

Practices for Sustainable Ministry Practices over the Long Term

Longevity is a key goal in Christian ministry, as it is a distance race not a sprint. Moreover, our culture values hurry and hustle, and over work can be the norm. No one will monitor your diary or work life balance, so it is up to you to put rhythms and practices into place to maintain a sustainable lifestyle and an effective and impactful ministry life.

Below are some suggested practices and rhythms that I believe will enhance your longevity and joy in ministry.

1. **Try to keep work to 55 hours a week maximum.** After that studies show that our efficiency and productivity declines (John Mark Comer; The ruthless elimination of Hurry). It is tempting to add to our schedule, when really, if we want to start something new, our first step should be to evaluate what we are stopping to start this new venture.
2. **Try to keep your financial overheads low.** Keep a strict budget and avoid debt apart from a housing loan (Proverbs 22:7. Borrower is slave to the lender). It can be hard to hear Gods call and direction when we are living pay day to pay day. Keep an initial emergency fund of at least \$1000, with the goal of an emergency fund that can cover 3-6 months of living expenses. Organise your budget with your spouse and stick to it.
3. **Take annual holidays.** Studies and practical experience suggests that we need one three-week break at least per year to recharge our batteries. The first week to de-stress, the second to rest, the third to regenerate. You know you have rested well when you are thinking of getting back into work and new ideas are flourishing in that third week. A suggested 2 year rhythm to use all of our leave is as follows:
 - a. Three weeks off annually with the focus on resting and refreshment. This could be over January after Christmas or June or September school holidays if you have kids (if no kids then outside of peak times is preferable).
 - b. Every second year a two week adventure holiday travelling or sightseeing rounds out the rhythm. James Dobson calls this making family memories.
 - c. 4 weeks a year leave = 8 weeks over two years. $3+3+2=8$ over the two years.
4. **Avoid sermon preparation on a Saturday.** Call it a Sabbath or a day off. These days are especially important with family if you have kids at school or you want to catch up with family and friends. Our family needs to know that they are more important than our role. Yes, the calling is of supreme importance, however pastoring or leading is our role, Jesus and all that encompasses is our life.

5. **Take a Sabbath.** Call it your day off if you like but having a day to rest in God. Have a separate day to do jobs and chores if you can. Coordinate that with your spouse if possible. Sabbath, or Shabbat literally means to stop. Do what refreshes your soul.
6. **Aim for a maximum of 3 nights out per week when full time.** We need some days where we are socialising with the family and just relaxing in the evening to wind down. If you need to be out for a fourth night, take an afternoon off to compensate.
7. **Have a family night each week.** Good fun and no interruptions. This is a time when all in the household are invited to be present for a meal and interactive fun of some description. Works well when kids start to move out of home. You can also invite friends or people who are becoming part of your extended spiritual family. (Mike Breen; Family on Mission / Oikonomics).
8. **Insulated your kids from the conflict in church as much as possible.** Avoid where you can discussion of problems or people in our kids ear shot. They are not silly and will figure some of this out but try not to give them ammunition around this. We want them to view the Church through the lens of a participant and not the leadership lens as they are not the leader and they are too young to understand the nuances of the situation. Model the joy of following Jesus not the tension of leadership.
9. **Share your wins and conflicts.** Make sure you share the wins of conflict with your spouse and not just the hard times. When you have a resolution or a reconciliation share those with your spouse as much as you do the negative issues. Ideally, if you can insulate them from some things that is ideal, but we need to talk about the good and the bad as it will affect our relationships if we do not. (Wayne Cordero).
10. **Get enough rest.** People do not get passionate about this subject, but it is of extreme importance and often overlooked by many leaders. When we have young children, or we have a season of grief and loss in the church, we can be busy and lack sleep. These are out of our control, but we need to manage the things that are in our control like blue screen exposure late in the night, phones and iPads in our bedroom, lots of Television or YouTube etc. Retiring to bed 30 minutes before you need to be asleep and reading is a great way to wind down.
11. **Keep sustainable gaps between appointments.** One of the killers of effective and meaningful meetings is a lack of preparation for that meeting, and an inability to reflect and gather our thoughts after a meeting. Keeping larger gaps between meetings allows us to not feel stressed when a meeting run late. Lastly, let the person you are

meeting with know how long you have to meet with them and when you need to be leaving that meeting.

12. **Embrace your limitations.** We cannot do everything and we are not good at everything. If we could do everything in our own strength then we would not need God. As we acknowledge and embrace our limitations, we find God in what we cannot do (Pete Scazzero).
13. **Put Gods agenda first.** Avoid being be distracted by the agendas of others, including your own. This can be hard and can take a lot of discernment. We all have an agenda, even us leaders, so we could be distracted by our own agenda. What the church or organisation needs could be different from what you as a leader want, and it could be different from what others want. Discerning Gods agenda is a practice best discerned through corporate prayer. This gives a voice to those who do not usually have a voice, or who are not the loudest voice.
14. **Set up and welcome both internal and external accountability.** The rise and fall of Mars Hill podcast held up a light to what happens when leaders fail to submit to Godly accountability.
 - a. Internally we need to be accountable to our Elders / Boards / Church Counsels, whichever model you have, for our job description, moral conduct and how we are tracking with our vision as a church. Monthly written reports are a good way to begin the process with clear explanations on how you are progressing in ministry, your healthy measurable markers like prayer, ministry involvement, salvations, baptisms etc. (just looking at the three “B’s”, Buildings, Budgets & Butts on seats gives a distorted view of growth). Measure what matters.
 - b. Externally we need someone who will challenge our thinking and actions, and that we can learn from to be able to grow and develop as a leader. If we just stay in our own church bubble, we could miss ideas and concepts that would help us grow. The limitations of external accountability is that the external person only knows what you are telling them. Both internal and external accountability should operate together.
15. Get a good mentor and or Coach. Mentoring is primarily about who you are as a person and leader. Coaching is about the details and practical help along the way. Supervision focuses on ministry and working relationships; focusing on codes of

conduct, conflicts of interest, and how you are treating others in ministry. Ideally if you can have all three in your ministry life that would be great.

- a. **Mentoring:** A mentor will help you discern and walk with you through the personal issues of life, and how they affect work and family. It is a safe place to unpack how you are going in your relationship with God, others and your current issues, conflicts, sustainability and what God may be saying for the future.
- b. **Coaching:** This is when you seek out another leader to help you with a project, a leadership issue like vision casting, strategic planning, and even hiring or firing etc. These leaders can be for a short or long season but they serve a vital ministry purpose.
- c. **Supervision:** Since the royal commission into institutional child abuse, there is a move to mandate supervision for all who are in clergy and people caring roles. This is to make sure that we treat people well, that we avoid conflicts of interest and that we are following appropriate codes of conduct that bring safety and transparency to our roles.

This is not an exhaustive list, nor is it in a particular order of importance, and you may have other practices that will help you in your ministry journey. Our goal is to be an effective leader over the long haul and to be a positive influence on those that we serve. We can only do that if we are intentional about the practices that will sustain our families and us. All the while maintaining a sense of joy and wonder in our leadership.

Should you wish to implement these practices, identify what you are doing now, and then start with two or three desired ones and then moving onto others when you have a rhythm with these new ones? Trying to do all of these at once will only cause frustration.

I pray you will not only experience longevity in your ministry but also a sense of joy in God as you serve Him,

Dave Paroz