

Episode 039

The Value Of Rhythms Of Refreshing

Have you ever known those who seem to continue have energy, enthusiasm in their life, work or ministry despite facing tough challenges? How is that possible? How can we continually keep ourselves fresh, vibrant and passionate to keep moving forward as leaders? One of the keys is to understand the principle of rhythms of refreshing, a biblical pattern that God implemented in the Old Testament in particular.

In the Old Testament God commanded and implemented weekly Sabbaths, land year-long sabbaths and special sabbaths as part of 7 annual festivals. A detailed examination of the biblical basis and its implications on the principle of rhythms are found in my blog article “Rhythms of Refreshing: Biblical Basis”. We explained in the New Testament that the principle of sabbath is ultimately intended to point to the spiritual rest found in Christ. Yet there is a practical side to it. Jesus explained in Mark 2:27 (NIV) Then he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” In other words, sabbath was intended to benefit men. God created rhythms into the life of the Israelites for their benefit.

It was concluded that rhythms will benefit us in a number of ways. Firstly, it is about creating healthy, beneficial rhythms. This is seen in the regular weekly, bi-annual, and longer-term rhythms for the benefit of the Israelites. Secondly, these rhythms are intended to help us in wholesome ways such as spiritually, physically, communally. Thirdly, these are acts that reinforces our devotion and trust in God. For it requires us to stop certain activities which we may naturally desire to be involved in for activities that God deems more important.

Why are such rhythms important to leaders? Leaders can often be too busy and neglect healthy rhythms that helps us continue to be refreshed, revitalised and even realign with God. By recognizing and wisely incorporating healthy rhythms leaders set the foundations for sustainability and even growth. Further, by appreciating such rhythms, leaders could also implement it for the benefit of their organisations.



RHYTHMS THAT WORK FOR YOU

The key to effective rhythms is that it must be appropriate to help you specifically. Can you design a rhythm that sustains you spiritually, emotionally and physically throughout the week? To help us identify these we should consider what enables us to relieve stress, refresh, recalibrate and realign (4Rs).

What can help us relieve stress effectively?

There are many tips available on how to relieve stress even in just the internet. The practice of self-care is an important element in this. However, we should ask ourselves as leaders who are often time poor, what relaxes us efficiently and effectively? Is it a healthy way? It is important to carefully consider this, for there are ways to relieve stress that are neither healthy nor sustainable for the long-term.

It is commonly known that physical exercise especially aerobic exercises allow the toxins built up in our bodies to be flushed out. It also releases endorphins, brain chemicals that helps us feel better. Studies have found it helps reduce tension, improve mood, improve sleep and self-esteem. It is a natural and all-round healthy way to de-stress and is thus highly recommended. Better still if it allows multi-tasking to occur. Some listen to podcasts, etc while walking or running. I usually exercise on a cross-trainer and usually listen to podcasts, news or even watch videos. I also do gardening for exercise, fresh air and in addition, gain fresh organic fruits and vegetables!

Stress can also be relieved with social activities through spending time with family and friends. Having a good laugh and enjoying oneself. Done the right way, it can achieve both stress relieve and strengthen relationships.

There are many other ways, I won't list them here because you can find them elsewhere. But a key leadership question we should ask ourselves is what is effective in our context? Often we may be falling back on stress relievers that are not effective, but because of familiarity or habit.



What helps us to refresh effectively?

To relieve stress is to remove stress. To refresh is to regain enthusiasm and energy. Many of the approaches to de-stress does also help us regain energy, but not always. We must know the difference. For example, playing computer games may relieve stress but it does little to refresh. The additional problem is it is usually addictive. That is why I avoid it totally and remove all temptations from my laptop and smartphone.

Let us identify what helps us feel refreshed. What helps us to feel energised?

Firstly, when our frame of mind is positive and possibility oriented. Consider the approach of watching TV, movies and other media. It may relieve stress but not always refresh. If what we watch is uplifting, inspiring, makes us laugh, educational – it could refresh because of the positivity it fosters in our minds. Sometimes I watch a bit of America's Got Talent highlights because it is inspiring to see the talent hidden in people you may not expect. Similarly, the right type of uplifting music or worship, can refresh us. Being around positive people can also make a significant difference.

Being stimulated by creativity can also refresh as it lifts our minds with possibilities. Sometimes I watch how TV or movies are made because I appreciate the creative and technical process. It helps stimulate and inspire my creative side. That refreshes me. At times, it reveals the creative process that others go through which I find fascinating. Because it helps me understand creative people better. Each person is unique and it is useful to make a journey of discovery of what can refresh you effectively.

Secondly, when our emotional tank is refilled. This can occur when our hearts are warmed through affirmation, encouragement, love, etc. Even observing heart-warming incidents and gestures can help. This is why being in a supportive environment is such a tank filler. It is crucial that we have some supportive people that can help us refill our emotional tank.



Thirdly, when we feel physically healthy and have sufficient energy to do what is needed. The lack of physical energy can drain energy from all other areas. This is why it is crucial to maintain a healthy lifestyle including maintaining a healthy diet in order that we have sufficient energy levels.

Lastly, when we are spiritually vibrant. Our spiritual condition may be the least felt if we are spiritually dull. Yet our spiritual condition impacts all other aspects of mental, emotional and physical. Spiritual vibrancy comes from building our spirit through healthy spiritual disciplines. It is helpful to identify which spiritual disciplines helps us the most to revive our spirit when it feels depleted. In my case, I find that praying in tongues and worship in God's Presence brings the most immediate impact.

What helps us recalibrate and realign effectively?

To recalibrate is about restoring balance. As a former scientist I am very familiar with recalibrating all the instruments I used. At regular intervals, I did this because I had to be certain that my instruments were still accurate. For after a certain amount of use, or changes in the environment, it throws the instruments off eventually. Similarly, It is easy to get off balance when we are under pressure, when crisis occurs, other people's priorities push us, or even when we get excited about something new.

To realign is about getting the focus and direction correct. When we get our car tyres worked on, they do 2 things. Balance your wheels and realign your front tyres. Balance ensures equal wear is happening and enables longer tyre life. Alignment is about the correct direction that these tyres will roll which is critical when we brake hard.

We need regular times to recalibrate and realign. But what should we calibrate and realign against? It should be God and His Word. These are best done through worship, prayer, communion with God, reading God's Word, hearing God's Word through preaching etc.



UNDERSTANDING BREADTH, DEPTH AND INTENSITY

When we plant a tree, we have to appreciate its root system. The breadth of its roots, the depth it goes to and how vigorously it spreads. The same occurs in the challenges and stresses we face. It can impact us just like a tree root system.

Some stresses are very localised in its impact upon our hearts. Like the recent loss of my lower left molar tooth in itself. Some stresses may be broader. In my case, I had already lost the other left molar teeth, I no longer can chew on my left side. That has broader impact. I needed to replace it with dental implants. Worse, one of my upper tooth were over-extended down due to the previous loss the lower molar tooth many years ago. So I needed orthodontics as well to push it back up to give enough space to replace the molar teeth. The intensity is in realising all these were expensive and my insurance will only cover a small fraction! That became more intense. Fortunately, I did not have depth problem. If my molar had deep roots and my jaw did not have enough bone for the dentist to install the implant, then they would have to do extra work to infill with artificial bone.

Hence the issues we are confronted with will have varying breadth where its impact can affect other connected areas in our lives. It will have a depth aspect where it may go deeper into our psyches, be more deep-seated, more entrenched in our souls or it could be shallow and superficial. It will have an intensity in the rate of its progression and growing impact upon our lives.

To address the above the relieving of stress, refresh, recalibrate and realign has to be capable of reaching the appropriate breadth, depth and intensity. Therefore, appropriate measures has to be taken. Just as the dentist will not just happily clean my plague when one of my teeth is decaying. Appropriate measures are needed. We need similar measures for our life.

Rhythms can facilitate much of the above to enable maintenance, strengthening in order that we have sustainability in our life and ministries. Appropriate measures at the appropriate rhythms. Rhythms will not solve everything because there are times of traumatic crisis, there may be deep-seated issues that require much deeper spiritual, psychological surgeries.



Let's look at some examples. Having daily devotions and prayer can help us de-stress, refresh and recalibrate but at a shallow level since the amount of time and intensity involved is very limited. At the Sunday celebration worship there is greater opportunity to go deeper. Similarly with small group though probably in different aspects. By attending conferences, we could go even deeper in the more intense spiritual atmosphere and teaching of the Word.

However, another key is how much we take advantage of it. It will impact on how much we get out of it. When we are intentional, we can make the most of it. But if we are distracted, we get little out of it. Thus, we have to learn how to draw in. How to suck in every spiritual element! It is like having a hot shower. Are we revelling in it or simply rushing to get through it?

Allow me to illustrate with some of my personal rhythms that is so helpful to my own life.

Relieving stress and refreshing. Every day I am conscious of my mental and emotional well-being. My leadership responsibilities can lead to significant stress at times. Should stress build up and I can sense the emotional strain building up, the sense of being overwhelmed and so forth, I try to take steps quickly on the same day. For I intentionally do my best not to allow it to build up day after day. My most effective and time proven remedy is to worship till I enter God's Presence and pray in tongues. I discover God will help lift my burdens and help me refocus on Him. It does not take long to do this, usually less than 10 minutes. In other words, I have an almost daily spiritual rhythm of self-reflection and remedy for stress and to refresh. The self-reflection occurs very quickly because I had not accumulated lots of emotional baggage. Imagine if you tidy and clean your house daily. Not much dust or dirt accumulates and so it is quick work each day.

On top of this, almost every other day, I have some form of exercise. Whether it be in my little home gym or doing gardening as I had mentioned earlier.

Recalibrating and realigning through God's Word. As a pastor and preacher, I regularly prepare sermons and teaching almost every week. I have noticed many preachers who prepare their sermons only for their congregations. Hence, it can feel like burdensome work sometimes.



Instead, I approach it also for my own spiritual nourishment, recalibration and realignment. I allow God's Word to impact me. To challenge, convict, inspire me at the same time. To allow this, I do delve deeper into areas that I believe is of personal benefit, diverting slightly from my preparations. In other words, I have in-built an almost weekly rhythm of recalibrating and realignment to God's Word. On top of this, I aim to take some spiritual retreats once or twice a year to seek God, in order to make deeper recalibration and realignments.

PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION OF RHYTHMS OF REFRESHING

It is advisable to map our rhythms daily, weekly, monthly and annually. The most crucial is our daily and weekly. Get that going well, and most of the others will be ok. Following are some recommendations.

- A regular short time for devotion to God, preferably daily. To worship God, to commune with Him in prayer. It also provides regular opportunity to refresh our hearts.
- A regular time for self-reflection and self-adjustment. Where we contemplate the state of our own heart, learning to develop in self-awareness with the help of the Holy Spirit. It also provides opportunity to relieve stress, refresh or even to recalibrate.
- A time for God's Word. We may fulfil this by attending church worship services and small groups weekly. Perhaps augmented with Sunday school or other Christian educational avenues. This helps us to continually and incrementally recalibrate and realign to God's Word.
- A time to do God's work. By intentionally setting aside our normal work. Hence, it could be serving in a church ministry regularly.
- A time for spiritual retreats. It could be a time for spiritual retreats to seek God, to realign spiritually. Or to attend spiritual conferences.
- A time out from our work. It is good for us to use that time to balance physical rest and exercise. To have healthy recreation that can relieve stress and refresh us.
- A time for family. It is important as leaders not to neglect our families. Hence, setting aside regular times for family relations and bonding is highly recommended.
- A time for community. Being involved in church services and small groups provide such times of community. As being part of a supportive and positive community contributes to our well-being.





CONCLUSION

There is great value in developing appropriate rhythms that enable us to relive stress, refresh, recalibrate and realign. This is particularly important for leaders as we tend to face higher levels of stress and buffeting that may throw us off course. By wisely creating effective rhythms, we can have a more sustainable and successful life and ministry.



Discussion Questions

These questions could be done personally or as part of a group discussion.

1. It was argued that the idea of rhythms has a strong biblical basis and practical benefits, as seen in the Old Testament patterns insisted by God for the Israelites. What are your thoughts about this?
2. It is proposed in the article that there are 4 major aspects that rhythms can be utilised to sustain us spiritually, emotionally and physically. Discuss your thoughts about these principles.
3. The article presents the idea that the depth, breadth and intensity of various issues we are confronted with in our lives require corresponding measures. Hence the relieving of stress, refresh, recalibrate and realign has to be capable of reaching the appropriate breadth, depth and intensity. Discuss the validity of these concepts.

Actionable Steps

Following questions are to prompt us on suitable actions. Importantly, come up with steps you will take to make progress. Give them datelines and priority.

1. Identify 1 or 2 areas in your life that would benefit from the rhythms proposed in this article. Consider carefully which aspects of relieving stress, refreshing, recalibrating and realigning is most needed. Then design an appropriate rhythm to achieve this. Consider frequency, intensity, and manner. Adjust along the way to suit your own dynamic situation.
2. Is there a regular activity that you are already doing which can be tweaked so that it can also become a rhythm that contributes to your well-being? Consider carefully which aspect of relieving of stress, refresh, recalibrate and realign you are trying to achieve.





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