

Sabbatical Guidelines

(adapted from The Navigators)

Taking a sabbatical every few years is a necessary part of nurturing your soul and relationship with God. A sabbatical is an intentionally planned time away from routine and regular responsibilities for the purpose of connecting with God in ways that renew you in the Lord so that your joy in Jesus and in life's journey with Him is pervasive.

Overview

A sabbatical is not a vacation but a guided process where one deliberately trusts God for the unfinished as one disengages from normal ministry and leadership involvement to allow for serious evaluation of life and ministry.

Why a Sabbatical?

Experiencing sabbatical may be counter to American culture but will pay significant dividends to the individual and to the Kingdom of God.

In the ministry, the messenger is the message. The messenger must embody the message. A sabbatical is a time of freshly engaging the gospel of Jesus Christ.

A sabbatical is an application of the biblical principle of rest—times that we deliberately trust God with the unfinished. As an act of faith, we disengage from our regular work for the purposes of worship, rest, renewal, and repair.

What Will You Do During Your Sabbatical?

1. Release and Relinquish: disengage from the ministry and leadership.

2. Rest and Recovery: “Rest” doesn’t mean ceasing from all activities. Rather, you stop ministry activities and engage in activities and experiences that restore you emotionally and feed you spiritually. You should be out of regularly scheduled ministry activities but not out of fellowship. Identify those people that walk with you well for the purpose of processing your thoughts and feelings.

3. Reflect and Refocus: This is an unhurried time to pray, “Lord, anything You want to say to me?” What have been meaningful times and places for you to hear from the Lord in the past? Posture yourself to hear His voice.

4. Realignment and/or Reassignment: “Father, what changes in life and ministry would you like me to make as a result of hearing from You?” This doesn’t necessarily mean a change of roles but a willingness to hold your current ministry in an open, surrendered hand. The goal is to experience maximum contribution in your next season of life.

5. Re-Entry, Re-Engagement: You will transition back into ministry. Expect emotional stresses, pace issues, spiritual warfare, and struggles in working out desired changes in life and ministry. Also expect the joy of being refreshed physically, reaffirming His vision for you, and gaining renewed perspective.

Getting Started

*Speak with key church leaders, explaining and casting vision for the purposes and benefits of a sabbatical. Gain their support and voice as the purposes and benefits of a sabbatical are then shared with the greater church family. Secure the blessing of the church to take a sabbatical.

(Please call upon the Puget Sound Baptist Association leaders to add their voice to casting the vision if helpful.)

The vision is to help the church adopt a policy of providing a sabbatical periodically for church leaders. Many churches do so on a 7-10-year basis. Depending on the spiritual and financial health of the church, sabbaticals range from 1-6 months. Most often the time is 2-3 months.

*Determine the calendar dates most strategic for the pastor to be away from church responsibilities.

*Determine the budget necessary to provide a sabbatical.

>Cost for guest preaching in addition to providing full salary and benefits to the pastor.

>Cost for travel and/or continuing education opportunities (optional).

*Determine who will cover what responsibilities in the church while the pastor is away.
(pastoral care, funerals, leadership, day-to-day operations, etc.)

*Consult with a Sabbatical Advisor to help plan and prepare for taking a sabbatical. The role of a Sabbatical Advisor is to shepherd you through the sabbatical process and experience.

(You may call upon a PSBA leader or another spiritual director.)

*Create a Sabbatical Support Group. Anyone taking a sabbatical is in danger of experiencing a lack of community and a loss of perspective, and a sense of isolation. A Sabbatical Support Group would ideally be 2-3 couples who have a good relationship with you and your spouse. This group meets with you and your spouse to provide a safe environment for processing your journey. A helpful group will:

>have your best interest at heart

>be willing to speak truth to you

>be people with whom you're willing to be transparent and vulnerable

>be willing to meet with you during your sabbatical

Illustration of a Sabbatical Support Group meeting:

>You lead the meeting

>Give an update and bring up issues God is stirring in you

>Give the group an opportunity to express their thoughts

>Pray together

A Word to Spouses

“When do I get my sabbatical?” is a sentiment often expressed by spouses of pastors on sabbatical. The wife should also disengage from church ministries during the sabbatical, but she also continues her ministry of parenting and maintaining a household. This reality may challenge or limit a spouse’s opportunity to rest, reflect, and refocus.

When putting together a sabbatical plan, a Sabbatical Advisor will acknowledge the spouse’s workload, encourage husband and wife to examine parental and household responsibilities and consider how the load can be lifted or shared during the sabbatical so that both can benefit as much as possible.

Spiritual Transformation

Spiritual transformation is a major focus during sabbatical. One needs to move toward inner freedom in the Lord to look at issues like personal brokenness, false identity, unresolved sin and woundedness, addictions, performance, perfectionism, hiddenness, shame, fears, guilt, pride, anger, etc. Dealing with these below-the-surface issues in our lives helps us move from living from the heart of flesh to living from the heart Jesus gave us. Your Sabbatical Advisor could be very helpful with the process of transformation.

Helpful Tips and Lessons Learned

*If you have school-aged children, plan for some of your time to be spent on family time and fun.

*Plan for some of your time to be spent in silence and solitude. Your advisor can help if spending this kind of time is new to you.

*Plan to sleep more than usual. It’s okay. You will discover that you were more tired than you knew.

*Expect spiritual warfare, especially as you examine and deal with deep, inner issues. God will be surfacing issues in order to apply His grace. The enemy will seek to bring shame and condemnation.

*This is not a sabbatical from life. Expect to spend time on family responsibilities.

*Expect to feel stress, especially in the first phase when you are decompressing from ministry responsibilities and in the last phase when you are preparing to re-enter church and ministry life.

--Sabbatical Guidelines have been prepared by Scott Brewer, PSBA Pastor Care Director and adapted from materials of The Navigators--