

Returning to work from a Sabbatical

Becoming a Sabbath Community: A Guide for Churches

Returning to work from a Sabbatical

Sourced from: Barton, Ruth Haley. Embracing Rhythms of Work and Rest (Transforming Resources) (p. 226). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.

One way to bring good closure to a sabbatical before re-entering your life in ministry is to schedule a spiritual retreat, extended time in solitude, and/or time with a spiritual director to “gather up” the gifts contained within your sabbatical. Such gifts may be something as broad and overarching as revisiting and clarifying your sense of God’s call on your life for the next season, or something as practical as how you will schedule the rhythms going forward—your rule of life. (For a full description of a rule of life, see Ruth Haley Barton, Sacred Rhythms.) If you already have one, this is a really good time to take a look at your rule of life to see if it still holds or if changes need to be made.

In particular, if you did not have a sabbath practice before taking sabbatical, or if your practice had slipped, coming back from sabbatical is an ideal time to renew your commitment to this. It’s also a good time to begin other spiritual practices God is impressing on your heart or that you experienced to be particularly fruitful and life-giving on sabbatical.

Here are some questions and areas of reflection to spend time with as you approach re-entry:

Pull out your sabbatical proposal and reflect on each of the areas you listed as needs or desires. Reflect on what happened in those areas and jot down notes and reflections.

- What was good and went well on your sabbatical?
- What was hard and what do you wish might have gone differently?
- What did you learn about yourself on sabbatical?
- How do you want to bring this back to your life in leadership?
- What were the questions you brought into sabbatical and what did God say to you about them? What spiritual practices were most meaningful to you on sabbatical?
- How can you incorporate at least some of that as you resume your normal life?
- Are there any needed changes to make to your schedule and life patterns going forward?
- What surprised you on sabbatical?
- What delighted you?
- What is a favourite story from sabbatical? (You may want to capture this in writing.)
- Is there any physical symbol or icon of this sabbatical season that you want to bring into your space to remind you of what God did during this time and who God was to you?
- Any special Scripture you can claim from this time?

- Are there any thank-you notes or other expressions of gratitude that you don't want to miss as you return?
- What is your sense of calling as you emerge from this time?

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

Ministry Re-entry – Purposeful Re-engagement

Systems Check

- Do I have new, personal, pastoral practices prepared to replace older, unhelpful ones?
- Am I going to “be” and “do” differently than I practiced before my sabbatical?
- Does the church need to change the way we as a community approach ministry and values? Do I have more healthy habits returning to community than when I went away from community? How will I maintain the sense of renewal and refreshment I'm returning with?
- Have I designated one day a week as a Sabbath to enjoy my walk with my Father? If married, hopefully you have agreed together about a day that you'll both observe as your Sabbath.

Spiritual Mentoring / Pastoral Supervision

Who do I have in place to walk with me as I re-enter and establish new patterns?

Reflection

Before you re-enter ministry, take the last four or five days of your sabbatical to review and reflect. Then take the last day or several hours at the end of each reflection day and write a summary of what you want to keep with you through the years until your next sabbatical. Write out what worked for you. What didn't? What would you do differently next time? Make a clear path for your feet as you re-enter your ministry. Put “sticky-notes,” with insights or favourite verses or quotes gleaned from your sabbatical reading, in places where you can review and remind yourself. Ask the Lord for a “favourite verse” that may sum up some new practice or important signpost for the way ahead. How will you conserve what you've gained during your sabbatical?