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Health-Enhancing Endeavors Learned Through Life

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INTERVIEW WITH CALVIN ROCK, PHD, DMIN HEALTH-ENHANCING ENDEAVORS LEARNED THROUGH LIFE

Petr Cincala, on behalf of the *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*: It's so good to talk to you today. I hear that you have just celebrated your 92nd birthday. To what do you attribute your long, healthy life?

Calvin Rock: You are correct: I just turned 92. I would say that adoption of health reform at an early age has allowed, or better stated, driven me to seek to maximize the longevity potential with which I was born. As I have aged, my goal has not been to merely “feel good” but to achieve maximum enhancement of my spiritual, mental, physical, and emotional powers. While I have enjoyed what the older saints might call a “reasonable portion of health and strength,” I know that my threescore and additional years would have yielded greater fruitage had I been even more careful. However, I am absolutely certain that Heaven has been pleased when I have tried to do those things that not only preserve but continuously develop the qualities I inherited.

JACL: Thank you. As you think back to your early days in ministry, would you share a memory that really stands out and relates to conflict, especially in the context of leadership?

CR: I was exposed to good health habits by my hard-working single-parent mother and church schoolteachers in the early grades.

Calvin Rock, PhD, DMin, is a retired pastor-evangelist, associate ministerial director of the Southern Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, president of Oakwood College, and vice president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

Petr Činčala, PhD, associate professor of World Mission, is director of the Institute of Church Ministry, director of NCD America, director of Doctor of Missiology at Andrews University, and executive editor of the *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*.

JACL: What are some tips you can offer our readers in regard to maintaining spiritual health?

CR: First of all, I recommend maintaining a special time and place for morning prayer and meditation, before assuming other activities. This ensures that the pressures of the day don't get in the way and distract from needed devotion. Also, I recommend engaging in textual and topical Bible study (especially the righteousness of Christ), not just "reading the Bible through." In addition, I recommend maintaining close, regular consultation with the works of Ellen G. White. I also suggest engaging in some form of fasting—regularly scheduled or dictated by events.

JACL: That's great. Thank you. What about an area closely tied to spiritual health—mental health?

CR: First and foremost, I truly believe that studying the word of God sharpens the intellect as no other activity does. Second, I believe that maintaining physical health through proper eating habits, as well as an adequate exercise program, is also vital to mental health. A third and very effective means, one which I have enjoyed, is memorizing special quotes, names, numbers, prose, and poetry; solving puzzles (especially sudoku); and playing games (usually at home) that require memory.

JACL: You already alluded to it a bit, but what are some of your recommendations to maintaining physical health?

CR: I eat two meals a day, one at 9:00 a.m. and the other at 4:00 p.m. I eat an abundance of salads, raw vegetables, and fruits, and I remain a vegetarian. I always try to drink a sufficient amount of water. When the weather allows, I try to expose my limbs to sunshine and exercise daily. When restricted on trips, I walk the hotel halls and parking lots where I am staying. My favorite exercise activity is golf, best enjoyed when walking. When I was younger—even into my 60s and 70s—I swam a lot at a local gym and for several years paid to have a personal trainer. I try to get seven to eight hours of sleep a night on a firm or semi-firm mattress, and occasionally I sleep for 10 minutes to one hour during the day—if I'm tired. Finally, I make it a priority to see my doctor sooner, rather than later.

JACL: And all this has worked well for you! What advice do you have for our readers on maintaining emotional health?

CR: First and foremost, avoid stimulating drinks and foods. I love sports but try not to get too absorbed in mind-crippling, emotion-sapping attachment to hyper-exciting events (football, boxing, etc.). I try to avoid long periods without a vacation, and sometimes I take the one- or two-day kind right at home. When I traveled a lot on work assignments, I sometimes structured trips to remain at my hotel an extra day all alone just to rest. I refrained from politicking (campaigning) for position, and I always tried to spend a few minutes alone in prayer and relaxed meditation before beginning an important committee, board, or business meeting. At each level of responsibility, I counseled with my superior (president/chairman) regarding highly controversial issues before my antagonists did, thereby getting ahead of the problem. Among other lessons, I have learned to (a) avoid thinking I am always right, (b) refuse to worry when I have done my best, (c) value transparency over secrecy in communicating with people, and (d) forgive even though forgetting is not practical. Finally, I recommend having a valid will/trust in place, even at a young age.

JACL: What would you say to pastors who go through major emotional events? Do you have any advice on how to recover and stay well?

CR: There are a number of options: counseling, a change of venue, the restructuring of lifestyle (work habits, diet, exercise, etc.), and most importantly, renewed dedication to reading good literature, especially the Bible and Ellen White's *The Ministry of Healing*.

JACL: Yes, yes. Thank you. Now, we all know health is important. But why is health so especially important for leaders?

CR: Good health promotes clear thinking, calm emotions, a positive appearance, and durable energy—all of which assist in maximum efficiency.

JACL: What are the most common mistakes pastors and leaders make in terms of taking care of themselves, according to your observations?

CR: Overworking and eating late in the evening and at night—in fact, ignoring our prophet’s advice in *Counsels on Diets and Foods* (pp. 141, 176) that two meals a day would be better than one.

JACL: Do you have any advice for aging, veteran leaders?

CR: Yes. Continue as many of the good habits (especially walking) already established, with special attention to daytime physical rest (sleep) when possible. Have a good medical plan and—even though doctors seem less aggressive about various attentions than before—read, ask questions, and fight hard to maintain the best health possible. Most of all, keep moving! Also, even while experiencing the inevitable deterioration of the body, remember that “It was after John had grown old in the service of the Lord that . . . he received more communications from heaven than he had received during the rest of his lifetime” (White, 1958a, p. 33), and that “The true minister of Christ should make continual improvement. The afternoon of his life may be more mellow and productive of fruit than the morning sun. It may continue to increase in size and brightness until it drops behind the western hills” (White, 1958b, p. 221).

JACL: Thank you. I really appreciate your holistic look at your own health and health of pastors and leaders.

References

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