

Refreshing Your Call

stale, *adj.*, 1. *not fresh; vapid or flat, as beverages; dry or hardened, as bread.* 2. *having ceased to be novel or interesting.* 3. *(of a person) affected with weariness, boredom, etc., from overwork or monotony.* (Random House College Dictionary)

Anything can become stale. If you do not seal up the deli crackers box, the next time you bite into a cracker you will get that disappointing mushy sensation. If you leave the screw top loose on your Dr. Pepper, the next time you take it from the refrigerator you will find the carbonation has leaked out. The general rule is that *things move from fresh to stale over time and with exposure to the elements.*

The same is true of any human activity. First, there is the impact of time itself. Activities that used to be invigorating become routine. Work that used to motivate you becomes old hat. Second, there is the fatigue factor. Demands dull our senses, especially over a long stretch when the demands do not let up. Frustrating obstacles compound weariness. Even success, inadequately defined as getting the results you want, can wear you out over time. Success breeds more work, more demands, more fatigue. What is true about Dr. Pepper is true about people, too: *We move from fresh to stale over time and with exposure to the elements.*

Those with a calling to serve the church certainly are not exempt. Ministry leaders, too, move from fresh to stale over time and with exposure to the elements *unless there is an intentional refreshing of the call.* Here are some staleness symptoms to watch out for.

1. *Loss of passion.*
2. *A short fuse.*
3. *Fraying of relationships.*
4. *Withdrawal from fellowship among peers.*
5. *Consistent negativity.*
6. *Lackluster preaching and teaching / loss of creative energy.*
7. *"Greener pastures syndrome" / envying those in "better" churches or ministries.*
8. *Negative marital and family dynamics.*
9. *Weight gain / lack of exercise / general neglect of physical well-being.*
10. *Neglect of spiritual disciplines.*

We all experience some of these symptoms some of the time. That is just being human. Over the long-haul, though, you do not want these behaviors to characterize your life and ministry. Therefore, you need to develop habits that promote and restore freshness in your calling. Here are some suggestions.

1. *Recognize your limitations.* You have limitations in terms of strengths, skills, time, and endurance. Self-awareness in these matters is a good thing. It will help you set healthy boundaries and make good decisions about when to say yes and when to say no. It will help you develop team members

whose strengths complement yours. Sometimes ministry leaders equate admitting their limitations with a lack of faith in the Lord. That is a great way to guilt yourself into burnout. Instead, embrace the way God made you and serve the Lord joyfully and faithfully within those boundaries.

2. *Rest and recreate.* Even doing what you do best and enjoy most will wear you out if you do not step back from it on a regular basis. I am never impressed with folks who like to talk about how much work they are doing and how little sleep they are getting. You need rest to refresh your calling. You need to recreate in order to re-create interest and passion in your ministry. Take a sabbath; use your vacation time; do something that puts fuel back in your tank. It is okay to turn off your cell phone for a while. It is okay to practice your porch-sitting. Take a deep breath. Take a walk. Learn something that is completely different from your ministry and uses different aspects of who you are. Allow freshness to reenter your calling by regularly stepping back from that calling for rest and recreation.

3. *Clarify your call.* With healthy self-awareness and regular time away from your ministry, you will then be able to reflect more clearly on the nature of your ministry. What exactly has the Lord called you to do? What specifically does that mean in your current ministry context? How will you know if you are doing it successfully? When we do not answer these questions, we tend to be aimless, anxious, and agitated. It is hard to hit a bullseye when you cannot see it. Calls grow stale when they mean everything and nothing. Take some time to clarify the Lord's call on your life. Write a mission statement for your role as a ministry leader. Define your bullseye. It will improve your aim quite a bit! (If you want help in this area, I recommend [Is God Calling Me?](#) by Jeff Iorg.)

4. *Nurture your soul.* Ministry leadership is soul work. It is character work. The first order of business for ministry leaders is nurturing their relationship with God. The soul is nurtured through hearing the voice of God speaking through Scripture and responding to that voice through prayer, worship, reflection, and obedience. This takes time and space. It is hard. It puts us in a place of vulnerability we often want to avoid. It is indispensable, though, for being the person you were created in Christ to be. Do not "do ministry" to the neglect of your soul, or else you will find that your ministry is increasingly hollow and joyless because your soul is dry. You want to carry out your ministry from the overflow of a heart that is full to the brim with the Spirit of the living God.

5. *Get a good ministry coach.* I have observed that the ministry leaders who go through Dr. Minton's coaching process tend to have a sense of renewal and freshness about them. The coaching process helps them get a new perspective on their calling. They seem to be thinking more long-term and behaving more proactively. They seem to be nurturing the kind of sustaining habits that work against staleness. All of this tells me that having a good coach is part of staying fresh in your calling. There needs to be someone in your life who has walked the road ahead of you and can help you spot the booby traps. There needs to be someone who can help correct your vision when it becomes blurred by busyness, someone who gets what you are going through and has successfully been through it themselves. A good coach will help promote freshness in your calling.

Brothers and sisters, do not allow your ministry to become stale over time and with exposure to the elements. Develop the habits that promote and restore freshness in your calling. You will be glad you did. And do not forget to tighten the cap on your Dr. Pepper!