

Radical Self-Care: A Call to Sustainability for Life and Ministry



MINISTRY IN THE COVID-CRUNCH

I get it.

Ministry in the 21st Century was challenging enough
and then COVID came on the scene.

NOW...

You are doing your best to serve 24/7 and feeling like it is not enough and
you are serving in ways you never imagined.

You are asking new questions:

How can I get our ministries up and running while keeping people safe?

What about discipleship and evangelism?

When will the people return to the building?

The future seems cloudy:

Is online ministry Plan B or Plan A?

How long will 3 songs and a message cut it?

Is the building our focus of ministry?

You are exhausted with new challenges that keep cropping up as congregants work to pull you in opposing directions, and you worry about seeds of disunity being sown.

And... what about those finances?

Radical self-care Journey

You hear a lot about ***PIVOT***.

A word easy to say, but you wonder how to live into it.

You need wisdom and direction... and you need it **YESTERDAY**. (Or even **NOW**.)

In your quiet moments, you want to stay faithful, yet you find yourself questioning your call. This is serious stuff. And probably not easy for you to admit. Please, please, please do not feel badly about this. There are many reasons for questioning your call, the challenge is to figure out what God is up to in the midst of it.

Because of the demands COVID placed on how ministry is typically lived out, you are tired and chronically overwhelmed.

In this eBook I will walk you through questions to explore to give you hope.

And if you are well on the way toward burnout or already a deep fried crispy critter there is indeed a way back.



A NEW PATH FORWARD

Regardless of the number of people you influence, this guide will help you assess where you are so you can discover the next step God has for you.

The problem is that many ministry leaders are over-worked and/or overwhelmed as a result of this new and challenging environment.

The path forward will require an intentionality on your part, so you keep in step with the Holy Spirit's creative energies.

In this quick read, you will learn how to assess yourself and move forward even if you have been on a retreat last week (which right now does not seem to have helped all that much).

You will be able to use this information to quickly understand the signals your body, soul and mind are giving you and what to do with those signals.



CALLED TO BE IN MINISTRY IN CRUNCH TIME

I understand what it is like to pastor in challenging times. Many churches in North America were already declining before COVID-19, regardless of size. COVID accelerated the decline and no one can predict what will happen next. That is unsettling.

To address decline, some churches have opted to merge. In my last ministry setting, I led a merger of 4.5 churches (*yes, 4 and 1/2 churches -- I'm sure you can imagine what that meant*) to come together in hopes of creating a new and vital missional faith community. Everyone left their beloved buildings, worshipped in a school for four years while the buildings were sold and assets pooled. Then, we purchased a gutted building on 10 acres, renovated that building, did a capital campaign, and a community needs assessment all in my final year serving there.

Boy, did I learn a lot!

I was so burned out that I took a leave of absence to reassemble my broken pieces.

One thing I learned had to do with how well I functioned as God's called person.

I really struggled with how to 'go the distance with God' even though on the outside I appeared to be extraordinarily successful.

Few knew what was going on underneath.

What I figured out is that for God's creativity to reign in our hearts and ministries things like pace, load, and anxieties need to be put in their proper place.

Nowhere in the New Testament does it say:
Jesus booked like a lunatic to Bethany.

In this guide, I'll share with you how you can evaluate where you are so you can move forward with God in renewed confidence, whether that is in your current ministry setting, or in a new one.



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Below are questions for contemplation. Give yourself at least a full day with each one. Maybe you will want to journal on these, pray on these. I'll even leave some space empty for journaling.

Exploring these questions will be time well spent to help you assess where you are so you can move forward in a *SUSTAINABLE* fashion. You want to 'go the distance' and present your best self to God, right? Then, sacrifice your TIME to this purpose!

We need to be calm and centered people so we can best position ourselves to connect with God's purposes. Here's why this is so critical:

We offer God ourselves and our sustainability for the long haul AND God offers the creativity of the Holy Spirit. This enables the kind of synergy that God will use to re-create ministry in new ways. This can be an exciting time to collaborate with God, right?

This Holy Spirit creativity is critical to post COVID ministry. I cannot state that enough. So, I will state it again: This Holy Spirit creativity is critical to post COVID ministry.

The first step in any next step is to begin with a clear understanding of where you are. Be completely honest with yourself and answer as if you are standing before God. Answer the questions that apply to you. If the question does not apply, skip it... for now.



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1. How often do I consider leaving ministry? How often do I daydream about what life could be like if I wasn't shackled to my current church setting?

Leaving is certainly one way out. For some, "I'm leaving ministry" would be impossible to say out loud let alone take active steps towards departure. Others, perform a version of ministry suicide by subconsciously taking part in a moral failure that is discovered, leading to lots of brokenness and strife that eventually ends up at the exit ramp.

Before all of that, plenty of time is spent brooding and fantasizing about what life would look like without ministry. Then, comes the guilt. Or, maybe no guilt comes and more and more days pass where departure no longer becomes a fleeting thought, but an ongoing daydream, an escape from reality and its demands.

How often do you think about leaving ministry? Monthly, weekly, daily, hourly? This is not an exercise to make you feel guilty. It's a measure of what is going on.

What do your daydreams look like? Describe this in detail compared with your current ministry setting. How could you tell whether this is your personal fantasy or a desire God is placing on your heart?

Radical self-care Journey

Here is some space for you to journal.

Radical self-care Journey

2. What event(s)/situation(s) trigger me to think about leaving my current ministry?

There are indeed events and situations in ministry that are more challenging than others. Crabby congregants making demands. Leadership that drop the reigns and look to you to pick them up when it is their task to own, not yours. Looking at the church checkbook. Whining congregants. Having congregants say they won't wear a mask or won't attend church with those who won't wear a mask. Trying to decide how to roll out the next sermon series and wondering how disciples are being formed in all this chaos. Technology that is wonderful but also a nightmare when it is not cooperating fully. Technology that now doubles the amount of time to deliver your sermon.

Keep a list of the times and situations where you think about leaving.

Do you wake in the middle of the night unable to go back to sleep? What is going through your mind then? Nighttime can be one of the worst times for the darkness to really settle in.

What happened during the week that triggered this memory to wake you from sleep? Perhaps a meeting set you off? A congregant's snide remark? Your own pressure on yourself?

Make a list of the times when you are thinking of being anywhere in ministry other than where you are. Describe what is happening in and around you.

Radical self-care Journey

Here is some space for you to journal.

Radical self-care Journey

3. If I could wave a magic wand and have three things in my role in ministry totally disappear forever, what would they be? Why?

Fill in this blank: If I could, I would stop _____ (the aspect of ministry that you find least fulfilling and possibly least useful to the Kingdom of God).

The challenges of this COVID era are numerous. Ministry leaders rethink just about every aspect of their work now. Did you hear that? EVERY aspect of their work. This goes well beyond what any government or denomination requires. It is not so much WHAT you do, but HOW it is done. Right?

Perhaps there is more than one? Then, ask yourself what you resist and why. Take some time of reflection, prayer, journaling on that. All vocations have aspects that are not favorites and everyone is naturally drawn to what they like to do.

The goal is to identify what drains your joy and explore that for a moment.

Radical self-care Journey

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Radical self-care Journey

4. On a scale from 1 to 10 (1 = none and 10 = the best!) how much of the following am I getting? Be totally honest with yourself. No one is going to look at this or grade it except you (and the Spirit of God).

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Exercise is often seen as separate from work life. I know I have done that, and I was wrong. Taking care of ourselves means taking care of our ministries. No joke. Scripture says to offer to God our best, and that includes our physical being.

Exercise keeps our minds, bodies, and emotions sharp and stable. By emotions, I mean finding some of those endorphins to help elevate our mood. Who needs some of that? Physical activity can be used to “clear our heads” or burn off aggravations to better address challenging situations.

Too many put physical activity on the back burner when it really does need to be high up on our priority list. Find some activity you love to do and do it. Exercise can be as simple as a walk. Even lower intensity levels of exercise help burn fat.

As aging happens, the term “use it or lose it” applies. Start now to make this a habit, a real part of your daily routine like brushing your teeth. Find a way to make it be a habit you enjoy. And if you are not in your 20s anymore, or 30s... start now. This is an investment that always pays dividends regardless of your age.

What score do you give yourself for Physical Activity?

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HEALTHY EATING

In the sea of unhealthy food that is our culture, there is a way to navigate your way to better food choices. This is never about perfection, but about progress. Few say they will never eat a piece of cake again and then go on to live that out. A good rule of thumb is to make healthy food choices 80% of the time. Maybe you are not there yet.

There are an abundance of resources and tools to help today. The challenge is to download the app and then use it. Sometimes you do not like the reality check. I can relate. Maybe an accountability system can help? Healthy Eating is not just about good weight management. It is about giving your body the fuel it needs to do what you ask your body to accomplish.

Spiritually speaking, this is care for the temple God provided for you to function in. You have the freedom to choose whatever you want; it is not always a good idea to just do whatever you want. I am paraphrasing the Apostle Paul here. So, eating ice cream for breakfast, lunch and diner is not a great idea. This would be one massive sugar buzz and since you are what you eat, your body would become a sugar factory and that comes laden with plenty of seriously bad health issues.

You cannot outrun a bad diet. It will catch up to you.

What score would you give yourself for Healthy Eating?

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SLEEP

Sleep matters. Healthy sleep ranges in the 7-8 hours per night. And there are plenty of sports watches that will clock that for you if you don't care to track your bedtime/wake times.

Here is something interesting about sleep: if you don't get enough your thinking is cloudy and you don't make the best decisions. Maybe you are thinking the solution is St. Arbucks or Red Bull? Then read above about Healthy Eating. And certainly, lack of sleep is an easy excuse to opt out of Physical Activity.

Further, sleep challenges can be linked back to ministry demands with boundaries that do not protect the health of those leading ministry.

Ministry is no time for cloudy thinking. Certainly not in this COVID era. Certainly not if the Holy Spirit's creative energies are needed for next steps.

What score do you give yourself for Sleep?

Spend some time journaling or contemplating the role physical activity, healthy eating choices, and sleep play in your life. The goal here is to assess where you are to help create next steps to restore the joy of your call.

Radical self-care Journey

Here is some space for you to journal.

Radical self-care Journey

5. How is my personal spiritual life being nurtured (aside from spiritual preparation for leading/teaching in ministry)? How am I refilling my spiritual tank?

I read somewhere that ministry leaders spend at most 20 minutes a day nurturing their spiritual life. And yes, I get it, all of life is worship. Yet, when you pour out and pour out to others, especially in times of crisis, it is essential that you tank up to pour out again.

Over the years, this shifted and changed for me. I've gone from some hard-hitting devotionals, to softer ones, to listening to Christian music, to exercising on an elliptical with ear buds, to sitting still and just asking God to fill me. Sometimes, sitting and reading felt too structured and too much like 'work' so I shifted to other means of connecting to God.

So... when was the last time you took a retreat? Vacation? A quiet stroll in nature? And if you just took one of those and within a few days or hours felt like you were right back at the start, then I'd say burn out could be looming.

What about a creative outlet? You were created to create. This is part of what it means to be created in the Image of God. The Creation accounts show the Spirit of God actively taking the chaos of earth and forming it into usable fashion. What creative outlet do you have that stops your busy brain to focus on just the one thing you are working on? This is great 'rest' for us. You were not created to keep going and going without downtime.

Journal or contemplate any of the above ideas and see where God takes your thinking.

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6. What am I doing to “numb” myself from facing troubling circumstances?

Today we function in the Land of OVER. Are you overeating, drinking, spending beyond what is wise? There are also other OVERs.

You can choose your own form of anesthesia, a way to dull the pain. You might feel good for the moment, but the challenge is: once the anesthesia wears off, the challenge is sitting right there on the living room couch waiting for you.

And, if you spend too much time in the Land of OVER, you could easily end up dealing with an addiction. No one wakes up and says, “Hey, I think I’ll pick up an addiction today.” An addiction evolves when a bad habit takes control. This is scary stuff. And it should be scary to know a bad habit can indeed evolve into addiction.

If you think you have crossed that line, for sure seek help from a professional or local Celebrate Recovery.

So what are your forms of anesthesia? How often do you use them? Is this an area of your life where this numbing is out of control?

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WHERE DO I GO FROM HERE?

I used to not take self-care very seriously at all. I ended up in burnout and great fatigue, unable to creatively hear the call of the Spirit to daring new things.

Now my call is to help ministry leaders like you step into radical self-care so they can discover what the Spirit of God is asking in this challenging time.

I have a passion for helping you to experience what God has planned for you, whether that is in your current ministry setting or elsewhere. I am especially interested in encouraging you if you sense God nudging you in entrepreneurial ways.

If you value yourself and your call enough to really explore the above questions, by now you understand that some things you have control over are out of whack.

I know you want to remain faithful to God's call on your life.

And the first step in leading others is to LEAD YOURSELF WELL.

If you sense God's call to lean in more fully to what God is asking in this unusual season and would like help discerning next steps, I am a coach with a passion for helping ministry leaders discern and unlock their stuck thinking.

Let's talk! I'd love to hear your story.

**For reading through this eBook,
I'll provide you with a free 55 minute coaching call.**

Click [HERE](#) to schedule your FREE Coaching Assessment Call.

Coaching offers a safe place to unlock stuck thinking to discover next steps.