

4 Ways to Refresh When Your Soul Is Weary

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Early in March, the prevailing thought was that we'd all be back in buildings for church services by May. Very few expected the COVID pandemic to go this long. It's now May, and only a handful of churches have reopened at very limited percentages of their normal seating capacity.

Some churches are working on plans for reopening in June, still limiting their seating, and many will not reopen till July or August. One of the major existing questions is, **Are your people ready to come back?** How many are ready? Surveys will help, but it's more like refueling in flight, we have to move forward to get real answers.

This elongated waiting, combined with so much unknown, is wearing on leaders. It's difficult to lead when moving forward is so encumbered. No one is complaining, but leaders are honest about what feels like a desert experience.

As a leader, personally, I'm accustomed to moving fast. Now, I'm working at full strength, but it often seems more like holding things together (in a holding pattern) rather than moving things forward. Perhaps you feel something similar. Others do, I'm sure.

Leading during COVID is like being in park with your engine running. You are ready to go, but you can't, not yet, at least not much. It is good that we can go deeper in discipleship and care for the people we serve, and so many churches are doing just that.

Yet, part of our responsibility as leaders is to "see first." That's part of the process of vision. We are to anticipate and "see around the corner." But when the corner keeps moving, leading becomes weary making.

So, I'd like to offer you some thoughts for your soul. Thoughts that may help your current journey be a little lighter, more hopeful, and even more productive.

4 ways to refresh desert times of the soul:

1) Know that God is moving, even if it's hard to see.

A few years back, God said something to me during a prayer time that was one of those moments that you carry for a lifetime.

I was in a hurry that day, so I prayed for a shorter time than usual, and I remember moving quickly as I left my prayer room in the basement. As I was leaving, God spoke clearly, saying, it's okay for you to go and tend to your work, but I cannot be rushed. I genuinely felt his grace and love and sensed that my prayer time wasn't measured in minutes, but if I wanted the fullness of His presence, that could not be rushed. Whoa.

Waiting upon God is not always easy, but if you want to know how He is moving, you have to slow down and wait. When we slow down for time with God, His plans become clearer to us. When God chooses not to make His plans clear, His presence alone is enough, but that process can't be rushed.

Scripture is loaded with the idea of waiting. A few of my favorites are Psalm 27:14, Isaiah 30:18, and Isaiah 40:29-31. How might God be moving in your church that you don't see at the moment?

2) Honesty with God is spiritually healthy.

If you are frustrated, weary, anxious, even wondering if God is with you in your ministry, it's good to tell Him. If you are wondering about your church's future, remember it's His church, and He cares more than you do, so be blunt. Talk to God about exactly how you feel. He can handle it. This kind of honest conversation with God usually leads to spiritual self-reflection. It's in these kinds of prayers that the Holy Spirit often leads me to Psalm 139:23-24:

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting. Psalm 139:23-24

Verse 23 uses the word "anxious" (NIV), but you can insert many different words that represent what you are experiencing. God will meet you there and often begins with the question, "Why?" Why are your thoughts so anxious?

Typically, I'm reminded it's me, not God, or life's circumstances, and He meets me there. My hunch is that it may be similar with you as well. This process leads to great peace, and your leadership burden becomes lighter because you remember you don't carry it alone.

3) Figure out where you will get your water.

Desert times, weary times, dry times can leave any leader thirsty. And we can choose to "get our water" or quench our thirst from a number of different sources. Obviously, God is our primary source.

No one and no thing satisfies to the depth that God does. But in His kindness and according to the design of His creation, God gives us room to be human and allows us to be refreshed in several ways.

But let's first acknowledge a few ways that may seem like they satisfy the soul but don't.

- **Working harder** – Hard work is good but working harder to fill an inner void is not healthy.
- **Gaining approval from others** – The approval that matters most is from God and a small inner circle.
- **Changing how you measure success** – Lowering standards may make you feel better in the short term, but over time, it's only changed lives that matter.
- **Justifying drift** – Pressure can make any leader justify unacceptable actions. Drift from God can lower pressure, but it will not increase peace.
- **Unhealthy diversions** – Unhealthy diversions may feel good in the moment but can become addictions and should be avoided at all costs.

God has made room for your thirst to be refreshed, your soul satisfied, and your weariness to be lifted through ways such as:

- The richness of friendships
- The joy of laughter
- The pleasure of a hobby you enjoy
- The need for physical rest
- The satisfaction of learning and growth

Again, nothing meets your deepest needs like God Himself, but don't miss out on all that He provides.

4) It's a great time to deepen relational roots.

In my perspective, everything comes down to relationships. The first relationship began in the garden with Adam but became broken. It was restored through a relational covenant with Abraham and ultimately offered to all of us through a personal relationship with Jesus.

It's a foundational biblical truth that relationships are key to our well-being. Whenever you face a difficult time, a leadership weary time, or possibly a spiritually dry time, a refreshed and a renewed sense of well-being comes from strengthened relationships.

Pause for inventory and investment in your closest relationships:

- God
- Family
- Friends
- Colleagues

Is there just one that could use your attention today?