

# THE PASTOR'S SABBATICAL & RENEWAL GUIDE

Refueling the Shepherd for the Sake of the Sheep

Ministry is a high-calling that requires the pouring out of one's soul. Without intentional seasons of replenishment, even the most vibrant leaders find themselves "leading on empty." This guide is designed to help you, your leadership team, and your congregation understand the biblical necessity of sabbatical—a planned time to rest, reset, and retool. Many healthy congregations now implement a sabbatical policy every 8 years to ensure the long-term health of their pastoral staff.

## 1. REST: Withdrawing for Presence

*"And he said to them, 'Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.' For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat." — Mark 6:31*

### Diagnostic Questions

- Has the pace of "coming and going" in ministry made it difficult for you to find time even for basic physical or spiritual needs?
- Do you feel a sense of guilt when you are not actively "doing" ministry?
- If you stopped today, would you know how to be still before God without an agenda?

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**Action: Identify a "desolate place" (a retreat center, a cabin, or a quiet park) where you will go for the first phase of your time away.**

## 2. RESET: Restoring Spiritual Joy

*"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you."*  
— Psalm 51:10-13

### Diagnostic Questions

- Does your current "spirit" feel right, or does it feel burdened, cynical, or defensive?
- Are you teaching others out of a current overflow of joy, or out of a memory of how joy used to feel?

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**Action: Schedule a day of confession and silence to allow God to "clean" the heart and remove the grime of ministry stress.**

## 3. REEVALUATE: Aligning with the Word

*"For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." — Romans 15:4*

### Diagnostic Questions

- When you read Scripture lately, are you reading it for a sermon or for your own instruction and endurance?
- Where has your hope become misplaced (e.g., in attendance numbers, budgets, or approval)?

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**Action: Choose one book of the Bible to read slowly during your time off with zero intention of preaching from it.**

## 4. RETOOL: Sharpening the Edge

*"If the iron is blunt, and one does not sharpen the edge, he must use more strength, but wisdom helps one to succeed." — Ecclesiastes 10:10*

### Diagnostic Questions

- Are you working harder but seeing less "cutting" impact in your ministry?
- What is one skill or area of knowledge (leadership, counseling, theology) that has become "blunt" through over-use?

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**Action: Select one book or a short workshop that specifically addresses a "dull" area of your professional or spiritual life.**

## 5. REENERGIZE: Filling the Tank

*"And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light." — Colossians 1:9-12*

### Diagnostic Questions

- Are you operating on your own "might" or on His "glorious might"?
- Do you currently possess "patience with joy," or is your patience thin and brittle?

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**Action: Identify two or three "refreshers"—people or activities that breathe life into you—and schedule time for them.**

## 6. REFLECT: Tasting His Goodness

*"Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!" — Psalm 34:8*

### Diagnostic Questions

- When was the last time you "tasted" God's goodness in a way that had nothing to do with church success?
- Are you taking refuge in God, or in your ability to manage the church?

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**Action: Keep a "Goodness Journal" for one week, writing down 5 things a day that prove God is good to you personally.**

## 7. REVEAL: Uncovering the Hidden

*"For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light." — Luke 8:17*

### Diagnostic Questions

- Is there a secret frustration, sin, or resentment that has been growing in the dark of your busy schedule?
- Are you willing to let God bring these things to light during your time off?

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**Action: Engage with a mentor or a Christian counselor during your sabbatical to discuss the "hidden" pressures of ministry.**

## 8. REMEMBER: Trusting the Path

*"In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths." — Proverbs 3:6*

### Diagnostic Questions

- Are you trying to "make your own path" straight through sheer force of will?
- Do you trust that the church will be okay in God's hands while you are away?

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**Action: Explicitly hand over the "keys" of the church to your leaders, verbally acknowledging that God is the one who sustains the path.**

## 9. REENGAGE: Returning with Purpose

*"Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain." — 1 Corinthians 15:58*

### Diagnostic Questions

- What "new work" or "renewed focus" do you feel God is calling you back to?
- Do you believe your labor is "not in vain," or are you feeling discouraged by a lack of visible results?

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**Action: Create a "First 30 Days" re-entry plan that protects your newly found rhythms of rest.**

## Essential Reading for the Sabbatical Journey

- **Leading on Empty** by Wayne Cordero
- **The Resilient Pastor** by Glenn Packiam & David Kinnaman
- **Planning Sabbaticals: A Guide for Congregations and Pastors** by Robert Saler
- **The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry** by John Mark Comer

*Consider asking the church to set aside a monthly stipend to help cover the costs of these resources and the time away.*