

What does a Sabbatical Look Like?

Sabbaticals come in many shapes and sizes, but they all have a common thread running through them: Intimacy with God leading to passion for God.

In a recent conversation with one of our NCD pastors, he shared a fond memory of his 2015 sabbatical experience. During his sabbatical, one I had the honor of coaching, he rested, he traveled, he deepened relations with his wife and children, and he renewed family devotions. He also tackled two writing projects: a vision plan for the church through 2020, and a booklet on the doctrine of union with Christ that his daughter illustrated, a moving analogy on life in Christ with adorable illustrations. In all, it was a successful, refreshing, restoring sabbatical.

But this week he showed me another aspect of his sabbatical, one he never shared during our coaching times. He opened his Bible, torn, worn, and literally falling apart, to 2 Timothy and laid it on the table in front of me. What I saw was the entire book of 2 Timothy thoroughly highlighted, underlined, circled, annotated, and commented on. He even had a full topical outline of the entire book.

What he had done during his sabbatical was to move through 2 Timothy very slowly, one verse each day, allowing the Word and the Spirit to work in and through him. He committed time to meditation, personal reflection, and prayer as he permitted this little book to study him and slowly shape him from the inside out. These pages of his Bible are a beautiful thing to see as they reflect what a strategic, restorative sabbatical can do.

But the beauty of this sabbatical is not seen only in the pages of his Bible. It is also seen in the heart and life of the man, in his passion for God's Word, God's church, and God's people. It is seen in his yearning to see the lost saved, disciples grown, and the church expanded. This is what a sabbatical looks like.

Stories like this are not unusual. While each sabbatical is different, there is a common thread in them all: moving the pastor toward deeper intimacy with God leading to a deeper passion for God. In some it is growth upon growth in an upward progression. In some, it is growth that starts with healing and restoring of brokenness. The path is rarely the same, but the end is always beautiful.

This is why the NCD encourages pastoral sabbaticals for all its pastors, lay staff, and churches. In the last six years, the NCD has seen 37 pastors take restorative, strategic sabbaticals, representing 11% of our pastors and 24% of the NCD Churches. When we consider the impact this has on the health of our churches, it is something we all need to explore. If NCD Pastoral Care can help with teaching your church about sabbatical and initiating a sabbatical for you, feel free to contact me: Kelley.Johnson@Frontiernet.net

In Christ,
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