



Talk about taking time 'off'

TN106 Training Notes series: Leadership

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These notes are concerned with time 'off' or breaks from work. They are designed as discussion starters, so there are more questions than answers. They are written for clergy and church leaders to work at together.

They are just as much about the use of weekends for members of the congregation as they are about 'the day off' for Ministers. The point is to enable church leaderships to have an open discussion about 'work' and 'rest', for everyone's benefit.

Use what follows for an Eldership, Trustees or PCC session. Ministers and other church members need to understand the pressures on each other. This topic is rarely shared in this way.

Key principles

It would be helpful for the group to agree key principles on which to base the discussion. Here are five suggestions.

- 1 The Sabbath principle from Scripture is part of the DNA of creation and life but we need to apply it to the complicated world of today. See, for starters, Genesis 2:2-3; Exodus 20:8-11; Exodus 31:12-17; Mark 2:23-28.
- 2 The two versions of the Ten Commandments have different reasons why the Sabbath is so important: Exodus 20:11 (creation) and Deuteronomy 5:15 (redemption). The idea of 'rest' should be central and holy in our lives, not viewed negatively as just the absence of 'work'.
- 3 Two powerful enemies of Sabbath are, for some, pride (we can manage without what God has provided – a doctrine of justification by busyness) and, for others, sloth (Proverbs 6:6-11; 13:4 etc.; 1 Thessalonians 4:11,12; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15.) The Sabbath principle of one day off also includes the idea of six days on!

- 4 There is a natural rhythm that God has provided in creation (seasons, day/night). Jesus lived in tune with a rhythm of work and rest (eg. Mark 1:35; 3:13; 6:45,46; 9:2; 14:32,33). We need to tune in with God's rhythms in the way we live.
- 5 There is a deep peace we are to experience in our lives, perhaps particularly when taking time away from the stress of work. See Matthew 6:25-34; John 14:27; 16:33 but also Matthew 11:28-30 where 'rest' is promised within our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Q Are the group happy with these (members need to spend time considering each one) or do you want to add other ideas or amend these?*

What is 'work'?

Life is complex. If talking about time off work, we have to define 'work'.

- 1 For most it is a paid job. It may involve fixed hours controlled by others or not, commuting or working from home, tiring manual labour, monotonous office work, or stressful levels of responsibility. For some it means leading, or working for, churches.
- 2 For some people 'work' involves looking after children at home, for others caring for elderly relatives, for still others the search for any employment in the job-market and, for the active retired, voluntary activities.
- 3 Most people are given two days a week off ('full time') work, but most Ministers have one or one-and-a-half days off. However, church attendance and other church activities have to fit within the two days 'off' for most lay people.
- 4 Many Ministers work 60 hours a week (sometimes in stressful circumstances) but some members of their congregations may work 45 hours with 10 hours of commuting and 5 hours of church activity. The European Working Time Directive limits average employment hours to 48 – but most Ministers are not technically 'employed'.
- 5 Factors which impact stress include: both parents working with child-care to arrange, conflicts at work, being a Christian disciple in a secular setting, health problems and different issues for singles and marrieds. For Ministers, some have to cope with social problems living on a tough estate, others are involved in regular bereavement/crisis work, still others will have an up-front ministry minutely scrutinised by gifted congregations with strong views.
- Q1 What other examples could be cited which show, like these, that comparisons are not as straightforward as some might think?*
- Q2 How well do your congregation appreciate the particular work/rest issues that the Minister and other church staff have to face? How might understanding grow?*
- Q3 How well do the Minister and other church staff or leaders appreciate the particular 'work' pressures that some of the congregation face each day?*
- Q4 How should you then view members of the congregation who, in their non-work time, lead a youth group, attend a church committee meeting or lead/preach on Sunday? Each of these would be 'work' for a Minister but not for most church members.*
- Q5 What about a Minister who sits on national church bodies, speaks at other churches or leads a local community group? Is all this done in work or non-work time? Why?*

What is 'rest'?

Here are six distinct functions of non-work time. Note that it is also possible to waste time without achieving the benefits in each of this list.

- 1 **Sleep** – the rest our bodies and minds need
Some need more than others. Some have their sleep interrupted (eg. by young children). Some have to cope with shift work or working unusual hours.
- 2 **Relaxation** – switching off
People relax in different ways. Extroverts might want to invite friends for a meal, introverts to have time to themselves reading a book. Some will be passionate about particular interests or hobbies, others want to chill out.
- 3 **Recreation** – activity for bodies and minds
We all need exercise which may involve team sports, going to the gym or walking outdoors. A different type of recreation would be attending an academic lecture or studying a textbook.
- 4 **Routines** – daily life has to go on
These are daily essentials: cooking meals, shopping, washing, cleaning the house, keeping track of finance or emails, DIY house/garden maintenance.
- 5 **Relationships** – responsibilities for others
This might be time for parents with their children, caring for elderly relatives, travelling to meet family, time to maintain real friendships for singles or time for one's spouse.
- 6 **Discipleship** – the growth of our life as Christians
This includes personal prayer and Bible study, church services and activities, Christian events and conferences, serious reading.

Q1 Where do holidays fit? A holiday in a hotel may minimise the 'routines' list and that very point may make the holiday. Some prefer relaxation (lying on a beach) whereas others want recreation (cultural visits). Some may need a break from family responsibilities, others will make family relationships the focus.

Q2 Take the Minister whose spouse looks after most of the shopping, cooking and housework: a day off can be relaxation and recreation. But another Minister is single and all the shopping, cooking and housework has to be done on the day off – with little time for relaxation. Do we all appreciate and make allowances for such differences?

Q3 What priority does/should church attendance have? Some years ago most people 'went to church' twice every Sunday. Now, with competing Sunday activities, many attend once every other week or so.

Q4 What about lay church staff who find themselves at church on Sunday alongside their work colleagues? Is this time 'off' or not?

Q5 Where does the use of social media and email/telephone availability fit into this analysis? How far is it possible/desirable to shut off work communication when 'off'?

Issues for time off / holidays

So how might the Sabbath and other principles work out for you and your family, whether you are a Minister, church staff worker or member of the congregation? Some ideas:

1 Location

There is benefit in getting physically and mentally away from all links to work. Examples:

- for those who work from home, getting out of the house/area;
- if that is not possible, shutting the study door, dressing down, etc.;
- for those with children / elderly relatives, occasional breaks with others supplying child or respite care;
- finding simple holidays that do not have the stress of complicated travel.

Q How does this work out for each member of the group?

2 Length of time

Short breaks may not be enough.

- Many people need a two-week holiday at some point in the year: one week to switch off and one week to relax.
- Similarly Ministers may need at least an evening before the day off to give the benefit on the day itself – and/or a monthly 48 hour period.

Q1 What are the particular issues facing members of the congregation in these respects?

Q2 What constitutes a crisis that is serious enough to trump time off? If it does, how do you make the time up afterwards?

3 Emails, phone and social media

There should be some form of protection from 'work' emails and phone calls. Yet some executives are expected to be available for work calls at home and on holiday, and some Ministers check emails each day when away to save a large pile accumulating.

Consider:

- banning the use of screens throughout any time off;
- in particular, resting from all social media throughout a day off;
- having a private number unknown to work people and using only that when 'off';
- putting an 'out-of-office' message for your emails (see TN105).

Q1 Share practices within the group – but don't be frightened to challenge each other if some feel that what is described is not the best.

Q2 Are there significant differences between needs here for Ministers and members of the congregation?

4 General issues for everyone

- Don't feel guilty about taking time to rest. We have fragile bodies and minds that are designed to need proper and regular rest if they are to continue functioning well. Busyness is no badge of office. The Sabbath is to be holy.

- But hard work is to be commended when 'at work'. Are we (Ministers and others) avoiding hard work to opt for an easy life (Proverbs 6:6)?
- Get proper time to rest during each **day** too: time set aside for sleep, relaxation, recreation, etc. What if you have young children to care for?
- Our bodies prefer a regular rhythm of rest. So although amount of sleep is important, constant bedtimes may be even more so.
- Include fixed times in the day for time off or with the family. Diarise them as meetings if necessary, for protection.

Q1 Do I have my work and my rest in reasonable balance? Would my spouse or close friends agree with that answer? Which of the six 'rest' categories am I ignoring?

Q2 Am I allowing enough time each day for prayer and Scripture study?

5 Specific issues for Ministers/staff

- Choice of a day off may need to change from time to time and will depend on conflicting factors such as spouse's job (if applicable), school-children's availability, likelihood of frequent interruptions, ability to switch off.
- Recognise that there are specific issues for Ministers who are single parents when they are responsible for the school run, cooking meals, etc.
- Seek ways to educate the congregation to understand issues that Ministers/staff face in choice of a day off.
- You need to balance taking care of yourself with the necessary sacrifices in Christian ministry. Should a Minister ever actually be 'off' while expecting the congregation to be available at any time?
- If you lose time off because of an emergency, diarise an alternative immediately.
- Block time off in the diary before other engagements get added in. Show it as an engagement so nothing can force it out.
- Seek people to help you in areas which are 'routines' for you. So a cleaner or a gardener may be wise uses of limited funds.

Q1 How can clergy ensure lay leaders understand issues of clergy stress and matters concerned with a day off or holidays?

Q2 What opportunities do lay leaders have to explain issues that face them with church 'work' to fit in, and to voice concerns they have about perceptions of clergy time off?

These notes are available at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Training-Notes-index> then TN106. See also Article A25, *Working from home*, and Training Notes TN7, *Ideas for how to make time for life*, TN10, *What do Christians do between Sundays?*, TN43, *Did Jesus use an iPhone?*, TN67, *Stress and the Christian worker*, TN84, *How to say 'No' when you should*, and TN151, *Loss of leadership passion*.

John's resources are marked for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication and Administration. File TN106 under Leadership.

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