as the curse is found." In terms of personhood, this means that holiness is also wholeness.

Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 35

Q. What is sanctification?

A. Sanctification is a **work of God's free grace**, whereby we are renewed **in the whole man after the image of God**, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.

Genesis 1-2: What stands out to you about human wholeness from these opening chapters?

Three realities about human personhood:

1. We are bounded: As a creature, I am limited.
- How are we limited? *bodies, time, intellectual capacity, personality (introvert versus extrovert, etc.), proclivities, struggles and weaknesses, roles, etc.*

"Time is a non-expandable commodity. We cannot manage time better. Time manages itself quite well – it just keeps going. We must learn to manage ourselves better."²

"All great religious leader eventually learn that they must do ministry within the confines of a human body. Having a body means being finite, having limits, being vulnerable to fatigue, illness, and death. All of us, to some degree or other, have run into the wall of human limitations. When we have pressed on beyond our limits it doesn't feel good at all, so we back off a bit while still holding on to goals important to us. This is called commitment.

"The over-committed person, on the other hand, does not listen to the physical signs of being overextended. These people are so focused on their mission that they continually press on, ignoring the admonitions of friends and family and their body's increasing exhaustion. This is not commitment. In fact, we may need to question whether we are really serving idols or ego rather than the Kingdom. I do not believe God calls us to be physically and emotionally exhausted, cynical, disillusioned, and self-deprecating."³

- Think about our boundedness as a balloon. It's healthy for us to be stretched to some degree. Unless we are stretched, we will not grow. But stretch us too far, and we will blow up and become useless.

² Oswald, *Clergy Self-Care*

³ *Ibid.*, 71

- Fighting against the culture: Dallas as “a city with no limits;” “you can be anything you set your mind to;” busyness as a badge of honor, a mark of self-importance.
- Psalm 16:6: “The boundary lines have fallen in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance.” Can you say that?
- So what???. Pay attention to your emotions. Listen to your body (exhaustion, anxiety, etc.). Take care of yourself (eating, sleeping, exercising). Embrace limits and boundaries. Learn to say no with an appropriate amount of assertiveness.

2. We are connected: As a creature, I am dependent.

- In the Genesis 1-2, what connections are required for healthy personhood?
- Fighting against the culture: more connected than ever before, but also more lonely; Dallas as a “can do” city; autonomy as maturity; it’s a sign of weakness to ask for help.
- The pattern of Jesus:

“The Son can do nothing of his own accord.” (John 5:19)

“I can do nothing on my own.” (John 5:30; cf. John 15)

“Jesus is, without question, the most dependent human being who ever lived. Because he can’t do life on his own, he prays. And he prays. And he prays.”⁴

If Jesus... then how much more, us?

- The experience of Henri Nouwen

“I am telling you all this because I am deeply convinced that the Christian leader of the future is called to be completely irrelevant and to stand in this world with nothing to offer but his or her own vulnerable self. That is the way Jesus came to reveal God’s love. The great message that we have to carry, as ministers of God’s Word and followers of Jesus Christ, is that God loves us not because of what we do or accomplish, but because God has created and redeemed us in love and has chosen us to proclaim that love as the true source of human life.”⁵

“Much Christian leadership is exercised by people who do not know how to develop healthy, intimate relationships and have opted for power and control instead. Many Christian empire-builders have been people unable to give and receive love.”⁶

- So what???. Remember that serving God is not the same thing as loving God. Set aside time to love and be loved by him. Foster healthy peer relationships with those willing to be gracious and honest with you.

⁴ Paul Miller, *The Praying Life*, 45.

⁵ Henri Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*, 30.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 79.

3. We are empowered: As an image-bearer, I am called and gifted to contribute to the good of the world.
 - How does God empower us?
 - “Why is power a gift? Because power is for flourishing. When power is used well, people and the whole cosmos come more alive to what they were meant to be. And flourishing is the test of power.”⁷
 - The pattern in Scripture: from good to very good to glory (grapes, sounds, pig skins; kings and queens)
 - 1 Corinthians 12:14-27

For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

- So what???. Consider the dignity with which you have been made! Spend time revisiting your giftedness and calling: What contributions give you the most joy? What opportunities has God given you? What are the needs around you? Where have you sensed God’s pleasure in your work? How can you use your power creatively, to empower others?

Healthy personhood requires that we embrace our limitations, foster strong relationships, and actively contribute to the good of the world.

Diagnostics: *Taking Stock of Myself*

1. Most simply, the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. If the fruit of my life is more characterized by cynicism, anger, resentment, joylessness, anxiety, dread, etc., then something needs to change.

⁷ Andy Crouch, *Playing God*

"When the pain of staying the same is greater than the pain of changing, we are ripe for making a move."⁸

2. Wholistic Assessment: What area of your being do you tend to focus on the most? Least? Which is the healthiest? Least?

physical health: 1_____5_____10+

emotional health: 1_____5_____10+

intellectual health: 1_____5_____10+

spiritual health: 1_____5_____10+

3. See "Clergy Burnout Tool" developed by Roy Oswald. Change the language from "Clergy" to "Ministry Leader," and from "parish" to "small group," or "Sunday morning community."

Take the exam. If you score above 50, please talk to a pastor or ministry leader. And do not be ashamed! This could be an incredible opportunity for maturity.

4. Work through "self-care/ ministry to others" quadrants filled with questions. Where would you locate yourself right now?

Conclusion

"Proper self-care begins with realizing, through the gospel, that we cannot properly care for ourselves. Our best efforts to do so either end up in sinful neglect or indulgent narcissism."

"Proper self-care begins with believing that God cares. That he loves us. That he delights in us, and has given us the liberty (i.e. command) to take good care, as to reflect the care he gives us. The suffering and difficulty in our life cause us to doubt that he cares, yet the gospel tells us that his presence in the suffering and difficulty are proof that he cares and furthermore, he has promised, one day, to redeem us from all suffering, difficulty and sin because he cares. He cares so deeply that he sent his son into our suffering, to be with us, to suffer, more than anyone ever, on our behalf, because he cares."⁹

The Monk with the Gun

A Prayer: "Lord, make me whole. Help me to live as an image of your love. See if there is any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

⁸ Ruth Hailey Barton, *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership*.

⁹ Brent Harriman, "Soul Care," RUF Training, 2011.

NOTES