

How to Go on a Sabbatical

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Summary

We want to introduce or reinforce the concept of going on a sabbatical with God. The idea of sabbatical is a major concept in the Old Testament, and in the New Testament, Jesus often went on sabbaticals to spend time with God. If Jesus needed to do this, so do we!

Outcomes

We want to encourage you to go away and spend time with God on a sabbatical. Make it a priority and see what God will do in your life!

Scriptural Basis

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work” Exodus 20:8–10

All Scriptures are from the New King James Version of the Bible, unless noted otherwise.

Additional Resources

MasterPlan Business Seminar with Steve Dulin (See Online Resources)

The Importance of Sabbatical

I want to share something that we touched on briefly in the lesson “It All Starts with Vision”: the idea of sabbatical. A sabbatical is essentially time away with God. I believe the biblical principle of sabbatical is probably the most important subject we will discuss this semester. I also think it is the most difficult concept for many people to accept and apply because they just don’t understand how important the concept of sabbatical is.

Most business owners are working very hard. They are fighting fires and running a hundred miles an hour. Each of them wants to be proactive and have vision for the future and the company God wants them to have. They are incredibly busy trying to come up with solutions to their problems, but they usually fail to realize that God is the one who has all of the solutions. Many times they wind up hurting their businesses because they don’t have time to think and come up with good answers, but if they would get away with God, they would find the answers they need. This is one of the reasons God commanded us to take a weekly Sabbath.

The Biblical Principle of Sabbatical

The word “sabbatical” is derived from the word Sabbath, the day which God appointed to be observed as a day of rest and to be kept holy and consecrated to His service and worship. The Sabbath is to be kept holy (set apart for God) and is a day of cessation from work. A sabbatical is simply several Sabbaths put together. It is an extended time set apart for God, during which no work is done.

Sabbath Is a Command

Sabbath comes from the fourth commandment. Exodus 20:8–11 says, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.” It is not a suggestion; it is a command.

“A sabbatical is simply several Sabbaths put together.”



A Revelation of Sabbatical

When I was much younger, the main concept I had of sabbaticals was of a college teacher getting to take a paid leave from their job every seven years. I knew of one Christian leader who would take time off to go away and spend time with the Lord, but that was basically all I knew about sabbaticals. Then, 26 years ago, I was reading a scripture that totally changed my thinking about sabbaticals. As I read this scripture, it seemed to jump off the page at me. I instinctively knew it was a rhema from God for my life. In Exodus 34:21–24, God is speaking with Moses on top of Mount Sinai and says, “Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall rest; in plowing time and in harvest you shall rest. And you shall observe the Feast of Weeks, of the first fruits of wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering at the year’s end. *Three times in the year* [emphasis added] all your men shall appear before the Lord, the Lord God of Israel. For I will cast out the nations before you and enlarge your borders; neither will any man covet your land when you go up to appear before the Lord your God three times in the year.”

Think about this! God told Moses that he was to gather all the men of Israel at the temple in Jerusalem to celebrate these feasts three times a year. Now I don’t know about you, but if I were an enemy of Israel, it seems like that would be a pretty good time to attack. All the men have left the villages and cities and gathered in Jerusalem for the feasts. Amazingly, I can find no place in Scripture or in my research that tells of a time when Israel was attacked during one of these three festivals.

God tells us why in verse 24 of Exodus 34 which says, “For I will cast out the nations before you and enlarge your borders; neither will any man covet your land when you go up to appear before the Lord your God three times in the year.” God is telling the Israelites that while they are spending time with Him, He is driving out their enemies, enlarging their borders, and that no one will even want or covet their land. That’s a promise from God! Isn’t that incredible? We have the same promise today. When we go on a sabbatical with God, He enlarges our borders. We actually gain land (market share) from our enemies when we spend time with God.

My First Sabbatical

I remember the first time I said, “Ok, God, I’ll do it. I’ll go on sabbatical the first week in January.” That was 26 years ago. I knew nothing about going on a sabbatical. My in-laws found a little cabin in the woods of East Texas for me. It is cold the first week in January in East Texas. The cabin was probably 500 square feet, and it had one small wall mounted electric heater. I was fasting, and when you are fasting you get really cold. I was freezing. The cabin didn’t even have a bed. It had a small couch that I would pull right next to the little wall heater and try to get

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some sleep at night. Also, this was before mobile phones. To make a phone call you had to drive to a pay phone two miles away, so I would call my wife every three days to let her know I was alive. I don’t go to East Texas and stay in a cabin anymore!

God Wants Our Minds Focused on Him

What I found out on my first sabbatical was very surprising. I had “made the sacrifice” to spend a week with God, and for three days it was as if God didn’t know I was there. I had gone to spend time with God and hear His will for my life, and I heard *nothing*! I was not particularly happy about it! I told God, “You don’t understand. I have taken off work. I could be making money right now. I’m sacrificing to spend time with You, and You are not showing me anything. I have been here three days *freezing*, and You have not said one word.” Here was the problem. My mind was so occupied with thinking about things I was dealing with that I couldn’t hear anything from God. I had always prided myself that my mind was always going a hundred miles an hour, but that is not God’s way. He wants our minds to be in such a place that we can hear from Him at any time. If our minds are going too fast, it is very difficult to hear God. It took three days for my mind to slow down enough to hear from God.

God Will Be a Debtor to No Man

I also remember complaining to God about the money I could be making at work if I weren’t on sabbatical. As if in response to my complaining, on the fourth day, in about thirty minutes, God gave me five ideas I had never heard of before.

One of the ideas was two-way radios. Being in the construction business, I had used two-way radios that had approximately a one-mile radius on our job sites.

God showed me that there were two-way radios that had a radius of 20 or 30 miles. I checked it out and found out that the police department and fire department had them, so I went and procured them for our company. Remember this happened 26 years ago. There were no reasonably priced mobile phones at the time. We were one of the only construction companies in the Dallas Fort Worth area to have two-way radios that had a 20 to 30-mile radius, and it gave us the ability to instantly communicate with our employees. Can you imagine the advantage we had over our competitors?

Another idea God showed me was a fax machine that I did not know existed. We used to take sets of blueprints, copy them on 8-1/2" by 11" sheets and fax them to our subcontractors one sheet at a time, one subcontractor at a time. It was incredibly slow to fax drawings to subcontractors and suppliers over the phone line. On top of that, if the subcontractor's phone was busy, you would have to run the sheets back through the fax and hope they went through.

God showed me a fax machine where you could input all the 8-1/2" by 11" sheets at one time and program all of the subcontractor and supplier phone numbers at one time, and it would send out all the plans. It is called broadcasting, and years later almost all fax machines had this feature, but when I got back to Dallas, I found only one fax machine that would do this. It was an incredible time saver and once again gave us a competitive advantage.

God then showed me a blueprint copy machine. For large sets of plans, we had been copying them on 8-1/2" by 11" sheets and then taping them together for the subcontractors to come pick them up. We would spend hours taping these sets of plans together. I knew that you could have blueprint copies made at commercial production shops, but it was very expensive and often took several days. God showed me a machine that would work for our company. When I researched it, I found out the machine cost \$25,000 to \$30,000, and I felt like I was supposed to wait on buying this blueprint copy machine. About a month later, the tenant next door to us told me they were going out of business and wanted to know if we wanted to buy any of their furniture or equipment. We purchased everything in their 5,000-square foot space for \$7,500. Guess what was in that space? The blueprint copier that God has showed me on my sabbatical! We used it for many years, and it gave us an incredible edge over our competitors.

God also showed me two other ideas that we implemented, but I think you get the picture. I remember God saying to me: "Steve, don't ever think that getting away and spending time with Me is going to cost you anything." The ideas God gave me

on my first sabbatical were so valuable that I conservatively estimate they were worth \$150,000 a year for the rest of my life. God will be a debtor to no man.

Three Sabbaticals a Year

Since that first sabbatical in the piney woods of East Texas, I have maintained a schedule of three sabbaticals a year for 26 years. I have now been on 78 sabbaticals of at least three days, and I have never missed a sabbatical. Every year, I take the first five to seven days at the first of the year (a type of firstfruits of my time to the Lord). After four months, I go on a three-day sabbatical. Four months later, I go on another three-day sabbatical. Four months later, it is the first of the year again, and I go on a five- to seven-day sabbatical.

**“God will be a debtor
to no man.”**

During my second year of taking sabbaticals, I was driving to a condominium in Houston, and I don't know what I was thinking, but I started complaining again: “God, here I am sacrificing for You again, and I could be making a lot of money, but I'm going to spend a week with You. I just want to remind You that this is costing me a lot of money.” God spoke to me and said, “I don't ever again want to hear you say spending time with Me will cost you anything.” Right there on the spot, He gave me an idea that made our company \$25,000 to \$50,000 a year and basically cost us nothing to implement. I wasn't even on my Sabbatical yet! I was still driving to Houston. I have never heard of another general contractor in the United States implementing this idea. Spending time with God will ultimately never cost you anything.

Reasons to Go on a Sabbatical

1. Relationship with the Lord. If you are a Christian and are setting goals for next year, a good goal to make is to have a better relationship with God. One of the ways you can have a better relationship with God is to spend time with Him. Everything about the Christian life takes time. It takes time to meet with God. It takes time to pray, read the Bible, go to church, and attend a small group. If you want a better relationship with God, it takes time.

2. To solve problems and get ideas, plans, and strategies from the Lord. Our problems are solved when we get the mind of Christ. God knows the problems before we do, and He will give us answers before we even know the problems if

we will only go away and spend time with Him.

There is an old adage that says: “Ask good questions, get good answers. Ask bad questions, get bad answers. Ask no questions, get no answers.” A sabbatical is a great time to get answers from God. I never go on sabbatical for the purpose of getting answers. I go on sabbatical to meet with God, but my experience has been that God usually does answer a lot of questions I have about every area of my life.

3. Revelation. We are moved by information, but we are changed by revelation. God wants us to go on sabbatical to get revelation from Him. Moses was on a 40-day sabbatical when God gave him the Law. If you are not getting revelation from God, I want to encourage you to go on a sabbatical.

I remember one time when one of our employees was looking at a different career but was not sure what to do. I said, “Why don’t you go on a sabbatical and ask God?” He said, “I don’t believe God speaks today.” I said, “Why don’t

you just give it a try?” So he did. He came back from sabbatical with 26 pages of handwritten notes detailing what God had spoken to him.

**“We are moved by
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4. Wisdom. An operational definition of wisdom is seeing life from God’s perspective. God wants to speak to us and give us His wisdom, so that we will see life the way He sees it.

What to Do on a Sabbatical

1. Rest. A sabbatical is a time of rest. Most people who go on their first sabbatical are surprised at how tired they are. Many have been running on adrenaline and have exhausted themselves without their bodies actually knowing it until they take some down time and realize how tired they are. It is typical for a young mom going on her first sabbatical to sleep 14 to 16 hours her first day. There is nothing wrong with resting on sabbatical.

2. Pray. Prayer is communication with God. Sabbatical is a great time to communicate with God when you are alone with Him.

3. Fast. In Psalm 35:13, David said he “humbled his soul with fasting.” Fasting humbles our soul under our spirit. When our souls are out of the way, the Holy

Spirit can speak to our spirits more easily.

4. Worship God. I always take worship music with me, but music is just one way to worship God. Prayer is worship. Reading the Bible is worship. Obeying God is worship. Going on a sabbatical is worship!

5. Spend time with God. This is the main purpose of going on a sabbatical.

6. Whatever God wants you to do. A sabbatical is consecrated to His service and worship.



A Practical Example in the Business World

A sabbatical is not just a religious exercise. It is a life exercise. One of the core principles of Dan Sullivan's program, The Strategic Coach, is sabbatical. Dan calls it "free time." Free time is defined as a 24-hour period from midnight to midnight where no work activities are done. No phone calls to the office, no files, no briefcase or work-related magazines, etc. Nothing for even thirty seconds. Dan believes you have to "totally disconnect from your work and rest, relax and rejuvenate (to make young again) your health, perspective, thinking, etc. so that when you come back to work you have a totally different outlook on your work. Out of this outlook you will make a tremendous number of creative changes and decisions. Many people typically ruin your free time by bringing along a little work or somehow staying connected to work. Dan recommends a week of free time at a time. When you come back, you will have tremendous breakthroughs. The Strategic Coach program teaches you to use your free time for setting up the next period of breakthrough in your business."

Some Final Thoughts

I love to go away and spend time with God on sabbatical. Much of the revelation I have received from God has been on sabbatical, and to a large degree, this is where I get vision for the year. Every four months I go back on sabbatical to see if I am on track. "God, is this still what You want me to do? Am I on track? Do You want to adjust anything? Do You want to add anything? Do You want to take anything away?" In a sense, I live from sabbatical to sabbatical. I can't imagine living any other way, and I don't believe I can accomplish God's purpose for my life without going away on sabbatical.

Every seventh year, I go on my regular sabbaticals, but I also take off every Friday and spend it with God (a modified version of Leviticus 25). As you can imagine, those years have been the best years of my life.

People have asked me if I always go by myself. The answer is yes. Just me and God. I also don't make phone calls except to let my wife know every two or three days that I am still alive, and I tell people in our organization, "Unless the building is burning down, don't contact me." Of course this is what I do, but you don't have to do it my way. The important thing is that you go spend time with God.

"Sabbaticals should become a lifestyle."

I believe sabbaticals should become a lifestyle, just as they were a lifestyle for Jesus. He would take short sabbaticals to go away to hear God and come back and do

what God said. Unfortunately, many people consider the idea of sabbatical as just too radical. The idea of taking off work for three days or a week can be overwhelming, and sometimes it is hard to really grasp the benefits of a sabbatical.

One last thing: It is never a "good time" to go on a sabbatical, ever, but it is always worth it. I hope you have learned that this is not a commandment from God to put a burden on you but to bless you. I pray this lesson has encouraged you to make going on a sabbatical a priority in your life.

Personal Reflection Questions

1. Have you ever gone on a sabbatical? What were the results?
2. Do you know anyone who has gone on a sabbatical? What were the results?
3. Do you need revelation from God at this point in your life?
4. Do you believe God can protect and grow your business while you are spending time with Him?
5. Is your mind going a hundred miles an hour regarding issues in your life or business?
6. Do you believe that going on a sabbatical with God will ultimately cost you something?
7. Do you desire a better relationship with God? If so, how are you going to pursue that?
8. Are you tired and in need of rest?

Practical Steps to Go on a Sabbatical

One of the best ways to hear from God and see His vision for us, our organization, and our lives is to go on a sabbatical, a dedicated time alone with God. We encourage you to go on a sabbatical and have listed some tips below on how to make the most effective use of your sabbatical time.

1. Start preparing for the sabbatical about a week ahead of time. Begin to consciously slow down your mind and thoughts so you will be prepared to focus on the Lord rather than work, projects, issues, etc.
2. Bring plenty of paper, pens, pencils, and/or highlighters.
3. Bring warm clothes. Fasting tends to make you feel colder than usual.
4. Try to do some type of fast during the sabbatical. Fasting makes your spirit more sensitive to the Lord. If possible, start fasting the day before your sabbatical as part of your preparation.
5. Drink plenty of pure water to flush out any toxins brought out by the fast.
6. As you start your sabbatical, pray over your room and dedicate this time to the Lord. Ask the Lord to come and ask the Holy Spirit to fill the room.
7. Try to keep your focus on the Lord. I avoid all newspapers, magazines, and television. It is fine to bring a few books along, but it is usually best to keep them to a minimum. It is easy to get involved in reading a book and lose a lot of time.
8. Use this time to build your relationship with God. It can be beneficial to read books written by people who are further along in their relationship with the Lord than we are, so we can learn from them how to get closer to Lord. Once again, keep this to a minimum.
9. Do not go into the sabbatical with a set agenda. Pray that God's agenda will be accomplished. The purpose is not to get something *from* God but to spend time *with* Him.

10. This is typically not the best time to do an in-depth Bible study on a specific topic. It can be very time consuming and distract you from spending time with God and hearing from Him.
11. Keep outside contact to a minimum.
12. It is good to get out of your room periodically. You can take a quiet walk or choose another activity. There is nothing wrong with doing an activity that takes your mind off the sabbatical as long as it is for a short time.
13. Create a blank “To Do” list at the beginning of the sabbatical. Anytime you think of a task that you need to do at work, at home, etc., immediately write it on this list so you don’t have to spend time thinking about it or trying to remember it.
14. Ask the Lord if there are specific areas He wants you to focus on during the sabbatical. I usually begin the sabbatical by asking the Lord to reveal to me any sin in my life that I am not aware of.
15. Bring or create a prayer list with specific needs in your life and in the lives of others so you can pray about them. I leave space to write down anything the Lord speaks to me about people and their needs.
16. For organizational purposes, I usually list on separate pieces of paper any topics in my life that I feel the Lord may want to address (Ex. ministry, relationships, family, to do, work, etc.) I place these pages into different areas of a binder so that each topic is easy to find when I need to write down things the Lord is saying. I also have a general topic entitled “Sabbatical [Year]” where I can write anything the Lord says that is not under a specific topic.
17. Do not strive to hear the Lord. Submit your will to His will and ask Him to speak to you and direct and guide you. Ask Him to give you revelation as you read the Word. The Lord wants to speak to you more than you want to hear from Him.
18. Ask the Lord what He wants to do in the coming year and then use the results from your sabbatical as a guide to keep you on course until your next sabbatical.