



Sabbatical for Success

The term "sabbatical" originates from the word Sabbath, a day designated for rest and dedicated to God's service. The Sabbath is a holy day of abstaining from work. **A sabbatical extends this concept by combining multiple Sabbaths into an extended period, during which one sets aside time for God and refrains from work.** 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."*

Many individuals struggle to grasp and implement the concept of sabbatical, often underestimating its significance. Business owners, engrossed in the daily challenges of their enterprises, often work tirelessly to address issues and plan for the future. Despite their proactive efforts, they may overlook the vital role of seeking guidance from God, who holds the solutions to their problems. Failing to take time away with God can lead to detrimental consequences for their businesses, hindering their ability to think and generate effective solutions. The weekly Sabbath, as commanded by God, serves as a reminder of the need to pause, reflect, and find the answers to challenges through connection with a higher purpose. So, where does the biblical concept of an extended Sabbath/Sabbatical come from? Let's look at Exodus 34:21-24 *"You have six days each week for your ordinary work, but on the seventh day you must stop working, even during the seasons of plowing and harvest. You must celebrate the Festival of Harvest with the first crop of the wheat harvest and celebrate the Festival of the Final Harvest at the end of the harvest season. **Three times each year** every man in Israel must appear before the Sovereign, the LORD, the God of Israel. **I will DRIVE OUT the other nations ahead of you and EXPAND YOUR TERRITORY, so no one will covet and conquer your land WHILE YOU APPEAR before the LORD your God three times each year.**"* Yes, it says... GOD will expand your territory while you spend time with Him, amazing!!!

When Kara and I were starting our new company several years ago and trying to discover the Vision God had for us, a mentor challenged us to stop and take 3 sabbaticals that first year... there was only one problem we didn't have any free time and we didn't really have the extra money. We wanted to be obedient to the Lord and honor the wisdom our mentor had provided and so we scheduled a 3 day sabbatical in Florida. Being one of our first sabbaticals I was a little frustrated after three days of praying reading and seeking God that I hadn't really received anything profound or ground breaking, but at the end of the 3th day we just rested and recalled all the amazing things God had done for us over the years. That was on a Saturday afternoon, and we flew out back to Texas the next day....one of my aunts heard



we were in town and called us to ask if we wanted to join them for church and then brunch the following morning before we flew out. I hadn't seen my aunt or uncle in several years, but that side of my family owned a large and successful business and had over 1,000 employees and was a multi-billion dollar group of companies! Growing up I had always wanted to emulate them, they were brilliant and extremely hard workers and working for them in the summers meant regular 70-80+ hour weeks. As I didn't know any different, I had come to believe this was the way to build a successful company, working crazy hours and sacrificing time, family, and purpose on the alter of successes. That morning as we arrived at their church my uncle was absent, my aunt explained he had been working crazy hours and weekends at one of the projects to keep everything on track, but he "might" be able to join us for brunch. They took us to a lovely high end steakhouse, and we had fun catching up with the cousins and family, about 45 minutes later my uncle finally arrived, sweating and exhausted. I barely got to talk to him as he wolfed down his cold steak and 10-15 minutes later, he pushed back from the table and exclaimed... Johnathan I would love to spend more time with you, but you see I just can't, I have to get back to the proverbial salt mines... you know how it is, if I don't, I am afraid the wheels are going to come off this whole thing! And with that he was gone! It hit me like a ton of bricks, and the holy spirit said... "if you build it with the sweat of your brow and the blood of your hands... that is the only way you will be able to maintain it! I was in shock... I had thought my whole life this is what I wanted, but now I saw a vision of myself, almost 70 years old, sitting around a table with my friends and family, unable to enjoy the simple things in life because it was time to go back to work and maintain the kingdom I had built on my own. That glimpse of my future broke me, and it was in that moment I said "Lord I don't want this, there has to be another way?" The Holy spirit said, "If you let me Build the company My Way, then it will be by My Wisdom that it is established, by My Power that it prospers, and My grace that it be will sustained after you are gone, but it will Not be in the strength of your own hand! And in that moment everything changed, it was one of the most powerful sabbaticals we have ever taken...God shifted our focus and philosophy on work. The good news is we now let God build the business and maintain it, and since that sabbatical HIS company has grown over 1200%+, I would say it would be many times more than that... but in all honesty we still get in His way quite a lot, but we are making progress...lol! But now our future success is 100% dependent upon His Vison, as are we!

We have found Sabbaticals can be a powerful way to pause... and hear what you have been too busy to understand in your own strength, it gives you time to reflect and praise God for the amazing works he has already done which takes the limits off of what God wants to do for you! Psalms 78:41-42 *"Yes, again and again they tempted God, **And limited the Holy One of Israel. They did not remember His power...**"* The day when He redeemed them from the enemy, It also gives time to spiritually and mentally "Reset", bring clarity and focus to what God has for the next season. We often find our company grows and is blessed with new projects while we are physically on sabbatical, Not working at all! ... Demonstrating all our blessing come from the Lord and not the work of our own hands. It is also likely because the Lord has been waiting since our last Sabbatical for us to get out of the way so He can bless our business!



3-5 Day Sabbatical

Travel Day: If it is a short sabbatical, we usually make travel day, Day 1 and begin praying and fasting on flights listening to our audio books or worship only and reading the bible. If it is a longer sabbatical, we use this day to unwind and begin to ask God what we are to focus on during the sabbatical.

Day 1: Wake up pray together (we will have coffee/tea together) and then split up and find a quiet area i.e., balcony, beach, patio, deck, coffee bar, (may be a travel day as well car/plane) etc.

In the morning of Day 1 we always focus first on:

A. What is God saying to me?

B. Lord show me what have I been too busy to hear?

C. What areas of my personal life/walk do you want me to focus on the next several weeks/months, read His word and pray and read more...we take notes as you will probably start getting a lot of rhema by doing nothing and being quiet, reading His word and listening to what He has been waiting to say during our normally busy schedules. NO cell phones, NO email between breakfast and lunch and again NO distractions between lunch and supper (we have several times shut the phones down for all 3x days, but this can be hard with kids, business, employees) At lunch we usually meet up and share what God said to each of us as this is one of the most awesome parts of sabbatical, hearing what the Lord is saying to your mate.

Day 1 After lunch: We split up again and shift the focus from our personal walk to marriage and family. We ask God specifically how to be a better husband/wife, father/mother, brother/sister, son/daughter. We ask the Lord what He wants to accomplish through our family in the coming weeks/months/year and ask for a specific plan to accomplish these goals with His help and timeline. During the afternoon we usually start or continue a Christian book (i.e., Awe of God, John Bevere, Poverty Riches Wealth, Chris Vallaton, All In, Mark Batterson) or a self help/educational book (i.e. 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, Laws of Leadership, Traction/EOS, etc.)

At dinner we debrief and compare written notes and words the Lord gave us for our family and spend an hour or two during and after dinner just formulating a strategic plan to guide the direction, we want to move our families and relationships (for example on our last sabbatical the Lord told us to assist our parents with housing transitions and retirement issues to make sure they were prepared properly ahead of time)

Day 2: Same format as Day 1

After breakfast, split, work on strategic goals and evaluate previous goals and plans, read, pray, read.

Day 2 Lunch debrief and then we usually have separate topics for the afternoon. We may work on one area, and I will work on another, for example.



Pray and ask the Lord for a plan for specific steps to increase, shape, and mold business, or specifically marketing and sales or specifically training and mentoring employees to full potential, possibly reading a book on leadership or training peppered with prayer and reading the word.

Day 2 Supper debrief, our favorite time of day

Day 3: Is great because we usually have not set agenda. We typically after having covered personal growth/family day 1 and business/goals/finances day 2 we'll use the morning of Day 3 for mission, outreach and serving (i.e., there are always a lot of demands on leaders time at Gateway, we place before the Lord all the areas we volunteer in and ask if there are any we should pull back from or any new areas we need to volunteer and serve in over the next few months to provide time, work, life, family balance.

Day 3 After lunch, sometimes we continue on if there is there are some specific answers, we need solved, other times we just rest and relax with each other and by Day 3 you are so in tune with the Holy Spirit he doesn't quick talking anyway. The rest of the week we just rest and enjoy each other, nature and God's creation, but keep an open mind and heart and pray with each other daily...sometimes we will get a concept or outline on day 1, but it will take the whole week for the Holy Spirit to download the specifics and plan of action.

Day 3-5+ We rejoice in what the Lord has shown you, we celebrate what he has already done.... Many times we find the greatest REVELATION comes in the REST that immediately follows the sabbatical! The Lord just wants to hang out with you and enjoy time with you, this time of joy, peace and rest often produces the greatest downloads, breakthroughs and results of the entire sabbatical!

1-2 day Quick Sabbatical

We once had a young man we were mentoring, he said he had no money or time to go on sabbatical, he was broke and working 70-80 hours a week in his roofing company and going in the hole more every day and was convinced he couldn't hear from the Lord. We told him he couldn't afford not to take a sabbatical immediately! We encouraged him if he would simply by faith take a one day, \$5 sabbatical we believed he would hear from the Lord for his future. We challenged him to be at a local free park by a lake before sunrise, take a sandwich and drink, and just spend time in the presence of God with zero phones or distractions and still be sitting there when the sun set that evening! Needless to say this simple one day sabbatical worked, the man who didn't think he could hear from God did! God gave him wisdom and direction... and the next year his business grew almost 8X in sales, God your heavenly Father can work with what you have, he just wants your obedience and to spend time with you!!!

If time or budget is limited and you can only do a 24 to 48 hour sabbatical... step out in faith, the Lord is waiting to share his peace, wisdom, love, strategy, creativity and Vision with those who are obedient and faithful... These short retreats with God can still be highly effective and life changing... **Go with God!**



Where to start – good questions to ask the Lord while on Sabbatical:

(If you have time, answer each question below as it pertains to the primary areas of focus while on Sabbatical: 1. Personal, 2. Marriage/Relationships, 3. Family, 4. Business, 5. Ministry.)

1. What is God saying to me in this new season?
2. What is God wanting to do through me which I am excited to do?
3. What is God wanting to do through me which I don't want to do or am afraid of?
4. What is God asking for me to stop, quit or change direction?
5. What is God asking of me which is new, unfamiliar or a new opportunity?
6. What is God asking for me of which is not new, but a task, character trait or project I need to complete?
7. What does success for me look like from God's perspective for this new season?
8. What are some specific milestones or key performance indicators to chart progress on vision above?
9. Who do I need to spend more time with and love, mentor, develop and build relationships with?
10. Where I am supposed to go to advance the Kingdom...send me Lord, I will go!