
Wisdom to live by, lead by and grow by

Leadership Essentials



Nolan W. McCants

Foreword by Marvin E. Wiley

Thank you for visiting my website and downloading this FREE chapter, “*Practicing Rest*” from my book **Leadership Essentials**. This is one of seven chapters in the full version of this powerful leadership tool.

Solid leadership is the key ingredient to building a strong ministry, and every leader needs guiding principles to follow in order to keep their ministry on track.

Leadership Essentials is the ideal book for those who are already leading a vibrant ministry or looking to build one from the ground up. I’m sure you’ll enjoy the reading and I hope you are able to benefit from the things shared here.

You’ll find the following chapters in the full version of **Leadership Essentials**:

- **Grace to Serve**
- **Need to be Needed**
- **The Pride Factor**
- **Redefining Success**
- **Creating Culture**
- **Excellence**

You can order the full version of this book and other books I’ve authored at www.nolanmccants.com. Order yours today! This book is also great as an affordable gift that any Christian leader would appreciate. I would also like to invite you to join our on-line Blog community and share your thoughts about this book by logging on to my site.

Thanks for your interest, may the Lord bless your every effort in ministry and in Life.

Sincerely,

Nolan McCants

Practicing Rest

Following His extraordinary feat of creating the heavens and the earth, God rested. Wow, what a concept! It may not have been the type of rest we require, but He certainly sent a message to mankind: Rest is an essential part of our lives. It is also a powerful expression of faith and something that should be practiced regularly. Rest is evidence that we believe the job is complete, so we rest from the work. Many people consider vacationing, getaways or leisure time a luxury. However, these are essential in maintaining our physical, emotional and spiritual health, and should have the same priority as your devotional time or serving your others.

It is important that we rest our mind and body each day from the rigors we face. As simple as this might seem, it is a common sense lesson that many in leadership have yet to learn. There will always be one more phone call or decision to make, or one more crisis to deal with. If taking time to rest isn't a part of your daily routine, then emotional and physical exhaustion are sure to come. In His wisdom, God instituted the Sabbath knowing we would get too consumed in life's affairs to slow it down and take a break. Here is what Jesus said to the disciples upon their return from a very powerful and productive ministry trip. "And the apostles gathered themselves together unto Jesus, and told him all things, both what they had done, and what they had taught. And he said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat," (Mark 6:31 KJV).

Sadly, I know many people in ministry who think rest is the first cousin to slothfulness; their excuses for not taking a vacation are some of the most creative I've ever heard. Of course *doing the work of the ministry* is always their justification. This begs the questions: Are we in ministry for ourselves or because Jesus called us? And if He called us, then shouldn't we follow His example in taking time to rest? In the above verse, I'm sure that Jesus was just as excited as the disciples were in their experiencing God's life transforming power flowing through them. But he also wanted to teach them an invaluable lesson that would increase their potential to experience successful ministry for many years to come. We often overlook the practical side of Jesus' lifestyle and ministry, and focus on the miracles. I would imagine some of the *super spiritual disciples* were offended that Jesus would seemingly downplay their jubilant victory reports and emphasize their need to rest.

Rest is Not an Option

When rested you can love better, build better, serve better, think better, pray better, lead better, and overall you will just be better.

In Mark 6:31, Jesus' disciples had not stopped to rest long enough to eat a decent meal. He was concerned and wanted to make it clear to them that resting was not an option. This same lesson applies to us as well: regular intervals of rest are a necessity. While in business, I disciplined myself to take regular times of rest. Now that I'm in ministry I am even more resolute in doing so, and I won't apologize or carry guilt.

When I was younger, I learned to listen to my body. I could sense when I was over the top and could pull back. Over the years it's become increasingly difficult to pick up these same warnings. When I am tired, my one clear indicator is that I become short with people, and I hate getting to that place. Often I can hide my frustrations and exhibit

patience in the most difficult situations. But if I'm overtired and don't take time to rest, the bear in me comes out all too quickly. My wife, Gloria, will then say, "It's time isn't it?"

I'm sure the demands of ministry can drive you to overload quickly as well. You've got to know yourself and take time to rest when you feel the need coming on. When we're overworked and void of sufficient rest, our perspective becomes distorted. Decisions are hastily made without clear thought, and our creative abilities ebb away. Wisdom says that taking time to rest keeps us fresh and focused.

Developing a Plan

When I was a young minister in training, my pastor, the late Dr. James B. Alford, would often wisely say, "Burning the candle at both ends may give you more light, but it will also burn faster too." He practiced what he preached by taking regular vacations as a demonstration of his proclamation. On his days off you could find him at home relaxing in his easy chair. To this day his words and life minister to me whenever I'm overextended.

Since I can no longer trust myself to know when to stop, I've factored into my annual planning quarterly getaways and alone time. Over the years, Gloria and I have enjoyed both planned and spontaneous escapes, some local and some long distance. For instance, as a young man working hard to build a business, I took frequent trips to Lake Geneva, a beautiful area of southern Wisconsin, a place I am still fond of. This continues to be one of my preferred getaway destinations. The quiet beauty and small town atmosphere provides the perfect setting for my personal rejuvenation. The duration of my trips there have varied over the years depending upon available time, money, and needed rest. Sometimes I go alone, occasionally with the entire family, and often with Gloria.

Gloria and I have also planned breaks together, with other couples, with the kids, as well as by ourselves. If you're married, I believe getaways with your mate should take precedence over all others. Before traveling with the entire family, I try to find alone time and unwind so that others don't experience the all-too-common burnout backlash. It's proven to be an excellent strategy. The kids can laugh all night and ask if we're there yet over and over, and Mr. Grumpy never comes out thanks to the pre-trip rest. There's nothing worse than taking a vacation and being so stressed that you trudge through each day attempting to wear a happy face over your misery, while trying to give what you really don't have.

For married couples, I think it's also a good idea to take separate trips as long as both spouses agree. This will bring renewal, and can restore vitality to your marriage. Separate breaks might not be a need for both of you. However, if one partner needs time alone, then the other should consider encouraging them and aiding in the planning process. The last I checked, the marriage vows did not include a mandate to be joined at the hip. Of course this always works best when there is agreement.

It also pays to be spontaneous. One year I was on the phone with a client and friend who informed me about *another* exotic trip he was taking, this one to Acapulco, Mexico. He then mentioned the deal he had found and asked if Gloria and I would like to go along. It was February in Chicago and about ten degrees, need I say more? Days later we were strolling along the beaches of Acapulco under sunny skies and daily temperatures in the eighties. It was both romantic and refreshing. I should add that we

managed not to discuss any business, as was agreed to before hand. No matter the frequency, whether alone or with family or friends, there has to be a plan. It won't just happen—that's why it's called *taking a vacation*.

The Guilt Factor

Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word. But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me. And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her (Luke 10:38-42 KJV).

Do you know anyone like Martha who is guilt ridden whenever she takes a break and badgers others who know how to choose *the good part*? They're everywhere—at church, work, school, and home. Mary made a wise decision to pull back and rest at the feet of Jesus. Don't allow others to lay guilt trips on you, and refuse to succumb to self-imposed ones as well.

Many people suffer from guilt, fear, or the thought that if they aren't present somehow the "boat will cease to float." Others view vacations as a reward for working themselves crazy. But a vacation is more than a reward: it is a necessity. I once overheard a conversation between two top-level executives. The younger one had recently been promoted to an unprecedented level within the company and was eager to prove his worth. On this particular day he was not feeling well, and had not been for days. The wiser, older, executive shared a simple parable with him. "Do you remember when Mr. Jones passed away? Did any of the Jones stores close?" he asked. "No," the younger man replied. "So what do you think would happen if you died today?" The message instantly became clear. "Go home and get some rest," the wise executive said. "Your job and all of its worries will be here tomorrow when you return."

Don't be afraid to relax; it's not a sin. I checked. Nor are we expected to work until we literally fall at the feet of Jesus. Unfortunately for some this manner of doing ministry is considered commendable. They believe they will receive an extra reward for working overtime in the *works* department. The truth is there will be no rewards for foolishly overextending ourselves. I believe that Jesus knew His disciples—like most of us—would use ministry as an excuse to work perpetually. I feel this is why He quickly turned their attention from their successful mission, and onto their need for rest. In today's world, many in ministry are adrenaline junkies and overachievers who like surfing the waves of momentum, and find it difficult to rest. Some have attained a measure of success, yet are driven by the fear of losing what they have gained; they want to hold to what they believe *they* have achieved. My advice is simple: let it go, and you'll find out that rest is just as important as the work you do.

Beware! Guilt can surface from various places:

- Demands of society, the rat race
- The workplace culture
- Over zealous church workers and leaders
- An overachieving attitude
- The thought of being undeserving

- A works mentality
- Self-imposed guilt

Travel Destinations

I like traveling to a variety of resting places. One of my favorite spots to visit is the Mill Valley area of California, just north of San Francisco. The combination of the ocean, mountains, palm trees, and their microclimates provide both therapy and creative stimulation. I've often gone there to relieve my stress and anxiety. I've return rejuvenated with renewed passion, clarity of vision, and the patience to take on the best metal testers.

When it comes to ministry, the drain on your mental and emotional state varies. Depending on the volume of work and the type of activity, you may need different forms of rest. For me, there are times when I crave the solitude of Wisconsin, and other times when I need to have my creative juices stirred and stimulated. This may call for a trip to Las Vegas or Disney World. These two destinations are places where creativity is constantly being redefined. Technology and resources from around the world are employed to captivate their target markets, and I'm re-energized every time I visit. The key is to know yourself and choose your place of rest based on your present emotional, physical, and spiritual state.

Mini-Vacations

Travel distance is an important factor when choosing where to take a mini-vacation. For frequent but short breaks—perhaps once a quarter—it is best if the location is within a two-hour drive. In my case, the sooner I can reach my destination, the better I feel. Conversely, some people find that driving is just as relaxing as staying in one place. Whatever works for you is the best plan to follow, but be sure to take the necessary time.

Micro-Breaks

While stress is a fact of life, getting away for extended periods of time isn't always feasible. Now, for you excuse makers, I don't want you to add this to your list. The truth is that sometimes you need a quick escape from all the madness, but leaving home isn't possible. This calls for some creativity. There are many simple ways that I call micro-breaks. For instance, a few years ago I was in Atlanta visiting with mentors and dear friends, Bishop Kirby and Sandra Clements. They have a way of relaxing the formalities and weaving a visit into their everyday lives. While there I witnessed one of their relaxation routines. After a peaceful dinner at a Thai restaurant, we strolled through the mall, enjoying a leisure evening of window shopping. It was their way of unwinding. I guess as long as there are no credit cards available, I'd be willing to try this with my wife too!

My point is that finding the time and appropriate place to rest doesn't have to be involved, expensive or difficult. For example, I am blessed to live less than an hour outside of Chicago. A world-class city, it has many diversions to offer. A visit to the lakefront alone can take you away better than a Calgon bath. Walks down north Michigan Avenue, or a visit to the Museum Campus are a couple ways my family and I experience rest.

I found another way right in my own backyard. A few years ago, I was driving through my neighborhood and realized I knew every street, pass through, and hideaway in the neighborhood I grew up in. However, driving to and from work had alienated me from my present home environment. After some thought, I decided to take up walking. Gloria and I began walking three to five miles a day, at least three times a week. Strolling along the trails and across the bridge-covered ponds in our subdivision has also provided us with quality time to exercise and talk.

I also like to fish, but unlike some of my friends and family, I don't consider fishing to be serious business. I like putting the worm on the hook, dropping the line in the water, and relaxing. If I actually catch something, that's a bonus. To me the whole point is to spend time outdoors soaking up the sunshine, and feeling the warmth while I rest my mind.

Recently Gloria and I decided to establish a daily quiet time in our home. For an hour and a half each weekday we turn off the television and only take selective phone calls; it's amazing what an intrusion these are. Some days we're in the family room together with our girls, working on homework and projects. Other times we're reading a book or working at the computer.

Whatever relaxes you and allows you to get away from routine hustle and bustle, I encourage you to take deliberate and regular times of rest.

Friends and Family

Combining rest with visiting family or friends might seem like a good idea. You may even feel you're being efficient, but often these visits only serve to increase your stress levels. Your host might have a hidden agenda that will demand your time, but won't be revealed until the middle of breakfast. Save yourself. During your times of rest, give yourself license to be selfish. That's right, be *selfish*. Serve yourself first. Once you've rested, then visit with friends or relatives wearing a genuine smile and fortified with the patience of Job.

Ministers are also notorious for attending conferences and calling it a vacation break. It's true that some conferences build in leisure time, but this isn't the type of rest I'm talking about. You need time away from your cell phone, networking, and the business of ministry. Give yourself permission to get away from all of these distractions and unwind.

Establishing Rules

It's important to establish rest rules for yourself and with those around you. When our children were younger, Gloria and I would enjoy regular date nights. My mother, who passed away in 2004, would keep them and guard the telephone. If our girls attempted to call she would explain that mom and dad needed time to be alone. She helped protect us from burnout, a measure of loving support that we've missed very much.

While I'm away, my office staff directs all matters to appropriately trained and assigned personnel. I leave with the knowledge that some things may even fall apart. What's my attitude? If it's not essential or life threatening, either the team can handle it or I will upon my return. Do not hesitate to ask those around you to honor your wish for peace and quiet and to assist you in meeting this objective. Arrange your ministry so that

it can run without you for brief periods. Trust me, whatever and whomever you left will still be there when you return.

Making it Happen

Vacations, getaways and excursions can be costly. If you have the financial means, do it. If finances are a challenge you'll need to become resourceful. When Gloria and I started the church we struggled financially, and it was difficult to maintain our home, not to mention taking a vacation. We decided to take micro-breaks, then moved up to mini-vacations when finances allowed.

Following the first-year anniversary of our ministry, we had about one hundred fifty dollars and a real need for a break. We took our girls, then ages three and four, to Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, a little over an hours drive from our home. We didn't have any reservations, just a need and the belief that God would provide. We pulled into a small Christian-owned motel, and I shared my story with the front desk attendant. I explained that we had limited funds, were celebrating our freshman year in the pastorate, and needed two nights stay at their facility. I offered to pay seventy-five dollars for the two nights. He said that was fine as long as we made our own beds and used the same towels. We agreed and enjoyed a mini-vacation on a shoestring. Thank God that our girls were so young; at that age they had no idea we weren't at a Marriott.

As the congregation grew, a number of businessmen and women joined us. Many of them traveled, and I thought that someone might have excess frequent flyer miles they could part with. Sure enough a couple of guys freely surrendered theirs. You could check within your sphere of ministry, because the last thing a frequent traveler wants to see is another airport, and you could be the beneficiary.

One Kansas City church gives their pastor and his wife gift certificates for a two-week stay at a major hotel chain. They can use these anytime, a couple days at a time or the entire two weeks at once. Another way to reduce your expenses is through the use of credit cards that offer points towards free flights and hotel stays. I am not suggesting that you go into debt to pay for a vacation. Rather, I encourage you to pay your bills using your credit card and then pay off the card with the same money you would have used to pay your bills. Your points will add up fast and can be earned on both personal and business cards.

Another option is to join the various free travel programs offered by hotels, airlines, and rental car agencies. Be sure to read the fine print though, because all programs are not created equally. Some offer better deals, allowing you to earn freebies faster, while others may charge hidden fees for transferring or accessing points. When you combine the use of points earned on credit cards with those from frequent traveler programs you can double your point accumulation. I've had many people ask me if I'm independently wealthy because of my travel. I love removing the mystery by explaining my strategy for vacationing on a budget.

If you like a particular destination, get to know the people at the hotels, particularly the small boutique hotels. Remember names of people who gave you excellent service. Write thank you notes and letters to their bosses. They will not forget your efforts and they will pay off on future visits with upgrades and other perks.

Finally, before calling to book a room check rates on the hotel's Internet site;

most offer slightly better deals on-line. If you call a hotel's front desk, let them know you saw a particular rate on-line and that you want it. If they refuse, book it on-line. A week or two before you travel, check the rates online again. If the hotel has booked fewer guests than anticipated, their rates may have dropped. Call the hotel, give your confirmation number, tell them you saw a lower rate on-line, and request an adjustment. During my travels, I've had my rate reduced many times using this strategy.

Now, forget the thought that travel is too costly, and start making plans to get some well-deserved rest and relaxation.

Commit to Doing This for You

- *Leave ALL work behind*

Unless it is a working trip, leave your to-do list at home. Resist the temptation to bring along things that can rob you of true rest.

- *Turn the cell phone off and say no to e-mail*

This may be difficult to imagine, but for years we all functioned wonderfully without these modern conveniences. Record a message stating you will return calls upon the date of your return. Invite them to call your office or designated person in the meantime. Give office staff specific guidelines for contacting you while you're away. The same can be done with email.

- *Learn your signs of fatigue*

We all overreact when we're fatigued. We have to learn our own warning signs and respond appropriately.

- *Become disciplined in your rest time*

Get rid of the excuses. Make rest a planned priority.

- *Don't be afraid to be selfish*

Here is one time that selfishness is permissible. Take care of yourself so that you can better take care of others.

- *Encourage those you serve with to rest as well*

Since we reproduce ourselves, I'm sure that an *all work and no play* mentality has been woven into your culture. Encourage those around you to take time to rest. You may even need to share your frequent travelers points at times to make it possible.

You can order the full version of this book and other books I've authored at www.nolanmccants.com.

ISBN: 978-0-9795711-0-7

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