Cultivate Spiritual Rhythms

The Power of Communal Spiritual Rhythms

What are Communal Spiritual Rhythms?

Our goal in this course is to help you lead ministries that practice strong communal spiritual rhythms. Let's break down what each words means and its significance:

- **Communal** – In community we can truly feel supported, held accountable, and encouraged.
- **Spiritual** – Spiritual practices are activities that foster a relationship with God.
- **Rhythms** – Rhythms are repeated patterns, offering life and structure.

Cultivating a Healthy Culture of Spiritual Rhythms

Healthy Culture	Unhealthy Culture
1. Staff, students, and faculty model spiritual rhythms to newcomers 2. Communal and individual spiritual rhythms go hand-in-hand 3. People are open to the work of the Spirit 4. People are excited to engage in rhythms together and it doesn't feel like an obligation 5. Creates space for experimenting with different rhythms 6. Includes time and space to debrief 7. Balances freedom and accountability, inviting people into a posture of transparency	1. Makes spiritual rhythms optional and places the responsibility entirely on the individual 2. People participate in spiritual rhythms because of communal guilt and pressure 3. An atmosphere of judgment for people who aren't perceived as "doing enough" 4. The focus is on perfection or performance and people feel that their relationship with God and worth as a Christian depends on how fervent their spiritual life is 5. Feelings of superiority come over those who we perceive as spiritual enough or who have different spiritual practices 6. Pressures members toward transparency while leaders hide their weaknesses

Putting It into Practice

Categories of Rhythms

- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Semesterly/Yearly

REFLECT

What's your ministry's current communal spiritual rhythms? Write them down and consider how they've been transformative.

Inviting Non-Christians into Spiritual Practices

Inviting non-Christians to engage in spiritual practices can be an opportunity to try them out in the safety of community. Consider Acts 10:1-3, where Cornelius while not yet a believer, engages in prayer.

Tips for inviting non-Christians into spiritual practices:

- Using accessible language (avoid Christianese)
- Explaining what's happening in a non-judgmental way
- Honoring and welcoming their curiosity
- Gently inviting them to try new things
- Debriefing afterwards to see what they thought

Where to Start

If you're just establishing your ministry start by incorporating prayer, worship, and Scripture rhythms. If your ministry already incorporates prayer, worship, and Scripture rhythms then try taking your community to the next level by leaning into Sabbath, testimony sharing, or fasting.

Spiritual Practices to Incorporate into your Rhythm

Prayer

Each lesson will other sample rhythms, but don't feel the need to incorporate all of them.

- **Daily prayer** – Seasonal daily prayer meetings, online daily prayer, praying "together" at a certain time, and asynchronous daily prayer
- **Weekly or monthly prayer meetings** – Praying in small groups, with partners, or prayer walking
- **Monthly or semi-annual concert of prayer** – A concert of prayer is an extended time where your community comes together as one body for prayer.
- **Annual retreat of silence** – Silence and solitude in community can help you hold each other accountable, take solitude at the same time, and be encouraged by others also doing it.
- **Organizing a prayer room** – A prayer room is a dedicated space where a community gathers for extended periods of prayers, often spanning a day, multiple days, or even 24 continuous hours.

Worship

When we worship in community, we point each other to God, remind ourselves of the greatness of our God, and together respond to him with adoration, reverence, and obedience.

- **Weekly worship in small group or large group** – Spend a few minutes in worship so that together you can experience God and respond.
- **Monthly or quarterly worship nights** – Consider new ways of worshiping or integrating worship with a concert of prayer.
- **Annual worship at retreat or conference** – Use these events to kick-start a worship culture in your community. Incorporate songs or worship practices that resonated with your community.

Studying Scripture

Studying Scripture together can affirm what we sense the Holy Spirit is telling us and can open us up to new things that we wouldn't have seen or thought about.

- **Daily Bible reading** – Use a daily reading plan or a quiet time book to read the same passages together and use group messaging to share what God is teaching you from your reading.
- **Weekly Bible study in small group** – Read God's word and consider what it means for your lives.
- **Monthly/annual Bible dig-ins, conferences, and camps** – Spending extended time in Scripture to go deep, experience God, and grow your skills in Bible study.

Sabbath

Sabbath is a physical act of reliance on God, an act of rebellion that reminds us God is in charge, and especially important as a ministry leader. Sabbath is usually practiced weekly, but there are ways to use other rhythms to help you Sabbath well:

- **Daily** – Think about how you like to spend your upcoming Sabbath and use each day to prepare.
- **Monthly** – Spend time evaluating how your Sabbath rhythm has been going.
- **Annual** – Plan an annual weekend retreat to practice an extended Sabbath.

Sharing Testimonies

A testimony is a heartfelt account of an experience with God. Create a culture of testimony by creating a habit of storytelling, creating a safe space to share, sharing your story, and share stories about struggles.

- **Weekly testimony sharing** – Designate time during your small group for someone to share a recent testimony. Or use an weekly event to spotlight someone's testimony.
- **Monthly testimony times** – Each month you could have a particular theme or topic which can help people reflect on how God has helped them grow in that area or bring in a guest speaker.

- **Annual or quarterly testimony gatherings** – Encourage people to share their testimonies during special moments, create a tradition of sharing at retreats, or encourage people to journal about significant spiritual milestones.

Fasting

Through communal fasting, we can unite in a beautiful, sacrificial pursuit of God.

- **Daily fasting** – One example is fasting from social media in the morning when you wake up.
- **Weekly fasting** – You could choose something to fast from for a week and use that time to pray.
- **Seasonal or Annual** – Some people practice fasting throughout different seasons like Lent.

Leading Culture Change

Communal Discernment

Incorporating the group into the decision-making process can help members feel like they're part of the community in a deeper way, grow their spiritual awareness, and help mitigate against unhealthy elements of spiritual authority and abuse. However, leaders should help guide the decision, and when necessary, make the final call. Take time to pray and ask God what he might be inviting your community into.

Talking About Spiritual Authority

Spiritual authority is our ability to receive and use that which God gives us through the Holy Spirit. We may feel unsure about our spiritual authority. Experiencing such doubts is natural. Instead, bring them into the light by sharing with God and your community and invite God's loving voice into your leadership.

Navigating Risks in Spiritual Leadership

Here's some pastoral words about leading in this area:

- When we live by God's grace, we can put in effort while knowing it's not all on us.
- You don't need to be an expert before taking the risk to lead
- Don't view spiritual rhythms in terms of success and achievement
- Recognize that not everyone experiences God the same way through the same spiritual practices.
- Spiritual practices take time. Embrace the slow and steady pace.

Finding Sustainable Rhythms

Don't overwhelm yourselves and your students with a lot of activities, rather weave these disciplines into your existing schedules. Spiritual rhythms should permeate all facets of our leadership responsibilities. They're not optional extras but fundamental aspects of our identity and practice as leaders.

A Breath Prayer Exercise

Breath prayers are, "intentional prayers centered around Scripture that focus our minds on Christ as we calm our bodies through breathing."

To practice a breath prayer:

1. Begin by minimizing noise and distractions around you.
2. Once you're ready, start the prayer in rhythm with your breath. For example, breathe in and say "The Lord is my shepherd." Breathe out and say, "I shall not want."
3. Repeat for the remainder of the prayer. You can do this entire prayer a number of times.

Examples:

- "The Lord is my Shepherd/I shall not want" (Psalm 23:1)
- "Be still and know/that I am God" (Psalm 46:10)
- "Wait for the Lord/Be strong and take heart" (Psalm 27:14)
- "When I am afraid/I put my trust in You" (Psalm 56:3)

Related Resources

- Anchored in Jesus: A Retreat and Prayer Guide to Begin NSO
- Diverse Worship Matters Video Series
- Diverse Worship Matters Workbook
- Host a Launch Gathering
- Leading Prayer Meetings (pdf)
- Listening Prayer Guide (pdf)
- Prayer Guide for NSO (pdf)
- Small Group Bible Study Collection
- Why Pray Together?

Books

- *Quiet Time Bible Guide* by Cindy Bunch
- *Atomic Habits* by James Clear

Recommended Courses

- Cultivating Intimacy with God Together
- Establishing Rhythms for Ministry & Revival
- Growing Authentic Community

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