

What is a Sabbatical?

Most leaders, pastors and churches do not understand the heart of a Sabbatical. There is confusion on what the spirit of a biblical Sabbatical is and why it is vital.

A Sabbatical is not a long vacation. It's not a time to read books on leadership or visit successful churches to learn from them. It's not a time to write a book, do research, or work on some other special project. These are good things to do and it's not that you can't do any of them on a Sabbatical, but they work against the spirit of biblical Sabbath rest.

Also, a Sabbatical is not a job search, and it's not an elder imposed leave of absence to discipline a pastor. When these activities are done in the name of "Sabbatical," it breaks down the trust of church attenders.

The biblical precedent and Christian tradition is for pastors to go on Sabbatical once every seven years. Typical Sabbaticals today are from one to six months long, with three being a standard.

A true Sabbatical is a season of Sabbath for prolonged rest. It's like stringing together a number of Sabbath days. It's an extended time in which you do no work. You do no pastoring, no leading, no ministering, no visioning the future of the church, no sermon planning. You don't try to accomplish anything big. You just "do nothing"!

Yes, nothing! Of course, we don't do nothing as an end in itself — that'd be an empty legalism — our purpose is to worship our Creator and Redeemer (like the Bible teaches in the Sabbath commands of Exodus and Deuteronomy). Dallas Willard explained that the key to Sabbath rest is: "Do nothing! Don't try to make anything happen!" Just be with God. But most of us in Christian leadership can't rest and BE that freely. So, Dallas would say, "First, you need to train in extended solitude and silence with Jesus."

Eventually, after your body stops jittering, after your thoughts stop flitting about, after you start feeling your emotions, after your ideal self that performs and pleases is dismantled, after you experience your nothingness and nakedness before God, after you experience unconditional love, then you can hopefully begin to really rest in your body and soul.

We're putting the words of Psalm 23 to the test. "The Lord is my shepherd," we say with David. "I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul."

There it is! He restores my soul. This soul restoration comes as we submit to the Lord as our Shepherd, lying down and being still in his presence.

What happens on a sabbatical:

Rest - from the work of shepherding

Guidance - Sabbatical Coach

Renewal - marriage, kids and self