

Rest for the Soul

You can't lead well without it.

“AS THE LEADERSHIP GOES, so goes the organization. And, more importantly, as the soul of the leader goes, so goes the leader.” This has been the mantra at Leadership Transformations since the day we opened our doors in July 2003.

Churches and Christian ministries are filled with leadership teams that spend nearly 100 percent of their time talking about everything but the care of the soul. It's far more invigorating to gather around boardroom tables and discuss matters of finance, marketing, programming and strategic plans for the next big thing. Issues of soul care simply aren't on the priority list.

What will it take to move the care of the soul up the food chain and even to the top of the pyramid for today's leadership team? It begins with acknowledging the reality of the soul today. Frankly, the soul is the most neglected part of the person.

Consider the reasons we neglect the soul: First of all, the enemy of our soul wants us busy doing other things. We must be aware that disrupting our spiritual growth is on the top of the enemy's list. So, the battle that rages within us isn't man-made. Instead, its origin is the fiery darts of the evil one seeking to slay anything that looks like nourishment of the soul.

The most powerful antidote to the neglect of the soul is an activity we've long ignored: Sabbath rest.

Alongside the work of the enemy come other “lesser” reasons for not feeding our souls. Busyness is likely our number one culprit. But there is also the pride of the sovereign self which whispers in our ears that we don't need anyone else in our lives. And what about technology, now considered by many as a “new limb?” These and many other idols of the heart grab our attention, separate us from our first love and create an environment for a neglected soul. What could you add to this list from your own experience?

The most powerful antidote to the neglect of the soul is an activity we've long ignored: Sabbath rest. No means of grace is more productive for the deeper spiritual life than rest. And that's only possible when we reclaim Sabbath as a day and as a lifestyle.

Spiritual disciplines for the Christian life are plentiful. No matter which spiritual disciplines you practice,

the essential ingredient for the care of the soul is creating life-giving space to be in the Scriptures, prayer and reflection. Sabbath rest is the most fertile context for these basic disciplines. “My soul finds rest in God alone” writes the psalmist. Those seven words will change your life!

Rest is hard to find in this fast-paced, hard-working, high-demand, and noisy Christian ministry world. Adding even one minute of silence at the front of a meeting agenda feels like a waste of time. Instead, we opt for a perfunctory Bible reading and an opening prayer. But we've seen over and over again how that one minute of silence can transform a meeting. In fact, I'd love to see a tithe of the time scheduled for our meetings. That time would be devoted to silence and soul care. Imagine the impact of that radical idea.

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But, none of this will happen without the leader choosing first to personally prioritize Sabbath rest. Rest itself was God's idea. He practiced it first, on the heels of creation (Gen. 2:2). He paused and rested in the beauty of his handiwork of creation. In Exodus 20 he invites his people to join in the sacrament of rest and worship via the Ten Commandments. And, among this list of commands, he uses the most words to describe remembering the Sabbath Day (Ex. 20:8). So, why do we treat it as optional?

At Leadership Transformations, and among our work with seminary students, we've discovered that Sabbath rest is the turnkey to the deeper life with God. As we discover the joy of rest in God, we delight in experientially knowing the depth of the rest of God.

Rest that is spacious and adrenaline-free, combined with receiving the love of the triune God in the Scriptures, in prayer and in our life reflection, makes the soul come alive. It's here that we find deeper meaning in our worship, our relationships and our service to a lost and needy world.

Sabbath rest. Imagine what your life would be like if you made it your number one priority. I guarantee that you will be glad you did. ●

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