

FOR STARTERS

How do you define rest?

How often do you take time away from your ministry responsibilities?

Are you consistent with that time away? Now...take a deep breath and relax before you read on.

IN THE TRENCHES

I started to notice that Mike, one of our key volunteer leaders, was beginning to experience a little bit of emotional slowing (aka burnout). Mike had been a small-group leader in our youth ministry for five years. I knew that he loved students and loved serving in ministry, but it seemed as if he was losing steam.

I pulled him aside one Sunday after church, looked him in the eyes, and asked some simple questions: "When was the last time you took some time off from your normal schedule and rested?" "When was the last time you spent some uninterrupted time with God?" "When was the last time you took a week away from your Sunday school teaching responsibility?" Mike was a little embarrassed and softly responded with "I don't know."

I encouraged Mike to get some time away—time to connect with God and refresh his heart. He needed that time to quietly recharge his spiritual and emotional tanks. After missing a couple weeks' worth of meetings, Mike still needed more time away. I asked him to put his ministry to students on hold for two months while he focused on recharging. He did. Today he's healthier and moving at a more realistic pace; now we have a better youth ministry volunteer in Mike.

TRAINING on the GO

Recharge. Refresh. Rest. Reflect. Renew. Rekindle. Reconnect. These words might not be a part of your vocabulary as a youth ministry leader—especially when it comes to your personal life. But if you're going to be part of a healthy youth ministry, you've got to find time to experience these seven R's.

In the midst of doing ministry, it's easy to get caught in a routine that becomes about responding to the issues of the moment. Whatever is urgent consumes time and attention, and there's always something (or someone) screaming for attention. And by always being "on," we tend to pay more attention to the issues of the *urgent* rather than the issues of the *soul*.

When we do this, we miss the God-moments because of the crisis-moments. Too much of being "on" will cause one's heart to dry up and harden to God and his ways. But when we remove ourselves from the pace of ministry (and work, relationships, and life in general), we can recognize the dryness of the heart. Occasional time away allows leaders to hear from God, be refreshed, and focus on the depth of their own heart for God.

Most youth leaders don't take breaks because they believe either they're invincible or that ministry won't get done without them. The result: volunteers who are moving too fast, allowing their passion for God to slow down. Does that describe you? Are you so busy doing ministry that you don't even really want to take the time to read this?

Imagine for a moment that you have no plans tomorrow. No work, no meetings, no small groups, no youth events—absolutely no agenda for you to fulfill. No one needs your time. What are you going to do with the day? Do you think, "Wow, nothing to do! That's perfect! I've got a lot to catch up on"? Are you someone who always has to be moving, busy, doing something? Or could you envision yourself putting everything on hold and being still before God—recharging that connection?

I understand it's not very realistic to have a lot of leisure time as a youth ministry volunteer; your life is probably packed. But commit to finding regular ways to recharge your spiritual battery—and encourage others to do the same—then everyone will win.

Call these breaks your mini-vacation. Look for time in your schedule when you can rest, be still, read, experience silence, and just sit and listen for God's Spirit to tell you something. Remember, even Jesus took breaks away from the crowd and activity (and that was as God). Jesus knew that rest and time away were essential ingredients for his ministry. It's an essential for you, too.

CONNECT to God's Word

“This is what the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One of Israel, says: ‘In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it.’ You said, ‘No, we will flee on horses.’ Therefore you will flee! You said, ‘We will ride off on swift horses.’ Therefore your pursuers will be swift!” —Isaiah 30:15-16

- Describe a time you really experienced rest. How did you feel after you rested?
- What do you have a difficult time trusting God with? How does your lack of trust affect you?

Write a response and prayer to God here...

TO THE POINT

- It's about the long haul, not the quick sprints.
- To last for the long haul, you've got to learn to recharge.
- Look for times to rest, step back, slow down, or stop.

TRY IT

Take a weekend retreat—by yourself.

Tell your closest friends what you're doing and why. Ask them to pray for your renewal, and ask for suggestions on how to recharge.

Find an available location, such as a local retreat center or a friend's house (if they're out of town). Look for something quiet and away from distractions.

You don't want to overplan, but it could be helpful to think ahead and pray about where God wants to lead you during your time away. Should you bring your Bible, journal, walking shoes, some good books? Do what's good for your soul.

Here's a sample retreat agenda:

Day 1: Reflect on where you've been. Think about experiences, hurts, or ways that God has grown you.

Day 2: Take a prayer walk, spend the whole day in silence, or fast.

Day 3: Find a serene, quiet setting, and immerse yourself in God's creation. Enjoy, relax, breathe deeply, surrender, read God's Word, journal, listen, experience silence, let go, and move forward. Take time to reflect on yourself, youth ministry, and your students.

MAKE IT PERSONAL