

taking care of yourself

The best gift we can give to those we lead is that of a leader who is spiritually alive and growing in their relationship with God. So how is it that so many of us struggle to take care of ourselves?

Warning signs

I am convinced no one intends to cease investing in themselves, but it can be something that happens over a period of time. Youth leaders spend so much of their time using the Bible as they prepare the next talk and praying over issues with young people that there can start to be a real disinterest in doing these same things for their own benefit, as it can feel like more work or they simply don't have the time. This is never a decision that we take, it is more something that creeps in subconsciously over time. Here are some tell-tale signs that we need to invest more time in our own spiritual life:

- Loss of love for God and his Word.
- Prayer is empty.
- Life is too easy.
- Life is too hard.
- Doing faith from memory.
- Loss of awe.
- Loss of joy.

If we are relying too much on our own strengths and talents, we know that we need to reconnect with our heavenly Father.

A spiritual check-up

Our cars need to have an annual MOT to ensure that they are still safe to drive. As leaders, it is important that we regularly check how we are doing to ensure that we are still safe to lead others. The following questions may be useful as a form of spiritual check-up.

- When did you last see God at work?
- What excites you about God?
- How have you seen God at work in your life?
- What is God trying to grow in you at the moment?
- What spiritual disciplines are you practising?

Questions like these aren't there to send us on a guilt trip but are there to help us recognise the reality of our own situations. We need to answer them honestly before God so we can make sure we are fully alive in Christ (Ephesians 2:5).

Try a new discipline

A great way to re-ignite our passion for Jesus can be to try a new spiritual discipline. As the name suggests, these things are not always easy and do require a degree of discipline for us to see growth occur. Just as an athlete requires discipline to train to run a marathon, so disciples need to discipline themselves to commit to



We need to read the tell-tale signs to invest in our own spiritual life

growing more like Jesus. But once the initial 'pain threshold' is overcome, disciplines can become lifelines and highlights of the disciple's day or week.

Take a retreat

Make space in your diary to take a day out, not a day off, but a day to meet with God in a deeper way than perhaps you might usually. It is often helpful to go somewhere different so the change of environment helps you to realise that this is a special, different day. How you use the time is up to the individual but what is important is that we do things that connect us with God, give room for Him to speak to us, and find ourselves challenged and growing as a result. Jesus often withdrew from others to spend time with his Father, we need to follow his example.

Nourished by the Word

The Bible is full of so much life-enriching food; we all know this as we teach it week after week. So making sure that we allow it to nourish our own bodies is essential. We need to develop a routine that fits our own lifestyle and personality. It is essential that we keep our personal times with the Bible alive and fresh, which may mean we have to be creative in what we do. That may mean setting ourselves the challenge to read the Bible in a year (there are many books available to help make this both easy and enjoyable), reading a different translation to what we are used to, or committing certain verses of Scripture to memory. What is important is that we keep stretching ourselves and building on what we have done in the past.

Passionate in prayer

There are many books written on how we can pray and these can be really useful for trying new ways of praying so we don't get stuck in a rut, which sucks the life out of our prayer life. Praying is how we build our personal relationship with God so it should be life-giving, transforming and fun. We also need to remember that there is more to pray for than just our ministry. Try praying without asking



Reconnect by getting out into God's creation

God for anything but just chatting about how you are, what your hopes are, what your worries are.

The wonder of worship

A great way to reconnect your soul with your maker's is to put yourself in a place where you can wonder at his works. This may mean getting out into the countryside or watching the latest David Attenborough programme on DVD. Anything that helps to remind us of the greatness of God and the relative smallness of ourselves. Make space to worship God in a style that suits you, in a place where you can be free. This may be putting on a worship CD or going



Learn the rhythms of your life

to a church where you don't lead anything and connecting with God in a new way. Anything which will help us connect with the awesomeness of God will be helpful to our spiritual well-being.

Learn the rhythms

We have many things going on in our lives and it is important to learn their rhythms or cycles. Knowing when is the best time of day to read your Bible will be extremely useful in making the most of your quiet times, recognising the busier and quieter periods of the year will help us to set a good pace to run at, both spiritually and practically. No one can run a marathon at a sprint speed and similarly no one can live life at that pace so we need to learn the annual rhythm of our lives.

God has given us a gift of Sabbath rest each week. This is a day to recharge, to reconnect and to ready ourselves for the week ahead. Make sure you don't end up doing the household chores or anything else that may drain you of energy on this day. Use it to be creative, to get closer to the heart beat of God and to enjoy being a part of His creation.

Finally, we need to be good role models so growing in our spiritual walk is vital if we are to develop young disciples who are growing.