

KEEPING THE JOY IN MINISTRY

BY Kurt N. Fredrickson

Remember when you first sensed that call to ministry? There was nothing you wanted to do more. But over time, ministry takes a toll on our lives. Joy is replaced by exhaustion, cynicism, and discouragement. If we are not careful, this work we once loved will kill us—emotionally, spiritually, relationally, and physically.

A friend of mine who helps care for pastors in the Evangelical Covenant Church notes this formula for disaster: depletion + isolation + conflict = significant trouble. We can't do anything about conflict; it is part of our lives as leaders. But we can order our lives so that we are not depleted or isolated. What's more, the place that sometimes brings us conflict is also the place where we develop, by Christ's power, into the people the Lord wants us to be. Eugene Peterson's has this to say:

The congregation is the pastor's place for developing vocational holiness. It goes without saying that it is the place of ministry: we preach the word and administer the sacraments, we give pastoral care and administer community life, we teach and we give spiritual direction. But it is also the place in which we develop virtue, learn to love, advance in hope—become what we preach.

(Under the Unpredictable Plant, pg. 21)

Here are some practices we can integrate into our lives to keep the joy of ministry.

ABIDE *I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15:5)*

We need to stay connected to Jesus Christ as branches to the vine. Our strength ultimately comes from the Lord; we need to remain in him.

- **Pray.** Set aside time on a regular basis to read Scripture, to pray, to reflect, to confess. Strive to know Jesus better and become more like him.
- **Worship.** Engage with others in worship. Let corporate time hearing the Word and gathering at the Table nourish your life.
- **Serve.** Find a place beyond your ministry context to serve others. Don't be the leader or organizer. Just slow down and care for others. Ministry to strangers, to the least of these, will change you.
- **Remember.** Think back to your call to ministry and write that story down. Recall what it was like when the Lord placed his hand on your life. What were the Lord's promises to you?

BREATHE *Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. (Mark 1:35)*

We need to take time away from the busyness of life, get off the proving-our-worth treadmill, and breathe. In the midst of each day, we need Sabbath time. One day out of the week, we need to stop working. Sabbath living helps us center our lives in God, rather than in our activities and our doing.

- **Recreate.** Immerse yourself in something fun that is not ministry related; engage in activities that bring you joy. Hike, run, play golf, kayak, garden, rock climb, bike.
- **Laugh.** It's good for you!
- **Take care of your body.** Pay attention to what you eat; get a good amount of sleep; exercise—you'll feel better. We are not indestructible.
- **Move beyond the clamor.** Find quiet places in your life, away from computers and cell phones and people. Silence is not the absence of sound, but the absence of noise.
- **Go on a retreat.** All by yourself, without your cell phone. Walk, sit, pray, listen to God. Turn off everything from your normal life.
- **Keep a day of Sabbath.** Really make one day of the week a Sabbath—a day that is different. Stop working! Let this be a day to pray and play.

CONNECT

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. (1 Corinthians 12:5)

We need to have good people circling around us.
Whatever our personality, we need to connect with others.

- **Develop a small group of trusted friends.** Stay close to the people who love and care for you—who you can vent to and confide in, who will say the hard things to you, and with whom you can just hang out and laugh.
- **Develop relationships in a faith community.** We live our lives with others. Engage in the social aspects of church. Enjoy ministry colleagues.
- **Be a lifelong learner.** Keep stretching your thinking and your ministry skills. Read books, lots of kinds. Take a class. Get another degree. Better yourself—it will impact your life for the good.
- **Pay attention to your family.** They need your best, not what is left over. These are the most important relationships, so nurture them.
- **Create a satisfying work environment.** Develop a good attitude. Push yourself to do your work well and to make a difference. Cultivate mentors who will support you.

Ministry always emerges out of who we are. In order to serve well, we must pay attention to our insides. Abide in Christ; breathe in still spaces; connect with others. I pray that you will serve well in the world as you attend to your life.



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MORE RESOURCES

That Their Work Will Be a Joy: Understanding and Coping with the Challenges of Pastoral Ministry, by Cameron Lee and Kurt Fredrickson (Cascade, 2012).
[For a free download of two chapters, click here.](#)

Toughest People to Love: How to Understand, Lead, and Love the Difficult People in Your Life—Including Yourself, by Chuck DeGroat (Eerdmans, 2014).

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