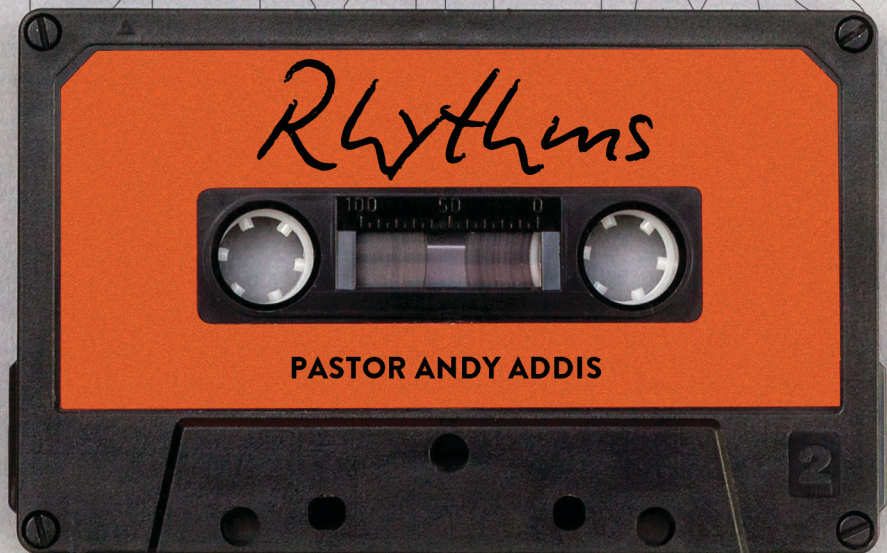


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**FINDING A BIBLICAL RHYTHM:
MOVING FROM SURVIVING
TO THRIVING IN MINISTRY**



Dedication

This book is founded on real-life experiences that I am thankful to have been afforded by the gracious and loving people of CrossPoint Church. Without their compassionate prayers and responses, I would have been one of many sacrificed to the ministry grinder.

Specifically, I say thank you to Rod Sims, Eric Franklin, and Keith Bryant, who helped lay the foundations for making CrossPoint Church a healthy place to work and a great place to raise a family.

Finally, I want to thank my wife Kathy, who has been a partner in this mission from the beginning, carried the weight beautifully and been a great minister to me even though she calls me pastor.

Of note as well are the six members of the prayer and accountability team who helped inspire, correct and guide this project: Kathy Addis, Amber Graber, Ben Ludwig, David Manner, John Shields and Chuck Stecker.

I am indebted.

More of Him, less of me

Pastor Andy Addis

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Prologue

A PROBLEM WE CAN FIX

Why another book about ministers and ministerial health?

I could argue that I have a story to tell of ruin, recognition, recovery and restoration. It would be true and alliterative, so it would make for a good sermon outline. But, I don't believe that alone justifies another book like this.

I could argue that the world is getting more difficult, ministry more complex, and no one seems to have found the answer yet. Again, that would be true but not necessarily compelling because this could just be more self-help white noise clamoring for the same attention.

I could argue that pandemics, inflation, wars, rumors of wars, and so on have finally pushed us to the breaking point. Still true, but that is no reason to believe this book has anything to say that would be corrective beyond what others have already said.

So why then another book? The truth is that long before this was a book, it was an experience that led to a practice, that started a conversation, that now is a testimony in numerous lives, families and ministries.

This book exists because I wish I could have this conversation with every minister in the world and see them make healthy changes to their lives and ministries like I have already seen in many others.

I want to write this book because it's not a theory I would like to try out; rather, it's a history I'd like to see repeated.

A startling statistic came out near the end of the pandemic. No, not one of those made-up internet stats claiming that 90% of "blank" are about to "blank" because "blank"... so everybody freak out!

It was a real stat from the Barna Group that stated in late 2021, "38% of U.S. pastors have thought about quitting full-time ministry in the past year" (Leach). If you're like me, that information was not that startling, and in fact, you may have just whispered under your breath, "I kind of thought it might be higher."

If that's you, you probably think that because you realize something... the pandemic didn't really change much in ministry, but it sure clarified many things.

You see, Barna went on to say that the 38% statistic they offered was up 9% from a “normal” year. Wait a minute, what? In a year full of chaos and confusion, it’s only up 9%?

There you go, that’s the really startling statistic; the pandemic just clarified it! On any given year, more than a quarter of all pastors (29%) are considering leaving the ministry for good.

Almost 30% of those preaching the word, visiting the sick, marrying the hopeful and burying the faithful are ready to call it quits. That’s a real problem. There is a sickness in the machinery of ministry that needs to be addressed, and it’s not pandemics, politics, denominational stresses, or any other outside issue.

It’s a problem inside the minister and inside the ministry. But thanks be to God with His grace and mercy... it’s a problem we can fix!

This book is written from one practitioner in the ministry to another, understanding the pressures you face. In fact, it was written as concisely as possible (knowing that nonfiction books generally run 30-60,000 words). This book clocks in at around 29,000 words to make it a quick read and not “one more thing for you to get done.”

All of this is why I am writing this book. And, if the minister you are thinking about is yourself, your spouse, your loved one, or your pastor, please take some time to read, pray and process. It’s time to reset the rhythm of ministry and move from surviving to thriving.

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Introduction

HITTING THE WALL

Every muscle ached.

Every breath a labor.

Exhaustion loomed like a towering tree about to be felled in the woods, creaking, swaying, giving clear signs that it was about to come down.

But, this was not the day to give in to such weakness. A personal best was within grasp, and not just by mere minutes or even tenths of a mile. I had never run more than four miles before, yet, something in the air on this day made me push just that much harder. I had no idea I would be closing in on six miles an hour earlier.

My pace was not worthy of a medal, and my form was nothing to be modeled, but it was the product of a personal journey. In the previous year, taking my health by the horns and losing more than 90 pounds, exercise was added to the daily regimen of this 50-year-old who had never really mastered physical labor as a personal discipline.

Perhaps that's why seeing that sixth mile add up on my smart watch seemed that much sweeter.

I often ran on the treadmill to distract myself from the physical torment while I binged Netflix on my tablet, but out here in the open air, it was the movie screen of my mind which distracted me from the pain that reached from the soles of my feet up to my weary shoulders.

That unfamiliar scenery on this run from the River Walk in San Antonio, Texas, was the backdrop to the leadership conference I was midway through when I decided to redeem the downtime of the afternoon with a run.

As I ran, my mind was ablaze with what I had been learning, and I was already putting together staff memos, video scripts and preaching calendar plans for the next year. Motivated was an understatement. I was ready to hit pause on everything and fly home to get to work immediately.

But, there were still two more full days of learning, and I was sure that I was on the verge of unlocking the doors that had been closed, stuck or barred back home in the ministry I loved so much.

Maybe it was that excitement or that expectation that made me look past what happened just after the fourth mile. After ascending some steps, I stumbled a bit. Dizziness out of nowhere. I paused the run for just a moment and leaned on a light pole.

“That was weird,” I remember thinking to myself. “I better drink more water when I get back. I’m sure it’s nothing. Pain is just weakness leaving the body. Can’t stop now anyway. I’m two miles from the hotel. Sure not fun being 50.”

All those rationalizations and explanations had faded over the next mile or two, and now all that remained was the excited yet exhausted anticipation of sending my wife the screenshot of a six-mile run from the exercise history of my fitness app.

Although I was a visitor to the San Antonio River Walk, I was beginning to see some familiar landscapes and knew the hotel was near. I remember running under a bridge and climbing the rise just beyond the shadows of that overpass. I saw a young couple up ahead and to the left reclining on some concrete benches. There was a well-dressed professional headed my way on the right, heading back to the office, I am sure, and then nothing.

A vague memory of falling forward and then just pain.

I had been aching for a while, but this was different. There was obvious damage.

My head was pounding, my face tender, and that taste in my mouth, sickeningly familiar, was the taste of blood. Attempting to emerge from the darkness of being face down on the concrete with a pushup, I was only able to turn myself over onto an elbow and try to gather my wits.

There, inches from my face, was the young man and his friend just behind him, asking me if I was okay.

“Sure, I am fine,” I said as I tried to push myself up off of the pavement.

Stumbling a bit, he caught me and helped me to one of the concrete benches, which my weary body and very unstable legs gladly received.

The young man protested, “Man, you don’t look good. Can I call someone?”

Of course not, I thought. I just fell, that’s all. I just need a minute. An ambulance would cost so much. How embarrassing it would be back at the conference if they knew. I’m a guy, you don’t go to the hospital for a bloody nose. Those were some of the thoughts bouncing around my head, but the words that came out were slightly different.

“No, thank you, though. My hotel is just over there. I just need to get there and clean up. I’m okay.”

He met my protest with his own, including lots of “dudes” and “you look bad’s.” He claimed to have seen it all. He said that I hit hard and he thought I was dead.

Dead? Well, that had to be an exaggeration. So, I decided to prove him wrong and stand on my own two feet.

Mistake.

As I rose, the world started to spin, and if this stranger/triage nurse hadn't caught me, I'm sure I would have hit the ground again. The blood from my face covered my entire front, and I only assumed the sickness I was feeling was from a stomach full of 'myself' as well.

So, I am certain that my words seemed pretty frail when I hung on his arm and said, "I'm okay."

Setting me back down, he looked me in the eye and said some hard words: "Dude, you are not okay!"

Next came the firemen, with two trucks. The initial assessment was that I would probably live, but they were worried about a head injury and what may lie beneath that bony, balding brow.

What followed was my first ambulance ride and then a trip to an unfamiliar Emergency Room. Intake, cat scan, and hours of waiting.

During this circus, my phone died, and my last call to my wife was: "Don't worry, I'm okay, but I took a tumble." Stupid phone. Oh, and the main conference speaker came to sit with me as word had gotten around... quite a day this had become.

The final diagnosis was no brain injury but several facial lacerations and an eggshell fracture of the nose. Well, I knew that my modeling career was over, but the attending physician had another thing to add.

"So, you tripped on a run, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Any scrapes or bruises on your hands or arms?"

"No, sir."

"Any fingers feel broken, dislocated, or out of place?"

"No, they are fine."

"Well, I don't think you tripped unless you are the slowest person on earth. There is no sign you tried to catch yourself or break your fall in any way. You went down full speed and landed face first. You passed out."

"Really?"

"You hit a wall. You went out. Your body just said, 'No more.' You need to think about how hard you're pushing yourself."

That moment was quite a realization. To my knowledge, I don't ever recall having passed out before, but when the doctor said I passed out, I needed to face the truth... I had just pushed too hard.

And, it wasn't just a momentary stutter in my life. The experience cost me thousands of dollars, extensive time in surgery and recovery, fed me no small amount of humble pie and worst of all... at the time of this writing, I have still not had a "great" outdoor run because of the fear of repeating my past mistake.

Unfortunately, even though I have never passed out on a run before, this was not the first time I had pushed it further than I should have. In relationships, in projects, in ministry, and in almost any area of life, I have the terrible tendency to assume too much, say yes to too many things, and obligate myself beyond what I am able to do.

And I bet you're reading this book because we have that in common.

As you read this book, I hope you won't get to the place of the crash and burn, the brokenness that follows and the forced period of healing that ensues. Maybe there is a way to avoid that before you get there.

In the following pages, I want us to get honest about where we are, get some real handles on how to live a life of ministry well, and install a sustainable rhythm for a healthy journey in the life God has called us.

The material that follows is not just conjecture, it comes from about 30 years of ministry experience as a prescription following a time of exhaustion and hopelessness in ministry. It also follows an outline of a spoken presentation on the subject of moving from surviving to thriving in ministry. That presentation garnered so much attention that I was asked to repeat it for numerous other groups, record it for others to see, and now in print form. Hopefully, it will reach even more fellow stragglers who just want to serve the Lord well!

And, just a reminder, this is not just for YOU to get healthy. This is for you to get healthy and lead your family to be healthy. This is for you to be healthy and for your ministry to be healthy. This is not just a benefit for you, this is a circumstance in need of attention that a thoughtful leader will see the beneficial ripples in their pond extending out to every corner of their life if they get this right.

There is a reason that the safety instructions at the start of every flight instruct you to "in the event of a loss of cabin pressure and masks drop from the ceiling, please put your mask on first." They know that if you can't help yourself, you can never help anyone else. Getting healthy allows you to help others get healthy.

So, if you're like me and understand that sometimes we allow ourselves to become overwhelmed and inundated, let's begin at the beginning and get honest about who we are and where we are struggling.

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Part One **FEELING THE RHYTHM**

This first section is written to outline a reality. It's time to take off the rose-colored glasses and look at the mounting schedule, what we have put on our own plate, and what others have put on our plate. Then we must face the reality of what it's doing to us, our family, and our ministry.

There is a hardship here.

The logic goes like this: we believe that God called us, so we believe that He will strengthen us. Therefore, when we fail, something must be spiritually wrong with us.

Well, here's a newsflash: there's something wrong with all of us. Sin is the issue in every human failing. Still, when it comes to acts of service, our schedules and sanity, we tend to think it's just a character flaw bordering on laziness or the need for some new organizational system, staff member, or new job.

But what if the stress was caused by something else? What if exhaustion found its root in sinfulness? What if God really can supply all your needs?

Let's start from that perspective and ask ourselves some hard questions, looking closely at our reality.

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Chapter One

RECOGNIZING THE TERRAIN

I have a good friend and mentor in a man named Chuck Stecker. He is a retired military man and has done everything from command a regiment in Italy to serve our country administratively in the Pentagon. He's a tall, robust man, and in his 70s, he still has a very commanding voice and presence. He's one of those guys you listen to when he speaks because there's no alternative.

One of the skills of this veteran is in the arena of being a paratrooper. Yes, he's the guy that would jump out of planes wearing a full pack and hit the ground ready to fight.

A few years ago, he led a devotional and offered a startling revelation that was simply a part of his basic training. He said that there is a primary task every paratrooper must perform as soon as they hit the ground. I started to think about what that might be: chamber a round in your weapon for the coming fight, radio back to the HQ about a successful arrival, or (in my case) kiss the ground and spend a few moments weeping, thankful I made it alive.

Not surprisingly, all my guesses were wrong. Chuck said that the most important thing to do once you hit the ground is recognize the terrain and figure out where you are.

Jumping out of a plane means that you could've drifted. Weather conditions may have pushed you in different directions. Your intended landing spot may be quite far from where you ended up, and you're almost always on unfamiliar ground. So, the absolute most crucial thing to do once you hit the ground is to figure out where you are because if you don't, any move you make from that point might take you in the wrong direction.

That's what we need to do here. Let's recognize the terrain of our life, soul, and ministry. There may be more scientific ways to study your schedule and add up priorities or something academic like that, but I find it insightful to measure the language we use as a map of the terrain of our lives.

Words mean things, and we often use words that mean more than what we verbally communicate. So, let's begin!

Let's examine a few phrases that I hear coming out of my mouth and the mouths of others in ministry and try to figure out what they really mean.

“Nothing happens without hard work”: This protestant work-ethic phrase has permeated American culture through more than just the church, and it has led us to places of difficulty and brokenness. We translate that phrase into working alone all day and into the night. We mutter that phrase during work days around the church where no one showed up but you and your “volun-told” wife and children.

There is truth in the phrase, “Nothing happens without hard work,” but most ministers translate that internally as “My effort is most important.” We assume since we are the pastor, we must model, sacrifice, and lay down our very lives. True, but for what? For the sheep? Yes! The paint in the foyer, the Vacation Bible School decorations, the all-night church council meeting, the next night’s midweek service, and the next night’s building committee? No! Those are NOT items worthy of self/family sacrifice. For God so loved the world that He did not send a committee.

“Hard work pays off”: Here’s another genuinely American phrase celebrated by our culture and churches. When I say “celebrated,” I mean movies are made, memes are created, and the culture applauds those who work so hard they nearly grind themselves into dust. The problem with this phrase is that it leads us to a place where we see results in the church as our responsibility. We often display this in the need to be the first one there and the last to leave. We must work harder and sweat more than anyone else during work projects. And, there can never be an event under the auspices of the church that we don’t make an appearance. Sometimes it’s hard to remember that we are the under-shepherd, and the One the congregation needs to follow is the True Shepherd.

There is truth in the phrase that “Hard work pays off,” but what we often mean when we say it is that we believe success for the church/ministry is dependent on us. Well, that’s a phrase that tastes bad rolling off the tongue, right? When it’s all about our hard work, we are missing something. Where is the dependence on a God greater than us? Where is the adherence to a strong sovereignty of God theology? What happens when our examples teach the church that hard work is more important than the activity of God? Hard work, yes, but laying yourself on the altar of sacrifice for less than eternal things, no.

“Sacrifice is sanctified”: This is probably not something you have ever said, but I bet we have said something like it and meant that our efforts are holy(ish). It’s when we lay down the God card. We say things like, “This is my calling,” or “I’m the pastor, so it’s my job.” These phrases connect to truth but spin off in directions far from biblical reality.

There is truth in the phrase that “Sacrifice is sanctified,” but killing

yourself and your family because "God told me to do it" sounds crazy when spoken out loud, doesn't it? We were taught early on that God will never give you more than you can handle, which we always speak over somebody who is stressing out because they can't handle things. First of all, that phrase is simply not accurate at all! God often gives you things that are far greater than you can bear. He wants to be glorified as He does the work through you. Translation: it's not about us or even because of us. He'll do it in us. But what about those moments when life crushes us, and the weight becomes too much? That's when we need to ask ourselves the hard question, did God ask me to do all this? I think many times, we are overwhelmed because we are overcommitted. We made promises for God that He never asked us to make. Just like the paratrooper jumping from a plane needing to recognize the terrain, sometimes we must stop and listen to ourselves. And, when we are not in the will of God, we need to get moving.

"It's my responsibility": As a pastor, we are consistently preaching and counseling others to take ownership of the things that belong to them: responsibilities, mistakes, priorities, etc. So it should be no wonder that we often serve ourselves up a heaping dose of the stuff when it comes to responsibility, usually in quantities that are unfair and physically impossible to carry. The prime example is the phrase, "This church is my responsibility." We are indeed held accountable for our calling and obedience, but you need to remember this is not your church, in case you have forgotten. And, if you have ever said you love your church, be careful lest you fall into a trap. The church is already married and has a jealous Husband. I wouldn't mess with Him.

There is truth in the phrase, "It's my responsibility," but too often, what we mean when we say that is, "No one else can do this." Well, that is a bit arrogant as God has called and gifted many, and your job is to build up the saints for works of service, not for you to do all the works of service. The problem isn't that no one else can do it; the problem is more will they do it? They'll never know so long as "someone" keeps doing it. For example, pastors skip needed family vacations because no one can preach. You're right, so train them up and give them a shot, and yes, they will have a few stumbles (just like you in the beginning). That's how we all learn. I remember once waiting for a service to start because we couldn't find the worship pastor. Ten minutes after start time, we got word that there would be no music as the worship pastor was serving in the nursery. He'd called for help in the nursery in previous weeks, and now he was making a statement... It was a mic drop moment. That was the last time he had to fill in. Don't say yes to things others should be saying yes to in their own service. Let them serve, or you'll never get off the hamster wheel.

“It’s just a season”: As we continue recognizing our terrain, this phrase reveals our location in a valuable way. “It’s just a season” is one of the new, humbly spiritual things to say when we are nearing exhaustion and want to let others pass by as we continue an endless toil, faithfully believing this too shall pass. Everything has beginnings and endings, but some of the regular cycles we have grown accustomed to have just disappeared. Remember when there used to be some slower times of the year: summer, just after Christmas, spring break? It seems there is no downtime anymore. The goal of modernity and modernization was to increase our ability to produce and decrease the amount of time we had to put in, making life easier. Well, here in postmodernity, we now see we got it half right. We are more productive, but we did not cut back. It’s just more and more and more and more.

There is truth in the phrase, “It’s just a season,” but what we mean when we say it is that we have no idea when this will be over! It’s winter in the land of Narnia under the White Witch, always winter and never Christmas. It’s a sacrificial way to look at your current circumstances and say, I know this isn’t forever, but it certainly feels like forever when you have no idea if or how that season will end. That can be soul-crushing. And, if you are in a perpetual “season” that’s draining, consuming, depressing... it’s time to recognize where you are if you are ever going to get out.

“Give it all”: Conference after conference, this sentiment is like a half-time speech from the coach at the regional finals! “Come on, guys, our time to play is short, and when we’re no longer in the game, we’re gonna wish we played harder. Leave nothing on the field, no pain, no gain. This is your one shot. Whatever it takes, give it all!” Booyah coach put me in the game! The problem is, no matter the coach’s greatness or the players’ passion, there is only so much to give at the end of the day. Look around and see how many who started well have gotten out of the race of ministry altogether. It’s an epidemic that is often self-induced.

There is truth in the phrase, “Give it all,” but think about what you mean when you say it for just a minute. You are saying that overwork and burnout are the expectation in ministry, and that just can’t be right. There are moments on the mission field where the faithful follow the call to lose their very lives for the faith, to follow in the footsteps of our humble Lord who went to the cross for us! But even He pleaded with the Father for the cup to pass if at all possible. Why then are we so willing to die for VBS? So sacrificial that you’d damage your marriage to counsel someone else in theirs? So Gospel-focused, you’d neglect your kids for someone else’s kids to go on a mission trip? When good things become destructive things, they can’t be God things.

Each of these above phrases (and I am sure that you could come up with numerous others) are simply pins on a map of your life to help you figure out where you are. If you are saying or feeling any of these things regularly, I would guess you and I have something in common: we need to find a healthier way to live inside the ministry. We need to do more than survive if we are ever going to thrive.

Yet, let's make sure we are clear on something. The purpose of this book is not to excuse laziness or pave a pathway to incompetence. Remember Colossians 3:23-24, which says, "Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ." And yet, our Lord also said these words in Matthew 11:29-30, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

That's why we can't look for an "out" to shirk our responsibilities, nor should we feel condemnation for caring for ourselves and our families. In fact, the healthier we are personally, the healthier the congregation we lead can become.

Somewhere in the tension between "work heartily" and "my yoke is easy" is the balance of faithfulness to the Lord. Sadly, the average minister called to the ministry doesn't find their balance in this lifetime.

Let's not be average.

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Chapter Two

THE HONEST TRUTH

Before we go any further, let's enjoy a moment of honesty. I would love to say the solutions we are offering, and the discussion that we're having about the difficulties in ministry outlined in this book were the product of some kind of PhD education. I'd love to tell you that the prescriptions outlined in the following pages developed from a keen scientific, empirical study.

The truth is, I can't.

These lessons are born from personal failure, failures redeemed by restoration. And now offered to others as a testimony, a genuine Romans 8:28 moment where all things can be used for good. So, before I get knocked off a pedestal, let me climb down.

The story I need to share with you begins with brokenness, as every salvation story does!

I've only pastored two churches in my professional life, one as I attended and graduated seminary and one after. This is the story of life in that church fresh out of seminary!

We moved back to Kansas, 60 miles from where I grew up, after attending seminary in Fort Worth. Called by Westbrook Baptist Church, a small neighborhood church in the rural community of Hutchinson, Kansas, that I knew well because they had the best facilities for our annual Central Baptist Association meetings when I was youth pastoring in college.

They had been a strong church seeing their heyday of attendance in the 1990s of about 400 weekly. They had been through a traditional three-phase building program and were just a few months shy of burning the note and being debt-free. That was the good side of the story.

Why would they hire a young punk right out of seminary? Well, they'd been without a pastor for a couple of years. Financially things were getting tight. Membership had dropped off and attendance even more. Nobody wanted to move to a rural community to try and restart a ministry that looked like it was on the downward side of the life cycle.

That's where we come in, and this story takes a turn. This is not a book about church strategy, replanting, or revitalization, so let me summarize and say that God showed up fantastically.

That little church made a remarkable turnaround. In the first year, it started seeing an attendance near its historical high of 400; they dropped the median age by almost 20 years and added two additional services to

their weekly calendar for all those new young families.

Over the next two years, growth became exponential, and we bought an old Big A Auto Parts store across town to start another service. A year after that, we identified more than 200 people from a city half an hour away attending and decided to start a service there. Soon after, two churches in our association asked if they could partner with us and become a part of our tribe. We started launching other locations in rural Kansas.

Things were blowing and going as I could never have imagined. I was now leading a network of churches, and we were making headway in rural communities where the church had been on retreat for years. Developing leaders and preaching at multiple locations was my weekly task, sometimes speaking up to 10 times in four locations over seven days.

We were the darling of our association, and our Director of Associational Missions was constantly thinking of ways that we could influence other churches and help reach new locations. The state convention was patting us on the back and using us as an example, helping open doors for us to find new leaders. The North American Mission Board even invited me to present our model at one of their national meetings.

As a recent seminary grad, everything was winning... except for me, a few years into this new ministry.

There's a little veterinary clinic just outside a town called Hoisington, Kansas, which is midway between two of our locations known as CrossPoint Hays and CrossPoint Hutchinson (yes, we changed our name to CrossPoint when we became a multi-location congregation).

I remember that veterinary clinic not because I used it but because one afternoon when travelling between those two locations and knowing that going home meant more meetings and speaking, I was done.

I remember the gravel parking lot popping under my tires as I pulled off the highway. I remember my hands shaking but barely noticing because of the head spinning I was experiencing. I had hardly put the truck into park when I lost it.

I sat in the driver's seat sobbing like a baby, uncontrollably weeping and trying to figure out why.

I knew I was exhausted, but I'd been tired before. I knew I was behind, but God always provides. I knew others before had done more and done it better; that wasn't any help.

I remember thinking some thoughts that, at the time, I was not willing to say out loud, ideas like:

- God gave me everything I wanted, and now I don't want any of it.
- All my prayers have been answered, and I'm still not fulfilled.
- I can't live this way.

I had heard about people hitting a wall, and I'm sure this was my turn. I did not remember hearing how people drove away after hitting the wall. That would've been helpful.

As I sat there, head on my steering wheel, trying to recover, I knew that we had so many plates spinning there would certainly come a crash if something didn't change. Worse still, I knew that crash would have a name, mine.

I pulled out my Palm Treo (go ahead, you Millennials and Z's, it's okay to laugh) and began typing a letter to our personnel team. That letter confessed that I was not well even while everything was good and the ministry was healthy.

I remember trying to reassure them that I was not losing it (a lie) and that I knew things would be okay (another lie). But, I needed to reach out because I needed help, and the practice and pace of CrossPoint would kill me or the ministry without some change.

I hit send. I felt like a failure. I questioned whether I should be in the chair of leadership. I wiped my nose and gathered myself enough to drive home.

By the time I got home, there were already a couple of personnel team members on my front porch. I did not know if this would be a reckoning or restoration. It was the latter.

They embraced my wife and me, and even as I type these words, I tear up thinking about their compassion for me with no judgment, just a sincere desire to help the one leading them.

Their immediate plan was for me to take two weekends off (not including the weekend starting the next day, "We don't know how to fix that," they said). They also said they would require me to take a couple of months off next summer; one of them had heard about a Sabbatical and thought that's what I needed.

After a few moments of feigned strength and pretending I did not want what they were offering, I relented. They asked me my favorite places to go and offered to fly me there and pay for whatever might be a healing activity. I picked Colorado Springs and a prayer retreat. In retrospect, I probably should've picked Rome, right?

Those two weeks were healing, and the prayer retreat was exactly what I

needed. I returned hopeful about a more extended break just a few weeks away in the summer and was eager to make plans to make it a healthy and productive time.

My personnel team's plan for my family and me made me feel incredibly valued and gave me hope.

The extended Sabbatical I was able to take during the following summer was everything I hoped for as well: refreshing, educating and restful. I know it was a generous time away because, in the last week or two, my family started getting itchy about wanting to go back to normal, and so did I!

Now, let me erase the images of rainbows and unicorns we just conjured. About one month after returning to my office's quietness, I remember having that horrible feeling that included dread, exhaustion and everything I felt back in that parking lot months ago. How could this come back so soon? I've done everything they told me to do. What must be wrong with me?

I remember thinking, "I cannot wait another ten years to catch my breath with another Sabbatical!"

This time, with much more trepidation, I typed another letter to our personnel team explaining how grateful I was for what they'd done but that I was still at my wit's end and broken. Again they did not come back with shame or unreal expectations but instead responded, "Then let's figure out what we need to do to keep you healthy for the long haul."

The rest of this book describes the fantastic pathway, solution, idea, whatever you want to call it that we came up with to meet that need.

While I don't want to give away the details of it right now, let me say that what we came up with at that time is why I was able to write this book so many years later.

It's the reason God has allowed me to stay in the same place, pastoring the same growing congregation for 20 years.

It's the reason God has entrusted us with a ministry reaching 14 locations with nearly 3,000 in attendance each weekend across rural Kansas.

It's the reason I'm blessed with such a healthy family, including a wife neck-deep in ministry with me and on her own, and two adult sons committed to the Lord and ministry as a career.

It's why I can balance these church responsibilities, my volunteer role on the state staff of our convention, and offer services as a rural strategist for the North American Mission Board.

It's not a program or a plan but a return to God's purpose and strength at His pace. You'll have to trust me for now, but in a few pages, I'll share the amazing blessing God gave us to make ministry life sustainable.

Doing things His way moved us from barely surviving to thriving. No, obedience is never an easy fix. Still, our story begins with my complete collapse and failure, followed by fundamental changes and uncomfortable new norms... and it leads to the best life I've ever lived.

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Chapter Three

COPING WITH THE WEIGHT

There are as many different ways to cope with life's issues as there are people, but we would have to be blind to say there aren't some recognizable patterns, just like we see in conflict management as we counsel couples.

Every man, woman and child are independently unique and beautiful, as well as individually difficult. Yet, there are patterns that we can recognize. And we know that when it comes to conflict management between couples, there are generally two basic categories: a pursuer and a withdrawer.

Pursuers want an answer to the question right now. They want to deal with things immediately, to press into the conflict before they do anything else. Withdrawers need time to "pray," talk to their mother, think about it, and do anything but entangle themselves in the actual issue.

While those two types may sound like a recipe for destruction, that combination is far better than two pursuers who are constantly at each other with an endless list of issues. Or two withdrawers who never say anything, store it all up and eventually make a very entertaining yet sad episode of *Forensic Files* when one snaps!

All this is to say that each of us is unique, subtly or dramatically different, but there are some general categories and patterns into which we fall. That's what this section is all about.

What are some common ways we cope with the weight of ministry? While this may not be an exhaustive list, I think you might find a reflection of yourself somewhere in the following paragraphs.

Breaks

The most common answer to stress and the proposed light at the end of the tunnel for challenging stretches in the ministry road is the fanciful "break" that's coming up just around the corner.

I am sure you are familiar with this particular "hope." That weekend off in two months? Sure, you have to do a wedding for a friend and drive 13 hours one way, but it's just good to get away, right? Or, maybe a week of camp/mission trip. Sure, it is still work, but at least it's different, you know, a break in the routine?

Or, maybe you do get to go on vacation! Six full days away, leaving right after services on Sunday and back late the following Saturday night so you

and the whole family can look refreshed and renewed at 9 am the next day. You only had to take a handful of calls, and there was only one minor "emergency" back at the church while you were gone, so that trip was a win, right? And prepping for the message poolside didn't bother your family, I'm sure.

Maybe I am being a bit harsh, or am I?

Let's give the full benefit of the doubt. You get a two-week vacation as a gift from a generous congregation member. You enjoy a mountain retreat with no cell phone service. And, the Sunday you return, your best friend from school visits and will preach for you as you get to sit with your family and enjoy a service.

Sounds great! And it is, but the problem with a break is that it's not a real solution to systemic ministry problems and fatigue. Breaks are just band-aids, and band-aids do not heal mortal wounds.

Most of us don't know how to take a break, even if we have the time. A family vacation is an oxymoron. It's a great memory maker and a huge benefit, but hardly ever is it refreshing. People who burn the candle on both ends generally snuff out one end while taking a "break," and they secretly use the lit end of the candle to do some work in the hotel closet where their spouse and kids can't see (sorry, but your family knows).

The philosophy of a "break" aiding in your recovery is akin to physically working out. If you have ever tried to get in shape, you know you can't work out every day. You have to have rest days to recover, heal and prevent injury.

But, let's do the temporal math here: a break day is not equal to a workout day. A workout day has 1-2 hours of workout followed by 22-23 hours of rest, then comes the rest day with another total of 24 hours. In other words, 2 hours of training compared to 46 hours of rest.

Well, that does not translate to work life, especially when we do the opposite by "working out" 50 weeks a year and taking a "rest day" for two weeks.

Please don't get me wrong; breaks are fantastic, needed and effective as a short-term solution. Take them when you can get them. However, a break is a band-aid and won't fix the big stuff.

There has to be another solution.

Balance

It is hard to do any research online concerning a healthy workplace and not be confronted by the directive to find a work-life balance.

"By definition, work-life balance involves the minimization of work-related stress and the establishment of stable and sustainable ways to work while maintaining health and general well-being" ("Work-Life Balance - What it Means and Why it Matters").

Balance is the dream to achieve a work-life balance that makes you the next Karate Kid with one knee up posing on a beachside stump in the crane kick position, totally at peace and ready to kill it! But what does that look like in ministry?

All you have to do is make sure your spouse thinks you care about your marriage more than anything else while keeping the family devotions fun and engaging and the romance white-hot. The deacons should see you as an alpha predator of ministry, shaking their heads in congratulations at every monthly meeting as they mutter, "We don't know how you do it." And your kids will eventually eulogize you at your funeral with a single tear rolling down their faces as they recall that "He never missed a game."

And how do you get to this point? All you need to do is find work-life balance! Here's the problem, you're not that good; no one is.

I believe the work-life balance myth developed out of another highly contagious myth we know as multitasking. You know that thing we all say we do when we go to our kid's game while reading notes prepping for the committee meeting or sermon prep while working at our bivocational job. I've got some bad news for you, so let me have someone else tell you.

"Research in neuroscience tells us that the brain doesn't really do tasks simultaneously, as we thought (hoped) it might. In fact, we just switch tasks quickly. Each time we move from hearing music, to writing a text, or talking to someone, there is a stop/start process that goes on in the brain" (Napier).

In fact, multitasking is worse than a myth because pretending we can do it may be making things worse.

"Today's non-stop multitasking actually wastes more time than it saves," said Clifford Nass, a psychology professor at Stanford University. He says there's evidence it may be killing our concentration and creativity (Napier).

Finding a work-life balance is a myth on par with multitasking, a myth that our culture has bought into fully. What makes it even worse is that if you believe you can find "balance," you add another source of stress to

your life each time you sense imbalance. You've heard the adage that the treatment is worse than the disease. Well, that can definitely be the case here, especially in ministry. Let me show you the pitfalls.

Let's just say you finally got it figured out, have captured the unicorn of vocational ministry, and have achieved work-life balance... Do you know what happens next?

Someone dies.

The funeral is planned for the absolute worst time.

And the cascading calendar conflicts continuously conflagrate contingencies, causing colossal commitment casualties.

Translation: your balancing act just fell off the high wire.

There is wisdom in carving out time and trying to find a healthy "balance" of time between your multiple commitments, but life is life, and you will never get that balance on lock.

There has to be another solution.

Delegation

I've been the pastor of a single-staff church, a multi-staff church, and a multi-site/staff church, and I'd like to share one common denominator each of them believes: "Things would be better/easier if we just had more people helping out."

It's the same problem of modernity. We like to throw that postmodern phrase around a lot concerning psychological and sociological issues, but do you know from where it comes?

Modernity hoped that the workforce would "modernize" enough that we would eventually be able to do all our work in a quarter of the time and thus buy ourselves a different way of life, a better life with more leisure and relaxation. Well, we did it, kind of.

We invented machines, assembly lines, processes, strategies and technologies that skyrocketed our production capabilities beyond our wildest dreams. We could quickly produce cars, newspapers, homes, and widgets with better quality and quantity than ever before, but we forgot something.

We forgot to keep that extra time saved for ourselves. So, now that we can do what we used to do in a quarter of the time, instead of giving ourselves three-quarters of a break, we decided to expect 300% more of ourselves, working just as much and with even higher expectations.

Humans, meet your life-sized hamster wheel.

Ministry always believes things would be better if more people helped out, but it's like modernity: the more people you have, the more you end up doing, and the more things need to be done. More help does not end up making the work any easier; it just increases the scope of what can be accomplished. While that's a good thing, it doesn't help with the problem of surviving on a ministry-sized hamster wheel.

I know your argument. "But, I am talking about raising someone up to help me out specifically with what I do so I can delegate some of my tasks to them."

It's a great idea. The problem with delegation being a solution to your workload is that it only works on paper.

Delegation is a necessary part of ministry because delegation is discipleship! In fact, refusing to delegate is usually a fear or control response, and that, my friend, is another book entirely.

So delegate, please, delegate away, but do not suppose that delegation is the answer to your stress problems. It could be the source of them.

Have you ever given a ministry task away only to need to hand walk them through the process, worry about it the entire time it was in their hands and then fix it when they finished? Followed by the need to thank them for the help and correct them, so they do it right the next time.

Go ahead and say what you're thinking: "It would just be easier to do it myself."

And you're right! That being said, you do need to delegate to disciples and develop leaders. You just can't use it as a strategy to keep your head above water (at least not until you give them 2-4 years to grow into the tasks).

Delegate decisively and with the purpose of developing others. Otherwise, you may go the way of Bilbo Baggins from J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Fellowship of the Ring*: "I feel thin, sort of stretched, like butter scraped over too much bread."

Delegation is a valuable part of ministry but not a way out of burnout.

There has to be another solution.

Rhythm

I wanted to be a drummer, but my stepdad had a saxophone that he used to play back in school, so guess what that meant for my future?

There's no heartache in this since I fell in love with music and the saxophone. Even as I sit here in the office writing this to you, just a few paces away are my treasures on their stands: a soprano sax, alto sax, tenor sax and a big boy baritone saxophone. I love them and the opportunities I have had with them.

I grew up playing marches and concert music with the Great Bend Municipal City Band in outside bandshell concerts over the summer. I played with the Fort Hays State University Jazz Band during my undergraduate career. I even had the opportunity to be a featured soloist for a Christmas concert of the Hutchinson Symphony (probably the most nervous I have ever been).

Over the years, there have been dozens of other opportunities to play in classical, rock, country, small group trios and full orchestrations. While all of those styles and opportunities differed greatly, a common thread held every performance together.

Rhythm.

How do all the players, pieces and parts come together to play and perform? The answer is rhythm.

While there may be many ways and motifs to manage schedules, orchestrate calendars and preserve the life of a minister in a world of demands, random changes and unfair expectations, most fall short of our desired end for a healthy minister and ministry.

I believe that finding a rhythm is a long-term and biblical solution. Yes, I know that's making quite a claim, but I believe that the pages of Scripture hold the answers we need to all our questions in life. Even answers to the question of how we survive in the chaos, demands and pressure of ministry are within its pages. I believe the answer is finding the God-ordained rhythm for our lives in the text of the Bible!

Think of your heart, more specifically, your heartbeat.

Thump, thump. Thump, thump. Thump, thump. Thump, thump.

Sometimes your resting heart rate is slow, but there is a rhythm. Sometimes in moments of exertion, the heart will race, but there is a rhythm. A healthy heart will have that rhythm in good and bad, fast and slow, known and unknown times, but always a rhythm.

It's the lack of rhythm that identifies the disease.

Thump. Thump, thump, thump. Thu...thu... thump.

When the rhythm is off, life is in danger.

I believe there is a biblical rhythm for all, especially those in ministry. Why, especially those in ministry? To model for the flock, yes, but also to maintain the under-shepherd because you are important and what you do is important!

Luke 12:32 (ESV) says, "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

The following principles have helped establish the ministry rhythm I have lived in for more than a decade and look forward to enjoying for many more years.

Step forward with me toward a biblical solution to the modern problems of ministry as we seek a life of rhythm as described in God's Word.

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Chapter Four

A BIBLICAL FOUNDATION FOR RHYTHM

It doesn't take much research to discover that there are (supposed) answers to everything. One of the best-selling sections of any bookstore is the self-help section... can you smell the irony?

If you could help yourself, you probably wouldn't be looking for a book to help. But I digress.

Since this book is about ministers and ministry, there is even more of a need for us to find answers outside of ourselves and in God's Word. Up to this point, I have offered several thoughts and testimony, but without the backing of God's Word, it does not amount to any more than the wisdom of the Twittersphere. In case you are missing the implication I am trying to make, I don't see much value there.

Let's look for a Biblical argument concerning rhythm in ministry. Please understand that I have a personal exegetical philosophy: any truth you find in one testament, you should be able to find in the other, and if the letters are in red, that's worth theological bonus points.

The First Appearance of Rhythm

What many of us automatically consider a commandment actually started as an expression of the creative order modeled by God Himself.

Genesis 2:1-3 (ESV) "1 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. 2 And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. 3 So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation."

This verse is so familiar that sometimes we have to pinch ourselves and make ourselves pay attention to ensure we're seeing what's there and not just what we remember. In this passage, we know that God establishes a day of rest. We don't see the term Sabbath yet, simply because it is just what it is, a day of rest.

God spent six days on the creation, and on the seventh, He set it apart and rested from all the work He had done. Several questions arise that will help us to understand what's happening here.

Was God tired and needed rest? Obviously not. It is ludicrous to envision the God of the universe throwing a celestial towel on the tool bench of creation after wiping His brow before flopping into some oversized throne

and reaching for a bottle of Crystal Sea Gatorade. The God of the universe created everything by speaking it into existence, with no note or tone of hard labor or difficulty. The "rest" that He displayed must have to do with something else.

Was God modeling behavior for His creation? Maybe, but not necessarily or likely. We know that later He will establish several commands for all humanity to obey, and we have no record of Him modeling each one of those for His creation. So, if this were merely an exercise in modeling, it would be unique for God the Father to do such a thing. Indeed, there are examples in Christ Jesus of Him setting an example, but that's a New Testament/incarnational issue at this point.

Was God simply making something holy? Absolutely, that is abundantly clear in the Scripture. But, it was not necessarily the primary purpose for this expression we find here in Genesis, yet it helps us understand what God is doing here. He takes one-seventh of a week and (by definition of holy) sets it apart, separate, distinct, and consecrated like the tools on the dentist's tray, clean and set apart from everything else for a purpose.

So, is that the purpose of creating a day of rest? Simply to have a day that's different? Yes, and no. This is just the beginning of understanding what this day means. The bigger picture is in the timing. You see, after God spent six days creating, His resting on the seventh day began establishing an order for His creation.

His first established pattern in Scripture after creation was to produce a rhythm in which there is rest once a week. That is significant!

But, don't worry, this book is not a guilt trip about you taking a Sabbath. However, it is about understanding the rhythm of what a day of rest means.

The First Commandment for Rhythm

The passage studied above was simply an act of God recorded in the pages of Scripture. In the next book of the Bible, that same act is revered and set up as a command on one of the greatest lists of all time. Let's look at number four on the all-time ten greatest hits... I mean commandments: Remembering the Sabbath and making it holy.

Exodus 20:8–11 (ESV) "8 Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. 11 For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore

the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy."

By this time in the history of God's people, the day of "rest" now has a name called Sabbath. That word, for us, is a transliteration of the word in the original Hebrew that is pronounced just that way. Although scholars debate a little, the word Sabbath (שַׁבָּת) is actually from the root word in Hebrew sobat (שָׁבַת), which means "rest." But, it also may have a connection to the word Seba (שֶׁבַע), which means "seven."

Apparently, God's establishment of the pattern was not enough; people weren't good at following His example. And obviously, that is still true today, as we aren't very good at "rest." One of the great commandments ordained by God and enshrined in Scripture is that we would follow a pattern of six days of work followed by a day of rest. So important is this rest we were to consecrate it as holy.

Let me leave Bible study for a moment and jump back into our issue of learning to live with a ministry rhythm. Here's the statement: so long as you are serving the church that meets on Sundays, Sunday will never be your day of rest. It's okay though! Sabbath used to be on Saturday, but the early church moved it to Sunday to honor the resurrection. So now we know it's not about the day of the week. It's about the spirit of the law.

So, while many in your congregation may find Sunday to be a day of rest, don't lie to them or yourself and pretend that you can honor the Sabbath as holy before, during or after your sermon, worship service, and children's duties, etc.

Many of you are probably writing this section off because you believe you're an anomaly. In your head, you're saying to yourself, "I love preaching. It's refreshing to me." Serving the Lord may be a joy to you, but is there any way you can honestly justify not resting when He told you to rest? Go back and read the verse. He didn't even want livestock working on the Sabbath, so you better rethink how you handle your day of "rest."

By the way, we all think we're the anomaly until we find ourselves pulled over in a veterinarian's parking lot weeping on the steering wheel... If you don't understand that reference, please go back and read chapter 2.

The First Interpretation of Rhythm

With the pattern of restful rhythm firmly established in the Old Testament, is there evidence for this truth to be a living expression in the life of New Testament believers? The answer is a resounding yes! We see the Sabbath most clearly in the debate surrounding its misappropriated usage by the nation of Israel and the corrected interpretation by our Lord

Jesus Christ.

Yes, that means we have a New Testament reference and have it in red letters... we're finding some good theological ground here.

In Mark chapter 2, there is an exciting episode in which the Pharisees accuse Jesus' disciples of breaking Sabbath law by "harvesting grain" as they walk through a field, pulling the heads off and popping them in their mouths. It is a minor infraction, but based on the letter of the law, it is an infraction.

The response Jesus gives in argument is at first a little confusing (to me at least) and then ultimately relieving. But through it all, we see that Jesus is taking the legalistic interpretation of Old Testament Sabbath law and re-envisioning it for New Testament believers in the New Testament era.

That would be us!

Jesus begins His response by bringing up what is an Old Testament reference from 1 Samuel that might initially seem unconnected. He remembers the story of David and his warriors eating some consecrated "Bread of the Presence" from the temple. That bread was a holy offering for the priests, not for commoners like kings and soldiers. Then Jesus offers one of my favorite teachings in the New Testament.

Mark 2:27-28 (ESV) "27 And he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. 28 So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath."

Wait, what?

Those two verses are Jesus' commentary on reading the story about David from 1 Samuel. Although the bread was holy and consecrated in the temple, Jesus said God is more concerned with people than religious rituals. Jesus connected what appeared to be a violation to many by David and his warriors to the offense the Pharisees accused Jesus' disciples of by breaking Sabbath law.

Jesus took the legalistic hardship of Sabbath law and turned it into a blessing for believers from God Himself.

From Jesus' mouth to our ears, the Sabbath is not a commandment to bear up under but was given as a gift that we can enjoy. Man was not made for the Sabbath, but God made the Sabbath, a day of rest, one out of every six days, to be different for us!

If I correctly understand what Jesus is trying to teach, we see Him giving us a Sabbath day of rest as a gift from God. We should keep this day holy as a once-a-week blessing to refresh, renew, and disconnect from our lives so

that we can reconnect with Him.

The Old Testament establishes a rhythm of rest and then codifies it into law. The New Testament remembers and reveres the law, but Jesus transforms its understanding in terms of grace, much like He transformed the Passover meal into the Lord's Supper.

Now we have the blessing and the challenge of remembering the Sabbath and keeping it holy. He gives us a life-giving rhythm that can help us learn to thrive in the dance of life.

But if you are like me, there is a problem. I'm a Baptist, and I don't dance very well. That is just a nice way of saying we tend to be sinfully disobedient by not keeping a Sabbath, or even worse, not being grateful for the weekly gift of grace God has given us.

Again, do not worry that the entirety of this book is about keeping a Sabbath day. I believe it is much bigger than that. It's about establishing a rhythm of rest that a Sabbath models for us. However, I would be leading you astray if I did not admit that the fourth commandment is still a commandment.

To deny that commandment regularly while expecting to be blessed is being a disobedient child dumbfounded as to why his father won't give him ice cream.

Good parents don't ignore disobedience, no matter how right the child thinks they are.

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Part Two

FINDING YOUR RHYTHMS

Every good preacher knows that a good sermon must have some strong application. And most of us agree there is a need to make some changes to the pace and weight of ministry that is family-grinding and soul-crushing.

We have recognized the terrain and realize that we are on some dangerous ground. We can identify with others in our failed attempts to cope with the stress and burden of it all. And there is no denying that biblically there is a standard rhythm that, when obeyed, would lead to a quality of life far different than most of us are experiencing.

So, the only question remains: What will we do with this?

This section of the book will focus on four key areas to apply the biblical rhythm to our lives and ministries, but please don't look for a one-to-one ratio of biblical commands to points of application. Three of the four key areas outlined will apply to the spirit of the law regarding the rhythm of rest; only one area will be applied specifically as the letter of the law.

The four areas we will be looking to apply this rhythm include:

- Annually
- Regularly
- Weekly
- Daily

While I believe all of these are right and helpful, let me begin with a caveat by saying that while I personally employ all of these practices, it has been a part of my vocational life for nearly 15 years. It may be near impossible for you to implement them all at once.

We will talk more about implementation in the final section, but for now, I challenge you to grasp the concepts in each area and select the one you believe would benefit you, your family, and your ministry the most. Then, pursue that area for implementation.

Let's dive in! Some of you reading this are about to make some changes that will give you a new rhythm that helps you take back your life from the grinder of what ministry has become and change it to the ministry it could and should be.

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Chapter Five

THE ANNUAL RHYTHM

Although the rhythm commanded for rest in the pages of Scripture is a weekly issue of obedience, I have found that taking that principle and applying it at various levels has been healing and productive. Those levels include annual, regular, weekly and daily. In this chapter, I want to look at a yearly cycle of rest that benefits the minister and the ministry.

We talked earlier about the concept of the Sabbath, but another term that we use in our culture today that is a derivative of that term is Sabbatical. A Sabbatical is a planned break from regular activity for study, rejuvenation, refreshment, and preparation, all before returning to the original work.

In our culture, academicians primarily practice Sabbaticals, including an extended period away from everyday responsibilities every seven or ten years. We all know some big-name church leaders who famously have schedules, including an annual "Sabbatical" and think they sure have it nice!

But what if we, the common and everyday minister type, were to make a Sabbatic an annual event in our own lives? I wonder what difference that would make.

Earlier in this book, I argued against "breaks" being the answer to our problem of an overwhelmed and chaotic schedule. I still think that's true. So, the Sabbatical break I'm proposing is one with particular dimensions designed to create an annual rhythm that is both refreshing and productive.

If you remember the personal story I shared earlier, I mentioned taking a Sabbatical over several weeks that summer. It was good, but one of the reasons it was not enough was because it was missing the potentiality afforded by a structured Sabbatical.

Executive Lead Pastor Eric Franklin of the CrossPoint Network discovered these principles through life coach training, which is now our pattern and expectation for any employee taking a Sabbatical break.

What It's Not

It is important to note firstly what a Sabbatical is not. It's not vacation time, but it is a healthy alteration of the employee's schedule to strengthen them and increase their capacity for the job they do. A true Sabbatical will not infringe on the minister's vacation time but should be an adjusted part of their annual schedule.

This means a scheduled Sabbatical does not affect whatever vacation and comp time a pastor has.

A Sabbatical is not arbitrary but should follow a format beneficial to the minister and the ministry. Ultimately, the pastor on Sabbatical leave divides whatever length of time decided upon into three separate segments, which we will consider in the next section. While there is no industry standard Sabbatical length, academicians generally get more prolonged Sabbaticals in proportion to their longer tenure. However, what I'm proposing is not a reward for loyalty; it's an active part of a healthy rhythm and calendar year for a minister.

A Sabbatical is also not time to write a book, finish your degree, or engage in some massive undertaking. Too often, people take a Sabbatical and work harder than before they started. If you're asking why that's a problem, don't forget the root word for Sabbath/Sabbatical is "rest."

What It Is

With those false expectations realized, we have to figure out precisely what a Sabbatical is if we ever hope to move in that direction. First, we must acknowledge that in the spirit of Jesus' interpretation of Sabbath law, an annual Sabbatical exists for you, the minister and not the minister for the Sabbatical. Thus, whatever it is, it must be beneficial.

An annual ministerial Sabbatical is a reminder to the congregation. It's a reminder of the weight upon the church's leadership, reminding them to pray. It's a reminder of the importance of leading well and enhancing the credibility of the one taking the Sabbatical. It's a rhythm that values a well-thought, prayed and prepped minister of the Gospel by a congregation who should expect nothing less.

Finally, a Sabbatical is anticipation, like a breath before the leap or gathering oneself before the launch. A Sabbatical is not a retreat from work but a strengthening for the work. It's the time in the weight room before you hit the field.

How to Use an Annual Sabbatical

First, in your context, you must decide the length of an annual Sabbatical. I think a three-week Sabbatical each year is perfect, but even one week is a fantastic place to start. No matter the length, there are three components that you should consider making a part of any annual Sabbatical time: rest, study and planning.

Rest: let's just imagine that you can secure a three-week annual Sabbatical. My suggestion is that the first week takes after the very origin of the term and involves nothing but rest! How is that not vacation? Because its purpose is the intentional target of rejuvenation.

If you were honest with yourself, most vacations are not that restful. I know people who take vacations and drag their families halfway across the country at nonstop, frenetic paces to see everything and visit everyone. I know people who take vacations to prep their house for sale, conduct garage sales or invest time in construction projects. We don't vacation well because we don't know how to rest well.

But, a Sabbatical rest focuses on unplugging and rejuvenating. It needs to be a time of re-establishing your circadian rhythm by either sleeping in or going to bed early. It's not a family vacay, so it would be an excellent time for grandma to watch her amazing grandchildren. It's a cell phone and email-free getaway (I promise you can do it, the world will go on even if you're not on the grid). It's rest!

Remember, rest is not a light day of work with a family game night in the evening. That's robbing yourself and lying to yourself; doing that will never get you to the intended destination.

I have played the saxophone since the fifth grade and still love to play in local city and jazz bands each summer. Just a couple of years ago, I heard our conductor make a statement that resonated with me at a completely different level. He said, "If you're going to play great jazz, you can't just play the notes. You have to play the rest. The time you're not playing is just as important to the music as the time that you are playing."

So true! Great music isn't just about the sound you make, it's about the spaces in-between when you rest, and ministry is precisely the same!

So, here's a picture of a day of rest: sleep in, drive to the trailhead, set your phone on do not disturb, backpack 2 hours up, stop at a lookout point for lunch, read your book for an hour, nap, hike back down, meet your wife for dinner, sit on the couch to cuddle during a movie, then go to bed before doing it all again (or something similar) tomorrow.

While that might not seem productive to you, it's a day spent sharpening the axe. Yes, no wood got cut today, but when you come back swinging, you're going to be sharper than you have been in a long time, and the wood chips will fly!

Study: The second week of a Sabbatical break should be all about study. Most ministerial types love this because we get to dive into the word and start developing content imagining all the public social media spin-off posts

from the wordsmithing you get to do in private. Sorry to disappoint, but that is not the kind of study I am referencing.

Indeed, you cannot be an effective leader, communicator, or pastor if you are not a committed learner. So, being a naturally studious type is a boon for those in the pulpit. But, for an annual Sabbatical, this study time is not meant to continue doing more of the same. That would be counterproductive to the purpose of the Sabbatical. All work and no play make Johnny a dull boy. That's a literary fact.

This time study is for something completely different from our day-to-day and weekly study schedules. I remember the warnings to take breaks during finals week cramming in undergraduate school. They told us there was a law of diminishing returns and that after about 90 minutes, we started receiving less benefit for the same effort. So, play the guitar, shoot some hoops, drive around and then come back to it. You'll improve your study time by getting away from it for a while. Studying and resting during a Sabbatical will do the same thing for you.

I am not a coffee snob, but I don't consider myself a Neanderthal. So, when I ordered an espresso at a speciality coffee shop, and they asked me if I had ever had an espresso before, I chuckled and said, "Yes." Thinking to myself, I can't remember the countless times I popped one in my Keurig. A few moments later, I was a little uneasy when they handed me a tray instead of a cup. On the tray were clear and fizzy shot glasses on either side of a small sipping cup of the one thing I did recognize, espresso.

I swallowed my pride before I tried to swallow what was on that tray and confessed my ignorance. I said, "What's up with the fizzy stuff?" I'm sure I sounded like a real espresso connoisseur. They explained that to appreciate and enjoy espresso truly, you must cleanse the pallet before and after the experience, and plain soda water would do the trick.

I drank that espresso that day with my pinky raised because I was now one of the fancy ones in the know.

In the same way, those given to a lifetime of study need to cleanse the pallet every now and then to truly appreciate the richness and fullness of what we theologically swim in every day! So, during an annual Sabbatical period of study, you change it up and study something else. I have done deep dives on jazz music, ancestor research, tested for a Green Belt in TaeKwonDo and even introduced myself to metal detecting. I hope to study and test for a ham radio license for my next break.

What does any of that have to do with ministry? Everything, because it's about rejuvenating and elevating the minister! Plus, new perspectives on anything give us unique frames through which to see the Gospel (and come

up with new illustrations, bonus).

I recently heard LifeWay CEO Ben Mandrell tell a room of pastors that preachers without interests aren't interesting. If you are all theology and polity, the common person won't find a reason to connect with you. Use your Sabbatical breaks to study something new and become more interesting!

Plan: During the third week (or portion) of a Sabbatical, you keep one foot firmly away from the regular routine but place the other foot back on the path to normal as you engage in planning. For the preaching pastor, this most likely will include a significant amount of time dedicated to your preaching calendar, schedule and speaking opportunities. But, it may involve other planning related to whatever may be on your plate for the following year.

In my life, I take a good chunk of my planning time to prep the annual teaching calendar. It's generally a 30,000-foot view of what is to come in the next year, but there are times that there is a bit more detail.

The finished product is usually a highly valuable spreadsheet that includes one line for every week of the year, series start and end dates, and indications of when I'll be in the pulpit versus when other staff members will be there. So, this ends up not only being a planning session for the teaching calendar but also giving me a great perspective on where my life will go over the next 12 months, including vacations, conferences, travel, etc.

Because of that planning, it is a beautiful gift that I can give our location pastors, all of our staff, my wife and anyone interested in where our church will go next year.

Years ago, this plan that was set in motion just after my Sabbatic break usually saw about 50-60% of the planning become a reality. Multiple unforeseen circumstances, and poorly thought out planning, lead to 40 to 50% never making it to the calendar year. However, as I have grown more familiar with the process and become more accustomed to planning, what I put on paper generally sees 90% plus become a reality. That is a fantastic tool for reducing stress in my life and those who work with me.

My planning comes with built-in caveats knowing that there may be one to three weekends that I want to keep flexible because I don't know what the year will hold. It always comes with the asterisk footnote that the Holy Spirit has the right to change and alter anything we put on paper whenever He would like (which should be true whether you do annual planning or not).

Here is a moment of confession. I'm a closet prepper. Yes, that means I'm

one of those guys who likes to prepare for emergencies and has that weird room in the basement full of things that we hope we will never need, like bug-out backpacks, dried food stores, and anything needed to live off the grid for a short time.

Now, I'm not one of those "out there" preppers making plans for the inevitable apocalypse and the rise of *The Walking Dead*. It's just a hobby for me, but it gives me some confidence that if the power goes out for a few days, bad weather wreaks havoc in our lives, or some unforeseen circumstance hits us, I might just have a leg up.

Sure, eating only rice and beans and drinking water from the local stream through a "LifeStraw" does not seem pleasant, but at least it's a future. It is a future brought to you courtesy of planning!

An Annual Sabbatical break's final portion is preparation for whatever may come. There's always going to be the need for a teaching calendar, and the better equipped you are to give people a foreseeable pathway, the better they can plan and move concurrently with yours. But, your preparation may be a building program, or writing a book, or an upstart of a discipleship emphasis... there's no way that planning will hurt any of that.

And why is this a part of a Sabbatical and not just part of your regular work? Well, that brings up two other issues.

First, this time of preparation focuses on the most important task you'll be undertaking next year. It is a period of time to prepare you for the most significant work you will do and is worthy of happening outside your regular work schedule.

Second, if the task is that important, it deserves the undivided attention that only a Sabbatical break can afford. During the regular work week, you are pulled at, over-scheduled and constantly interrupted by people, phone calls and email. Making this a part of your Sabbatical creates a deserving block of time free of all those distractions so you can focus on this monumentally important task and get it done right!

Finally, let's look at a few random thoughts related to a Sabbatic break that you should keep in mind:

If you can't take three weeks, still take whatever time you can and divide it into three parts: rest, study and planning—a Sabbatic break is scalable. So, if it's only one week, take two days for each component and observe a Sabbath day.

If you want to bring your family with you, maybe traveling for your Sabbatic break, I recommend including them in the first section only. Rest

time is possible with your family if you do it right, but focusing on a new field of study and in-depth planning with a family wanting you to do an assortment of other things is challenging. I generally enjoy traveling with my family for the first week and performing the other 2/3 at home, where they can go about their own business, and I can focus on mine.

You can plan a Sabbatic break anytime that fits your calendar, but my recommendation is to use the calendar to your advantage between Memorial Day and Labor Day. If you include either of those holidays as part of your break, you can do what most of your church often does on that weekend... get away and rest. While those are naturally low attendance weekends, and it's easier to be gone, it also lets you plan early enough in the year that you can make plans for the next year with sufficient time to implement the ideas.

You getting away for some time is not as significant to your congregation as you think. Tom Rainer cites a new statistic indicating that church members we consider regulars only attend one to three times a month. We tested this at our church in 2019 during Christmas Eve services. While our regular attendance at our Hutchinson location is about 1,500 people, we saw 4,000 in attendance that Christmas. Yet, roughly only 200 of them claimed to be guests. That means that Christmas was not when we were receiving guests. It's just when all of our "regulars" decided to show up on the same weekend. What does that mean for you? If the regular congregation member only attends one to three times a month and you're gone a couple of weekends in a row, they may not even know you were out or would probably think you just had a weekend off.

Don't forget that this kind of break is not just for you. It's for the entire congregation. The renewed "you" the congregation will receive at the end of your Sabbatical is fantastic. The planning that you will offer your leadership and staff is an excellent resource. And the model that you're setting for establishing a sustainable and biblical rhythm in life is the definition of healthy leadership. It's another way for you to lead the flock, harassed and helpless in a chaotic and crushing culture.

While creating a Sabbatic schedule as an annual rhythm is not the end all be all of establishing a healthy balance for your life and ministry. It is an incredible way to improve your work and home life. And it positively impacts the life and ministry of those who live and work with you. All change is painful, but sometimes the pain of change is worth far greater than the pain of not changing. Establishing an annual rhythm of rest, study and planning is one of those painful yet worthwhile changes.

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Chapter Six

THE REGULAR RHYTHM

While three of the four suggested rhythm changes fit nicely into a time motif we are familiar with (annual, weekly, daily), this particular "regular" rhythm principle can be challenging to understand because it's not packaged in a standard time frame. And concerning this principle, I will show my cards early and claim that I believe this could be the most productive and beneficial rhythm change a minister can make.

I make that statement out of personal experience.

The suggested pattern of regular rhythm I am proposing is establishing seven-week periods ending with a weekend off. Yes, you heard me right. It's not a vacation. It's not participating in outside responsibilities. It's planning a rhythm that once every other month, there is a weekend off for the minister.

The pattern of a seven-week cycle models the rhythmic practice we have already discovered in the pages of Scripture regarding Sabbath rest. Additionally, the reason for ending each cycle with a weekend off is twofold:

- First, it allows the minister to be "normal" once every other month with the opportunity to focus on family and family life with time off the job.
- Second, it is a built-in way to create the necessary margin 6 to 7 times a year in the life of a busy pastor enabling a hyper-focus on some part of the job.

If you refer back a few chapters, you will remember that my testimony of personal failure included a time of restoration during an extended Sabbatical. While that was good, it was not long after returning that I discovered I was heading back to the same dysfunctional place I was before. I then shared with you that we devised a career-saving, life-giving, and ministry-affirming plan.

This regular rhythm is that plan!

Let me dig a little deeper and explain the two major benefits of taking a weekend off every seven weeks.

Being normal: Being normal and able to take care of your family once every seven weekends is a benefit most ministry professionals have never enjoyed. Here's why:

- Every three-day weekend includes a Sunday.

- Every time you finish your work week, there's always a weekend.
- There's never been a week without a Sunday.

What do all these seemingly nonsensical statements mean? Unless you intentionally break the cycle, you will never find rest!

What would it be like to know that once every other month, you could do what the congregation you serve gets to do all the time?

- You could take a family trip to see the in-laws.
- You could catch a ball game.
- You could take a road trip to visit a church you've always wanted to attend, hang out at the pool at the hotel, and grab a great meal as a family!
- You could sleep in on a Sunday morning, cook pancakes in your pajamas and go to church online!

But, most importantly, what having a weekend off every seven weeks does is give you hope. It's not a once-a-year vacation. It's not a one-in-a-million getaway specially approved by the personnel committee. It's an embedded rhythm that says even if I'm overwhelmed today, I know that I will get a break in "X" number of weeks. Knowing that a weekend off is coming and not that far away is surprisingly encouraging and rejuvenating.

This rhythm also creates margin: An invaluable benefit to getting one weekend off every other month is the creation of a margin to help you hyper-fixate on things you don't usually have the bandwidth to focus on during a typical week.

As a preaching pastor, I know that preparing the message, sermon visuals, handout materials, and all that goes into getting ready to speak on that Sunday morning requires labor. And it should! The job of delivering the Word of God deserves that kind of attention.

But, what would it be like if there was a week in which you worked because it was your job, but you didn't have to do sermon prep because you were off that weekend? In my world, that means I get 20 to 25 hours back in a work week to do/focus on something else!

Let me try and explain it in these terms: most of us work from a to-do list of some form or fashion. Those lists can haunt you over the years. Some of you have done something during the work day before going to your list and discovering that you hadn't put it on the list. So you wrote it on there for the only purpose of checking it off.

You need therapy, just saying.

Even worse, many of you get close to finishing a list with only an item or two left, so you start a new list and simply transfer those old items over. What you haven't kept track of is those two things have been on your lists for months, if not years, and you're never going to get to them, but you will keep moving them from list to list. That's called list abuse, but you don't need therapy. You need a regular rhythm!

Those projects that never seem to get accomplished or that there is never enough time to complete (or often even start), could get a new time slot on your calendar. Imagine what you could do with a whole week every other month with an additional 20 to 30 hours to do the things you can't normally do on a regular production schedule!

I don't know about you, but that makes me very excited about the future.

I remember about 15 years ago when we took our very first regular rhythm Sabbath weekend. We had never done it before, and it felt awkward, but on Friday morning, I looked at my wife and said, "What do you want to do this weekend?"

After picking the boys up from school, we decided to surprise them and tell them we planned a trip to Kansas City. They asked what we were going to do, and we said, "I don't know. What do you want to do?"

They both looked at us like our heads were falling off. But one of them said, "Why don't we go to Worlds of Fun and ride roller coasters?" He said it jokingly, but when I said, "Okay," we got that serious look from two preteen boys that said, "Don't mess with us."

So we loaded up the family truckster, grabbed a cheap hotel room, and Saturday morning, we were at the amusement park bright and early. I vividly remember standing in line for one of those twisty, splashy boat rides called the Fury of the Nile! While we were waiting in a long line, my eldest, about 11 or 12, casually asked me, "So why are we here again?"

I reminded him of the struggle I had had the year before and the difficulty of me trying to manage all the responsibilities at work, and I told him this is what the church has decided to do for us.

He said, "Did you get fired?"

"No!" I said. "This is just a new way of handling life for us. Every seven weeks, I will get the weekend off and..."

He interrupted me before I could finish and said, "Wait, you mean we get to do this again?"

When I told him he was right and that we would be getting away every

other month, I watched my son begin to tear up. I saw him look at me with amazement and confusion.

I knew there were girls in line that he did not want to make eye contact with, so I moved to shelter him, and right there in line for the Fury of the Nile, he leaned into me and pressed his forehead into my chest.

As I sheltered my emotionally rocked preteen, I remember thinking, "A little late, dad, but at least you got here."

At the time of this writing, both my sons are in their early 20s, engaged to be married, and either still in college or embarking on a career, but they still request my annual Sabbatic weekend schedule so that they know when we can do family stuff.

They felt the rhythm.

They love the rhythm.

They are still living by the rhythm.

As much as I appreciate and value this regular rhythm, I have to admit that I still have Friday afternoon jitters almost every time I take that weekend off. I worry about whoever is filling the pulpit, what people will think if I'm gone, or how much better things would be if I delivered the message. Yeah, pretty selfish, right?

When I start having those feelings, I must consciously and intentionally force myself to remember that it is the carnal me. I must recognize the terrain, hear the language I'm using internally, and realize that God is good, His kingdom will grow, and I'm blessed to be a part of it, but not necessary for it to succeed. Things will be fine if I am not there for a weekend.

It also doesn't hurt to remember who needs me more that weekend. Is it the same congregation hearing me preach the 40th or 50th message that year, or my family who desperately wants time with me almost as much as I need it with them?

It's pretty easy to answer if you will answer honestly.

Of all the things you consider changing to find a healthy rhythm, establishing the regular rhythm of a seven-week rotation with a weekend off would be one of the most vital.

I can tell you I think this is the most significant change that we made with the most beneficial results in not only my life but every staff member who practices this.

I am told again and again by staff members that this is their favorite benefit. Their families plan life around it, and it kept a few of them from

wandering to other jobs knowing that this is a benefit they would miss too much.

Here are a few issues related to a Sabbatic weekend pattern that you should keep in mind.

If your major obstacle is needing someone to preach for you when you're out, that's no excuse. Your local association has staff and volunteers who would love to help and give you a break. Your state convention would jump at the opportunity to help you get healthy. But, most importantly, there are probably some youngsters in your congregation that God is working on that you can give the opportunity to grow and learn to speak and lead. That's the best avenue to take, and your congregation will afford them all kinds of grace; excited that a young preacher is coming up in their midst!

If you absolutely can't find anyone to fill in for you, believe it or not, there are resources that our video-based culture is more than willing to accept. Yes, they are much more accommodating than you give them credit for. There is a website where more than ten churches (including ours) contribute to giving away sermons, worship elements, and many other resources for small church pastors getting a break or at least an assist. Check out RePlantHub.com, and you can download whatever you need to ensure you can get away. Remember this; you are not alone!

If you have a midweek service, I encourage you to get someone to cover that during your Sabbatic weekend as well. Remember, you're not just getting away for the weekend. You're trying to create a regular margin for yourself, so you can handle more significant and new tasks that you hadn't been able to take on before.

If you just can't fathom not being in the pulpit for one weekend every now and then, I challenge you to show me a chapter and verse that claims the local pastor is to be the exclusive voice to their congregation. I challenge you because I've looked for it and can't find it. Part of our responsibility as pastors is to raise others to replace ourselves one day, and they'll never learn how to do that if we don't give them opportunities. The truth is if there's absolutely no one in your life that can help you fill the pulpit, even if they are a novice, then you're doing something wrong, and I lovingly want to remind you that Christianity is a team sport.

Some have asked if they can attend their own church on weekends that they're taking off. Absolutely, but I know I can't. Because the minute I step in the door, even if I'm not preaching, I'm on the job. People in the congregation don't recognize that you are off that weekend if you're there, and they can start piling up church business on you when you should be protecting that time for you and your family. So, yes, it's possible to be

there. It just depends on whether you can do it or not.

I cannot.

Some have received pushback from congregation members who tell a pastor they don't get off one weekend every other month. To them, I have two responses: first, you're right, you generally get every weekend off, plus holidays and three-day weekends, none of those we receive in the ministry. Second, you probably work 9 to 5, but I am accessible 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. A pastor serves a church that needs attention after hours, all the time. A regular rhythm Sabbath weekend is a necessary break for the pastoral family.

When I started preaching for the church I serve today, I preached 50 out of 52 weeks every year. I thought that was good stewardship, but it wasn't for me, my family or even my church. I learned to take sabbatic breaks, and I got healthy. I learned that others needed to know how to preach since I wouldn't live forever. Now, not only do my location pastors preach every other month, but I have a teaching team that allows me only to preach 32 to 36 times a year. It's part of our Mac truck philosophy. If Andy gets hit by a Mack truck, we have teaching team members ready to fill in, and the church won't collapse. And believe it or not, that's healthy for everybody.

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Chapter Seven

THE WEEKLY RHYTHM

The third area of focus regarding a healthy rhythm is one we should be familiar with and practice regularly. The problem is it's not the "gimme" putt you would think it would be for the crowd reading this book.

Yes, pastors should be the first ones in line to obey number four from the big list of Ten Commandments, remembering the Sabbath to keep it holy. The reality is that this book is necessary because we haven't done that well. If we had a consistent and well-applied Sabbath, many of the things we're talking about in this text would not be necessary.

It is at this point I must admit a known flaw. Earlier in this work, I claimed that the most significant change for you to implement would be the regular rhythm of the seven-week cycle. I submit to our God in front of you, acknowledging that He would most likely disagree, saying the weekly rhythm should be the first and most crucial adjustment since it was one of His original commandments!

Just as a reminder, let us read into the text Exodus 20:8–11, *"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy."*

The weekly rhythm is made up of the scriptural admonition to protect one day weekly and honor it as a day of rest, further enhanced by Jesus' interpretation that this day was made for you and not you for this day. Yet, even though it's a gift of grace and a sought-after source of rejuvenation, there may not be a more collectively disobeyed commandment in Scripture than to remember the Sabbath.

We often honor him with our lips but disobey him with our lives, and I know that was true of me concerning the Sabbath for several years. I believe the reason for that is that our culture today has a conflated view of a Protestant work ethic that reveres super service, even burnout for God as an admirable quality. But this view has a problem; we don't see that anywhere in Scripture.

He was quite clear that we were to bust our hump six days a week, but on that seventh day, we were to chill out and find rest! It is a gift to us that we refuse to open, and it's slowly killing us as a culture, as families and as

ministers of the gospel.

So how do we get that back?

We must first understand that your Sabbath will never be Sunday if you are on staff at a church. You can hyper-spiritualize the conversation all you want. Still, if you're responsible for guiding a flock, delivering a message, and responding to the needs of every individual that passes through the door, I'm never going to believe you when you tell me that that is a restful day for you.

It's a great day, a ministry day, a forward progress day, but it's no rest. Again, before we go into too much detail, please know I'm not leading you down the road to an alternative pharisaical stance. I'm not saying we should be so guarded and protective of the day of rest that we turn it into one of our ancestors' heavy burdens. There will be days with emergencies and things outside our control that we must accept and pray to avoid next time.

I am talking about the day-to-day decisions we make that can help us begin practicing the healthy rhythm of a weekly Sabbath. I'm going to say it once again, this could change everything!

In trying to find a weekly rhythm in my life, I take two days off every week, hoping to get one of them. If you're in ministry, you know this is a reality.

In my particular context, we have services on Saturday and Sunday so I have declared that my days off are Monday and Friday. And if I get my Monday off, I will inevitably work on Friday! But if Monday ends up a bust, I still have Friday as a hopeful potential.

So how does a day of rest look? What is a Sabbath made for me and not me for the Sabbath? Let me offer you a potential day:

- For me, any great day off starts without rising to an alarm clock. Yet, sleeping in for a 50-year-old means making it to almost 7 AM... that's a great start!
- I love to lounge around on mornings that I consider restful, spending time in my back porch hot tub, prowling the Internet for funny memes and catching up with my extended family via text.
- My wife and I will generally burn through a couple of pots of coffee on a day off because after soaking in that tub for a couple of hours, we sit down at the dining room table to do our quiet times together. I've learned that if she ever verbalizes a "Huh?" it is my responsibility to stop what I'm doing and say, "So what did you just learn?"

- After an extended devotional time together, it's either a late brunch or early lunch, sometimes at home and sometimes out and about. The afternoon can vary widely as sometimes we go shopping locally, head half an hour down the road to the big city of Wichita, catch a movie, take a walk, who knows. But, what's important is what I don't do (see below).
- We usually work out early in the day, although sometimes we do that later. Generally, we like to get it "out of the way" on days off.
- Late in the day, I often turn to my hobbies; you remember, the things that keep me interesting. I might play some music, enjoy Frisbee golf, take a shot at treasure hunting with my metal detector, or just take some time taking inventory in my prepper man cave.
- Dinner is sometimes at home, sometimes with friends, but very often with our adult children if we can nail them down!
- The evenings are usually spent cuddling on the couch with my wife and watching a movie, to which I must always add that my wife is a trooper and has never forced me or even asked me to watch anything romantic. I do love her.

After a day like that, I never lay down and put my head on the pillow saying, "Well, that was a productive day," or "Sure did get a lot of things accomplished today." But, I do say to myself, "That was a good day!"

And when you go to bed realizing that you enjoyed a Sabbath day of rest, it's encouraging to think that I get to do this again next week. And that is the key!

The knowledge of and expectation of a weekly day of rest is the rhythm that gives you strength for the six hard work days.

Just do not forget that the Sabbath was made for you and not you for the Sabbath, so here is what I do not do on my day of Sabbath: I do NOT go into the office. I do NOT open the computer. And, I do NOT engage with all kinds of work-related items from my phone. A day of rest is not your day to get everything else done and accomplish all your "non-spiritual" errands. If it's not a day of rest, if it isn't for you, if it doesn't rejuvenate, then it's not the Sabbath, and you are not remembering it well.

The plan I described earlier for my day off may have nothing to do with what is restful and rejuvenating to you. I simply offer it as an example so that in your mind, you can break free of some destructive patterns we've

seen displayed by the cult of compulsory work, well-hearted but ill-thought-out church member expectations, and cultural norms.

Let me make the case again that this is a biblical issue, and I am more than confident that you agree with the fourth commandment. Sometimes, we have not considered the ramifications of how we interpret and apply this commandment to rest. This chapter is my desire to wake us up to the fact that God has given us a gift, and many of us are dying on the vine because we are not using it.

It's absolutely essential that you remember your church loves you and that they generally have pure intentions for you and the church, but they are very often unaware that this is a need for you because they are unaware it is a need for them as well.

And why is that?

It's because it doesn't matter what's happening in our lives; whenever anyone asks, we're always doing "Fine." We are a bunch of liars, and until we come clean, we'll stay on that perpetual human hamster wheel that will run us all ragged for the rest of our lives.

Finally, let me encourage you to draw some lines as you apply this new weekly rhythm to your life. No one will draw these lines for you so you must draw them for yourself. Otherwise, years down the road, the church will wonder why you died on the altar of ministry.

If you were to come to any of our church services, you might hear me say to our congregation, "And when is the pastor's date night?" There will be a resounding and unified "Thursday!"

While it might seem strange to have trained our people to know and respond that way, it is a boundary line that I clearly set because of my high value for spending time with my wife. It's a high value because I believe it's a healthy thing to do, and I want to be able to protect that time.

Over the years, people have stopped scheduling meetings or asking us to do things on Thursday nights because they know that's "The pastor's date night." Additionally, I find it highly satisfying to see a couple from our church out on almost any night of the week who, after a short greeting, will make sure and tell us that they are on their "date night." Not only did I draw the boundary line that lets them know what's healthy for me, but it also stands as an example for them to follow in their lives.

Regularly observing a day of rest, remembering the Sabbath and keeping it holy is one thing to be preached but another to live. And when the congregation sees you living it out, they will begin to live it out in their own lives!

Way to go, Pastor! Lead that flock.

So, how do you draw those lines in your own life? In the final section of this book, I will give implementation suggestions for each of the four rhythm changes I am proposing. So patience, my friend. It's hard for me to describe just how important this is and even harder to explain what you should do with your Sabbath day.

Let it suffice to say that it needs to be a day that you protect and keep different, one that exists for you as a gift from God.

But probably most importantly, a Sabbath should be so good you look forward to the next one! And that's how you establish a rhythm that will let you run the marathon we call ministry.

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Chapter Eight

THE DAILY RHYTHM

The expression about not being able to see the forest for the trees is all about being too close to something, and that is precisely the problem most people encounter in trying to find a daily rhythm.

Each day is its own adventure; for most of us in the ministry, it is an exercise in the tyranny of the urgent. We plan annually. We prepare monthly. And, if you organize weekly it is a luxury, but daily? Nah, the goal for daily life is just survival, right?

No.

One of the most beneficial and life-enhancing practices you can engage in is securing and prioritizing a daily rhythm. Let me reintroduce a friend and mentor you met a few chapters ago to understand this. Chuck Stecker reminded us that we need first to recognize the terrain, but he also taught me a precious lesson concerning living life by what he calls “dayparts.”

Several years ago, I was slogging through an insanely difficult week. I had double and triple parked my calendar, and while everything fit, there was no way to do any of it well. I was a hot mess of running from place to place and praying in between that the wheels would not fall off.

Then my phone rang. I saw it was Chuck, and I almost did not answer because I just had too much on my plate. After a few pleasantries, he asked, “So how is Pastor Addis today?”

I said, “Fine... no, that's a lie. Truthfully, I am running on empty and have stress coming out of my eyeballs.”

His response was simple yet startling: “Yeah, the Holy Spirit told me to call because something wasn't right.”

This little Southern Baptist boy had learned to trust his charismatic friend and mentor, so I believed the Holy Spirit had told him to call. Which meant that I (a saved, believing receptacle of the Holy Spirit) had not been paying attention to the Holy Spirit inside of me, and God had to do an end run around my thickheadedness.

Ever been there? I'll wait for an answer...

Anyway, he asked me to detail what was going on, and I shared with him the graphic truth of my calendar:

- Everybody needed a piece of me that week.
- Everything on my calendar was super important.

- Every time slot was the only available time slot.
- Everybody knew I was the only one who could do it.

I do not remember exactly what he said, but I do remember the spirit of it. It went something like this, "I see the problem. It's you. You're not acting very smart. God didn't ask you to do all of that."

I may have cleaned that up a little.

I had the appropriate first response of being offended but then I remembered that he loved me and that he had never steered me wrong in the past. So, I asked what he meant.

Chuck reminded me that I was in charge of my schedule.

He reminded me that I had said yes to everything.

And most importantly, he told me that every one of my decisions which had gotten me to this point revealed where my priorities were.

My only thought was, "Not cool, Chuck." But wait, there's more.

Then he pointed out that I had mentioned nothing about my wife, my kids, or my spiritual health concerning my exceedingly busy calendar before asking, "How high should those things be on the priority list?"

If you internalize this conversation like I did that day, you probably think this is not helpful. You might even think, "I already know I am busy, and the important things get short-changed. I don't need a guilt trip on top of it."

Thank goodness Chuck did not stop at the guilt trip.

He spent a career in military leadership, and the health and productivity of those in his charge were his focus. He also noted that there will always be seasons of high involvement and over-extended activity, but that can not be the norm.

For the soldier's health and the mission's effectiveness, there had to be a daily balance of what he called dayparts. Every day has three parts of active waking time:

- Morning
- Afternoon
- Evening

His rule of thumb was simple, "The church gets two, and you and your family get one."

So, here was the plan:

1. Every day is divided into thirds.
2. Two-thirds should be dedicated to work.
3. One-third given to your family.

Daypart distribution is one of those amazingly simple solutions but not an easy one. Learning to discipline yourself in the ministry, not to work just because you are awake, is surprisingly rough. But, let me testify. This redemptive practice benefits you and is a true blessing to your family.

Enter the anecdote; see below.

I began to apply this practice to my life immediately (since Chuck told me to, I knew he would check back with me soon. If you know Chuck, you know you do what Chuck says).

My first change was to Wednesdays. You know the day we work from sunup to sundown. I knew that I had midweek services that night, and it was a nonnegotiable on the calendar. I also knew that I needed to prep for Wednesday evening, and if I didn't do it in the morning, I would worry about it all day.

So, I decided to work in the morning and work in the evening and take the afternoon off... on a Wednesday... as a pastor... it felt weird.

When I came home that afternoon, my wife greeted me with, "What's wrong?"

After a brief explanation, she raised an eyebrow and said, "Huh, thank you, Chuck." Then she loaded me up in the family truckster and took me grocery shopping.

I know that doesn't sound great, but after years of cramming on Wednesday afternoon for the final, I felt like I was skipping school and getting away with it!

We went home and just hung out for a minute or two before Kathy said she needed to get the kids from school, and I volunteered, "I'll go with you."

When the kids got in the car, they eyeballed me like a stranger before my eldest said, "What's wrong?"

Seriously? I live with you, and it should be okay for me to come home.

I suggested we go to Sonic, and I would explain over some Route 44 drinks and mozzarella sticks. After downloading the whole daypart thing at the grade school level, I got two thumbs up from the back seat.

We went home, played some front-yard football, ate dinner together and then went to church as a family (which never happened on Wednesdays). It

was such a hit we decided to make it a permanent calendar change!

Saving a daypart was a small change that had and continues to have enormous repercussions. I could never thank Chuck enough for the advice. My family learned to love Wednesdays and not endure or dread them. My boys are now full-grown men who realize ministry can be challenging and demanding, but they love it and are pursuing their own ministry callings. And my wife has told me she is so glad to have a husband who didn't cheat on her with the church (yeah, she dropped the mic).

So, for me, every day starts with an evaluation of what two-thirds I will go hard at and what third I will give my family.

Sure, schedules get interrupted, and the best-laid plans sometimes fail. But, when your family knows this is your pattern, they understand when you hit the impossible days, and instead of feeling their disappointment, you often feel their gratitude.

It's not just about them. This rhythm gives you a chance to catch your breath daily. It gives you energy and focuses the other two-thirds of the day to become much more productive.

It's a challenge I lay down before you to break up with your workaholism and decide what part of tomorrow you can give yourself and your family.

You should do it, or I'll sick Chuck on you.

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Part Three

PLAYING IN RHYTHM

They say that knowledge is power. I disagree.

Knowledge is fuel, but it's just stored energy until you turn the engine on and run it. That's why implementation is so essential for a book like this.

As pastors and preachers, we often get fed up with those who know more than they apply, like those in the church who complain about "not being fed" while never changing and never using what they've already learned.

Don't be that guy.

This section will review the four levels where you can implement a healthy rhythm and seek to put some hands and feet to this knowledge.

I also want to introduce you to some voices that will hopefully affirm these thoughts and (hopefully) the rhythmic intentions you have for your future.

So, let's wrap it up!

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Chapter Nine

PLAYING A LITTLE OFF BEAT

It's time to find your beat. Just as every song is at least a little different, every job, family, schedule, and life is different. But, every song has one thing in common: rhythm, which is what each of us needs to find.

In the following pages, I want to offer some practical help in the area of implementation and give you some easy directions to merge into the right lanes of life traffic, whether it be the annual, regular, weekly or daily rhythms we have discussed. But, before we get to those specific applications, let me go over a short list of general implementation practices that I have discovered in the question and answer portion of the times I have presented this material to a room full of pastors.

Re: Bivocational and Covocational Pastor

I wrote this book from the perspective of the full-time minister, and because of that, I am sure there are times in this reading that bi-vocational, co-vocational and volunteer pastors have thought, "This must not be for me." Please do not think like that!

At the beginning of this project, I decided to speak in one direction to avoid the confusion of a dual-track theme throughout this material. I spent about a decade in bivocational ministry (sometimes trivocational) and have massive respect for those of you who work hard all week so that you can also work hard all weekend. Your calling is exceptional, and your needs are so diverse and unique that it would be impossible to describe every situation.

For example, a single young seminary student working as a part-time youth pastor and a 45-year-old married father of four teaching school and pastoring are both bivocational, but they are not the same!

So for all of you out there with "real" jobs on top of your ministry positions, let me say this:

I believe the principles in this book are true and independent of our circumstances. That means that you bivo/covo people will need to adapt them to your situation. You already have to do that with everything else in life, so I know you can also do it here.

There will be things that are not feasible because of your other work life. In those cases, eat the fish and spit out the bones of this book. I urge you to glean what you can and let the rest fade away.

Think in terms of scalability. There will be things in implementation that you can only do in part, and there will be things that you need to supersize to fit your needs. Don't be afraid to scale the implementation to suit you. Remember, when making improvements to your life, doing something is always better than doing nothing.

Finally, don't forget this is about you and your family. While it may seem like you are living a double life, there is still only one of you, and you are worth the effort.

What about my spouse?

Generally, your spouse is blessed anytime you are blessed, but occasionally there are some extenuating circumstances. If your spouse works outside the home, taking a daypart off to be with them may never work and may even cause more stress as they struggle with you getting a break while they don't. Or, maybe your spouse stays home with a house full of kids and assumes you need to be helping wrangle the herd whenever you aren't in the office.

- Your spouse isn't wrong; you must remember that these principles are biblically based. That means they are just as beneficial to your spouse as they are to you! So, here are some thoughts regarding spousal integration into your new rhythm:
- Start practicing these things with them. In other words, grab your spouse as a partner for the journey. They may need to read this same book, take a date night to pound out some potential implementations, and bless them with the same rhythms.
- Understand that life comes at you in seasons (unlike the never-ending winter of Narnia), so whatever you're dealing with today will not be forever. You may have to make some sacrificial adjustments that allow you to find your rhythm, even if you have to skip a beat every now and then.
- Trade-off. For example, if you take a weekly day of rest on a Monday, but your stay-at-home spouse never gets a day of rest, that's a recipe for disaster. Either split your day in two where each of you gets a break, or alternate your weeks: first and third Mondays are your days off, second and fourth are theirs, and the winner of a cage match will own any fifth Mondays. Or, you might make that a family day if you're boring. Just kidding.
- Again remember, when making improvements to your life, doing something is always better than doing nothing.

Start Slow, but start now

While I live by all four of the annual, regular, weekly and daily rhythms, it is unwise to try and implement all of them at once. Like an astronaut trying to break free of the earth's gravitational pull, those G-forces can make that journey really hard on the journeyer.

When you go to a conference full of fantastic and radical ideas that require drastic changes, you should never go back home with guns blazing and force it all to happen at once. There would certainly be a change! Probably a change in pastoral leadership.

So, do not try to implement all four rhythms immediately. Instead, here are a few ideas:

- Pick your favorite. By favorite, I do not mean which one you like best, but which rhythm resonated with you at a level you were sure would be good for your family, church and soul. The internal hunger for that rhythm may be a Holy Spirit leading for what to implement first. My preferred starting place is the regular rhythm of taking a break every seven weeks, but mastering a daypart or keeping a Sabbath may be better for you.
- Change slowly, but do it now. Whichever rhythm you choose to implement, please do not put it off. Like anything, time erodes passion and the way you feel now. Having just read this book is the most fertile time in your life to cultivate new, healthy and spiritual habits.
- Give it time. Experts argue about how long you have to do something for it to be a true habit, but they all agree it will take some time. Most likely, the rhythm you try to implement will be interrupted: funerals, crises, people... they just do that to your life. So, it may take longer than you think, but don't stop trying. This path is a life change worth doing.
- And, if you have to start with only a portion of the change you wish to make, remember, when making improvements to your life, doing something is always better than doing nothing.

Don't Get Fired

While this could have gone under the heading of "Start slow but start now," I believe it warrants its own space here. I think you will understand why.

I genuinely believe that the health of the spiritual leader is indeed a concern for the church member/attender, but very often, the life that ministry requires of you is so foreign to them that they cannot connect the dots in a meaningful way. For instance, they may push back to having a day off weekly because they think you are off with them on Sundays. Or, they may scoff at protecting a daypart for you and your family because they work a 9 to 5 and consistently get their evenings off. But, you are on call 24/7/365 and serve unseen and unacknowledged most of the time.

So, here are my best bits of help at implementing these rhythms in your life without getting fired:

- Bring the right people along. Every church has them, officially or unofficially, the decision makers who truly keep the gate for the church. They may or may not be close to you, but you can still bring them along. Share this resource with them, or take them out for coffee before you implement and share your heart.
- Invite an expert. You know, an expert is anyone outside the church, usually with a business card. Most of you have regional denominational employees who would love to stand in the gap for you. Sharing your desire and reason for making these rhythm changes with them would prepare them to speak to your board, personnel team, deacon body, or whoever could bless the implementation of these practices.
- Request one of these rhythm changes as a benefit in the coming year. A church would love to benefit its pastor, especially if it did not cost them anything. If they could publicly pass a new benefits package that included a short annual Sabbatical or affirm weekly days off without impacting the bottom line, that's a win-win, my friend.
- Teach on rhythms and rest. Remember that these principles are biblical and would benefit all in your congregation, not just you. Preaching a short series on the Sabbath and reflecting publicly on implementing some new rhythms would not only pave the way for you to codify these practices in your profession, but it would also lead them to a healthier spiritual view of the rhythms of life.

And, remember you may not make every change you want to make right now, but when making improvements to your life, doing something is always better than doing nothing.

So, let's focus on some implementation strategies for each of the four major rhythms. If you are already confident which one will be your focus, skip the other chapters and go to your starting place. If you are still unsure, a quick read of these small chapters may inspire you to make your first rhythm implementation.

Here we go!

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Chapter Ten

YOUR ANNUAL RHYTHM

An annual rhythm is often referred to in our culture as a Sabbatical. It is a yearly period to pull away from the norm to be refreshing and rejuvenating. It is one of our four major rhythms to establish rest and refocus. An annual rhythm is roughly based on the biblical principle of the Sabbath being made for man, not man for the Sabbath.

Rhythm refresh:

- Annual rhythm is not vacation time but a healthy alteration of the employee's schedule to strengthen them and increase their capacity for their job.
- A Sabbatical is not arbitrary but should follow a format beneficial to the minister and the ministry.
- A Sabbatical is also not time to write a book, finish your degree, or engage in some massive undertaking.
- An annual ministerial Sabbatical reminds the congregation: of the weight upon the church's leadership, for the congregation's need to pray, of leading from a well and healthy place, and it is anticipation, like a breath before the leap or gathering oneself before the launch.

Elements of the rhythm:

Get your leadership team, the church body, deacons, or the church board on the same page, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Decide if you can rest at home or need to go somewhere. Have an open discussion with your family about getting away (or you getting alone) and that week's purpose, not being vacation but rest.

Decide on a topic of study. Something you can dive into in the time allotted, starting down the path of knowledge and understanding. This study should not be in the genre of what you do professionally but should be something that increases your scope, vision and field of interest. For example, pastors should not take a week to study Galatians for their Sabbatical but maybe study paragliding or a Spanish language intensive.

Decide on your most needed area of focus when you return. Would you, your congregation, and your staff most benefit from planning an entire calendar year's preaching schedule? Is there a particular project related to capital improvements that need focus and attention with a 30,000-

foot plan? Do you need to spend the time restructuring discipleship and emerging from your Sabbatic break with fresh vision and traction?

Put your time on the calendar and divide it into thirds. If it's three weeks, that's easy: one week each. If it's one week: two days for each and a day of rest.

Make this time away a priority!

Don't schedule things over it or add to it.

Guard it like a pitbull inside the gate.

Don't chicken out. As the time grows closer, you may try to talk yourself out of this rhythm for what appear to be heartfelt "pastoral" reasons.

Annual Rhythm (worksheet):

The date you received church confirmation for your annual Sabbatical:

Date ___/___/___

Dates you will take your Sabbatical:

Start ___/___/___

End ___/___/___

First third rest details:

Second third study details:

Final third planning details:

Enlist a small team of 3 to 5 friends/leaders who will pray for you up to and through the Sabbatical as you share the above details with them.

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Chapter Eleven

YOUR REGULAR RHYTHM

A regular rhythm is probably the most unique concept this book has to afford. It is the scheduled weekend break for the pastoral staff every seven weeks. It brings a sense of normalcy to the ministerial family and creates regular weeks of margin for more significant projects every other month. It is one of our four major rhythms to establish rest and refocus. It is roughly based on the principle of the Sabbath being made for man, not man for the Sabbath.

Rhythm refresh:

- This suggested regular rhythm pattern establishes seven-week periods ending with a weekend off.
- First, it allows the minister to be "normal" once every other month with the opportunity to focus on family and family life with time off the job.
- Second, it is a built-in way to create the necessary margin 6 to 7 weeks a year in the life of a busy pastor enabling a hyper-focus on some part of the job.
- Having a weekend off every seven weeks gives you hope with the knowledge that a break is coming and it's not too far away.
- For preaching pastors, this is also a break that allows you to accomplish both the prioritization of your family and the elevation of up-and-coming preachers who need space to get prepared as well as learn to lead and preach.

Elements of the rhythm:

Get your leadership team, the church body, deacons, or the church board on the same page, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Get out a calendar and do an annual plan marking every seventh weekend. Allow yourself some flexibility in this, as there may be times that you need to make sure you are in the pulpit for a holiday or out of your weekend responsibilities for a family event. I generally don't see a problem with moving the Sabbatical weekend forward or backwards one weekend to accommodate such circumstances.

Share the dates with your ministry team and make plans for covering your absence on those weekends. Preparing to be gone amid a time crunch is never fun... do this well in advance.

Share the dates with your family (especially your spouse) and begin to dream as you look at the calendar. Fill in some weekend plans of things you've always wanted to do, breaks you've always wanted to take, and places you've always wanted to go. Don't hesitate to visit other ministerial friends and see their churches, visit family, hit amusement parks, or take the whole family to an away game with one of the family kiddo sports teams.

Look ahead at when your weekends will take place and think about what major projects you might be able to accomplish in the margin created the week before. Remember that you're regaining several hours of valuable prep for something else in the week preceding your Sabbath break. Some might want to plan each of them, and others may want to keep them open for projects to come up throughout the year.

Make this time away a priority!

Don't schedule things over it or add to it.

Guard it like a pitbull inside the gate.

Don't chicken out. As the time grows closer, you may try to talk yourself out of this rhythm for what appear to be heartfelt "pastoral" reasons.

Regular Rhythm (worksheet):

The date you received church confirmation for your sabbatic breaks:

Date ___/___/_____

Dates you will take your sabbatic breaks:

1 ___/___/_____ 5 ___/___/_____

2 ___/___/_____ 6 ___/___/_____

3 ___/___/_____ 7 ___/___/_____

4 ___/___/_____ * optional on some years, however the calendar falls

Who will cover for you on your sabbatic breaks:

1 _____ 5 _____

2 _____ 6 _____

3 _____ 7* _____

4 _____ * optional on some years, however the calendar falls

Destination/Plans for your sabbatic breaks:

1 _____ 5 _____

2 _____ 6 _____

3 _____ 7* _____

4 _____ * optional on some years, however the calendar falls

Consider projects to focus on during the margin of your sabbatic breaks:

1 _____ 5 _____

2 _____ 6 _____

3 _____ 7* _____

4 _____ * optional on some years, however the calendar falls

Enlist a small team of 3 to 5 friends/leaders who will pray for you up to and through the Sabbatical as you share the above details with them.

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Chapter Twelve

YOUR WEEKLY RHYTHM

A Weekly Rhythm is probably the least unique concept this book has to afford. It is the biblical practice of remembering the Sabbath and keeping it holy. Yet, it has two unusual caveats for you. First, it is from a minister's perspective and should never be practiced on Sundays when that's your work day. And second, it is definitely following Jesus's command that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. It is one of our four major rhythms to establish rest and refocus. This rhythm is wholly based on biblical principles of the Sabbath.

Rhythm refresh:

- This is not the "gimme putt" you would think it would be for the ministerial crowd reading this book. Pastors should be the first ones in line to obey number four from the big list of Ten Commandments to remember the Sabbath and to keep it holy.
- We often honor God with our lips but disobey Him with our lives, which is all too often true regarding the Sabbath.
- The healthy rhythm of a weekly Sabbath could change everything, not because this book says so, but because God's word does!
- A day of Sabbath made for you will include time with God, your spouse, your family, your hobbies and your rest. It will not involve work and is not a day for hard labor on things around the house. It... is... a... day... of... rest.
- A good Sabbath day leads you to look forward to the weekly gift God has given you to experience every week! The knowledge of and expectation of a weekly day of rest is the rhythm that gives you strength for the six hard work days.
- It's absolutely essential that you remember your church loves you and that they generally have pure intentions for you and the church, but they are very often unaware that this is a need for you because they are unaware it is a need for them as well. Your practicing of Sabbath rest is a great model for a congregation to see how they should live their lives, too.
- Draw some lines as you apply this new weekly rhythm to your life. No one will draw these lines for you.

Elements of the rhythm:

Get your leadership team, the church body, deacons, or the church board on the same page, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Decide what weekday you would like to practice your Sabbath regularly (knowing that life happens and things change from time to time, but what's the best day). I pick two days a week, hoping I get one!

Let the congregation know in a message regarding Sabbath rest or just as a supplement to something else you preach that you want to practice a healthy understanding of restful rhythm. And that you will be protecting this day on your calendar for yourself, your family, and your ministry. Make it a positive announcement and encourage them to consider the same practice.

Protect the practice vigorously! People will forget and try to schedule things. You can lovingly bend over backwards to find other times and other days, but remind them of your spiritual discipline of maintaining a Sabbath and keeping it holy. It will take some time but will become part of your culture and will become a rhythm that helps you move from surviving to thriving.

Make this time away a priority!

Don't schedule things over it or add to it.

Guard it like a pitbull inside the gate.

Don't chicken out. As the time grows closer, you may try to talk yourself out of this rhythm for what appear to be heartfelt "pastoral" reasons.

Weekly Rhythm (worksheet):

The date you received church confirmation for your Sabbath day of rest plan:

Date ___/___/___

Dates you will take your sabbatic breaks:

1 Day you will schedule as a “day off”: _____

2 Day you will schedule as a backup “day off” when the plan is interrupted: _____

Create a list of things you would “love” to do on a day of rest:

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

4 _____

5 _____

Create a list of things that will be hard to avoid that might ruin a day of rest:

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

4 _____

5 _____

Create an “all-day” appointment that “repeats weekly” on your calendar and pray: 1) for strength to be obedient to the fourth commandment and 2) a prayer of gratitude for the gift of weekly Sabbath rest with the Lord.

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Chapter Thirteen

YOUR DAILY RHYTHM

A Daily Rhythm is learning to practice the healthy rhythm of working in dayparts. It establishes a healthy work pattern at one of the most minor levels as you make the daily decision to work and rest as you should. It is one of our four major rhythms to establish rest and refocus. It is roughly based on the principle of the Sabbath being made for man, not man for the Sabbath.

Rhythm refresh:

- One of the most beneficial and life-enhancing practices you can engage in is securing and prioritizing a daily rhythm.
- Every day has three parts of active waking time: morning, afternoon and evening.
- Your work life should get two dayparts you and your family get the remaining one.
- Daypart distribution is one of those amazingly simple solutions but not an easy one. Learning to discipline yourself in the ministry, not to work just because you are awake, is surprisingly rough.
- Every day should begin with an evaluation of what two-thirds of the day you will give away to work and what third you will keep for yourself and your family.
- Schedules get interrupted, and the best-laid plans sometimes fail. But, a protected daypart will never happen unless it is intentional.
- Practicing this rhythm gives you a chance to catch your breath daily. The third that is yours gives you the energy and focus to make the other two-thirds much more productive.
- Practicing this daily rhythm is your opportunity to break up with your workaholism.

Elements of the rhythm:

Get your leadership team, the church body, deacons, or the church board on the same page, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Look at your calendar from 30 thousand feet to see what days are so consistent that picking an off daypart is a no-brainer. For example, if you always do Wednesday night services, you should consistently take Wednesday afternoons or mornings off.

Create a daily discipline for looking at the next 24 hours and evaluating what's already on your schedule to see which part of the day would be best set aside for yourself and your family. You can do that the evening before the day that follows or first thing in the morning, whichever best suits your schedule and planning style.

Keep this pattern in mind as you or someone calendars for you. For example, if you have two morning meetings scheduled before evening services and someone wants to meet with you that afternoon, you're unavailable in the afternoon. Unless they can meet within one of the dayparts you have reserved for work, the meeting will have to wait.

Blocking off a daypart on your daily calendar is a legitimate way to preserve your productivity and sanity. It's scheduling your mental health and worktime effectiveness. So, if you're not available because you're protecting that time, it's a real thing to put on your calendar and protect.

Make this time away a priority!

Don't schedule things over it or add to it.

Guard it like a pitbull inside the gate.

Don't chicken out. As the time grows closer, you may try to talk yourself out of this rhythm for what appears to be very sincere "pastoral" reasons.

Daily Rhythm (worksheet):

The date you received church confirmation for your daypart plan:

Date ___/___/___

Fitting your planning style, when would be the best time for you to choose the following day's protected daypart? (check one):

- The evening before the day
- The morning of that day

What days on your schedule are consistent enough that you usually know which daypart must be protected? Circle all that apply:

Monday – Tuesday – Wednesday – Thursday – Friday – Saturday – Sunday

For the days selected above in which you can make consistent calendaring decisions, which daypart will you choose to protect for each? Circle one and draw a line through your day off:

Monday	(Morning / Afternoon / Evening)
Tuesday	(Morning / Afternoon / Evening)
Wednesday	(Morning / Afternoon / Evening)
Thursday	(Morning / Afternoon / Evening)
Friday	(Morning / Afternoon / Evening)
Saturday	(Morning / Afternoon / Evening)
Sunday	(Morning / Afternoon / Evening)

In the areas you have been able to identify consistent days and which daypart to protect, add those to your calendar as “blocked time” that you are unavailable using the repeat weekly function.

As you get in the habit of daily identifying which daypart to protect, add that to your calendar to make sure that you don't infringe on your own well-being.

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Chapter Fourteen

A WORD FROM THE OTHER SIDE

I believe so firmly in this kind of health-inducing practice that I would love for you to hear some other voices. One of those is my wife, literally hearing from the other side of this family equation. I asked her to simply give me her thoughts on things like Sabbath rest, dayparts, and generally focusing on the need to prioritize family and stay healthy. Let me introduce to you my wife, the wonderful Mrs Addis:



My name is Kathy Addis. I am married to Andy. We have been married and serving in pastoral ministry for a little more than 28 years. While I would love to say that it has been a blissful experience of love, hope and joy, if you have read this far in this book, you know I'd be lying. Don't get me wrong, there have certainly been moments, seasons even, of all of those, but for the most part, it has been hard, arduous, consuming work. Worth it, but work.

When Andy reached the breaking point that he talked about earlier, he was not alone. He was bearing the weight of the family, the church and the rest of the world, and we all felt it. I try to fancy myself as a fairly strong person, but we were stretched to the point of snapping. Thankfully it was not our relationship that was the issue, but it was definitely wrestling with it. I understood he was doing his best to strike a balance between his family and the church. I was doing my best not to ask more of him than was necessary, but the truth was, we just missed each other. Our boys were little and accepted the "Dad has to work" excuse, usually without argument, but their disappointment was obvious at times. Andy has always been a busy guy and thrives in that most of the time, but the real and perceived demands were piling too high.

His 'break' was scary, but it brought to light a real need and put into motion a new practice for our church that I could not be more grateful for. We have always had Date Night. I capitalize that as if it is a holiday, and in our lives, we try to guard it as one. If you ask anyone in our church when Date Night is, they will tell you Thursday. We have protected those few short hours once a week since the boys were tiny, and it was our only time alone for a long time. Once the church understood how important that time was for us, they respected it and began to protect it for us as well. After Andy and the deacons at the time talked about his break and what he needed, that time became even more of a priority. He began to

come home early on Thursdays, so we could pick the boys up together from school before we dropped them off with Nannee for their 'date' with her. If that wouldn't work, he would come home early on Wednesday and spend the afternoon with us before Wednesday night church. I can't speak for the boys, but I can tell you we all noticed a change in Dad and his tension level. He still had to work, but we knew we could count on him to really BE with us when he was with us. It made it easier for me not to feel like I had to pester him at work with things that could wait at home because I knew he would actually be at home.

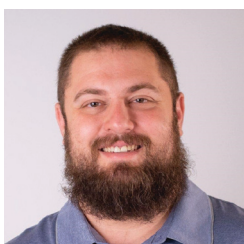
I remember getting so excited for Date Night not just because I got to spend some alone time with my Sweetness, but it also eventually led to the next big change, his day off. Ahh, Friday. Beautiful Friday. With the permission and encouragement of the staff, he actually started taking Friday, all day Friday, off from work. This was a very big deal! He was supposed to have a day off, but we rarely saw him the whole day because there was always someone who needed something. However, after Andy confessed his need to the powers that be, his day off became real. Really real. He prioritized it and ensured the people who would reach out would know he would not be working on Fridays. It was amazing the difference this made for our family. Yes, he would take a couple of extra hours off during the week but a whole day! I will never forget the first time we went to the school and picked the boys up to take them out for their lunch. They were wide-eyed and completely confused, not to mention a little disappointed when they had to go back to class. This became a normal practice for us, and they loved it. I remember one of them saying they felt bad for their friends that their dads couldn't come to get them for lunch. This was a privilege and was not taken for granted. Not only did the boys enjoy Dad having Friday off, but I was ecstatic about it. That meant that Date Night could lead to a Date Day when desired. I felt like we were able to reconnect. Spending intentional time together can do that. I no longer felt like my needs were second to the church's needs. He was making his family a priority without feeling like he had to justify it or as though he was somehow 'cheating' the church of their time as well. His time at home was much less stressful since he wasn't always trying to balance everything all at once.

The icing on the cake for our family was the institution of the seventh-week Sabbatical. What in the world?! We had never heard of such a thing, and it seemed too good to be real. As Andy mentioned earlier, the reaction of our boys the first time we missed church and were a 'normal family' was both exciting and a little heartbreaking. Ministry life is beautiful and brutal for the whole family. I firmly believe when you're in ministry, and you have children, God has designed them in such a way to thrive in that

environment when given the chance. It seemed this was that chance for our boys. They knew what it was like to sacrifice time, effort and energy as they had been volun-told for many things over the years, but this seemed to be the breath they needed to relax and realize we are all just people. The sabbatical break has been a model for them to know how to prioritize family, and no job should take every waking moment of your life. Having fun and getting away is important, and thankfully we have been able to do that with and for them over these years.

I am so incredibly grateful for the lessons that have come from my husband being pushed to the brink and a church that loved us enough to take a chance on a crazy change of pace and practice. By God's grace, our family is healthy and strong. As our boys are both engaged and will soon have families of their own, I am encouraged that they have seen what it is like to make time and be intentional about making family a priority.

I would also like for you to hear from some of those who work in our church and are encouraged to maintain the same healthy rhythms. Here is the Covocational Location Pastor of CrossPoint Church in Pittsburg, Ks, Zach Sachs:



For the first four years of being a location pastor with Crosspoint and a covocational one, I also found myself taking very few if any, Sabbatical breaks and making sure that I was there every Sunday for a couple of reasons. I first thought I needed to be at church because that was the biggest day that I did “ministry” as a covocational pastor. This is the day I see the most people, make the most plans for the week, and in some busy seasons, the only day that I interact with some of the church family. Especially because this is not my full-time job, I have felt the need to be there and ensure everything runs smoothly. The other reason that has been up and down but has leveled off recently is the lack of staff that I could trust to run things. Maybe trust is not the right word, but lacking staff trained to ensure all the little things were taken care of prompted me just to come in and get it done. Both of these reasons are not good enough to not take Sabbatical leave.

When listening to Andy's Sabbatical presentation, I felt the weight of not doing this practice. I felt the weight of what my family needed. It was not a pastor they needed every weekend but a husband and father they knew served his family well. I needed to change my outlook on what the weekends would look like for myself and how we, as a family, could do

better. Working all week as a teacher and giving even more time to other events happening in the week, the only day that I got “off” was Saturday most of the time. I saw it wearing on my wife and knew I wanted to do better for her and our kids. I say this because I can get consumed by a work-based mentality that says if the pastor is not there, the church can’t run well.

After learning from the Sabbatical teachings, I see how this concept needs to be a rhythm in life. Taking breaks from the “work” of ministry to be ministered to yourself or meet your family’s needs is an important part of continuing the “work” of ministry. Personally, my wife is much more at peace when we have scheduled time that we can take for ourselves on Sabbatical. As my kids grow older, I want them to know that we have time that we will be away and can do things on the weekend when Sabbaticals are scheduled. However, this is still a work in progress for me. For myself, I know that I need to work on implementing the longer Sabbatical times so that I can be ministered to and spend quality time with God. I already have a daily time that I spend with Him, but I know I need to add time to go to the place where I get refreshment.

I talked to a few other pastors in the area, and we got on the topic of Sabbaticals. Both of them said they preached between 49-50 weekends in the year. I am not saying that this is bad, but there has to be a way to get refreshed and have time for yourself and your family. We as pastors need to raise up our staff and our elders to be able to take this important time off and allow them time to teach as well. As a full-time pastor, it is important to take this time off, and I would stress that if you are working either as a bivocational or covocational pastor, you need to schedule these breaks and get into the rhythm as quickly as possible you can. Burnout is real in ministry, and this is one of the things that will help prevent it.

Since learning the lessons of stress on the family and getting close to burnout myself, I can attest that I am still not the greatest at making sure that this time is sacred for myself or my family but is becoming of higher importance to schedule and make sure that it is in my life. To be completely honest, after hearing about how Sabbaticals should work and how Christ modeled time for Him and the Father, it was a slap on the back of the head to me, seeing how even though I thought I was working well in ministry, I was actually hurting my ministry at home and myself by not walking this out. Long story short, take sabbatical breaks, make it a rhythm, walk your family through how important they are to you and schedule it out.

Here is another voice, Location Pastor Joel Beckner is a CrossPoint location pastor in the community of Lindsborg, Ks. Joel is a young man with a wife, kiddos and a church plant ministry:



Sabbatical weekends are something that my family and I look forward to doing on a regular basis. But it did not start off as something easy to do. When I first began in ministry and was encouraged at CrossPoint to take regular Sabbatical weekends, it sounded good in my head, but that did not translate to action right away. We had been in ministry for months and had not taken time off yet, but I could tell my wife and I needed a weekend away. So we ended up taking our first weekend off in ministry, and when the Sunday morning hit, my mind was racing. What happens if we have new visitors and no one connects with them? What happens if our tech equipment doesn't work and our team doesn't know what to do? What happens if...? What happens if...? and so on. The weekend was not as restful for me as it should have been. I was so concerned about what could go wrong and that I was not there to fix it that I missed the point of being on Sabbatical. The Lord does not need me to do ministry in my town, but the Lord allows me to be a part of that ministry! The service that Sunday did go well, we had new visitors, and they were welcomed and connected right away, we did not have tech issues, and all the other scenarios in my head were fine. But even if things did go wrong, Christ is still sovereign over all, and His work will continue.

Sabbatical weekends for me are important for two main reasons. First, my wife, kids and I, whether I realize it or not, need a break from the Sunday morning grind. We are so plugged in and give so much week after week that we need those times off to just be a family with no rush, responsibilities, and time just to be together. What our weekends off look like may differ. It may be going to another church for the weekend or going to a Royals game. The important thing is being a family together without the hats we all wear on Sunday mornings! It is such an amazing time to relax and enjoy something God has blessed us with in our lives. It's a good reminder that I cannot give what I do not have to offer. If I am stretched and worn down and tired, I need to be renewed to be able to pour into His church again, which is such an important part of Sabbatical weekends. Second, it is a constant and very important reminder that God is the one who is sovereign. God is the one who draws the people through our doors each week. God is the one who will work on people's hearts during the service. It is Jesus and His blood shed that saves our souls. The Holy Spirit

convicts, corrects and points our people to look more and more like Christ. Yes, we get to be there and see what He is doing in the towns and places God has called us to, but God is the one in control first and foremost.

Those weekends away are so good to see His church minister, love, worship, and change lives. Additionally, it is great to see my weakness (as hard as that is to admit), but it is even better to see Christ's perfection and His church living out his mission.

Here is a final voice from CrossPoint Location Pastor in Hays, Ks, Micah Sanderson:



As a pastor today and having grown up in a pastor's home for most of my life, I can honestly say very few things bring me displeasure as I look back over the years in ministry. Most of the negative would deal more with family or personal decisions.

My parents were very committed to raising me in a Christ-like home and church but allowed me to make my own choices and learn from my mistakes. They did a great job of spending time with me and making time for my extra-curricular activities, school, sports, etc.

There is one thing as I look back that I wish was different, and to this day, it is often at the forefront of my mind. Very few times we sat together as a family in church while in ministry. Everyone had their responsibilities, which were all good, and we enjoyed them, but there is something about being able to sit together and be "in church" with your family. As I began my full-time ministry with CrossPoint coming out of collegiate ministry for ten years, this was something already in my thoughts.

Thankfully - and with much appreciation - CrossPoint has emphasized our families and the importance of having Sabbatical breaks and Sabbatical Sundays. My family has tried our best to be faithful to these Sabbatical Sundays - and take advantage of the opportunity they give us to worship together, especially as my kids are in their teen years. We often visit another church or may even worship at home together. Sometimes we'll even attend CrossPoint and worship together there as a family.

I am thankful for what this has provided for my kids and me. To be next to them and my wife while worshipping is one of my greatest joys. I look forward to each opportunity I have in ministry, and I look forward to the

time I worship with my family as well. If I'm not worshipping with my family, discipling them, and making sure that I model that for them (and others!) - I can't expect them to do the same in the future.

Having a rhythm with the Sabbatical Sundays allows us to plan and utilize our weekends. This is helpful as it gives us something to look forward to as a family. My kids often ask when my next Sabbatical Sunday is and if we can go here or there or visit friends at another church or CrossPoint location.

It brings great joy to my heart that this is something CrossPoint asks of us and makes a priority. Healthy families make healthy churches, and my family has to be a part of that. I have lunch weekly with other local pastors, where Sabbatical Sundays and Sabbatical breaks have often been the topic of our discussion. They are practices I continue to encourage each of them to have.

It's healthy for a pastor and the church to be able to function without having the pastor present every Sunday! It's always refreshing to be gone, but it also makes us thankful for what we have. After the break, we look forward to being back with our faith community.

I would ask every church to consider how important this is to the health of their pastor, his family, and the congregation. I highly encourage it, and this will always be something I "fight for" in full-time ministry.

I hope my kids look back on it and remember it as one of their greatest joys growing up in a pastor's home and how the church treated them and showed them that they matter.

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Epilogue

NO MORE SURVIVING

This book has been a 12-week process of writing, editing, praying and sharing with others. It's been a labor of love, but I've also gotten my feet under myself along the way. You may remember in the beginning me telling the story of wiping out on a run.

I also shared that I had not had the courage to run on the street again since that day. Well, over the last 12 weeks, that has changed!

I'm nowhere near running 6 miles like last fall, but I am running again. I'm getting my feet under myself and moving back in a healthy direction. Many of you reading this book have felt the sting of the crash and burn. You have wondered what got you there and if you could ever make a comeback. I pray that you would do that precisely using these healthy rhythms.

Additionally, I pray these would be just the beginnings of healthy moves in multiple areas of your life! Sometimes when one domino from a good direction falls, it may cause a chain reaction for other good and healthy developments in your life. I'm hoping that if you get some healthy ministry rhythms in your life, you will also be able to take care of yourself on other important fronts:

Diet: our intake and weight have so much to do with how we feel every day and what we can do over the long haul. In 2020 I dropped nearly 90 pounds because I needed to. But there was no secret sauce, no magic trick. If you eat fewer calories than you burn, you will lose weight, so almost any diet works if you work the diet. It's worth the sacrifice, my friends.

Exercise: the first pastor I served under gave me this bit of advice, "Ministry is hard work, but it is sedentary. Find an activity you like and play hard, or this job will catch up with you". I agree! But, an exercise you enjoy doing even less than the work you have to do will never inspire you to stay in the game. Take up martial arts, weight lift like Mr Universe, play some pick-up basketball, etc. Just keep moving. It's good for you.

Devotional life: you need to have one. I know you study for the ministry, and you're in the Word constantly, but what are you reading that you enjoy? How are you hearing from God in a new and fresh way where He wants to talk to you and not necessarily through you? Let me say something that will make the chains fall off... It doesn't matter what models or methods you've learned before, seek the ways that you know God talks and refreshes you, and do those!

Date your spouse: what the church needs from you is a Biblically-

centered pastor, a caring pastoral shepherd, and someone who knows how to keep a white-hot romance while doing the job. If you think I'm wrong, look at the stats for relationships in our culture, even in the church. Enjoy your home life and use it as a model for a good, godly home.

Get some hobbies: remember somebody without interests is not interesting. Pursue something that is not a doctoral degree in theology. Do something fun. Hang out with the unchurched and give yourself a bank of new illustrations because you're giving yourself a new world of opportunity. No ideas? Here are a few: become a black belt, start birdwatching, take up leather or woodworking, buy a telescope, go camping, do something that sounds fun to you and make it part of your life; you know that thing God gave you to live?

Invest in some friends: full disclosure, this is the hardest part for me. I have been stabbed in the back and betrayed over the years. As a lifelong introvert, making friends is not the easiest task. But as a minister of the Gospel who swims in a sea of acquaintances and "knows" everybody, it is imperative that you have some friends you can invest in and who can invest in you. I won't pretend to tell you how to get them or what kind of friends they need to be. I just know this... You and I need them.

The beginning of this book talked about me "hitting the wall." I tried to describe how I hit that wall physically while running and spiritually while serving. There are many aspects to your physical, mental, and spiritual health, but I believe establishing some biblically-based rhythms is the beginning of being truly healthy.

Don't view this book as a way to get over the wall or even through the wall. What we need is to dismantle the wall. Jesus has told us repeatedly that His yoke is easy and His burden is light. We are to come to Him if we are weary, and we will find rest in Him.

Establish biblically-based rhythms in your life, family, and ministry to dismantle the world's broken culture as well as the church's well-intentioned but often soul-crushing culture.

With new rhythms in place, you will create the escape route needed to stay in the ministry and do more than survive.

When you establish a biblical rhythm to your ministry and life, you can thrive!

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"Almost 30% of those preaching the word, visiting the sick, marrying the hopeful and burying the faithful are ready to call it quits. That's a real problem. There is a sickness in the machinery of ministry that needs to be addressed, and it's not pandemics, politics, denominational stresses, or any other outside issue. It's a problem inside the minister and inside the ministry. But thanks be to God with His grace and mercy... it's a problem we can fix!"

- Prologue, *Rhythms*

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