

Planning a Sabbatical

Becoming a Sabbath Community: A Guide for Churches

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Questions to consider when planning a Sabbatical:

Sourced from: Barton, Ruth Haley. *Embracing Rhythms of Work and Rest (Transforming Resources)* InterVarsity Press.

Hopes and Dreams

What am I hearing from God regarding God's invitation to sabbatical time?

What would I like to see happen during this sabbatical time?

What are my hopes and dreams?

If you have trouble getting started, pull out your journal or a legal pad and write across the top:

What I am hoping for and dreaming of for my sabbatical is . . . and then just write.

Don't censor yourself or hold back at all. No one else has to see what you are writing here because you will still create a more formal plan for others to see when you are ready.

- What are my hopes and dreams for rest and replenishment?
- What would bring me delight?
- What gifts from God do I want to delight in?
- How does travel fit into my needs and desires?
- What does my personality need to experience in order to find refreshment and replenishment? What does my body need and what would I like to experience in my body?
- What will I need to do to arrange for that?

Spiritual Opportunity

- Is there a spiritual practice you have been wanting to learn more about or experience more deeply?
- How can you build that into your sabbatical schedule?
- How might you deepen your attention to your inner life during sabbatical?
- Are there psychological issues/spiritual questions/questions for discernment you would like to attend to in the spaciousness of sabbatical time, and what kind of accompaniment are you willing to seek out—a spiritual director, therapist, spiritual friend?
- How do you respond to the idea of keeping a sabbatical journal, and do you want to incorporate this as a practice?

- Is there anything related to your vocation, hobbies, and interests that you want to learn more about on sabbatical? What resources and opportunities are there for this?
- Are there any friends or relatives you want to be intentional about including in your sabbatical planning—people who are life-giving for you rather than work-related or life-draining? Brainstorm ways to make these connections happen.

Boundaries

- What do you want to give your attention to on sabbatical?
- What boundaries will need to be put in place in order for you to bring this attention?

Say it to God in your own words. Begin to list out the boundaries you want to put in place in order to protect this most precious season. Be as concrete as possible.

Sourced from: Alves, David. A Sabbatical Primer for Pastors: How to Initiate and Navigate a Spiritual Renewal Leave (pp. 86-87). paupakpress. Kindle Edition.

Dream, Discern and Design

Dream

What would your preferred outcome of your sabbatical look like?

Do you want a new sense of purpose? Perhaps you're hoping for a deeper experience of the Father's love. Or has reading the Word become boring or rote, because you've been mining for sermon material for so long?

Discern

Discerning is a little different than planning. Imagine if we as leaders did more discerning and opinions, and we trust that the Lord is the one directing those three as we form our plans. Discerning is finding out what He's doing, what He's up to, and aligning ourselves to Him and His plans. We sense what He's doing and where He's going, and we do and go with Him. Jesus said that He only did what He saw the Father doing. He only spoke what He heard the Father speaking.

- What hunger or desire is the Father placing in you?
- What spiritual season are you in?

Design

- How will you lay out the sabbatical months?
- Do you have a particular strategy for the time? Could each month have a different focus?
- Will you go away or travel in the beginning, middle, or toward the end of your sabbatical? Your travel component should not be exhausting. Where will you go? What will you focus on? Is the family able to go with you if you travel?

- You don't need to over-plan, but I would suggest a theme for each month you're on leave from your local ministry.

Eg's:

- Month 1: Unwind (vacation; spend time alone; take your spouse to a retreat centre for several days)
- Month 2: Rest, read, draw near
- Month 3: Reflect and redirect focus (at home, assuming it's a quiet place)

OR

- Vacation: 2 weeks
- Month 1: Upward (time alone with the Lord at your favourite Christian campground or conference centre)
- Month 2: Inward (reading devotional material and journaling; debriefing with the Lord and family)
- Month 3: Outward (1 week on retreat to develop a Life Mission Statement or craft a "Rule of Life" and finalize re-entry plan; 1 week considering how to reengage to conserve lessons learned)

Additional questions such as:

- If your spouse works outside the home, how much time can he or she take off?
- How much of the sabbatical will you do together? Except for rare occasions, if employers know far enough in advance, some will give time for family leave. It makes for happier and healthier employees. Don't assume an employer won't cooperate; you may be surprised. This may apply to you, as well, if you're a bi-vocational pastor.
- How much of the time will you do alone? Make sure several weeks are reserved for "alone time." Where will your "desert" be? In what wilderness will you camp?
- If you have children how will you handle their care?
- What resources are available? Are there people you know who may have a holiday property or other contribution they can make?