

FIRST-PERSON: Why sabbaticals matter

by Michael Lewis, posted [Thursday, May 28, 2015 \(4 years ago\)](#)

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ALPHARETTA, Ga. (BP) -- Pastor, you need rest. You were built to rest. God uses healthy pastors to build healthy churches. That's why you and your church's partnership in working through a sabbatical ministry plan may be one of the most important decisions you make about the future health of your church.

As a pastor for more than 25 years -- in churches large and small -- I know what you're thinking: I can't ask for more vacation time. My church will think I'm lazy.

Think again. Sabbaticals aren't vacations. They're a scheduled time of extended rest for your spiritual refreshment and renewal, ideally developed jointly by you and your congregation. Typically, it won't be longer than three months. My hope is that your church will fully support you in this by providing continued salary and benefits during this time and by providing for some of your other expenses.

Why take a sabbatical?

-- The concept is biblical. Sabbatical comes from the biblical word sabbath (related both to the word for "cease" and the number "seven"). God commanded the Israelites to take this day of rest each seventh day in [Exodus 20:8-11](#). In Leviticus 25, the Israelites were to provide "a sabbath of solemn rest for the land" every seventh year. Jesus "returned in the power of the Spirit" following his 40-day wilderness experience ([Luke 4:1-14](#)) and modeled rest before calming the storm in Matthew 8. Rest and renewal aren't optional to the biblical description of a life of ministry. They're a non-negotiable requirement.

-- It will make you more productive. Rest prepares leaders for the ever-growing demands of spiritual leadership like few other activities. Anecdotal evidence has shown that rested leaders return from sabbaticals with a renewed vision for ministry and empowered for more effective service.

-- It will extend your current ministry. Because you'll come back to your place of ministry service refreshed and renewed, you'll be more likely to stay longer. In a recent blog post on the topic of pastoral sabbaticals, LifeWay Christian Resources President Thom Rainer reported anecdotal evidence of pastors returning from sabbatical and serving at their current ministry locations much longer than pastors who didn't take a sabbatical.

-- It will add months -- and maybe years -- to your life. Ministry stress, if not handled correctly, can be hazardous to your health. Regular sabbaticals can help ministry leaders deal with the additional stresses inevitable in pastoral ministry in a healthy way.

-- It will revitalize you spiritually. Getting focused time alone with the Lord remains the most important reason for a pastor to take a sabbatical. This extended time with God will allow a pastor to get a renewed vision for God's unique purpose for his life and ministry.

At the North American Mission Board, we believe local churches -- and the pastors who lead them -- are the front-line forces for pushing back lostness throughout the continent. It's a huge task. To do this, we need to all be at top strength. Pastor, that includes you.

For more resources to help you begin this conversation with the lay leadership of your church, visit NAMB's pastoral care and development website (www.namb.net/pastor-support).

<http://www.bpnews.net/44837/firstperson-why-sabbaticals-matter>