

LEADER CONVERSATION GUIDE

Healthy Ministry Rhythms & Boundaries with Lance Witt - Episode 248

Pastoring Pastors (Part 1)

There's no doubt that the last few years have been incredibly challenging for ministry leaders. In fact, Barna reported last October that two out of five pastors were considering quitting full-time ministry—and the percentages were even higher for those pastors under the age of 45.

That's why we're kicking off a new four-week series called "Pastoring Pastors," where we'll be focusing on *your* personal health as a pastor and leader. In this episode, Lance Witt, former Executive and Teaching Pastor at Saddleback Church and founder of [Replenish](#), joins us to discuss establishing healthy ministry rhythms, boundaries, Sabbath, and more.

Rhythms, Boundaries, Sabbath, and More: Interview with Lance Witt

Tony: Do pastors and church leaders have a pace of life problem that needs to be fixed? Is creating healthy margin a need for those of us in ministry?

Lance: I think pace of life is a huge issue for a lot of leaders, but it is more than just pace—It's also complexity. It's leadership drain from all the shifts and adjustments and things that pastors have had to deal with over the last three years. And so the result is a lot of leaders feeling empty and seriously considering quitting.

As pastors, because we're about eternity and people are dying and going to hell and what we do matters, we can sort of justify this insane pace of life and not embracing our limit, because after all, we're doing it for Jesus. And to that I would say: Self-care is not selfish. It's actually good stewardship and it's going to help you stay in ministry over the long haul.

Tony: So, where should we begin? How do we begin to establish healthy rhythms in our lives?

Lance: You have to take ownership of your own life. Often as a pastor, I would play the victim card—I would say "I can't help it, this is just how life is in ministry." While yes, there are sacrifices for me and my family and all of that is true, I had to realize that I'm not a victim, I'm actually the perpetrator, and I'm responsible for my life and to lead myself well.

I also had to learn how to address both the internal and external issues as it relates to healthy rhythm. I had to ask myself, “Lance, why are you so driven? Why are you compulsively busy all the time? Why can you not say no?” And then there is the external issue of grabbing your calendar by the throat and being really aggressive with your schedule and making sure that you're getting the “big rocks” in your calendar first—things like your family time and rest.

Tony: What about practicing a Sabbath? Is it still important, and what should it look like?

Lance: Absolutely. First, I would say that if you're going to get serious about this, study it. Unless you develop a biblical conviction about this, the chances of you really meaningfully practicing this and integrating into your life are not very high—because the gravitational pull of busyness in ministry will always win. I've also created a practical little template for practicing Sabbath:

- **Prepare:** there is work involved in getting ready to not work.
- **Stop:** what would it look like for you to stop for 24 hours?
- **Rest:** not just physical rest, but being at rest in your soul.
- **Delight:** what are you doing that puts delight in you during Sabbath?
- **Worship:** there ought to be unhurried time to just be with God and honor him in our Sabbath.

So take those five words and ask: what would that look like for me and my family to put those into practice?

Tony: What coaching would you give a pastor or church leader considering a sabbatical?

Lance: I think one of the goals of sabbatical is to remove obligation and pressure. So whatever feels like obligation and pressure to you—it's setting that aside so that physically, emotionally, and spiritually, your life can just breathe. With that, my number one practical piece of advice: Do not overschedule your sabbatical. Give it some breathing room. You're probably more tired than you realize, so you should front load your sabbatical with physical rest.

You also have to figure out what you're going to do with your technology, like your work email, work phone, etc. Do something to intentionally create a great memory or two with your spouse and with your kids. And as you come out of your sabbatical, I recommend a personal retreat of a day or two to just listen to God and ask: What has he said to you during your sabbatical? And what should you pay attention to now moving back into normal life?

Tony: Any practical advice you can offer as it relates to the challenge of technology?

Lance: Technology has huge implications for the health of my soul because my phone and the

constant distraction has implications for my ability to pay attention, to actually pray, to read my Bible, to meditate, to practice silence and solitude, or even to be present in a conversation. But we're not going to go out and burn our iPhones, so we better learn how to manage them better. I would recommend just getting aggressive and having some good practices around unplugging and disconnecting from your phone—whatever that looks like for you.

Tony: Any final thoughts or encouragement you'd like to share with pastors and church leaders who are listening?

Lance: I wish I could sit down and have a cup of coffee with everybody listening and look them in the eye and say: "Thank you for staying faithful to Jesus and faithful to the church. Thank you for serving down in the trenches in probably what is one of the most complex moments in the history of the church. It's worth it—It matters and what you do matters. The Gospel still has power and the Church is the hope of the world."

Then I would say, along the way, don't forget to become a student of your own soul and of your inner life. The Christian life flows from the inside to the outside—So the church isn't your life, ministry is not your life, Jesus is your life. And when you can get that at the center, you can do ministry out of the overflow of that. So let Him be first and the center of everything.

Next Steps

We have to take control of our calendars. We have to be the boss of our schedules, rather than letting the pace of life dictate the health of our bodies, our minds, and our souls.

This week, figure out what you need to do to take control of your calendar and create space for God to do the work in you that only he can do in your soul.

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