

Rhythms of Renewal for Resilience in Ministry

By Cassie & Josh Spurlock, MA, LPC, CST, NICC

Ministry is a Full-Contact Sport

Hey friend, have you ever watched a professional football game? Those athletes take hit after hit, their bodies slammed to the ground over and over. And yet—they get back up, week after week. How? Because they build in recovery rhythms that keep them in the game.

Ministry is no different. When you step onto the field of serving people—especially hurting and immature people—you’re going to take some hits. There’s no way around it. The weight of bearing others’ burdens, loving deeply, and leading sacrificially comes at a cost. It’s called *secondary trauma*—the emotional and psychological toll of walking with people through their pain. And trust me, it’s real.

We’ve spent thousands of hours counseling ministry leaders, and we’ve seen it firsthand. If you don’t take steps to renew and restore yourself, burnout isn’t *possible*—it’s *inevitable*. And when that happens, best case? You’re exhausted and ineffective. Worst case? You blow up your life in ways you never saw coming.

No One is the Exception

Nobody steps into ministry planning to burn out or blow up. But here’s where we get tripped up: *We think it won’t happen to us*. We convince ourselves we’re built differently, that only “those” kinds of leaders collapse. That mindset is dangerous because we don’t protect against what we assume is impossible.

It’s like preparing for a zombie apocalypse. (Which, by the way, I have put exactly *zero* thought into.) No weapons, no survival plan, nothing. Why? Because in my mind, it’s not a real threat. But the moment zombies show up, I’m toast.

Burnout and breakdowns? They’re not *if* threats; they’re *when* threats. And pretending you’re immune is exactly where the enemy wants you—because you won’t fight against something you don’t believe is coming.

Building Rhythms of Renewal

So, how do you stay resilient in ministry? Let’s go back to football. Players don’t just take hits and hope for the best. The moment they step off the field, they engage in intentional recovery rhythms:

- **Rest and replenish.** They soak in ice baths, get massages, and sleep well.
- **Train wisely.** They stretch, lift weights, and build endurance.
- **Seek support.** They work with coaches, doctors, trainers, and mental health professionals.

Ministry leaders need the same rhythms:

- **Rest your soul.** Prioritize Sabbath, prayer, and solitude with God.
- **Strengthen your mind and body.** Exercise, eat well, and engage in life-giving hobbies.
- **Invite others in.** Seek mentors, counselors, and a trusted community who can hold you up when you're weary.

Without these, you *will* break down. But with them? You build resilience and stay in the game for the long haul.

Your Warning Sign: Danger Ahead

Proverbs 22:3 says, *“The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and pay the penalty.”*

Friend, this is your warning sign: *Danger ahead!* Take refuge now. Don't wait until you're already on the sidelines, broken and bruised. Establish rhythms of renewal today—because the Kingdom needs you strong, whole, and ready for the next play.

We're cheering you on. You've got this.

Rhythms of Renewal

Let's get practical. What are the rhythms of renewal we need in our life to restore our body and soul?

Rhythms of Rest

Let's be real—people in ministry are some of the worst at honoring the Sabbath. We're so busy helping *others* rest and recharge that we completely neglect it for *ourselves*. But here's the thing: **Jesus designed the Sabbath for you.** He designed *you*, and He knows exactly what you need.

What is Sabbath, Really?

At its core, the Sabbath is a day of rest—one out of every seven—where we step away from work and embrace rhythms that restore us. It's not just a day to *switch* from one kind of

work to another (looking at you, Saturday chore list). It's a day to pause, breathe, and do things that actually refill your tank.

If your Sabbath doesn't feel at least a little lazy, you might not be doing it right. Seriously. Sabbath should look like **laughter, naps (yes, Jesus took naps—lots of them), slow walks, fishing, playing**, or simply lounging around with no agenda. It's a time to enjoy God, your people, and the gift of rest itself.

More Than Just a Day Off

We need these rhythms not just *weekly*, but *daily*—pockets of pause that protect our mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being. And beyond that, we need **extended times away from the front lines**—vacations that actually leave us refreshed, not drained. If you come back from a trip feeling like you need *another* vacation, it wasn't Sabbath—it was just a change of scenery.

In the Old Testament, we see these rhythms built into the fabric of life. Agriculture had seasons of planting and harvesting, *but also* seasons of slowing down, celebrating, and reconnecting. God hardwired these rhythms into creation as a reminder: **rest isn't a luxury—it's a necessity.**

So friend, don't just preach rest—*practice* it. Your soul, your body, and your ministry depend on it.

Rhythms of Play

Hey friend, did you know **God designed you to play**? Seriously. Nobody has to *teach* kids how to play—it's hardwired into us. If we stop playing, it's not because we outgrow it; it's because life, stress, and expectations *squeeze* it out of us. And that's not how we were created to live.

Play isn't a luxury—it's essential. It keeps us healthy *physically, mentally, and spiritually*. All work and no play doesn't just make you boring—it makes you *unwell*. God designed our nervous systems to *thrive* on joy, laughter, and fun. When we embrace play, we're not just taking a break—we're reflecting our Creator.

What Is Play?

Play is anything that's so life-giving and energizing that you lose track of time while doing it. It looks different for everyone, which is why scientists (yes, people actually study this) have identified **eight different “play personalities.”** Dr. Stuart Brown's research breaks it down like this:

- **The Collector** – Finds joy in gathering things or experiences. (*Think: stamp collecting, hunting for antiques, trying every taco spot in town.*)
- **The Competitor** – Thrives on games and loves to win. (*Sports, board games, fantasy football? Yes, please.*)
- **The Creator/Artist** – Feels most alive when making things. (*Painting, crafting, writing, baking—if you love creating, this is you!*)
- **The Director** – Loves organizing and leading. (*Party planners, team captains, community project leaders—you know who you are!*)
- **The Explorer** – Always chasing new experiences. (*Whether it's traveling to a new country or deep-diving into an obscure hobby, explorers are fueled by curiosity.*)
- **The Joker** – The life of the party, bringing humor and fun everywhere. (*Think: class clowns, stand-up comedians, the friend who always has the best memes.*)
- **The Kinesthete** – Loves movement *for the joy of it*. (*Dancing, yoga, rock climbing—if moving makes you happy, this is your lane!*)
- **The Storyteller** – Finds joy in narratives and imagination. (*Writing, theater, role-playing games—if you love crafting stories, this one's for you!*)

Play is Worship

Play is bigger than just hobbies—it shows up in laughter, singing, dancing, feasting, and even Sabbath rest. God built these rhythms into creation, not just for *fun*, but for *flourishing*.

So, friend, **which “play personality” sounds like you?** Lean into it, make space for it, and let it bring life back to your soul. Because when you play, you're not just taking a break—you're living the way God designed you to.

Rhythms of Physical Health

You probably already *know* this, but let's say it anyway: **Your physical health affects everything—your energy, mood, relationships, even your spiritual life.** When we ignore the realities of our bodies, we set ourselves up for burnout, avoidable illness, and, honestly, fewer healthy years to do what God has called us to do.

Here's the deal—your body isn't just *yours* to run into the ground. **It's a gift from God, and He calls us to steward it well.** That doesn't mean becoming a health nut or living at the gym. It *does* mean embracing some simple, life-giving rhythms that help you stay strong for the long haul.

The Basics of Stewarding Your Body

1. Sleep Like You Mean It

God *could* have designed us to function without sleep, but He didn't. He built a daily rhythm of rest into our very design, and we ignore it at our own risk. Prioritizing around **eight hours of sleep** isn't a luxury—it's obedience to the way He made us. Want to be more joyful, clear-headed, and effective in ministry? Start by getting some *actual* rest.

2. Eat What Fuels You

Food isn't just about *not being hungry*—it's about **nourishing your body** so you have the energy to live fully. We don't have to be nutritionists to know that whole, nutrient-rich foods serve us better than processed junk. Honoring the way God designed our bodies includes paying attention to what fuels them best.

3. Hydrate, Hydrate, Hydrate

Your body is **70% water**, and if you don't replenish it, you *will* feel the effects—fatigue, brain fog, sluggishness. It's not rocket science. Drink enough water to keep your body functioning at its best and help flush out toxins.

4. Move Your Body (Without Overcomplicating It)

You don't have to be a gym rat or train for a marathon—just **move in a way that keeps your body strong and mobile**. Walk, stretch, lift something heavier than your coffee cup every now and then. There's truth to the saying: *use it or lose it*. God gave you muscles, joints, and ligaments for a reason—so don't let them stiffen up from neglect.

5. Take Advantage of Modern Medicine

Routine check-ups, lab work, preventative care—this isn't a lack of faith; **it's wisdom**. God gave us the common grace of modern medicine, and good stewardship means using it.

Be Intentional, Not Extreme

You don't have to be obsessed with health to practice *basic* self-care. You just have to be **intentional**. Your body is the vessel God has given you to carry out His work, love your people well, and experience joy in this life. Take care of it—not because you *have* to, but because you *get* to.

Rhythms of Friendship

You already know that **friendship matters**, but did you know it might be *the* most important factor in your happiness and health?

Sounds wild, right? But the research is crystal clear.

- A **2010 meta-analysis** of 148 studies (with over 300,000 participants!) found that people with strong relationships were **50% less likely to die** from anything—disease, accidents, you name it.
- Another study found that in *any given year*, you're **26% less likely to die** if you have strong relationships.
- The **Harvard Adult Development Study**, the longest-running study on human well-being, has tracked people for over 80 years. Their conclusion? **The number one predictor of happiness, success, and health is the quality and quantity of your relationships.**
- And in 2023, the **U.S. Surgeon General** released a report stating that loneliness is as dangerous as **smoking 15 cigarettes a day**—making it the biggest *preventable* contributor to sickness, disease, and death.

We Were Created for Connection

As Christians, this shouldn't surprise us. We're made in the image of a **relational God**—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—who exists in eternal relationship. He created us *for* relationship, with Him and with one another. Before sin ever entered the world, God said, **“It is not good for man to be alone.”** (Genesis 2:18)

We need friends. **Not just ministry acquaintances, not just people we pour into—we need actual, mutual friendships.**

The Different Types of Friendship

Not all friendships are the same, and that's a *good* thing. We need a variety of relationships that nourish us in different ways. Here are six key categories of friendships that bring wholeness to our lives:

1. **Safety & Security** – These are the friends who provide stability, trust, and reassurance. They're your anchors in times of stress or uncertainty. *Think: lifelong friends, mentors, or family members who have your back no matter what.*
2. **Learning & Growth** – These friends challenge you to think differently, expand your skills, and become a better version of yourself. *Think: mentors, coaches, or friends who push you to grow spiritually, intellectually, or professionally.*
3. **Emotional Closeness & Confiding** – The people you can **be fully yourself with**—no masks, no pretending. These friends provide deep emotional support and understanding. *Think: your closest confidants, your “call in the middle of the night” people.*

4. **Romantic Intimacy** – Your spouse or romantic partner. This is a unique category of friendship that provides affection, passion, and deep emotional connection. (*And yes, the sexual aspect of this friendship matters—but we’ll get to that in the next section!*)
5. **Practical Help** – These are the friends who show up when you need them. They help you move, watch your kids, bring you soup when you’re sick. *Think: neighbors, coworkers, family members who pitch in when life gets tough.*
6. **Fun & Relaxation** – The people who bring **joy, laughter, and play** into your life. They help you de-stress and remind you not to take everything so seriously. *Think: game night friends, hiking buddies, or the friend who always knows the best memes to send you.*

Mapping Your Relational Nutrition

Take a minute to reflect:

- Do you have friendships in **each of these categories**?
- Who are your high-quality, nourishing relationships—the ones that **fill you up**?
- How often do you actually spend time with those friends?

Because here’s the truth: **Having great friends you never see is like having healthy food in your pantry but never eating it.**

Friendships only nourish you if you engage in them *regularly*. That means prioritizing **quality and quantity**—high-quality relationships don’t do much for you if they’re low-frequency.

Relational Fitness: Are You Malnourished?

Ministry can be deceptive when it comes to relationships. You spend *a lot* of time with people—but that doesn’t mean you’re connecting in a way that nourishes *you*. You pour out, listen, counsel, and encourage, but if you’re not receiving in return, you can end up **relationally malnourished without realizing it.**

That’s why you have to be *intentional* about cultivating friendships—especially **friendships where you’re not responsible for the other person**. You need friends who don’t see you as “Pastor” or “Leader” first, but just *you*.

And don’t forget **the most important friendship in your life—your spouse**. Keep dating each other, keep building your friendship, and yes, keep nurturing the **intimate aspect** of your relationship. (We’ll talk more about that next.)

The Wrong Sacrifices

Here's the hard truth: **Too many ministry leaders sacrifice their families on the altar of ministry.** It's easy to justify—"I'm doing Kingdom work!"—but if your ministry causes you to **neglect** your first calling to your spouse and kids, something's off.

Sometimes, pouring into others is easier than facing the *real* struggles at home. It's easy to avoid the tough conversations, to brush conflict under the rug, to ignore loneliness in your marriage. But avoidance never leads to healing.

Don't ignore the hard things. Lean into them. Have the conversations. Get the help you need. If you don't, **implosion or explosion** is waiting at the door, ready to take out your ministry, your marriage, and your relationship with your kids.

But it doesn't have to be that way.

Invest in your friendships. Prioritize your family. Build rhythms of relational health that keep you strong for the long haul.

You're not meant to do this alone.

Rhythms of Sexual Intimacy

Sexuality matters. **From the very beginning, God designed it as a core part of who we are.** Think about it—"Be fruitful and multiply" (which, in case you missed that day in health class, involves sex) was the very *first* command God gave humanity.

God made people—**male and female**—and then He told them to *connect* sexually. A lot.

But let's be real—**sex doesn't always feel like the gift it was meant to be.**

The Battle Over Sex

Sex often gets a bad rap in the church, and that's no accident. The enemy has been twisting, distorting, and attacking it from day one. Why? Because sex reveals something profound about **who God is and the passionate relationship He desires with us.**

God *could* have designed reproduction like trees—pollinating each other with no intimacy or pleasure involved. (Romantic, right?) But instead, **He gave us the gift of sex—pleasurable, connecting, and deeply spiritual.**

Yet, for many couples, sex doesn't always feel like a gift. **Wounds from the past, struggles with sin, body image issues, and relational conflicts** can turn something beautiful into something frustrating or painful.

Here's the truth: **sex doesn't always come as naturally as we assume it should.** In fact, with all the cultural, emotional, and spiritual challenges stacked against it, cultivating a **healthy, fulfilling sexual rhythm in marriage takes intentionality.** But friend, it's so worth it.

A Healthy Sexual Rhythm

There's no "one-size-fits-all" formula for sex in marriage. But whatever your rhythm looks like, it should:

- Feel **good and fulfilling** for both you and your spouse
- Be something you both **desire and enjoy**—not just an obligation
- Foster **connection, intimacy, and mutual pleasure**

If that's *not* the case for you, **you're not alone**—and you don't have to stay stuck. Christian sex therapists are trained to help couples navigate every possible sexual challenge.

They've heard it all, and they know how to help. Don't let struggles in this area become an opportunity for the enemy to create distance between you and your spouse.

Instead, **fight for a sex life that nourishes your marriage, strengthens your bond, and enriches every season of life together.**

Single Sexuality: Embracing and Stewarding Your Sexuality in Ministry

Let's be honest—if we don't talk about sex in marriage *enough* in the church, we **definitely** don't talk about sexuality for singles. Other than a big fat **"No, don't, stop—don't even think about it!"**

But here's the thing: **Single people are sexual beings too.** Your sexuality isn't a switch that flips on when you say, "I do." It's **an integral part of your identity**—influencing your relationships, your self-perception, and even your connection with God.

Whether you're single by **choice, circumstance, or calling**, your sexuality—both social and erotic—is a gift. And like every other gift from God, it's something to be **understood, embraced, and stewarded well.**

Social Sexuality: Why It Matters

Sexuality isn't just about physical intimacy. It's also about **how we relate to others as men and women.** Healthy friendships with both genders are crucial for emotional and relational well-being. They give us:

- **Companionship** – We’re wired for connection, and friendships provide meaningful, life-giving relationships.
- **Encouragement** – Good friends remind us of our worth, challenge us, and help us grow.
- **A deeper understanding of God’s design** – Engaging with both men and women in healthy ways helps us reflect His relational nature.

And yes—**sometimes friendships involve attraction or erotic energy**. That’s *normal*. Attraction doesn’t mean you have to act on it, and it’s not something to fear. Acknowledging it without shame allows you to **steward those feelings wisely**.

Righteous Flirting?

Christian therapist **Doug Rosenau** coined the term *righteous flirting*—a playful, respectful way of affirming one another as men and women while maintaining **purity and integrity**. (Yes, flirting *can* be holy!)

For singles in ministry, **close friendships are just as essential as they are for married folks**. Whether you’re single for a season or a lifetime, embracing your sexuality in a **God-honoring** way leads to a **more fulfilled and integrated life**.

Rather than suppressing or fearing sexual energy, **channel it into building rich, life-giving relationships**—ones that reflect the beauty of Christlike love.

Because **your sexuality isn’t something to be ignored—it’s something to be stewarded well**.

Rhythms of Mentorship

Growth doesn’t happen in isolation.

From the time we’re born, we need **mature others** to help us grow—first as children learning from parents, and later as adults through **intentional mentoring relationships**. If we don’t have these voices in our lives, we **stop growing**.

That’s why we need what we call a **Sage Circle**—a group of trusted guides who speak into different areas of our lives. Here are five essential categories of mentors we should all seek out:

1. Gurus – Learning from the Greats

Gurus are experts—past or present, dead or alive—who **teach us through their wisdom**. We learn from them through **books, sermons, podcasts, courses, and talks**. They may never know our names, but their influence can profoundly shape us.

2. Pastors – Spiritual Shepherds

We're most familiar with this one—**pastors are our spiritual leaders and authorities**. They guide us in our faith, provide accountability, and help us grow in biblical wisdom. And let's be clear: **every pastor needs a pastor too**. Shepherds still need shepherding.

3. Professionals – Healing and Growth Experts

Professionals have dedicated their lives to **helping people heal and mature**. They help us navigate:

- **Wounds** – The painful experiences that shouldn't have happened but did.
- **Gaps** – The things we deeply needed but never received.
- **Unhelpful Habits** – The coping mechanisms we've developed in response to our wounds and gaps.

These professionals include **counselors, therapists, spiritual directors, and life coaches**—people trained to help us move forward in wholeness.

4. Life Mentors – Wise Guides for Everyday Living

Life mentors are **mature individuals we meet with regularly to help us grow**. They don't need credentials—their qualification is **a life well-lived** and a commitment to personal and spiritual growth. These are the people who have been where we are and can **help us navigate what's ahead**.

5. Spiritual Parents – Loving Wisdom from a Generation Ahead

Spiritual parents are **older couples or individuals who aren't related to us but love us like family**. They're old enough to be our parents or grandparents, and they willingly share **their life experiences and spiritual wisdom**.

Why Mentorship Matters

We all have blind spots. And by definition, **we can't see them on our own**.

That's where mentors come in. They hold up the mirror, helping us see what we're missing and guiding us toward wisdom. They offer **insight, accountability, and encouragement**—all essential for growth.

If we're not intentional about these relationships, we don't just stop growing—we start *atrophying*. So, friend, take a moment to reflect:

- Do you have mentors in these areas?
- Who is pouring into your life consistently?
- Where do you need to seek out more guidance?

Because **maturity isn't accidental—it's intentional**. And the right mentors will help you grow into the person God created you to be.

A **Sage Circle** is essential for growth, but we also need **Iron Sharpeners**—a group of **like-minded, growth-oriented peers** who share our vision for maturing into true happiness. These are the friends who **challenge, encourage, and cheer us on** in the epic journey of becoming who God created us to be.

Through **mentorship and community**, we continue to step into our **true self—the person God designed us to be** and is actively restoring us to through His Spirit. **Sanctification is a process**, but in God's eyes, the work is already finished. **He sees us as whole, and He's faithfully leading us there.**

So, friend, surround yourself with **Sages who pour wisdom into you** and **Iron Sharpeners who walk beside you**—because growth is a team sport, and you're not meant to do it alone.

Rhythms of Spiritual Renewal

Last but *definitely* not least, we need **rhythms of spiritual renewal**.

As people in ministry, this is probably the area we're *most* familiar with. But that familiarity? **It can actually lead to neglect.**

It's easy to spend so much time **studying the Bible to teach others, praying to encourage others, and discipling others** that we lose track of **our own** walk with Jesus. When our spiritual life becomes all about **what we do for Him**, we can forget that **He first and foremost wants a relationship with us.**

That's why we need **personal rhythms of renewal**—moments that are just about **being with Jesus**, apart from ministry.

These include:

- **Quiet, personal prayer time** – Not just praying *for* others, but praying *with* Jesus, pouring out your heart to Him.

- **Devotional time in Scripture** – Reading the Word for your *own* soul's nourishment, not just sermon prep.
- **Solitude** – Creating space to be still and listen.
- **Prayer journaling** – Processing your thoughts and hearing from God in a deeper way.
- **Worship** – Not leading it. Not planning it. Just engaging with God in awe and love.
- **Other spiritual disciplines** that draw you closer to Him.

When we neglect these rhythms, we risk turning our faith into a **job** instead of a **relationship**. But when we embrace them? We stay **connected, renewed, and deeply rooted** in the One who called us in the first place.

So, friend, before you *do* another thing *for* Jesus—pause. Spend time *with* Jesus. **He's after your heart, not just your work.**

Help for the Journey

Yes, you *can* establish rhythms of renewal on your own. But you don't *have* to. And honestly? **Getting help makes the journey so much easier.**

The Christian counselors at **MyCounselor.Online** have dedicated their ministry to **walking alongside Kingdom servants**—helping them **heal from wounds, fill the gaps, and transform unhelpful habits** so they can step into the **true happiness Jesus desires for them**.

Don't Wait Until You're on Fire

Too often, we see people wait until they're **burning out—or already burnt to a crisp—before reaching out for help**. But it *doesn't* have to be that way.

Wise people seek help before the crisis hits. Proverbs 22:3 says, "*The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and suffer for it.*" The time to invest in your well-being isn't **after** you're exhausted, disconnected, or struggling—it's **before**.

We've lost count of the number of people who've told us:

"I wish I hadn't put off getting help."

"I wish I had invested in myself, my marriage, and my family sooner."

Take a Word from the Wise: Get the Support You Need

Friend, **don't get so caught up serving others that you neglect your own soul**. Whether you need help **establishing rhythms of renewal** or you're already in crisis, **we're here to walk with you**.

You're not alone. You don't have to figure this out by yourself. **We're here to help.**

And know this—Cassie and I are cheering you on as you grow into the **full, joyful, thriving life Jesus has for you.**

Find More Resources

- <https://joshspurlock.com/>
- <https://mycounselor.online/>

About the Authors



Rev. Josh Spurlock, MA, LPC, LMHC, CST, is a passionate Jesus follower, theology nerd, certified sex therapist, and innovative entrepreneur. He and his wife Cassie have launched 5 adopted daughters, are now grandparents to 10, and have four biological children still at home in Montana.

Holding a BA in Biblical Languages and a Masters in Counseling, Josh is licensed in Missouri, Colorado, Florida, and Montana bringing over 13,000 hours of clinical experience in complex trauma, marriage, and sex therapy. An ordained minister with advanced training in EFT and AEDP therapies,

Josh, alongside Cassie, co-founded [MyCounselor.Online](https://www.mycounselor.online). There, they developed [Neuroscience Informed Christian Counseling® \(NICC\)](https://www.nicc.org), a faith-based model that integrates biblical principles with neuroscience. For more on his work, including articles and videos, visit [JoshSpurlock.com](https://www.joshspurlock.com)