

Spiritual Refreshment for Busy Sunday School Teachers and Leaders



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Practical Resources for Churches**

Burnt out?

I see a lot of people involved in Sunday school and other areas of children's ministry who are just plain burnt out; many of them are like this all the time, not just at the end of the school year. They keep on doing what they're doing because "there's nobody else to do it" but they no longer feel joyful or excited about their ministry. If you're at this point or, hopefully before you reach it, it's important to take time for a little spiritual refreshment.



Some of the symptoms of burnout include:

- You feel very tired, both physically and mentally.
- You're fed up to the point where you just want out.
- You're no longer enthusiastic about teaching or leading.
- You feel unappreciated and resentful.
- You have less patience than you used to.
- You're not having fun anymore.

If you are showing signs of burning out, then you need to take some time for yourself to recharge and refresh your spirit. Don't feel guilty about doing this. It will benefit not just you but also the children you teach and the other teachers and leaders you work with.

Self-assessment

How do you feel about what you're doing?

Why did you start teaching? Did you feel that God was calling you to this ministry or did you start teaching because you felt sorry for someone who was desperate for teachers? Do you still feel that you've called to teach or lead in children's ministry? Or could it be that God is leading you to something else?

How's your relationship with God?

Does God seem close or far away? Are you spending time with God through prayer and other spiritual practices? Are you attending worship services, a study group, or other actively fellowship activities that strengthen your relationship with God? Are seeking God's will for your life?

How is your relationship with your family?

Sometimes children's ministers (and other church leaders) are so caught up in their work that they neglect their family life. Don't let this happen to you. One thing to consider doing is to have your family get involved in your ministry with you. My husband and I have enjoyed teaching together for many years and when my children were younger they had fun helping me decorate bulletin boards, prepare crafts, and other tasks.

How are you doing physically?

Have you ever been physically exhausted and the world looked bleak but then you realized things weren't so bad after a good night's sleep? That's because our physical well-being affects our minds, emotions, and spirits. I was reading an article recently about a psychiatrist who was talking about people getting off antidepressant medications. She strongly suggested that they see a therapist but also added that "among my patients, the ones who are most likely to get off meds are also the ones who do regular cardio [exercise]." (Beth Levine in "You're Not Moody, You're Normal!" The Oprah Magazine, April 2015) So make sure you take care of yourself physically by eating healthy foods, getting enough sleep, and exercising regularly.

How are you doing emotionally and mentally?

If you are emotionally healthy you're able to express your emotions appropriately and manage them positively. When you're feeling good physically then it's easier to manage your emotions. Likewise, feeling good physically and emotionally will help your mental health and increase your ability to stay focused, process and store information and understand what you hear and see.

When you are physically, emotionally, and mentally healthy you can participate in the good things in life fully and cope with the challenges and stresses of life when things aren't going so well.



Your spiritual state affects you physically, emotionally, and mentally

If you are struggling with your physical, emotional, and mental health, it may be because you're ignoring your spiritual side. Studies show that the condition of a person's spirit can affect their overall health and that people who pay attention to their spiritual wellbeing are generally healthier than those who don't. People who engage in spiritual practices often recover from physical illness more quickly than people who don't. Paying attention to your spiritual nature by spending time with God through spiritual practices can help improve your emotional and mental well-being.

Plan

So now that we've seen how important our spiritual nature is to our general well-being, how can we find time in our busy lives to focus on our spirituality and God? We think of the Sabbath day as Sunday, when we usually find ourselves busy with our children and youth. But Sabbath time can be any time that you designate in your life.



As you've probably heard it said before, we're all given the same amount of time but it's up to us how we choose to use it. Perhaps you feel that you have no extra time in your life, but imagine that someone gives you free tickets to something you really enjoy, whether it's a concert, a sports event, or a free massage at the spa. I'm betting that you would probably figure out a way to use those free tickets despite your busy schedule. Spending time with God should be just as important to us as using those free tickets.

Some of us might have more work and family responsibilities than others, but we generally find time to do the things we need to do to take care of ourselves physically, such as taking time to eat and visit the doctor. Taking care of our spiritual needs is just as important, but we may need to plan and schedule our spiritual time or we'll find ourselves continually putting it off until another time. When I teach spiritual journaling I suggest to participants that they actually schedule their writing time in their planner or calendar and then respect it as much as they would any other important appointment. So you should consider doing the same thing for your spiritual time.

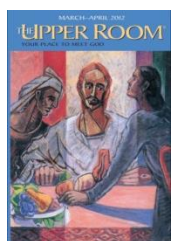
Too often we feel guilty about taking time out for ourselves and I think we need to change this way of thinking. Be firm about your need for spiritual refreshment. Explain to your family and friends how important this is for you and ask them to respect this special time. Learn to say "no" and learn when it's time to stop "doing things." I used to burn the candle at both ends and stay up late to get things done, but when I was tired I didn't work efficiently and activities that should be joyful were a burden. I found out that when I got a good night's sleep I could get more done in less time and I enjoyed it more.

I would advise Christian Ed directors or Sunday school superintendents to be on the look-out for signs of burnout in your teachers and staff and offer regular times when they can take time off and attend worship or other spiritual activities. Team teaching, having other people come in and lead a special all Sunday school program now and then, and giving teachers the summer are off are all ways you can help your people avoid burn out. You can also share this booklet with them!

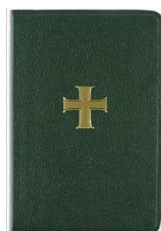
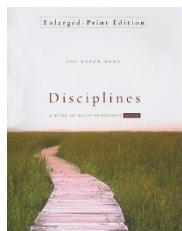
Unplug

Although electronic devices can be used for spiritual refreshment they can also be distracting, and a full email inbox can create anxiety. So you might want to try taking a break from your phone or computer for short periods of time, especially if you're involved in a spiritual practice such as meditation or yoga. If you're worried about missing an emergency call you can adjust the settings on your phone to allow only certain people to get through during your spiritual time.

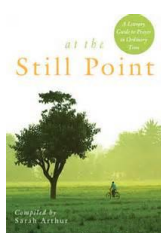
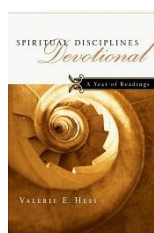
Daily Devotionals



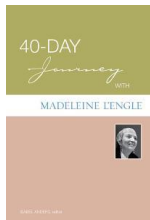
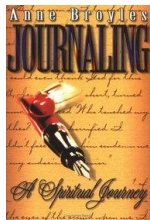
A very simple way of adding some spiritual refreshment to your life is by using a daily devotional book. There are a great variety of these available. Some of them are in magazine form, such as [The Upper Room](#), which is published quarterly and includes scripture readings, meditations written by people from around the world, a prayer, and a prayer focus for each day. The Upper Room comes out of the United Methodist tradition but other denominations and independent publishers offer similar magazines.



You can also go with a devotional book that covers a year's worth of readings. The Upper Room offers a devotional book called [Disciplines](#) each year which features daily readings by writers from diverse Christian backgrounds. There are many other good resources from this publisher including [A Guide to Prayer for All Who Seek God](#), one of my personal favorites.



[A Spiritual Disciplines Devotional](#) has five readings for each week and focuses on a different discipline each month. [At the Still Point: A Literary Guide to Prayer in Ordinary Time](#) includes scripture, excerpts from literary works, and poems for each week.



Other resources also offer an opportunity to spend a few weeks or longer focused on a particular practice or topic. The book [Journaling: A Spiritual Journey](#) focuses on a different method of spiritual journaling for each of six weeks and suggests daily exercises. The [40-Day Journey series](#) of books focus on past and present Christian leaders such as Madeline L'Engle, Julian of Norwich, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Each book has forty chapters with scripture, excerpts from the leader's writings, journaling exercises, and prayer. I've used several of these books for my devotional time and didn't worry about finishing them in 40 days.

You'll find a list of more devotional books, magazines, and websites listed at the end of this booklet.

Spiritual practices

Besides devotional reading, there are many other spiritual practices that we can use to rejuvenate our spirits. Many people think of spiritual practices as the ones identified in books such as the classic [Celebration of Discipline](#) by Richard Foster. These practices include meditation, prayer, fasting, study, simplicity, solitude, submission, service, confession, worship, guidance, and celebration. There are many websites with information about traditional spiritual disciplines

However, any activity which brings us closer to God can be considered a spiritual practice. It's also important to realize that not every spiritual practice works for every person. So you may have to experiment to find the practices which work for you.

Movement

Often people find it difficult to pray without something definite to focus on. There are many spiritual tools that involve our senses which we can use in our prayer lives.

Some people enjoy using movement to pray. There's a book called [Praying with the Body](#) which shows you how to pray the psalms using body movements.

[Walking a labyrinth](#) is also a wonderful spiritual practice. You may be surprised to find out that there are labyrinths in your area, inside and outdoors, which you are allowed to walk. There is actually a [labyrinth finder website](#). Even if you can't find a labyrinth, you can [purchase a finger labyrinth](#) or even [print one](#) out. There are also [virtual labyrinths](#) to walk online.

There may be someone in your area offering [Christian yoga](#). If not, there are [DVDs](#) you can purchase or you can attend a regular yoga class and input your own faith into the class.

Tactile objects

Tactile objects are also used to help people pray. Prayer beads have been around for centuries and many religions have some form of this. Roman Catholics and some Protestants use the rosary for prayer, but there are also many different versions of prayer beads. There are [several books](#) which will teach you how to make your own beads or you can purchase them ready made. Prayer beads can be very simple; you can take a string and put five different colored beads on it and each can represent a different person or something you wish to pray about.



Knitting or crocheting can be meditative and help us to pray. It's best to use a simple, repetitive pattern for prayerful knitting or crocheting. Many churches have prayer shawl ministries where shawls are created by praying for a person as the shawl is made. There are [books](#) about this as well as the [Prayer Shawl Ministry website](#) which has information, patterns, and prayers. Even something like working with clay or other art forms can be prayerful.

Visuals

Visual aids have been used for spiritual practices since ancient times. Christians from some denominations use icons for meditation and there are [books available](#) on praying with icons. Mandalas, which we usually think of as connected to Eastern religions, have also been used for meditative purposes in the Christian tradition. The rose windows of medieval cathedrals are mandalas. Hildegarde of Bingen was a nun and mystic who created visionary symbolic paintings in unmistakable mandala-forms. A more contemporary practice is [Praying in Color](#) which is a form of prayerful doodling.

Sounds

Sounds can be used as an aid to prayer. Taizé is a type of prayer service that uses simple, repetitive chants along with scripture readings, simple prayers, and silence. Some churches offer these on a monthly basis. You can also purchase [CDs of Taize chants](#) which you can listen to at home or in the car.



Some people find the Tibetan singing bowl, which produces a harmonic bell-like sound, helps them focus while meditating.

CDs of [guided meditations for Christians](#) are available. [My Morning Prayer](#) is a CD with seven services of prayer, scripture, poetry, and music. You can listen to them if you have a commute to work. There is also a CD called [My Evening Prayer](#) for the ride home.

Smell and taste

Smell and taste can also be used for spiritual refreshment. The Roman Catholic Church has used incense since ancient times. Of course our sense of taste is involved when we take the bread and wine during Holy Communion.

Online resources

There are many great resources for spiritual formation online. Some of them are listed at the end of this booklet. A number of the daily devotionals available in print are available online as well. You may be able to subscribe and be sent a daily devotional by email from the online websites.

Gratefulness.org is a great website for spiritual formation. On this website you can watch inspirational videos, walk a virtual labyrinth, and send uplifting e-cards. You can also light a virtual candle or listen to bells and chants for different times of the day and night.

[D365](#) is a devotional which is publicized as being for young people, but I think people of all ages can benefit from it. Each devotional has music, scripture, and writings from different people on a particular theme. You can subscribe by email and there's also an app for Apple devices.

Creating a Sacred Space

Another thing that can help you find spiritual refreshment in your life is creating a sacred space in your home. This doesn't require a lot of room. A small table or an area of your desk can be used for this purpose. You can collect objects which have meaning to you, your prayer books, and candles. The Women of the ELCA website offers an online resource for creating [Sacred Spaces](#) in your home.

Retreats

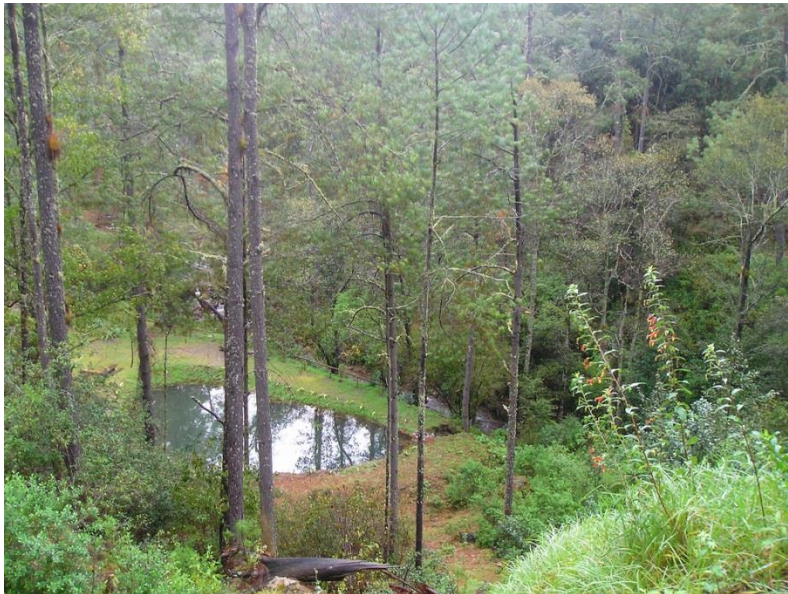
Going on a retreat can also be a way to refresh your spirit. There are many ways to do this and many options available. You might want to sign up for an organized retreat which may last for as little as a morning or as long as a week. You can search online for retreat centers in your area. Some of these offer retreats for a fee which includes programming and meals. Retreat centers often offer their space for a set fee; if you have a group of people you can put together your own retreat or you may be able to attend alone and have your own self-directed retreat.

Personal Retreat Resources

You can plan your own personal retreat, either in your own home or backyard or at another site. It can last for any length of time you choose; it can be as short as a few minutes or last for a weekend or longer.

Three books which offer suggestions for creating a personal retreat are [*Wilderness Time: A Guide for Spiritual Retreat*](#), [*Time Away: A Guide for Personal Retreat*](#), and [*20-Minute Retreats*](#).

There are also some websites with tips on how to do this such as [Retreat Day](#) and [Just Between Us](#).



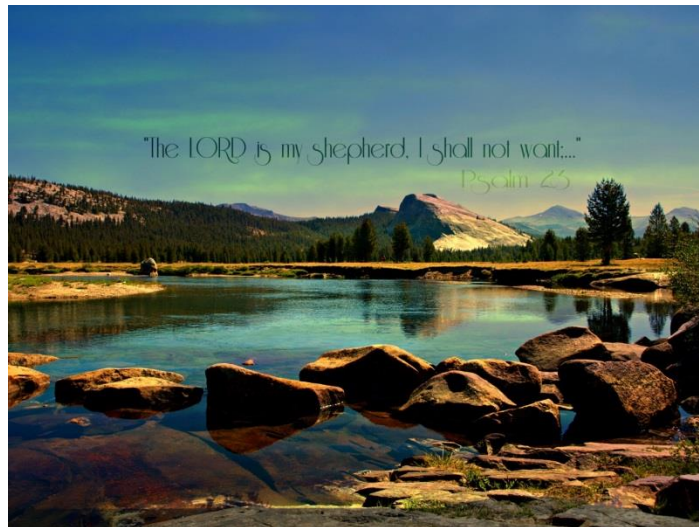
Psalm 23

We sometimes feel driven to do more and more and think that is what God wants from us. But should we really be doing more or would doing less be more effective?

Take some time to read through Psalm 23 and as you read I'd like you to ask yourself how God restores your soul – is it by giving you more work or by letting you rest in him?

The Lord is my shepherd;
I shall not want.

He makes me to lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside the still waters.
He restores my soul;
He leads me in the paths of righteousness
For His name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil;
For You are with me;
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil;
My cup runs over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
All the days of my life;
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord
Forever. *-New King James Version*



Devotional resources

Books

[*40 Day Journey Series*](#)

The 40-Day Journey series invites readers to take a personal spiritual journey with a Christian leader from the past or present. Each book begins with a short introduction to the life of the leader and then offers forty chapters, each of which includes a reading from the subject's writings, scripture selections from the Bible, a journal-writing exercise, and a prayer.

[*At the Still Point: A Literary Guide to Prayer in Ordinary Time*](#)

This book includes scripture, excerpts from literary works, and poems for each week.

[*Daily Devotions with William Barclay*](#)

These 365 devotions are from the writings of William Barclay, author of the popular Daily Study Bible.

[*Daily Feast: Meditations from Feasting on the Word*](#)

These daily devotionals draw from the wealth of writing in the Feasting on the Word commentaries to present inspirational reflections for each day of the year. Each day of the week contains Scripture passages for the coming Sunday from the Revised Common Lectionary, excerpts from the commentaries for reflection, a response, and a prayer. This resource is available for each of the three lectionary years.

[*God Is Still Speaking 365 Daily Devotionals*](#)

This is a collection of light-hearted, God-filled, and provocative devotionals for the person who thinks devotionals are “too religious.” The Stillspeaking Writers' Group provides relevant, brief, insightful devotionals designed to give you a powerful jolt each day. Each easy to read devotional provides a scripture verse, reflection and prayer for every day of the year.

[*A Guide to Prayer for All Who Seek God*](#)

This book offers readings for each week based on the church year. There is an opening affirmation, a petition of prayer, and daily scripture selections. The readings include excerpts from writers such as C.S. Lewis, Henri Nouwen, Mother Teresa, John Wesley, and others.

[*Journaling: A Spiritual Journey*](#)

Journaling focuses on a different method of spiritual journaling for each of six weeks and suggests daily exercises. Although this book is out of print, there are still copies available on Amazon.com from third party sellers.

[Spiritual Disciplines Devotional: A Year of Readings](#)

This book has five readings for each week and focuses on a different discipline each month.

[The Upper Room Disciplines](#)

This book includes a year's worth of scripture readings and devotionals by writers from diverse Christian backgrounds. An outline for small group use is also included.

CDs

[My Evening Prayer: Seven Daily Services for People on the Go](#)

My Evening Prayer contains seven settings of evening prayer on a two-CD set, one for each evening of the week. Each service lasts approximately twenty minutes and includes a booklet containing a transcript of the entire recording.

[My Morning Prayer: Seven Daily Services for People on the Go](#)

Ideal for commuters, this two-CD set contains seven separate settings of Morning Prayer, one for each day of the week. Each service lasts for approximately twenty minutes and includes a morning hymn, two psalms with psalm prayers, a scripture passage, a canticle, intercessions, the Lord's Prayer, a concluding prayer, and a blessing.

Magazines available in print only

[Christ in Our Home](#)

Christ in Our Home is a quarterly devotional resource that encourages readers to live out their faith daily. Each reflective reading is accompanied by a daily scripture reference and prayer for the day. It is available in a large print version and as an audio CD.

[These Days](#)

These daily meditations and devotion are published four times a year and written by clergy and lay leaders.

[The Word in Season](#)

This daily devotional, published quarterly, enriches life with a contemporary message for today's Christian. The Word in Season reflects on the themes of Sunday's texts with relevant meditations throughout the week.

Magazines available in print and online

[Forward Day by Day](#)

Forward Day by Day is a booklet of daily inspirational meditations reflecting on a specific Bible passage, chosen from the daily lectionary readings as listed in the Revised Common Lectionary or the Daily Office from the Episcopal Church's Book of Common Prayer. It is available in Regular Print, Spanish-language (called *Día a Día*), Large Print, E-mail, [e-book](#), Braille, and an audio version for those with a hearing impairment. There is a charge for an e-mail subscription but the daily readings can be viewed at no cost by clicking [here](#).

[Moravian Daily Texts](#)

This daily devotional from the Moravian Church offers printed texts, hymn verses and prayers. Each day's entry includes "watchwords" drawn from Old and New Testament verses as well as recommended daily Bible readings that allow readers to complete the Bible in two years and Psalms in one year. A printed book for the year is available for purchase or you can subscribe to daily e-mails.

[The Upper Room](#)

This devotional is printed monthly and has daily devotionals written by Christians around the world. Printed copies as well as digital editions are available for purchase. You can also sign up to receive the daily devotional free by e-mail.

Online devotionals

[D365 Daily Devotional](#)

These free daily online devotions with music are also available by e-mail.

[Daily Devotions from First Radio Parish Church of America](#)

These online devotions for mainline Protestants are available to read or watch as a video.

[God Pause Daily Devotions](#)

These free e-mail devotions are short, meaningful reflections on the following Sunday's lessons and gospel and are written by Luther Seminary alumni.

[Gratefulness.org](#)

This website includes videos, walking a virtual labyrinth, and uplifting e-cards to send. You can also light a virtual candle or listen to bells and chants for different times of the day and night.

[PresbyCan Daily Devotional](#)

The Presbyterian Church of Canada manages these online daily devotionals. A free e-mail subscription is available and the devotions can also be listened to as a podcast or with music.

[Still Speaking Daily Devotional](#)

Daily devotions from the United Church in Christ based on the ecumenical "Daily Readings" are available for free by e-mail.

www.prcli.org



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