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Creativity
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Introduction

From Panic to Peace



How women who write
can help us lead

By Caryn Rivadeneira

Earlier this year when I was invited to serve on our church's worship planning team, I panicked. I had said yes because it sounded like fun (I've got friends on the team) and it fit my schedule. But it took about five minutes after my affirmative answer to realize I had nothing to offer, no idea what the team was even about. Of course, they told me what it was about—but I failed to realize the significance of the work this committee does.

It got even worse after my first meeting, as I sat around a table with pastors, worship leaders, gifted artists, and people with a knack for the "flow" of worship. I came in with a lifetime of church-going experience and some idea of how to write a nice prayer. That was about it.





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From Panic to Peace

During that first meeting, my mind kept going to Nancy Beach—wondering if she had written about all this, suspecting she could help me. For those of you who don't know Nancy, she is a speaker, author, visionary leader, and champion for the power of the arts and artists in the local church. She served for more than 20 years as the programming director for **Willow Creek Community Church** in suburban Chicago, a congregation known around the world for creating culturally relevant, biblically based services that make full use of the arts.

So when I came back from the meeting, I searched what she had written in the pages of LEADERSHIP JOURNAL—and for us, at Gifted for Leadership. What I found excited me. Not only because it helped me think through ways I could actually add something to this committee—but because it re-affirmed gifts I had as both an artist (a writer, to be specific) and as a leader.

So I'm excited to be sharing these articles with you as well. Among them you'll find some inspiration, wisdom and practical ministry ideas. All great. All worth reading. I hope you enjoy them—and are as blessed by them—as much as I was.

Many blessings.

Caryn Rivadeneira

Contributing Editor, KYRIA downloads,
Christianity Today International



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The Heart of the Matter

Heart Check



What if there was a procedure that could evaluate the condition of your spiritual heart?

By Nancy Beach

A frequently heard advertisement on Chicago radio stations is for Heart Check America. The ad is a testimony:

"I am a businessman in my mid forties. I eat well and exercise five times a week. I've never had any serious medical problems. But my wife begged me to have a heart check. The test is quick and painless. She said, 'What have you got to lose?' So I went. And are we glad I did. The doctors discovered major blockage in three arteries and I was scheduled for treatment immediately. Heart Check America saved my life. You may think everything is fine. So did I. Do yourself a favor. Schedule your test today."





What if there was a procedure that could evaluate the condition of your spiritual heart, your heart for ministry?

At the end of an intense season of ministry, I'm limping a little. When friends have asked how I'm doing, I've replied, "Well, my heart isn't working quite right." We occasionally use that phrase around Willow Creek. So I've given some thought to five key indicators that the heart and soul are healthy.

Rate yourself high, medium, or low in each category.

Can You Feel Deep Emotion?

A healthy heart feels emotions deeply. It can be touched by joy, pain, anger, gratitude, and love.

Last February, when my heart was working better, I had such an experience. My family and I were at Disney World. We were watching a fabulous outdoor version of *The Lion King*. At one point, singers, dancers, and live animals—elephants and camels and tigers—paraded by to the beautiful music of that show. Then each performer invited a lucky child to join in the parade. One performer went to a young woman in a wheelchair. She was in her twenties, I guessed, and appeared to have cerebral palsy. The performer checked with her parents for permission to push her wheelchair along in the magnificent parade. They readily agreed. I don't know who was more radiant, the young woman or the loving parents who beamed with joy. I wondered about their journey together and the sacrifices they had made.





As I watched this young woman enjoying the time of her life, tears streamed down my face. My daughters, ages 10 and 7, said, "Daddy, Mommy's crying. What's wrong with Mommy?" I looked over to my husband, and his eyes had tears in them, too. Later I was grateful that I could see that wonderful drama and truly feel it.

The opposite of this is a heart that is numb. The prophet Elijah was in that kind of place when he sat down by the broom tree. He prayed, "I have had enough, Lord." And he lay down and fell asleep.

This past Easter we prepared an original musical, "Jairus." There were 11 performances, and believers in our congregation invited scores of their seeking friends.

The musical exceeded our expectations, but the process was hard on many of us. Every night I would see the place fill up. My daughter was in the cast, and I would watch her have the time of her life. The show had many incredible moments. But I had trouble feeling it deeply. My heart was numb.

How is your capacity to feel deep emotion these days? High, medium, or low?

Are You Mindful of Moments?

The older I get, the more I understand that our lives are a series of moments. I love these words of Frederick Buechner: "Listen to your life. See it for the fathomless mystery it is. In the boredom and pain of it no less than in the excitement and gladness . . . because in the last analysis, all moments are key moments and life itself is grace."





GFL Mentor Series: Nancy Beach

Heart Check

The leading cause of regret is failure to seize the day. So many of us miss out on the wonder and potential of simple, everyday moments. This is especially true in relationships. When our hearts are working right, we look into one another's eyes. We don't find ourselves in such destructive hurry that we are unable to be fully present. We cultivate the ability to truly listen to our family and friends and people we minister to.

A great test for me is how present I am for my two girls. When my heart and soul are healthy, I can give them the gift of genuine attention.

In her book *Surrendering to Motherhood*, Iris Krasnow describes it this way: "It's about Being Where You Are When You Are and Being There as Much as Possible. It's about crouching on the floor and getting delirious over the praying mantis your son just caught instead of perusing a fax while he is yelling for your attention and you distractedly say over your shoulder: 'O Honey, isn't that a pretty bug.' It's about being attuned enough to notice when your kid's eyes shine so you can make your eyes shine back."

Unhealthy hearts don't produce eyes that shine. Too often, we end up "skimming" in our key relationships. We skim along the surface, offering the bare minimum to a spouse, close friend, or child. Right now, can you be "all there when you are there?" or are you skimming? How mindful of moments have you been in recent days? High, medium, or low?

Do You Enjoy Spontaneity?

"Are we having fun yet?" was the common question on our ministry team before the Easter musical. The not-so-disguised implication was "No, we aren't."





I don't need to tell you that ministry can be overwhelming. There is no end to people's needs, and there are eternal consequences behind what we do. As a result, we can easily become worn out and much too serious.

A healthy heart has the capacity to laugh, to welcome the unexpected, the out-of-the-ordinary. A really healthy heart initiates spontaneous fun moments, spreading joy to others. Jesus described the kingdom life as one of *joy* and *abundance*, not as a burden that weighs us down.

We are in bad shape when we cannot laugh from the gut, play like a child, and simply let go.

So how's the fun factor for you these days? High, medium, low?

Are You Open to the Lost and Hurting?

When Jesus saw crowds who needed so much from him, he had compassion on them. In John 11, we see how grieved Jesus was by the death of his good friend Lazarus. When he saw Mary and the others weeping, Jesus was "deeply moved in spirit and troubled." And when he saw the tomb, Jesus wept.

A healthy heart can still weep for those who do not yet know God's love. A healthy heart can be empathetic and gracious to those who are suffering. But when our hearts aren't working right, we begin viewing precious human beings as another problem to be handled.

A few weeks ago I came to our midweek service exhausted. I had over-scheduled myself. Afterward my agenda was to meet briefly with our program team and then get home as soon as





possible. But as I was trying to move toward the exit, a couple I do not know asked for some moments of my time.

They were looking for some pastoral input. The situation they described in their family was one of the most difficult I've ever been confronted with. There was no other pastor around right then. I couldn't find an elder nearby, and I sensed the Holy Spirit saying, "Take a deep breath. Together we will care for these folks." I have never felt so under-equipped—and yet as God always does, he gave me strength and wisdom.

Now I want to be quick to say that no one's heart door should *always* be open. I believe in boundaries and limits and rest and vacations. But what I'm describing is the possibility that over time, our hearts, which once burned with passion for the seekers and the poor and the suffering, can become hardened and impenetrable. This is tragic for any Christ follower.

St. John of the Cross said that "at the evening of our day we shall be judged by our loving."

Have you shed a tear lately for someone who is outside God's family? Have you been deeply moved by someone's loss? Or is your heart becoming slowly hardened, almost without you realizing it? How loving is your heart these days? High, medium, or low?

Are You Hearing God's Promptings?

When the soul is strong and we operate from a quiet center, God doesn't need a megaphone to get our attention. We can hear his whispers.





GFL Mentor Series: Nancy Beach
Heart Check

Proverbs 3:32 says that God is "intimate with the upright"; he takes them "into his confidence." The question is not whether God is speaking to us. He is sending us messages all the time—through creation, through his Word, through people and events. Quoting Buechner again:

"There is no chance thing through which God cannot speak—even the walk from the house to the garage that you have walked ten thousand times before, even the moments when you cannot believe there is a God who speaks at all anywhere . . . to live without listening at all is to live deaf to the fullness of the music. Sometimes we avoid listening for fear of what we may hear, sometimes for fear that we may hear nothing at all but the empty rattle of our own feet on the pavement. . . . 'Be not afraid, for lo, I am with you always' Listen for Him."

There is one thing I hope I never get over, as long as I live: the truth that the awesome Creator of the universe is choosing to speak to me—not just once in a blue moon, but most of the time! Sometimes he wants to encourage me and comfort me. Sometimes he needs to convict me about a sin I've committed and to guide me to confess. Sometimes he wants to give me an idea. Sometimes he just wants me to remember I am treasured.

I shudder to think how many messages I have missed. How mindful is your heart these days of the presence of God? Are you quick to listen? Are you attentive to his promptings? How is your hearing?

High, medium, or low?





Interpreting the Results

Take a look at all five ratings. How is your heart?

Remember, God is in the business of transforming hearts. He promises: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh" (Ezek. 36:26).

Why is it so difficult to sustain hearts of flesh, to be increasingly healthy on the inside? John Ortberg, one of our former teaching pastors, talked to our staff about the tension of both *abiding* and *abounding*. We face this tension our whole lives—to be *both* vitally connected to God and fruitful in the Lord's work. As I face this tension in my own life, I need to ask five questions.

1. Who is responsible for my getting this right? My church? Another pastor, elders, or deacons? My spouse? No, I am responsible. It is so tempting to blame someone else for my schedule, my job description, even my hardened heart.

Elizabeth O'Connor describes our responsibility this way: "Each of us is the artist of his own life. The materials we are given to work with, the conditions we work under and what happens to us, are part of the drama of what we shall do with our lives."

2. Do I have systems in place to protect my heart? We all know what our physical hearts require to stay healthy—exercise, no smoking, less stress, and fewer Twinkies. And we are also aware that for the spiritual heart to be healthy, a commitment to certain systems and disciplines is necessary.



I do not bring up the "D" word (discipline) to add another *should* to your list. Some of us grew up with a distorted idea that our times of Bible reading, prayer, or fasting are efforts to score points with God so he'll bless us.

Annie Dillard, in *Teaching a Stone to Talk*, cuts to the heart of it:

"Experience has taught the race that if knowledge of God is the end, then these habits of life are not the means but the condition in which the means operates. You do not have to do these things; not at all. God does not, I regret to report, give a hoot. You do not have to do these things—unless you want to know God. They work on you, not on him.

"You do not have to sit outside in the dark. If, however, you want to look at the stars, you will find that darkness is necessary. But the stars neither require nor demand it."

Being the artist of our lives includes figuring out what is necessary for us to have healthy hearts. For most of us that will include some solitude—we need to schedule it. It will include washing ourselves in Scripture and regular times of prayer.

For me, a big need is getting out in creation where I most sense God's presence. I wrote most of this article in a park, listening to God in the wind, as a squirrel scampered by, and the sun warmed my face.

3. Have I ruthlessly clarified my role and contribution in terms of my gifts and passion? Some of the burnout I've observed can be traced to repeatedly giving out what we do



not possess—in other words, not functioning in the central zone of our gifts.

All our lives we should be seeking to clarify what we were born to do, who we are meant to be. But when we serve in churches, the needs are enormous and endless. And we keep responding to those needs, even if the role does not match our gifts. Day after day we put on clothes that do not fit.

There are times in the life of a church when lots of folks need to be willing to do whatever is necessary. In our church's early years, we all did everything—cleaned the movie theater, set up equipment, ushered, served on stage, led small groups, and took it all down. We knew all about spiritual gifts and passions. We tried to help people soar in their gift areas, but we couldn't all specialize.

In 25 years, I have gone through several transitions in my ministry role. This past year has brought significant change. I am doing less day-to-day leadership of our department and instead seeking to make an overall creative contribution. I am also using my teaching gifts more frequently. These changes have been both exhilarating and terrifying.

In the middle of one of my scarier weeks, a good friend gave me a little book, *Let Your Life Speak* by Parker Palmer. This Quaker teacher urges us to listen to our lives that we may understand what they are intended to be about. The word *vocation* comes from the Latin for *voice*. Palmer says, "Vocation does not mean a goal that I pursue. It means a calling that I hear. Before I tell my life what I want to do with it, I must listen to my life telling me who I am."





No one else can do this listening for us. Through experimentation and usually some hardship, we will learn as we go. From Palmer's book I learned I must pay as much attention to my limits as to my strengths.

I am a better creator than manager. I can do that stuff, but it wears me out. I also have set time limits by choice. I have chosen to work part-time while my children are young. So, after all these years of discovery and by God's grace, my role now is essentially about two things—contributing to the design of services and teaching.

I do not tell you this to discourage you if you are far removed from what you love to do. This has been a long, gradual process of dying to some ego needs, letting go, and trusting. Change has often been scary, but I am seeing the benefits already of this weaning. And I urge you to be on a similar journey. Please do not resign yourself to forever denying your true self.

Christians often have a hard time feeling okay about this kind of self-examination and self-care. It seems, well, selfish. After all, there are churches to build, services to prepare, people to reach! *Just buck up and get the job done*, we tell ourselves. *All this journaling and analysis is wasting time.*

Well, if you lean in that direction, I want to challenge your thinking. I truly believe that if you continually clarify what brings you the most joy, what you are born to do, you will have so much more to offer the kingdom!

4. Am I doing the inner work necessary to separate my self-worth and identity from what I do? All of us have a deep need for a sense of place. By that I mean we long to feel needed,





significant—like we really matter. And depending on the messages we received in our early years, many of us tie our worth directly to what we do. Many of us are actually quite insecure deep down.

This is evident when:

- we are overly concerned with a title or how we are described,
- we are consumed with approval from certain people,
- we have trouble celebrating the excellence of someone else who shares our gifts,
- we go away on vacation and feel a little less important if everything went well in our absence.

There are dark places inside each of us that we must gradually bring into the light. We need to have the courage to look into the deep down stuff. Jealousy, insecurity, pride, selfishness, anger, greed—these we need to face, wrestle down, and confess.

The apostle Paul began his letters by simply writing: "Paul, a servant (or apostle) of Christ Jesus." That's all he felt was necessary to describe himself. His foundational identity was as a servant of Jesus Christ, a child of God.

Do you see yourself as a precious child of God, who does not have to earn anything, or prove anything, or perform anything? We will become truly free in Christ when we settle where our worth comes from.



5. Am I living in authentic community? That kind of inner work is done both in solitude and in the context of genuine community. When our hearts are working right, they are connected to a few people who really love us and know us, even the yucky stuff.

When I was going through all this change the past year, I hit a real rough spot in March. I started to experience a great deal of insecurity and self-doubt. As I cycled lower and lower, I imagined things about my workplace and my co-workers that were not true. The Evil One was hard at work, trying to destroy my confidence and peace. I was distressed, but for a few days I kept it to myself.

I was afraid to disclose the ugliness of my thoughts, and I thought I had to figure everything out before going to my friends.

Well, I'd make a terrible poker player. Some of my friends saw my eyes and immediately knew I was hurting. They prodded and soon it all gushed out. They helped me see the lies I was starting to believe. They reminded me of my worth, my place, and their unconditional love for me. I should not have thought hiding was the answer. My heart could only find healing in community.

When we are too busy to live in genuine community with a few friends, we are too busy. Our hearts won't work right if there's no one who knows how we are really doing.



Big God, Little Me

I am learning that as we work to build the church, we can too easily lose sight of what God wants to do in us. When we worship, we often focus on the majesty, power, and magnitude of God—we celebrate how *big* he is, how *strong* he is, how *awesome* he is. But sometimes it is easier to believe that God is concerned with big things than it is to trust his concern for my everyday life.

Does our glorious Creator really spend much time and energy focusing on the condition of my little life, my struggles, my fears, my victories?

Psalm 139 says God is thinking about every one of us all the time. If we were to add up his thoughts of each of us, they would outnumber the grains of sand. As big as he is, our God is also intensely personal. He is intimately concerned with the condition of our hearts.

This article first appeared in LEADERSHIP JOURNAL.



AT A GLANCE

CONDUCT YOUR OWN HEART CHECK.

Rate yourself in five areas to test your spiritual health:

Emotions. Have you cried lately? Or really laughed? A healthy heart is fully aware of deep emotion—and can name it.

Moments. Are you present or preoccupied? Ask your spouse, children, or friends if you're "all there" when you're with them. They can say whether you're "skimming" key relationships.

Fun. Do you set aside time for enjoyment, whether active sports, quiet reading, arts, or crafts? When was the last time you really had fun.

People. Do you resent phone calls and people seeking you out? Or do you see them as opportunities for ministry? If you're running for cover, trying to dodge people, you're overextended.

Whispers. How long has it been since you heard the still, small voice? One of the first signs of a hardening heart is a deafened ear to the quiet promptings of God.

That's the test in brief. The article will help you interpret your findings.

Reflect

- *Were you surprised at the results of your heart check? Why or why not?*
- *What were some of the most interesting answers you came up with to Nancy's questions?*

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Practically Speaking

The Power of (Short) Story

An unmistakable connection takes place when we hear from others in the same boat.

By Nancy Beach

One hundred words or less. That was the assignment pitched to our congregation: "Send us a story of a 'God moment' in your life using less than 100 words." That's not a lot of words—this article is over twice that number. But one of our drama directors had experienced a deeply moving service at another church based on this premise, and we thought we'd give it a try.





GFL Mentor Series: Nancy Beach
The Power of (Short) Story

In poured the stories. The content ranged widely from the more dramatic, such as rescues from car accidents, adopted babies for the infertile, and recovery from addiction to alcohol, to the smaller and quieter moments that recognized the presence of the supernatural with no less impact or spiritual significance.

For our Easter celebration, Ingrid DeSanctis and a team of designers wove those stories into a beautiful 20-minute tapestry punctuated by visuals and music.

As I listened to people from our congregation who are normally sitting in the seats speak their 100 words of testimony to the work of God, I was struck once again by the power of story. Not just the stories of preachers and songwriters, but the true stories of everyday folks who have more to tell than we often give them credit for.

Without exception they gave tribute to a God who shows up just when we wonder whether we navigate this life on our own or whether we are guided by a Father who knows the intricate details and chooses to provide and protect.

We heard from a 17-year-old girl who almost lost her dad to a stroke, and from a Vietnam veteran who recalled a moment sitting on an aircraft carrier, reading the verse his mother often quoted to him about casting our cares on him. 1 Peter 5:7 has been his life verse ever since.

The young and the old, the wealthy and the working poor, the well-spoken and the shaky voices, each one communicated with a power beyond their own. In an Easter





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The Power of (Short) Story

service that included far more than 100 words from several of our pastors, the stories of the non-professionals will likely be the portion that sticks to our souls.

To church leaders and to myself, I simply remind us of the treasure of stories sitting in the seats every Sunday morning. Take the time to uncover those stories and create ways for others to hear them too.

An unmistakable connection takes place when the congregation hears from people who are very much in the same boat, just trying to do life from Monday through Saturday. They're people who simply give witness with humility and honesty to moments when "Only God" can be the explanation.

This article first appeared in LEADERSHIP JOURNAL.

Reflect

- *What are some creative ways you could invite members of your congregation to share their own "Only God" moments?*
- *What story would you tell?*



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Practically Speaking

Bring Down That Wall

How can we lower the barrier
between pastors and musicians?

By Nancy Beach



In too many of our churches, there is a wall, not made of brick and mortar, or even drywall, but just as real. Although rarely acknowledged, this wall effectively divides musicians and other artists from pastors and teachers.





GFL Mentor Series: Nancy Beach

Bring Down That Wall

In most cases, the wall is not erected intentionally or maliciously, yet it blocks vital communication and damages Sunday services more than we know. Even if they can't identify it, those who attend our churches sense the wall's existence—largely because the hour on Sunday feels disjointed or inexplicably "off" somehow. Instead of experiencing an integrated service that takes them on a spiritual journey, our congregations get a jerky shift from part one of the service to part two.

My ministry requires me to span two worlds: the world of teaching pastors and the world of artists. Because I function in both worlds, I have a front row seat when it comes to the challenges on each side of the wall.

Generally speaking, pastors/teachers and artists are wired differently. They may not naturally choose one another as close friends. Yet the first step toward creative collaboration is building a relationship. Pastors and artists need to understand one another better if they are going to work together for the good of the church.

Bringing down the wall and building trust requires sacrifice. Perhaps the biggest sacrifice of all is time, arguably our most precious commodity. But I can't imagine a better use of a pastor's time, if the hope is that Sunday morning would reach its full potential for transformation and wonder.

So here's my challenge to pastors: take an artist to lunch!





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Bring Down That Wall

Pastors should make the first move. The artists in our churches may be too tentative to ask the pastor to lunch, and they may even be shocked at the invitation. At lunch, choose to be a phenomenal listener. Ask questions about the artist's life, about his or her process in creating music or drama or lighting or whatever their discipline might be. Dare to ask for feedback about whether your church is a safe place for the artist to experiment, to offer creative ideas, to explore possibilities, and even to risk failure.

Yes, artists need to understand pastors as well, and that will happen as time goes on. But for now, move toward the artists in your church. Even pick up the bill. And watch as the wall that separates you slowly comes down.

This article first appeared in LEADERSHIP JOURNAL.

Reflect

- *Do you notice any disconnect between the pastoral and arts community in your church? How so?*
- *What would be some of the benefits for your church if pastors and artists worked together more often?*
- *If you are the artist, consider taking the pastor to lunch and initiating this conversation.*



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Practically Speaking

The Case for Sunday Brunch

Is your worship service a banquet or a bust?

By Nancy Beach

Three distinct paradigms have been evident for Sunday morning services in the past 30 years. These designs are not about style of music or teaching. I am not referring to whether the hour is traditional or contemporary, boomer or postmodern, free flowing or liturgical. These paradigms pertain to how integrated the arts portion of the service is with the teaching or sermon portion. To understand the differences, consider Sunday morning a meal we prepare and serve to the congregation, longing for God's Spirit to use it to transform human lives.





An a la Carte Meal

The church of my youth was an *a la carte* experience. If the sermon can be described as the main course, whatever preceded it was a random selection of menu items. The congregation sampled one distinct taste after another, without any intentional connection between them. I doubt whether the worship leaders who prepared songs, solos, segues, and readings had even communicated with one another. Rather, individual cooks each whipped up their course, and surprised all of us who gathered with their portion of the meal.

God still showed up in that church, and we were sometimes moved. We loaded our worship plates with the assorted foods of a potluck in the hope the diverse elements would somehow work together and some transcendent truth would become evident. But walking back to our cars afterward, we had no sense that we had been guided through an intentional, integrated experience.

The Two-Course Meal

My second experience was more like a two-part dinner. The arts portion served as appetizer and side dishes coordinated to come alongside the main course, biblical teaching.

This approach certainly is more cohesive. The pastor offers information in advance to the arts team, who view their job as preparing the congregation to receive the truth of the Scripture. Assembling their artistic chefs, they seek to discern what courses will best support and enhance the main course.





The congregation usually leaves grateful for a meal that shows planning and direction. It is definitely a more satisfying experience than the *a la carte* approach.

A Sunday Morning Feast

These days, I've experienced in several churches an even more delightful hour on Sunday. From beginning to end, this banquet is clearly designed by a team. The teaching and the arts support one another in every part. Words such as *organic* and *holistic* come to mind.

Such feasts require a far greater investment of a pastor's time with the artists.

Together, they craft an experience that joins every course in an intentional progression. The congregation does not discern separate parts, but rather savors a fine mix of distinct and yet wonderfully connected flavors. Often the teaching portion is divided into two or more sections, with the arts in between.

Though such services are more challenging for the chefs to coordinate, attenders, served with great care, head into their everyday lives with greater passion and focus.

This article first appeared in LEADERSHIP JOURNAL.



Reflect

- *Which "meal style" would you say best describes your worship service? What might you be able to learn from the other styles?*
- *What role overall do the arts play in your church?*



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Soul Care

Sabbatical Gifts

Giving the Lord room to work in
your life and ministry

By Nancy Beach



Recently I returned to an official ministry role following a sabbatical. After more than 20 years in leadership, I needed time away to become a quiet, private Christian for a while. Beyond rest and rich family time, I received other valuable gifts, each wrapped in a question.

Who am I?





For six months I did not teach, lead, or create anything connected to Sunday services. I wrestled at a deep level with my faith, seeking to disentangle what is most real and basic and true about my relationship with a holy God from the sticky web of professional ministry expectations.

I revisited the simple reasons I love my Lord so much, and the reasons that motivated my early decision to serve God and the church. I saw myself again as a precious daughter of God, and basked in the wonder of what grace means for me.

Assisted by a skilled Christian counselor, I also worked through some wounds of ministry disappointments and explored unhealthy patterns, both in my leadership style and in key relationships. Although my agenda going into the sabbatical was to discover my next ministry assignment, God had a distinctly different agenda. His priority was not so much where I would be serving, but who I am becoming.

What can I learn?

The second gift was the profound privilege of being catapulted into new arenas where I could breathe different air and be stretched and challenged. I read without thinking about how I would use the material in a service.

I seized the rare opportunity to visit other churches on Sunday mornings, Episcopal to Pentecostal, small to large. I was reminded of the incredible breadth and diversity of God's kingdom. God is at work in so many different places and in so many different ways!





I also had the privilege of enjoying a little travel, most memorably to Italy where I saw art and beauty that lifted my spirits, rooted my soul, and captured my imagination.

As a result, I returned to ministry with far more to give to our congregation.

Where am I headed?

Toward the end of my sabbatical, the Spirit finally gave me freedom to ask the questions that so urgently pressed on my mind. I held everything loosely, as loosely as I could, and gave God room to guide me in any direction, even if it meant a change in location or shifting into a volunteer role. In the end, I had peace about returning to my church in a different position, nothing too dramatic, but definitely a change.

I don't know how I could have wrestled with all these questions had I been caught up in the intense pace of ministry life. Solitude led me to peace. I learned what it really means to *wait on the Lord*.

I am now a passionate advocate for Christian leaders to plan ahead for a sabbatical time. These breaks can range from a month to a year, but they won't just happen. We must intentionally carve out a window of time, and then courageously make the request. Remember that some kind of resting period is truly biblical—an extended Sabbath, a year of no harvest, time to slip away to the desert.





GFL Mentor Series: Nancy Beach
Sabbatical Gifts

Give yourself and the Lord room to work in less structure, weaving your days with opportunities for surprises, unexpected connections, and new learnings. A sabbatical is not about completing a book or rehabbing your house. Let yourself breathe.

I've been back a month and I'm still basking in the glow of my sabbatical gifts. It's good to be back.

This article first appeared in LEADERSHIP JOURNAL.

Reflect

- *What excites you about the idea of taking a ministry sabbatical? What scares you?*
- *Nancy ends with this: "Give yourself and the Lord room to work. . . ."How might you make that happen?*



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Opinion

Finding My Voice

Continuing the process of discovering who we are

By Nancy Beach



Every leader needs to find his or her voice over time. But as a woman leader in the church, the challenge for me has been to discern what truly is my authentic voice, and what is an attempt to mimic the voices of male leaders I respect. In all kinds of settings, we have to discover what voice most accurately reflects our God-given instincts, personality, perspective, and story.





GFL Mentor Series: Nancy Beach
Finding My Voice

By nature I am fairly emotional and expressive. I don't believe this is unique to female leaders and communicators, though sometimes people assume that males will be more "in control" of their emotions and speak from the head more than the heart. Certainly there have been times both in meetings and in the pulpit when I have attempted to at least put a lid on becoming too emotional, avoiding the kind of blubbing that thwarts the ability to even choke out words. But to hide all my passion and deep feelings simply isn't me.

I have been discovering over time that the strongest connections made with individuals or with an entire congregation take place when I am centered, settled, and strong in my own voice, when I tell real stories straight out of my ordinary life, and when I allow myself room to express a wide range of emotion. Sometimes God leads me to speak with boldness, exhorting others and calling them to a higher level. Other moments call for tenderness, for genuine empathy, for bringing comfort to the hurting. And then there are times when my voice is all about laughter, looking at the absurdity of a situation and feeling the freedom to laugh out loud.

The church and every organization are more robust, vital, and real when every person on the team is free to speak with an authentic voice. The challenges for women leaders and communicators are a little steeper, I believe, than those for our brothers. For the sake of those we lead—both men and women—we must continue the process of discovering and then expressing our voices.





I wonder how this journey has been for others. What has helped you to discern when you are communicating with your unique voice and when you are not? How has your voice been received by those you lead or teach? Has the expression of genuine emotion been difficult for you to figure out?

This article first appeared at GiftedForLeadership.com.

Reflect

- *How would you answer the questions Nancy poses:*
- *What has helped you to discern when you are communicating with your unique voice and when you are not?*
- *How has your voice been received by those you lead or teach?*
- *Has the expression of genuine emotion been difficult for you to figure out?*



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Additional Resources

Books to help you further.

Gifted to Lead, by Nancy Beach. Women, do you long to follow your instincts to lead? Beach challenges you to use your gifts for the glory of God and the good of his church. Sharing her 30-year journey as a leader, she offers guidance on developing character, earning respect, finding your voice, and more to help you reach your full ministry potential. 176 pages, hardcover from Willow.

An Hour On Sunday: Creating Moments of Transformation, by Nancy Beach. Anyone who thinks "creativity in church" is an oxymoron hasn't met Willow Creek's teaching pastor and doodle-artist, Nancy Beach! In this wise, funny, and whimsically illustrated resource, she offers 10 reasons why *some* congregations endure Sunday morning yawn-athons while others are awed, changed, and moved to tears as they connect intimately with Jesus and each other. 288 pages, hardcover from Zondervan.





GFL Mentor Series: Nancy Beach

Additional Resources

Key Values, Arts Ministry Team Edition—DVD, by Nancy Beach. Lay a strong foundation for your arts ministry with this creative tool! Encouraging you to think outside the box, Nancy Beach's 5-session curriculum helps you define and hone such vital principles as innovation, authenticity, transformation, and collaboration. Sessions include "The Power of Imagination," "The Art of Collaboration," and more. Includes a downloadable, reproducible handout with message outlines, discussion questions, and a chart.



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