



**Rest & Renewal**  
for **Leaders** in  
**Rural Ministry**

*The Practice of Planned Rest in Ministry*

The Rural Church



Pastors Network

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## The Rural Church Pastors Network

Since its inception, the RCPN leadership team has prayerfully held this ministry with open hands before the Lord for His leading. It has been humbling to see over 200 rural pastors from four provinces and thirty denominations drawn to connect with a regional RCPN meeting over the past 6 years. We believe the RCPN will develop to its full potential as regional hubs are developed through local rural pastors accepting responsibility, twice a year, to call pastors together in their region and host an event... we currently gather in nine venues in Alberta and Saskatchewan.



### One of our Ministry Partners: **FOCUS ON THE FAMILY**

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## Introduction

Dr. John Ratey is a professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School who has done extensive research on exercise, creativity and depression. One of his findings has to do with the benefit of walking - not purposeful, "I've got somewhere to go and I'm in a hurry to get there" kind of walking, but purposeless, aimless, meandering, leisurely, "I'm *not* in a hurry" walking. Apparently, walking aimlessly - going for a stroll, if you please - allows the free flow of thoughts and ideas and enables inspired creative thinking.



Ratey also suggests that as little as ten minutes of walking every day can be therapeutic for depression and ADHD. "A bout of exercise is like taking a little bit of Prozac and a little bit of Ritalin." (In [A Slice of Infinity](#), "When We Wander", 16 May 2017)

Taking time to be still, or to do what is deemed an "un-productive" activity, is really a counter-intuitive way to live life. We live in a world which places many demands on us and, for those of us in ministry, the list never ends. There are lots of hats to be worn and each waking moment seems to yield new demands which - in our hubris - we may feel it is up to us to meet. It was never meant to be this way. Ministry - serving God and His people - was never meant to be a never-ending grind to get things done *by some deadline*, regardless of all of the complicating factors that life has a way of throwing in our path.

Perhaps it is time we pastors acknowledge that far too often, we *like* being needed. Or to be a bit more honest - we *need* to feel needed. And a good part of our drivenness stems from a desire to please people and have them applaud us as being necessary to whatever enterprise we are engaged in.

The need to be needed and the drivenness which flows from such a mindset, along with the attendant need to please people, are not healthy ways to live. We were designed for something much more and much better. As Os Guinness puts it, "*The greatest deeds are done before the Audience of One, and that is enough. Those who are seen and sung by the Audience of One can afford to be careless about lesser audiences.*"

As those whom God has called into His service, we must ever be mindful of Whom it is we actually serve. We serve the One who says, "*Come to Me. Get away with Me and you'll recover your life ... Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with Me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.*" (Matthew 11:28ff, *The Message*)

In our time together today, we want to explore the idea of **Planned Rest**. It is our conviction that we must **plan** the rest that we need - and we also believe that in God's good design for our lives, rest **is** part of His plan for us. It is thus that we maintain the gift of health (physical, spiritual, emotional, relational, psychological, etc) which He gives us, so that we will be able to go the distance in the work which He has given us to do.

## Session One   God Has a Plan - Towards a Theology of Rest

Some of us live like the guys on a road crew who had worked hard all day and were taking a much deserved coffee break under the shade of a tree, and then someone shouted out, "The boss is coming. Look busy!" And so they did. We sometimes labor under the misconception that we need to look busy, or keep busy, because what if Jesus should appear and find us taking it easy? To be "up and doing" is like a badge of honour and we sometimes disdain those who think or live otherwise.



It has been pointed out that this is as much a product of the Protestant work ethic as anything else and *nowhere in the Scriptures will we find this notion that our value is tied to our productivity*. Our value and worth are not tied to what we do but to who (and whose) we are and - truth be told - it is our view of God which will most significantly impact our practice concerning where our worth comes from. Work is part of the blessing of creation, but it is quite secondary to having relationship with the One who created us.

Someone has pointed out that the reason God gave the fourth commandment is so that no one could ever say that they had no time for God. Mark Buchanan notes that *"unless we trust God's sovereignty, we won't dare risk Sabbath."* Part of keeping the Sabbath day holy is that we actually rest in it. Sabbath and rest are synonymous. To keep Sabbath is to rest. In fact, as Buchanan again observes, *"There can be no true worship without true rest."* Perhaps we need to understand that *"God's provision for us and for His work through us is adequate. We do not have to "make it happen". We must stop shouldering the burdens of "outcomes". These are safely in His hands."* (Dallas Willard). Our view of God **will** indeed impact our understanding of rest and the necessity of it.

In the passages below, reflect on what God is telling us about the value and the necessity of rest.

### 1. Genesis 2:1-3

What made the seventh day holy? Is there something intrinsic to rest which pleases God?

### 2. Genesis 8:22

What does this verse say about rhythms in life? Does Ecclesiastes 3:1- 11 speak to this?

### 3. 1 Kings 19:1 - 8

How did God respond to Elijah's need?

### 4. Psalm 23

What does David tell us about the Lord's care and concern for his own?

### 5. Mark 6:30 - 32, 46,47

What do these two examples tell you about Jesus?

Not only do we have many examples of the value and necessity of rest throughout the Scriptures, but we have warnings of what happens when we refuse to obey God's commands about Sabbath rest. The

idea of rest was built into God's law for Israel. There was to be a Sabbath rest every seven years and on the fiftieth year there was to be a Year of Jubilee. As we learn from subsequent Bible history, a failure by God's people to keep Sabbath years led to exile from the land - the place of blessing by God (cf. 2 Chronicles 36:21). In other words, God takes this business of Sabbath very seriously.

Jesus taught a much needed corrective to the people of His day. He said that *"The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath"* (Mark 2:27). Or as *The Message* puts it, *"The Sabbath was made to serve us."* God's intent was never that Sabbath keeping be an end in itself. Rather, keeping the Sabbath was to be a reminder that we are not God - we need rest. And this need for rest is so important that God, who needs no rest, is willing to woo us into rest by resting Himself. Rest is not simply a matter of *"Do as I say"* but it is a matter of *"Do as I do"*. Our right to rest comes from God who makes us lie down in green pastures. The rest He gives us is not a reward, but it is a gift.

What Sabbath comes down to is this: Sabbath keeping is a matter of trust. Norma Wirzba says,

*When we become a Sabbath people, we give one of the most compelling witnesses to the world that we worship a God who desires our collective joy and good. We give concrete expression to an authentic faith that is working to deflect the anxious and destructive pride that supposes we have to "do it all" by ourselves.*

#### **For discussion ...**

Is there a particular Biblical passage which speaks to you about making rest a part of your life?



#### **Session Two   We Have a Problem - Burnout/"Hurry Sickness"/Compassion Fatigue**

Sometimes we know something is not quite right, but we can't - or don't want to - call it what it is. Part of the problem lies in the kind of things we tell ourselves. Often we do not want to give ourselves permission to have a need or to be perceived as being "weak". In fact, we sometimes believe lies that we have bought into but which do not reflect Biblical truth, such as these we have already thought about.

The following exercises are designed to help you identify how you are doing in regards to burnout and fatigue. These measures are a snapshot of how you are doing right now and are meant to be used like "warning lights on the dash" as we seek to understand our need for rest.



## BURNOUT INVENTORY

These questions will hopefully help you to understand how much you are experiencing burnout. Rate your response to each statement on a scale of 1 to 5.

*(1 = Doesn't describe me at all. 5 = Describes me very accurately)*

- \_\_\_\_\_ I'm exhausted much of the time, and rest doesn't seem to help much.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I don't get as much satisfaction from ministry as I used to.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Most mornings, I dread beginning my ministry responsibilities.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I feel like a failure in the ministry.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I don't sleep as well as I used to; or I'm sleeping more than I used to.
- \_\_\_\_\_ It's more and more difficult for me to deal with people's problems.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I have more difficulty making decisions that I used to.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I get very frustrated when things don't go well in the ministry.
- \_\_\_\_\_ More and more I find myself thinking about leaving my church/organization.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I feel greatly bothered or guilty about ministry responsibilities not done or not done well.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I get angry and/or irritable more easily than I used to.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I often feel a sense of emptiness and depletion, as if I have nothing more to give.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The ministry gives me little or no joy.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I'm concerned that I won't be able to last much longer in ministry.
- \_\_\_\_\_ It's getting more and more difficult to do some aspects of ministry.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I struggle with feeling pressure to perform and succeed.

\_\_\_\_\_ **TOTAL**

### **Assessing your level of burnout**

- 15 - 29 You probably don't have a problem with burnout.
- 30 - 49 You may be experiencing mild to moderate burnout.
- 50 - 64 You may be suffering from significant burnout.
- 65 - 75 You may be in serious trouble.

From *Healthy Pastors Sabbatical Preparation Workshop, Participant's Workbook, E.P. Wahl Centre/Taylor Seminary, 2015, p.19.*

### **For reflection and discussion ...**

1. Are you surprised by the result of the above exercise? Why or why not?
2. When you think of "burnout", what emotions do you feel as a response to that possibility?  
Does your emotional response have a message that you need to listen to?

"Burnout" never happens in a vacuum. Dr. Archibald Hart describes burnout as the product of "hurry sickness". How do we know if we have this "hurry sickness"? The following exercise can help us to get a sense of what pace we are living life at and how "sick" we are.





## PACE OF LIFE INDEX

Please indicate how often each of the following applies to you in daily life.

(1 = Seldom or never; 2 = Sometimes; 3 = Always or usually)

- \_\_\_\_\_ Do you find yourself rushing your speech?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Do you hurry other people's speech by interrupting them with "uh-huh, hmmm" or by completing their sentences for them?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Do you hate to wait in line?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Do you seem to be short of time to get everything done?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Do you detest wasting time?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Do you eat fast?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Do you drive over the speed limit?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Do you try to do more than one thing at a time?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Do you become impatient if others do something too slowly?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Do you seem to have little time to relax and enjoy the time of day?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Do you find yourself over-committed?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Do you jiggle your knees or tap your fingers?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Do you think about other things during conversations?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Do you walk fast?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Do you hate dawdling after a meal?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Do you become irritable if kept waiting?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Do you detest losing in sports or games?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Do you find yourself with clenched fists or tight neck or jaw muscles?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Does your concentration sometimes wander while you think about what's coming up later?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Are you a competitive person?
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ **TOTAL**

### **Assessing your level of hurry sickness**

20 - 34 Low hurry sickness

35 - 44 Medium hurry sickness

45 - 60 High hurry sickness

*From Walt Schafer, Stress, Distress and Growth, Responsible Action, Inc. 1978, Davis CA*

### ***For discussion ...***

1. How much does personality type play into pace of life?
  
2. In what ways might it be possible to use personality type as an excuse for not addressing a "rest deficit" in one's life? Explain.



**Symptoms of Compassion Fatigue** would include, but not be limited to, the following:

*(Feel free to check off any that you feel apply to you)*

- Difficulty concentrating
- Feelings of discouragement about the world
- Hopelessness
- Exhaustion
- Irritability
- Feeling dispirited
- Being cynical about the situation one is in
- Allowing ongoing boundary violations in the situation/setting which is causing the emotional fatigue or distress
- Having one's ability to function interfered with or altered
- Waking up tired
- Having trouble getting to work
- Feeling as if you are working harder but getting less done
- Feeling depressed or "under a cloud" but not really knowing why
- Finding positive emotional engagement difficult

Someone experiencing compassion fatigue will likely progress through four phases of this ailment.

- \* **Zealot Phase** in which a person will be solving problems and making a difference. They are willing to go the extra mile. They are characterized by high enthusiasm and will volunteer without being asked.
- \* **Irritability Phase** in which a person begins to have an "edge" - particularly in relation to the people in their life. They may denigrate those they serve or mock those they work with. They distance themselves from others. There will be an inappropriate use of humour towards or about others. In relation to their work, they begin to cut corners and begin to make mistakes and lack the ability to concentrate on tasks at hand.
- \* **Withdrawal Phase** in which a person is irritated by those they serve and they experience a loss of enthusiasm for the work they are doing. They have complaints about their work/life balance, but don't really want to talk about their job and how to address these concerns. This person builds a tolerance of the situation they find themselves in as a way of coping with their feelings of pain and sadness. They neglect the people around them as they withdraw even more.
- \* **Zombie Phase** in which a person is putting in time and going through the motions. They "tick off the boxes" of responsibilities entrusted to them, but are not really engaged in what they are doing. This person sees others as being incompetent and ignorant. A disdain begins to grow towards those being served and this person begins to dislike them. They lack patience with others and the hopelessness they feel about their situation begins to turn to anger.

***For reflection and discussion ...***

1. Identify three emotional or compassion overloads or stressors that you have experienced in the past year.

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2. What strategies have you found helpful in dealing with cumulative compassion fatigue - the soul weariness that comes from constantly "giving out" over extended periods of time?

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3. Who do you have who provides a safe place to "vent" or process the compassion deficit that comes as a result of always being the care ***giver*** in your situation?

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***Houston, we've got a problem ...!!***

Obviously, if we who are in ministry are experiencing any of the problems that have been outlined above, we need help. Not only do we want to be healthy for our own sake, but we want to be healthy so that we can actually serve others in a way that brings blessing to them and glory to the Master whom we serve. Our goal is not merely survival but sustained effectiveness over the long haul. For some of us, this may mean a radical shift in the way that we are living our lives and for others of us it may simply mean that we tweak our life practices to become even more healthy.



If you were to write a letter to the Lord expressing the measure to which you are tired and 'weary in well doing' from being a pastor to your congregation and town... how would you express yourself?  
(use the space below to get your started...)

**Dear Lord...**

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## Session Three - Principles of Renewal



There are several principles which will be helpful for us as we seek to deal with our "rest deficit" lifestyle and prepare ourselves to live lives that are characterized by sustained effectiveness and fruitfulness over the long haul.

### **Principle # 1**

***Renewal begins with a readiness and willingness to be honest about our inner life.***

There can be no renewal without acknowledging our current condition and what it is that needs to actually be renewed.

***\* Our part is to be honest with ourselves about our need.***

### **Principle # 2**

***Ultimately, renewal must come from Jesus who renews us with His grace, love and power.***

It is in Him that we will find true rest (Matthew 11:28ff) and it is by abiding in Him that we will find what we need to not only sustain our lives but to thrive in the life He has called us to (John 15:1-8).

***\* Our role is to intentionally make space in our lives for this to happen.***

### **Principle # 3**

***Renewal is unique to each person and respects individual design.***

In other words, what works for Peter may not work for Paul. Our gifts, temperament, age, history, season of life, current situation, calling, and so much more, determine - in part - what will work for us and what *can* work for us. What brings renewal to a young parent might be quite different from what works for a recently bereaved spouse.

***\* We need to be aware that it is okay to do what refreshes, replenishes, and restores us as we are.***

### **Principle # 4**

***Renewal is not a destination but a process.***

By seeking renewal we are committing to a different way of living and not merely to a "fix" for our current state. The goal of renewal is not just mid-course correction but a whole new flight-plan. We want to start living in ways that sustain us over time and not just fix us for the moment.

***\* Our commitment must be to nothing less than a new way of living - which will mean making some tough decisions about how we will live and what values will govern us.***

### **Principle # 5**

***Renewal is greatly helped by community, whether that is expressed in an individual or a group, or in formal or informal ways.***

The point is that sharing the journey helps us reach the destination. An old African proverb says, "If you want to go fast, go alone; but if you want to go far, take someone with you."

***\* Our need is to find people with whom we can share the journey.***

## **Principle # 6**

***A commitment to renewal will make necessary a commitment to rest.***

The Scriptures are full of examples (eg. Session # 1 above) of those who took time away from the busy-ness of life to be alone, to be quiet, and to rest. Our foremost example of this is the Lord Jesus, who regularly "got away" to nourish His soul and thus sustain His life. Renewal does not happen on the fly. It doesn't happen when we are busy and pre-occupied and overwhelmed by our responsibilities.

Renewal, which is very much tied to renewing our relationship with Christ (who sustains us), needs disengagement from whatever it is that normally fills our days and our lives. The Scripture says, "*Be still/cease striving and know that I am God*", not "*Be busy/strive harder and know that I am God.*" (*Psalms 46:10*). Perhaps we need to pay attention to that.

***\* Our commitment is to learn to plan and practice the kind of rest which will allow us to be renewed***

*Adapted from "Principles of Renewal", Healthy Pastors Sabbatical Preparation Workshop, Participant's Workbook, E.P.Wahl Centre/Taylor Seminary, 2015, p.15*

## **The Practice of Renewal**

Pastors, like many in helping professions, often experience an accumulation of stresses coupled with compassion fatigue and high intensity ministry events. When considering such things as speaking deadlines, multiple demands on creativity, board / congregational meetings, unhappy church people, counselling misfires, time management issues, financial stress at both a personal and organizational level, plus family balance issues, one has a less than exhaustive list in which to see the potential for fatigue and burnout.

You have probably heard the old adage "I'd rather burn out than rust out." The problem is that in both cases you are "out". It is not a healthy ministry lifestyle to simply go full out from one season of renewal to the next. Along side of planning for specific seasons of renewal, it is beneficial to consider the development of certain habits / activities that facilitate ongoing daily and weekly renewal.

The following habits for the practise of ongoing renewal are offered for consideration:

### **1) Find Someone to Talk To.**

Actually, a few "somebodies" is even better, for as certain words of wisdom tell us, "A cord of three strands is not quickly broken." Its been said that "What you can't put to words, you can't put to rest." The regular habit of talking to someone, who ideally is not part of your immediate ministry world, gives valuable perspective on what you are thinking or feeling. Maybe the fatigue, headaches, the frustration, or depressed moods are normal responses given recent and ongoing experiences and are not the result of a lack of strength or deficiency in your relationship with God. Maybe you just need a safe environment to sort out what you feel with someone who won't hold your "rant" against you. Again, "what you can't put to words, you can't put to rest." The input of another can give perspective both to

what is “normal” given the present experiences, and can give perspective on where one’s understanding of a situation may be faulty or missing something. Often we are not aware of our own blind spots until others point them out. The regular habit of finding a trusted person to talk to aids in diffusing ministry stress and adds wisdom to what we have to offer to others.

## 2) Ongoing Training

In a book entitled *Mastering Pastoral Counselling*, the authors are quoted as saying that “Burnout hits pastors and counsellors who repeatedly face situations that outstrip their competence.” What pastor hasn’t sent up that silent prayer to God of “what should I say?” or “what should I do?” in the face of a need that is greater than their capacity to meet? And yes, God is faithful and provides, but He also tells us to take advantage of preparation, “Always be prepared to give an answer.....” (1 Peter 3:15); “Do your best to present yourself to God as one.....who correctly handles the word of truth.” (2 Timothy 2:15).

Richard Foster, In *Celebration of Discipline*, writes:

**“My problem was more than having something to say from Sunday to Sunday. My problem was that what I did say had no power to help people. I had no substance, no depth. The people were starving for a word from God, and I had nothing to give.”**

Sometimes pastors may feel that their time spent in personal reading and study or in taking advantage of training opportunities are wasted moments and signs of not doing enough “real work.” Rather, time spent in adding to our ministry input and skills are essential in diffusing the stress of feeling like the demands of ministry outstrip what a pastor brings to the table. Training opportunities and taking the time to be well read in a variety of areas that speak into ministry are essential in ongoing renewal.

## 3) Physical Health

The ability to function with ongoing renewal can be assisted or hindered by the physical care given to one’s body. Even as a vehicle will last longer and maintain better peak performance when a “pause” is given for regular maintenance and upkeep, so to one’s physical well-being requires attention if one is to continue do more than just “get by.”. The body can experience chemically induced stress through some of the substances put into it (caffeine, alcohol, nicotine for example) as well as being effected by diet in general. This adds to the overall accumulation of stress in one’s life. Giving consideration to diet and exercise will reap rewards in terms of energy and creativity. How often is the experience of lethargy and a lack of creativity related to the physical experience of the mind and body? Along with consideration of diet and exercise, there is also the need for proper physical rest. For many people, regular and consistent sleep patterns of sufficient time would lead to more constructive work in less hours of the day. Physical fatigue leads to wasted and unproductive efforts. Sometimes, the most spiritual and productive thing you can do is “take a nap!” One cannot continuously violate regular Sabbath rest or care for physical health without paying an unwanted price.

#### 4) Understand Your Theology

Another habit to cultivate in order to assist ongoing daily / weekly renewal is that of regularly reflecting on one's Theology. Jesus said "apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5) which clearly tells us that "It's not all up to me." Resting in God, taking on of Jesus' yoke and learning from Him (Mt 12:28-30), means coming to terms with issues of control. People in ministry need to understand that outcomes are not theirs to control. Rather one comes alongside and, in Christ, provides opportunities that were not previously present. Burnout & fatigue are accentuated when one takes responsibility for a situation beyond what God ever intended. Samuel was upset when the people under his care were clamouring for a king and God said to him "it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king." (1 Samuel 8:7). Sometimes its just not about us! When you take on a responsibility that is beyond what God intended, your ministry will carry a wearing load that hinders ongoing renewal. When it comes to considering issues of control:

**"Remember the only power you have in this world is to state what you think, feel, value, and believe. You can't make people change. You can't make outcomes happen; people decide for themselves."  
(Blue Cross EAP Update, Oct 2002.)**

For reflection and discussion:

1. Which of the four habits for ongoing renewal most resonates as a need for you to develop?
2. What most interferes with developing habits of ongoing renewal as a regular practise in your ministry?
3. What is one way you could begin to apply a needed habit of ongoing renewal in the next week?

#### [Session Four - Steps Forward - Planned Rest](#)

A church leader once approached a famous Baptist preacher with some concern over his upcoming two month vacation. "Don't you realize that the devil never takes a vacation?" was the anxious query. To which the preacher wittily replied, "Yes, but who, my friend, wants to be like the devil?"



I wonder if sometimes we have allowed the devil to inform our practice more than the Scriptures we claim to revere? One of the themes in Scripture is that of rest. God makes no bones about it - rest is to be a part of our lives, and not just if and when it happens, but ***it is to be a planned part of our living.*** The following are examples of common ways that we might plan to take the rest God wants us to have.

## Practicing Sabbath

John Anthony Page gives the following tips for learning how to integrate the practice of Sabbath into one's life.

**\* Decide to have a Sabbath**

This will probably be the hardest step to take, but make a commitment to God to enjoy His gift.

**\* Ask God for help.**

Acknowledge your desire to be obedient about this and ask Him to help you do so.

**\* Protect your Sabbath**

Learn to say "No". Do not let yourself be available on your Sabbath.

**\* Be flexible**

Pick whatever day will work for you, or a 24 hour period. The point isn't when but that you actually set a consistent time aside for you to practice and enjoy Sabbath rest.

**\* Involve your family**

The impact and success of Sabbath increases when those you live with are all "on the same page".

**\* Rest!**

Let this time be unscheduled and unhurried. Avoid the temptation to be busy doing too many "restful" activities. Part of the point of Sabbath is to change the pace of life, so do that.

**\* Give yourself grace and space**

Allow yourself time to get this new rhythm established in your life. It will take time before you begin to notice the benefit of Sabbath and the difference it makes.

**\* Learn from others**

Ask others how they practice Sabbath. Read good books, such as Mark Buchanan's The Rest of God. Make keeping Sabbath an area of growth and life-long study.

*Adapted from John Anthony Page, "Sabbath Starters", Healthy Pastors Sabbatical Preparation Workshop, Participant's Workbook, E.P. Wahl Centre/Taylor Seminary, 2015, p.47*

**Discuss ...** How do you make Sabbath a regular part of your life? What does Sabbath look like for you?

## Taking Vacations

Obviously, if we spend our vacations rushing from one activity to another, we will not find much rest for our weary souls. The point of a vacation is to "vacate", to create an empty space where we can be still and get the proper benefit from extended time set apart to be apart and be refreshed. Paul Borthwick suggests seven purposes which can be fulfilled in a relaxing, "low-key" get away.

### **1. Rest**

Chronic exhaustion must be addressed and there is no time like time away on a vacation. There we can recharge our physical and spiritual batteries through the gift of rest.

### **2. Gratitude**

Vacations can be a time for stopping and recalling the good things God has done, and is doing, in our lives. Thankfulness is a God-ordained balm for weary souls having an effect on our whole being.

**3. Reflection**

Retreating from the routines of daily living can help us to assess our priorities and commitments. Such activity takes time - and while vacating, there is time available to do this.

**4. Relationships**

Daily living can take a toll on relationships, no matter how good they are. Getting away from regular routines provides an opportunity to get a different perspective on how we are relating to the people God has put in our lives. A vacation can also provide the time necessary to engage in relationships.

**5. Grace**

Vacations remind us that we live by grace and not by work/s. Work is not all that matters - rest is also important, and while God is always working (according to Jesus) we are not God and we need to remember that.

**6. Refocusing**

Vacations provide an opportunity to evaluate and refocus our spiritual lives at a time when we actually have time to become re-acquainted with spiritual practices which have fallen by the wayside.

**7. Imitation**

By taking a break, we follow God's example and, even more, we obey His command to rest before we return to the work God has given us to do. God did not design us to Go, Go, Go. He designed us to Go and then to Go away and get some rest. Vacations are an opportunity to do just that.

*Adapted from Paul Borthwick, "How To Have a Restful Vacation", in Healthy Pastors Sabbatical Preparation Workshop, Participant's Workbook, E>P>Wahl Centre/Taylor Seminary, 2015, p.49)*

**For discussion ...**

1. Share memories from your favorite vacation. What made this particular vacation so special?

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2. What would your dream vacation look like? What would it take to make it happen?

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3. What vacation resources are you aware of which could be a benefit to others who serve in ministry? Make a list of these and forward it to the RCPN website so a resource can be made available to others who serve in pastoral ministry.

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## Sabbaticals

We will not touch on all of the practical aspects of taking a sabbatical but simply share three presuppositions which can help frame our thinking in regards to such an opportunity. An excellent resource on this subject has been put together by the E.P.Wahl Centre at Taylor Seminary. Each spring a one day workshop is offered which covers the material in the resource booklet. The workshop is well worth attending.



**In your own words.. how would you define a 'sabbatical'**

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### ***Sabbatical Presuppositions***

\* *A sabbatical is all about a person having rest, renewal, and an opportunity to revision what they and their life is all about.*

Each of these three aspects is crucial to a fulfilling sabbatical.

**Rest** is necessary because we often come to time away very tired. We can't attain health in each area of our life unless we first have a chance to be refreshed and restored physically.

**Renewal**, by which we mean spiritual renewal, is also a necessary part of being healthy. Life, and life in ministry, has a way of loading us with baggage which only extended time in the presence of the Master can heal.

**Re-visioning** is also a necessary component of a sabbatical in that we all change and sometimes we need to recalibrate who we are and what "makes us tick". Over time our passions may change, or become more focussed. It is good to figure these things out so that we can direct our energy (which is limited) towards those things which both fulfill us and contribute the most to the work God wants to do in and through us.

\* *A sabbatical is a time of preparation for the next chapter of our lives.*

A sabbatical is not simply a glorified vacation at someone else's expense. It is actually an opportunity to re-tool and prepare oneself for the next assignment God may be giving. By deliberately taking time away, a person can disengage long enough to re-engage in a way which will sustain health and healthy practices in life and ministry, with a renewed and laser sharp focus as to what that ministry can and should be like.

\* A sabbatical is a gift for past service, not a payment for future service.

In other words, a sabbatical is a gift, not a bribe. It is a recognition of past service rendered and the inherent cost involved (physically, spiritually, emotionally, etc.) in carrying out that service. Underlying this gift of Sabbath/sabbatical is a desire on the part of the giver/s to bless, encourage, and help the "servant" sustain the life of service God has called them to. While it is customary to return to one's ministry for at least one year after the sabbatical is completed, the point of a sabbatical is not to place someone under obligation, but to bless them as they seek to bring blessing to others.



***For reflection and discussion ...***

1. Have you ever considered taking a sabbatical? Explain.

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What would be the biggest hindrance to you taking a sabbatical?

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2. If you have had a sabbatical, what was the greatest benefit to you of your time away?

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Was there a benefit to your congregation or organization from your sabbatical? What was it?

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Rest is to be a part of our lives. In fact, rest is to be a **planned** part of our lives. In fact, God wants us to live out of a place of rest - He wants a restful soul and life to be the foundation for the work He calls us to do. This much we can easily ascertain from the Scriptures. However, we would do well to understand that rest won't just happen; it will actually create work for us, all on the way to freeing us up so that we **can** have the rest we desire and so much need.

The alternative to learning the disciplines of rest and the "*unforced rhythms of grace*" is to experience compassion fatigue, burnout, or worse. That, however, would not be God's preferred way for us. He wants us to serve Him, yes, and to serve others, as well - but to serve from a place of rest. The Lord God said, "*In **repentance and rest** you shall be saved, in **quietness and trust** is your strength*" (Isaiah 30:15). Perhaps we could paraphrase that like this: "*By being still we will be able to move forward.*"

God wants us to learn how to rest, in part, because rest demonstrates our confidence in Him to "take care of business" while we tend to the health of our body and soul. Rest is a gift and receiving the gift of rest is but another way of acknowledging that God wants us to be healthy and fully alive as we live before Him each and every day of our lives.

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**“BE STILL  
AND KNOW THAT  
I AM GOD”**

**Psalm 46:10**