



Episode 17: What I Wish I Would Have Known Before I Became a Pastor – Part 3: Effective Ways to Stay Healthy

EPISODE NOTES

In this episode of the Transforming the Church Podcast, Pastor Derwin Gray shares insights on maintaining health as a ministry leader. This is the third part of the series "What I Wish I Would Have Known Before I Became a Pastor." Pastor Derwin discusses the importance of taking sabbaticals, establishing a weekly Sabbath, having mentors, peers, and mentees, and staying physically fit. These practices are essential for sustaining a healthy ministry and personal life, allowing leaders to serve effectively and joyfully.

Here are a few of the practical things you'll learn in this episode:

- **Sabbatical and Study Breaks:** Pastor Derwin emphasizes the importance of taking extended breaks, such as a seven-week summer sabbatical, to recharge and prepare for future ministry work. These breaks are not just for rest but also for spiritual renewal and planning, allowing leaders to be proactive and organized.
- **Weekly Sabbath:** A weekly Sabbath is a day of delight and rest, not boredom. It's a time to engage in activities that refresh the soul, such as hobbies or spending time in nature. Pastor Derwin shares his personal practice of fishing on his Sabbath, which reinvigorates his spirit.
- **Mentorship and Community:** Having mentors (a "Paul"), peers (a "Barnabas"), and mentees (a "Timothy") creates a cycle of learning and teaching that enriches personal and spiritual growth. Mentors provide wisdom and experience, peers offer mutual support, and mentees allow leaders to pass on their knowledge.
- **Physical Fitness:** Staying physically fit is crucial for mental health and overall well-being. Resistance weight training, in particular, helps maintain mental clarity and emotional stability. Pastor Derwin shares his journey of rediscovering the importance of physical fitness after his NFL career and how it benefits his ministry.
- **Living from Affirmation:** Leaders should live from the affirmation of being loved and approved by God, rather than seeking approval through their work. Understanding that righteousness comes from Christ allows leaders to serve from a place of grace and security.

QUOTES

- "If you don't come apart, you will be torn apart." -Derwin L. Gray
- "Live from affirmation, not for affirmation." -Derwin L. Gray
- "Couples that lift weights together stay together." -Derwin L. Gray

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SHOW TRANSCRIPTION

Hey guys, what's happening? I'm Pastor Derwin and welcome to Transforming the Church podcast. Because when the church is transformed, the world is transformed. And what is the church? The church is the blood bought, justified, holy, blameless people of God who are just soaked in the majesty of King Jesus.

The church is not something that was earned through our behavior. It was earned through the sinless behavior of King Jesus, his substitutionary death on the cross and his glorious resurrection and the sin in of the Holy Spirit to seal us so that we can be filled with the glory of God. So yeah, that's what I mean by the church. And if you've tuned into Transforming the Church podcast, you know, as a pastor, as a theologian, we love the word of God here because in the word of God we get to see the face of God and the face of God is revealed in King Jesus. So we're walking through a three part series and this is part three, the title of the series is this what I wish I would have known before I became a pastor.

Part one was effective pastoral leadership. Part two was effective ways to engage in difficult conversations. So if you haven't listened to those episodes, go back and listen to them. Listen to them with your church staff, Listen to them with your elders. Listen to them as a family.

Because gospel principles transcend everything. So if you are a lead pastor, a small groups pastor, if you are on a church staff, if you are a person that loves Jesus and you're getting after it and you're serving at your church, you're living on mission and you want more, this podcast is for you. So the last episode in this three part series of what I wish I would have known before I became a pastor is this. Number three, effective ways to stay healthy. Effective ways to stay healthy.

One of the rhythms that we started early on here at Transformation Church is this is during the summer months, I take seven weeks off and it's called sabbatical slash study break. Now let me pause there. Some of you just went, you do what? You take that much time off. I could never do that.

Right now. You can't do that. However, what you can do is, number one, begin to pray. Number two, begin to vision cast for the leadership of your church, whether it's elders or deacons or aboard. And number three, begin to plan out what this could look like for you.

So this is what it looks like for me. I take seven weeks and I have guest preachers that come in. Now, here's what's important is the first four weeks is refreshing. Recharging it is about just renewing my soul. It is sinking deeper into Scripture.

It's not sermon preparation. It is simply enjoying it. We spend about two weeks in Montana, in Western Montana, because that's where my wife is from. Her mother still lives there. And so we get out there in the mountains and we just really, really refreshed.

It usually takes about a week to disentangle from the rhythm and the pace. And so the following three weeks, then I prepare the preaching calendar for the next year. So this year, the preaching calendar for 2025 is already complete with sermon outlines, sermon summaries. What does this do for me? Number one, it allows me to be proactive.

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It allows me to make an investment on the front end. And that also helps our small groups, our production, our communication. It helps our entire church, and it helps me immensely. So begin to think about building into a summer break where you can have a sabbatical as well as some rest time. Next.

Once a week, every Friday is my personal Sabbath day, okay? On Fridays, for the most part. And what I do on that day, Sabbath is a day of delight. It is not a day to be bored. It is a day of delight.

And so you know what I do? I go fishing. I love to fish. My grandmother, my uncle gave me a passion to fish. And so when I'm out fishing, I'm thinking about them, I'm praying, I'm enjoying creation.

It reinvigorates my soul. It's a day of rest. I look forward to it. So what is your Sabbath day? And I wanna repeat, a Sabbath day is not a day to be bored.

It's a day of delight. It's a day of fun. Like, what are your hobbies? What do you do to recharge, right? So I have that personal Sabbath.

Now, this is really important. If you don't come apart, you will be torn apart. If you don't come apart, you will be torn apart. To come apart means you set aside a day where you are recharging and refreshing. I read scripture, I pray, I marinate, I enjoy creation.

So find out what your Sabbath rhythm is like. Now, obviously, to be healthy, I am assuming that as a ministry leader, you're spending time in prayer, you are spending time in the Word. I'm assuming that you have community. I'm assuming the basic rhythms of what it means to be a healthy disciple. Okay?

So think about a summer Sabbath break. Think about a weekly Sabbath. Now, let me pause here. Some of you right now are pushing back, going, well, I don't have time for it. If you don't have time for it.

I'm just going to say this lovingly. I'm going to say this as passionate, compassionate as I can. You are an idolater. You think too much of yourself. Really.

The God who rose from the dead needs you to work seven days a week. Really, a lot of times a lack of our own emotional stability is what makes us into workaholics. And ultimately we are looking for approval of someone. It could be a dead dad, it could be the approval of people, it could be the approval of peers, and we work ourselves into oblivion. I've often heard it said from more experienced pastors is this is most ministry leaders that have a moral affair, financial mishandling, corruption, abuse of power.

What happens is, is they're so stretched and like a rubber band, eventually it snaps because they're unhealthy. Please, please, please, please, ministry leaders, please sit at the feet of Jesus. Abide in Jesus. Walk in the Spirit's power, delight in the Father's love from you and be healthy. You don't have to prove anything to Jesus.

SHOW TRANSCRIPTION

Jesus already made you approved. You don't get one iota of righteousness based on what you do or don't do. You are as fully as righteous as you will ever be because of Christ, the righteous one. Live from affirmation, not for affirmation. When the Father says to the Son, this is my beloved Son, whom I'm well pleased, because you're united to Christ, you're united to Him.

That type of grace is what pulls Christ out of us and we can be healthy. The Transforming the Church Podcast is a part of the Church Leaders Podcast Network, which is dedicated to resourcing church leaders in order to help them face the complexities of ministry. Church Leaders Podcast Network supports pastors and ministry leaders by challenging assumptions, providing insights, and offering practical steps that will help church leaders navigate a variety of cultures and contexts. Learn more@churchleaders.com podcast network what I wish I would have known effective ways to stay healthy is you want to have mentors, peers and mentees. My mentor used to tell me this.

His name is Alan Bacon. He passed away recently and I miss that man dearly. But he's still with me because I hear his words all the time. Every time I get up to preach, I hear him saying, derwin, give him the word. Be ready in season and out of season.

People ask me, man, how is it that you can come up with a sermon so fast? And I hear his voice saying, be ready in season and out of season to preach the word when you ready, you ain't got to get ready, so stay ready. Where do I get that from? I get that from him. So what you want to have is you want to have a Paul in your life.

You want to have wiser, more mature mentors who can pour into you, right? You want people with wisdom and with experience. Let me please, please hear what I'm about to say. Particularly if you're a Gen Z and millennials. We live in a time where it is so easy to create content about things you are actually not doing.

It's called clout chasing. So be careful about getting advice from people who actually aren't doing the things they're giving advice to. They're trying to get followers and clicks. So make sure you find some people, some mentors with some battle scars who've been through the battle. Make sure you find some people who go, listen, my kids are 40, and let me tell you what it was like when they were teenagers.

Let me tell you. It was like when I was betrayed at my church and there was a church coup. Like, you want to find wise mentors to pour into you, but you also want to have peers. So you want to have a Paul and you want to have a Barnabas. Barnabas.

You want to have a peer, someone in the same stage of life that you can talk about things with and encourage each other and challenge each other and invite each other deeper into the beautiful mystery of God's heart revealed in Jesus. And then you want to have mentees. Who are the people that you are pouring into? And what this discipleship cycle does is you become a constant river of flowing water. Wiser people pouring into you, you sharing what you're learning with your peers, and then giving away to your mentees.

SHOW TRANSCRIPTION

So who's your Paul? Who's your Barnabas? And who is your Timothy that has aided me so much throughout the years. Do not be too proud to ask for help. Okay?

That's a sign of strength, is knowing we all need help. Effective ways to Stay Healthy. Part three in the series, what I Wish I Would have Known before I Became a pastor. Now, this one, you're going to go, yeah, duh. You're a former NFL player.

The last one is Stay physically fit. Stay physically fit. And some of you go, well, Pastor Derwin, you look like you're fairly physically fit. You've never had a problem with that, and in some ways you're correct. But let me give you the backstory.

So from about age 14 to age 26. So that's 12 years of high intensity training. So when I retired from the NFL, became a follower of Christ, the last thing I wanted to do was work out. So literally for two years, from 26 to 28, I did not work out. I did not pick up a weight.

I was just tired. And then God moves us into ministry. I start getting speaking engagements, I develop a hunger and a passion for theology, start going to seminary. So I'm going to seminary, I'm traveling and speaking. I'm a husband, I'm a dad, and I'm like, I'll work out if I want to.

But what I began to notice about 2007, 2008, 2009, even around 2010, when we began to Plant Transformation Church, I began to think, wow, I don't feel as good as I used to, man. I think I got like a low grade depression going on. So understand this, okay? Physical fitness is not just about muscles. It's not about abs, not about your traps and your delts and your pecs.

Physical fitness, particularly resistant weight training is for your mental health. When you lift weights, all these great chemicals God gave us, dopamine and serotonin, all this stuff floods our bodies. And for men, when you get over the age of 30, your testosterone levels begin to drop and that affects your mood as well on multiple levels. So physical fitness, resistance, weight training is a good thing. So twice a week, my wife and I, we lift weights together, which is pretty cool because we met in a weight room at BYU back in the day.

So you know what they say, couples that pray together stay together. Well, here's another one. Couples that lift weights together stay together. Anyway, that's the Derwin Gray philosophical point. But anyway, we work out together, so it gives us a oneness.

But also physically, it affects us. We feel better, we feel stronger. Matter of fact, at 53 years old, I feel better than I felt at 45 years old. So you want to take care of the temple God has given you. And ultimately, I know at 53, I'm just getting started.

I believe God has so much for me and God has so much for you. And it's important for us to take care of ourselves. Now. Don't go crazy and try to do crazy stuff, right? Do something that is sustainable and that is consistent and that you enjoy what you put into your body.

SHOW TRANSCRIPTION

Think of it as fuel. You want to fuel your body for the glory of God. And so when we are overweight, it actually makes the volume in our brains smaller, right? So God has given you a body, take care of it. Just like the body of Christ.

Take care of your physical body. Don't compare yourself to anybody else. Just be the best version of you can. One day at a time, One step at a time. As a act of worship.

What is it that I wish I would have known? What are the things I wish I would have known? Before I became a pastor, in the subsection of the three part series, I learned that effective ways to stay healthy. Have a sabbatical weekly. Have a summer sabbatical Study break.

If you can. Have mentors, peers and mentees. And stay physically fit. Listen, God has so much for you. I believe in you.

God is in you. May we be healthy for his glory. Hey, this is Pastor Derwin. When the church is transformed, the world will be transformed.