



Spiritual Rhythms in the Life of a Leader

Ruth Haley Barton

Sacred Rhythms in the Life of the Leader

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A Sobering Question:

What does it profit a person if they gain the whole world but lose their own soul? What is worth more than your soul?

I. Spiritual Rhythms that will Save Your Soul in Ministry

"We are blessed with inner rhythms that tell us where we are, and where we are going. No matter, then, our fifty and sixty hour work weeks, the refusing to stop for lunch, the bypassing sleep and working deep into the darkness. If we stop, if we return to rest, our natural state reasserts itself. Our natural wisdom and balance come to our aid, and we can find our way to what is necessary and good."

Wayne Muller

II. Sane Rhythms of Work and Rest

"Because we do not rest we lost our way...Poisoned by the hypnotic belief that good things come only through unceasing determination and tireless effort, we can never truly rest. And for want of rest our lives are in danger."

Wayne Muller

III. Solitude and Community, Engagement and Retreat

"In silence my soul waits for you and you alone, Oh God. From you alone comes my salvation."

Psalm 62:1

IV. Silence and Word, Stillness and Action

The things that most need to be fixed, solved, figured out in our lives will not be fixed, solved, figured out at the thinking level anyway. They will be solved at the listening level where God's spirit witnesses with our spirit about things that are true.

V. Self Knowledge and Self-examination

It takes profound willingness to invite God to search us and know us at the deepest levels of our being, allowing him to show us the difference between performance-oriented driven-ness and the deeper calling to lead from our authentic self in God.

VI. The Delights of Sabbath-Keeping

VII. Developing a Personal Rhythm of Spiritual Practices

Reflect on the rhythms we have explored in this seminar. Which rhythms do you have in place already and which rhythms are lacking? Which rhythm do you think would be most significant for you to introduce or reclaim in your life at this time? (Don't try to change your whole life all at once! Do something before you do everything.)

1. Attend to your desire.

What words, phrases, prayers seem to most consistently capture my sense of longing for God and what he is inviting me to these days? (It will be very helpful if you actually write this out.)

2. Acknowledge the challenges.

In what area (s) of my life right now am I most aware of my need for a way of life that works? Acknowledge whatever difficulty or challenge you feel about your capacity to bring this about.

Ask God for his guidance in putting together a rhythm of spiritual practices that will meet your spiritual desire in the midst of your life in ministry. Sit quietly in his presence and listen for his response.

3. Develop your plan.

Based on my desire and my understanding of key rhythms in the life of the leader, what rhythms do I need to put in place in order to arrange my life for what my heart most wants and strengthen the soul of my leadership?

- Rhythms of Work and Rest (including Sabbath keeping)
- Silence and Word, Stillness and Action
- Engagement and Retreat, Solitude and Community
- Self-knowledge and self-examination
- Discerning and Doing the Will of God

4. Write out your plan.

Based on your reflections begin to craft a plan for your rule of life.

- A. What rhythms practices will I seek to engage in on a daily basis/ weekly/monthly/yearly basis? Are there practices that are particularly needed based on my awareness of the false self and my desire to live as an authentic self in God?

Write down a simple first draft of the daily, weekly, monthly, annual rhythms that you feel God is inviting you to.

5. Make plans for living in rhythm.

What changes will I need to make in my own scheduling in order to consistently choose this life-giving way of life?

What arrangements do I need to make with those I live with in order to make this possible? Are there any questions or conversations that I need to have with those I work with in order to make this possible?

6. Give Yourself Some Space

After you have captured in writing your desire and plan for establishing your own spiritual rhythms, take a break if you wish. Go for a walk, take a nap, do some reading, pray or sit in silence. You can even take a few days off if you wish. When you come back, take another look at your plan. How does it look and feel to you now? Is it personal enough? Balanced? Realistic? Are you able to think of it as a flexible thing rather than a legalistic straight-jacket?

7. Commit Prayerfully.

Are you able to commit to this plan *out of desire for God* rather than a sense of obligation?

As you feel ready, commit prayerfully to these rhythms as a means of releasing yourself in a consistent manner to God's transforming work in you.

8. Engage Community.

The spiritual journey is not meant to be taken alone. With whom will you share your desire and intent to cultivate a way of life that is grounded in God and strengthens the soul of your leadership? Are there any questions, concerns that you would like to raise with your spiritual friend or others who could pray for you? Explore how you might share the journey together.

*Ministry is the least important thing.
You cannot not minister if you are in communion with God and live in community.
A lot of people are always concerned about:
"How can I help people? Or help the youth come to Christ? Or preach well?"
But these are all basically non-issues.
If you are burning with the love of Jesus, don't worry; everyone will know.
They will say, "I want to get so close to this person who is so full of God."
Henri Nouwen*