



**Proposed Outline for Pastoral Sabbatical**  
(Particular attention to those experiencing burnout)

This is a general outline of some proposed foundational pieces to a sabbatical. Please review, then we can talk about it and link to more specific resources, etc.

**1. Psychological assessment:**

A psychological assessment for the pastor is recommended. For married pastors, depending on the issues, it may be recommended that the counselor interview the couple as well. Examples of questions to pose include:

- a. Is the pastor experiencing depression or burnout? If so, to what level of depression?
- b. Is medication recommended?
- c. How well can the pastor participate in his/her own recovery?
- d. Can the pastor put protocols in place on his/her own?
- e. Explore the question, "How did I get here?"
- f. Identify core issues that lead to depression/burnout
- g. Determine what needs to change.
- h. Communicate general results to District (if necessary)

An initial assessment with a qualified counselor will help determine the full nature of the sabbatical and suggested recovery plan. This will also help determine the types of assessment tools to employ at various points during the sabbatical. A physical exam may also be wise.

**2. Clearly identify the purpose of the sabbatical:**

An assessment can help determine the approach to a sabbatical designed for rest and recovery from burnout. But there are other types of sabbaticals such as cultivating greater spiritual intimacy with God and others and a professional development sabbatical for studying a particular topic or investigating new vision for one's ministry and church. This is slow, sacred time. It should not be rushed. Appropriate time off for rest/recovery, re-connecting with God and key relationships, and realignment for ministry going forward is of utmost importance spiritually, emotionally, mentally, relationally.

**3. Make sure the pastor and local board (and district if necessary) are on the same page:**

It is vital that the pastor and local board communicate clearly and agree about the nature, purpose, and expectations of the sabbatical. For instance, there should be agreement about how the pastor and the church will mutually benefit from the pastor taking a sabbatical, as well as the length of time. Here are some considerations:

- a. Support & Boundaries
  - i. Length of time
  - ii. Respect the pastor's time, space and family
  - iii. Friendship, yes,
  - iv. Pastoral requests, strict NO
  - v. Goals/objectives clearly communicated
  - vi. Expectations upon completion clearly communicated
  - vii. Be flexible with expectations and that change of plans might be necessary due to human nature, infinite number of variables.
  - viii. Identify who in the local church will help convey and be accountable for reinforcing these guidelines?
  - ix. Ensuring the leadership of the church is covered well while the pastor is away.
  - x. Ensuring adequate resourcing the pastor is available.

#### 4. General Suggested Framework for a 3-month Sabbatical:

- a. **1<sup>st</sup> Month (after initial assessments):** Need for total shutdown/rest—time for settling down, recovery.
    - i. What restores the body, soul, spirit?
    - ii. Where will the sabbatical take place?
    - iii. Realize it will take extended time to “settle”
    - iv. Physical exercise program – what does the pastor enjoy doing?
    - v. Meet with spiritual friend/mentor – Needs to be willing to walk with the pastor in uncomfortable places and be full of grace; supportive conversation, encouragement, ability to listen well. Suggest a seasoned pastor with great pastoral skills.
  
  - b. **2<sup>nd</sup> Month:** Focus on who I am in Christ (apart from how I can use it in ministry).
    - i. Become reacquainted with God’s unconditional love *for me* (apart from what I do for God, since I cannot do anything to make him love and accept me more)
    - ii. Exploring new spiritual disciplines and re-learning those more familiar. Over time, craft a “rule of life” for cultivating one’s walk with God.
    - iii. Identifying significant spiritual reading
    - iv. Strongly consider journaling
    - v. Consider taking the Spiritual Transformation Inventory (STI) Todd Hall
      1. Identify specific areas to work on
      2. More contemplative prayer – time alone
      3. Journaling
      4. Ongoing Spiritual conversation with spiritual friend/mentor
    - vi. Continuing Practices from first month:
      1. Continuing Sabbath/restorative practices (what puts fuel back in the tank?)
      2. Continuing to focus on my spiritual life with God, (rather than what it can do for my ministry).
      3. Continuing to focus on building my connection to my spouse and family if married.
      4. Continuing to focus on my connection to friends who truly add value to my life (not pastoral visits or those who drain my tank).
  
  - c. **3<sup>rd</sup> Month:** Focus on Who I am as it relates to ministry.
    - i. Consider specific assessments to reaffirm specific calling and gifts.
      1. What is the nature of my deepest calling? What has God called me to do?
      2. What are my specific areas of gifting?
      3. Where is my greatest joy in ministry?
    - ii. Come to grips with my greatest limitations
      1. How willing am I to receive the gift of limitations?
      2. Am I willing to delegate? To let go (if that is the issue)
    - iii. Considerable critical self-reflection regarding “who I am” in relation to pastoral ministry.
    - iv. Identify what internal mental attitudes and outward behaviors need to change going forward
    - v. Continuing to journal
5. **Plan going forward:** to prevent burnout again.
- vi. What will be different?
  - vii. What new structures will be put in place to support the pastor?
  - viii. Who will hold the pastor accountable? (for self-care, etc.)
  - ix. What specific boundaries will be established: for self-care, work habits, delegation, etc.
  - x. Revisit with the local board the plan and boundaries going forward.
  - xi. What specific personal spiritual practices will be established, including regular Sabbath practice?
  - xii. View vacations, regular days off, quarterly retreats as sacred space and time. Communicate same to local board and church.
  - xiii. What ministry philosophy changes will be changed? E.g. delegation and off-loading onto other capable people, unleashing gifts of others, focusing on the pastor’s greatest areas of strength and joyful service?
  - xiv. What ongoing relational connection & support will the local church or district help put in place:

1. at least one spiritual friend/mentor;
2. engage with other friends, including both pastor-friends and non-pastor friends.
3. Ongoing personal accountability team (2-3 others) who will meet with him support—e.g. bi-weekly