

# FIVE REASONS YOUR PASTOR SHOULD TAKE A SABBATICAL

The word “sabbatical” has different meanings depending on the context in which it is used. It has one meaning in the academic community, another meaning in its biblical usage, and still another in many secular settings.

For the purpose of this article, I define sabbatical in simple terms. It simply means time off for rest and/or study. The time can be a few days, a few weeks or, on rare occasions, a few months. The pastor is given paid leave for rest, rejuvenation and, perhaps, deeper study. I would love to see churches of all sizes provide this requirement of their pastor, even if it's only for a few days.

I have the opportunity to work with lay leaders and pastors. I have a pretty good view of both perspectives. And I am convinced that more lay leaders need to insist their pastors take regular breaks even beyond vacations. Allow me to provide five reasons for my rationale.

1. **A pastor has emotional highs and lows unlike most other vocations.** In the course of a day, a pastor can deal with death, deep spiritual issues, great encouragement, petty criticisms, tragedies, illnesses, and celebrations of birth. The emotional roller coaster is draining. Your pastor needs a break—many times a break with no distractions.
2. **A pastor is on 24-hour call.** Most pastors don't have an “off” switch. They go to sleep with the knowledge they could be awakened by a phone call at anytime of the day. Vacations are rarely uninterrupted. It can be an exhausting vocation, and a sabbatical can be a welcome time to slow down.
3. **Pastors need time of uninterrupted study.** It doesn't usually happen in the study at church or home. There is always the crisis or need of the moment. Church members expect sermons that reflect much prayer and study. The pastor's schedule often works against that ideal. The sabbatical can offer much needed, and uninterrupted, study time.

4. **Pastors who have sabbaticals have longer tenure at churches.** Though my information is anecdotal, I do see the trend. And while I cannot prove a cause-and-effect relationship, I feel confident that pastors who have sabbaticals are much more likely to stay at a church because they are less likely to experience burnout.
5. **Pastors who have sabbaticals view the time off as an affirmation from their churches.** I have heard from many pastors who share with me a sentence similar to this one: "I know my church loves me because they give me a sabbatical." Pastors need affirmation. Sabbaticals can accomplish that goal.

I estimate that only about five percent of churches offer sabbaticals. In almost every case where I am familiar, the relationship between pastor and congregation is very healthy. I do think at least one of the reasons is the sabbatical.

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