



PERFECTLY FLAWED
LEADERSHIP

The Leader's Forgotten Discipline: Why Rest Isn't Optional

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There's a quiet epidemic among leaders today — pastors, executives, parents, volunteers — and it doesn't look like burnout at first. It looks like faithfulness. It looks like grinding through another seventy-hour week, answering one more email at midnight, saying yes to one more commitment because the need is real and the workers are few.

But somewhere along the way, we confused exhaustion with devotion. And Scripture has something to say about that.

God Rested First

Before any commandment was given, before any law was written on stone, God modeled rest. Genesis 2:2 tells us that after six days of creation, God rested on the seventh day. Not because He was tired — the Creator of the universe doesn't run out of energy. He rested to establish a rhythm, a pattern woven into the very fabric of how the world was meant to work.

If the God who holds galaxies together chose to stop and be still, what makes us think we're exempt?

Rest is not a concession to weakness. It's an act of trust. When a leader pauses, they are declaring something profound: *the work does not depend entirely on me*. That is a theological statement as much as it is a practical one.

Elijah Under the Broom Tree

One of the most striking pictures of leadership fatigue in Scripture is Elijah in 1 Kings 19. This is a man who had just called down fire from heaven, who had stood alone against 450 prophets of Baal and won. And yet, just one chapter later, he is running for his life, collapsing under a broom tree, and asking God to let him die.

What did God prescribe? Not a sermon. Not a rebuke. Not a leadership conference.

He sent an angel with bread and water. Twice. Then He let Elijah sleep. God's first response to a burned-out leader was physical care — food and rest — before any conversation about the future.

There's a lesson here that leaders desperately need to hear: sometimes the most spiritual thing you can do is take a nap. Your despair may not be a crisis of faith. It may be a crisis of sleep, nutrition, and margin.

Jesus Withdrew

Jesus was the most purposeful person who ever lived, and yet the Gospels are filled with moments where He stepped away. Mark 1:35 — He rose early and went to a solitary place to pray. Luke 5:16 — He often withdrew to lonely places. Matthew 14:23 — After feeding five thousand people, He went up on a mountainside by Himself.

Notice the pattern: the greater the demand, the more deliberate the withdrawal. Jesus did not wait until He was depleted. He built rest and solitude into the rhythm of His most demanding seasons.

Leaders tend to think of rest as something they earn after the work is done. Jesus treated it as something that made the work possible.

The Sabbath Was Made for You

When the Pharisees criticized His disciples for picking grain on the Sabbath, Jesus said something that reframes the entire conversation: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27).

Rest is a gift, not a punishment. It was designed for your benefit — for your body, your mind, your relationships, and your soul. You were not created to serve the grind. The rhythm of rest was created to serve you.

For leaders who carry heavy responsibility, this truth can feel almost scandalous. But receiving the gift of rest requires the same posture as receiving grace itself: open hands and the humility to admit you are not infinite.

Practical Principles for Leaders Who Struggle to Rest

Understanding the theology of rest is one thing. Living it out is another. Here are several principles that can help leaders move from conviction to practice.

Protect a weekly rhythm. You may not be able to observe a traditional Saturday or Sunday Sabbath depending on your role, but you can designate one day each week where you are not producing, solving, or leading. Guard it the way you would guard a meeting with your most important stakeholder — because you are the stakeholder.

Distinguish between rest and escape. Scrolling your phone for three hours is not rest. Binge-watching television until you feel numb is not rest. True rest restores. It may look like a long walk, an unhurried meal with someone you love, time in prayer without an agenda, or simply sitting in silence. Rest is active receptivity — opening yourself up to be replenished rather than just checking out.

Learn to delegate before you're desperate. Moses nearly destroyed himself trying to lead alone until Jethro intervened in Exodus 18 and told him to share the load. Many leaders wait until they're in crisis before they hand things off. Delegation isn't a sign of failure. It's an acknowledgment that God designed the body of Christ — and your organization — to function through many members, not one.

Pay attention to your body. Leaders are often remarkably disconnected from their own physical signals. Chronic headaches, disrupted sleep, a short temper, inability to concentrate — these aren't just inconveniences. They're warning lights on the dashboard. Ignoring them doesn't make you tough. It makes you unavailable to the people who need you most.

Build transition rituals. One of the hardest things for leaders is turning off. Create small practices that signal the shift from work to rest: a specific prayer at the end of the workday, changing clothes, putting your phone in another room, a short walk around the block. These rituals give your nervous system permission to stand down.

Take your vacation days. This sounds painfully obvious, and yet studies consistently show that leaders — particularly in ministry and nonprofit work — leave rest on the table year after year. Taking time away is not abandoning your post. It is investing in your longevity and your capacity to lead well for decades rather than just a few intense years.

Say no without guilt. Every yes is a no to something else. When you say yes to the extra meeting, you may be saying no to dinner with your family, to your own health, to the creative energy you need for the work only you can do. A leader who cannot say no is not generous — they are unguarded.

Rest as an Act of Faith

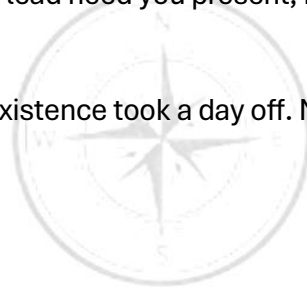
At its core, rest is an issue of trust. When you refuse to stop, you are functionally saying that the outcomes depend on your effort alone. But the Psalmist wrote, "Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain. In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat — for He grants sleep to those He loves" (Psalm 127:1–2).

God is not asking you to be less committed. He is asking you to be less self-reliant. Rest positions you to receive what striving never can: the deep awareness that you are held by Someone who does not sleep, who does not grow weary, and who has never once lost control of the things you're lying awake worrying about.

A Final Word

If you are a leader reading this and you cannot remember the last time you felt truly rested, consider this your invitation — not to do more, but to stop. Not because the work doesn't matter, but because you do. The people you lead need you present, not just productive. They need you whole, not just efficient.

The God who spoke the world into existence took a day off. Maybe it's time you did too.



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