

FRONTLINE BIBLE CHURCH

Lead Pastor Sabbatical Proposal



February 2017

Introduction

The Frontline Bible Church Sabbatical Model

Congregations, as a matter of course, expect much of their pastors and don't always fully recognize and make allowance for the time, effort, and energy required for the role. The lead pastor is typically the first to be looked to for spiritual guidance, care, and involvement in the lives of the congregants and the larger the church, the higher the number of directions in which a pastor is pulled. Frontline Bible Church is no exception; with an average attendance hovering near 200, there are any number of voices, situations, and opportunities looking for attention from the lead pastor.

There is little chance for a meaningful, sustained respite with the numerous ongoing relationships and job commitments associated with full-time ministry. Christians have long recognized the value of a periodic and extended "Sabbath break" that takes the pastor away from the regular push-and-pull of their role. Churches willing to take the risk of walking without their pastor for a time, often find that the sabbatical can yield benefits not only for the pastor but for the congregation he serves as well.

As a church with a Mission that desires to equip everyone to make an eternal impact, there is the additional concern with how, and when, can the pastor himself become equipped in the areas in which God is leading while still fulfilling the requirements of their role?

After over two decades of continuous ministry at Frontline Bible Church, the board recognizes the benefit of providing Pastor John with an extended time away from regular duties to pursue activities that can refocus and equip for future ministries, at a pace that allows for the recharging of emotional, physical, and spiritual energy reserves.

In order to create the procedural space for a sabbatical to occur, the board at Frontline Bible Church has endeavored to create a policy that is both consistent with the Mission of the church and can provide opportunities for spiritual and physical revitalization. The sabbatical model that the board has formulated, defines the sabbatical as a time to engage in an off-site project, with well-defined objectives, and with a specified equipping theme or focus. The majority of the tasks, activities, and reflections that are planned for the sabbatical period should in some way contribute to meeting the goals of the project.

Personal and Congregational Benefits

Description of benefits to Pastor John:

- Time away from the day to day pressures of ministry will provide a time of soul care for John. It will also provide increased opportunity to revitalize family relationships. Both are critical to ensure effective and healthy years of ministry ahead.

- Time away will give opportunities to explore what others are doing in ministry. Being so close to one church for 20+ years can lead to short-sighted thinking – the proverbial “Can’t see the forest for the trees”
- We named our church Frontline on purpose to remind us that what we do IN the walls is to prepare us to go OUT of our walls to make an eternal impact. The essence of being an equipping church is that every person realizes they are equipped/getting equipped to be on a mission in their own environments – home, work, school, play, etc.. This sabbatical will give our Pastor time to research and visit churches that are truly helping their people live on mission and see what might help us more effectively do the same.
- Time away will also provide an opportunity to explore what it looks like to do church planting with an equipping focus. This has been discussed from time to time, but has remained relatively unexplored due to the demands of the ministry.

Description of benefits to Frontline Bible Church:

Congregations benefit from sabbaticals in the following ways:

- They find a new appreciation for their minister, in his absence, realizing the multiple responsibilities, tasks and assignments in which their minister has been engaged. In most cases, the congregation will be surprised at how much their pastor does and will wonder how he gets it all done. Sometimes, they will discover the opposite. In either case, there is value in better understanding what it is like to be a pastor of this congregation. When the pastor returns, he or she often finds a congregation with a whole new heart.
- Congregations gain a new understanding of how well the church can function as a whole. Churches have individuals who, given the opportunity, will share their gifts and fill in the gap. This is a proving ground for up-and-coming leaders, spiritually gifted laity and volunteers. Volunteer involvement has been found to increase as a result of a pastor’s sabbatical.
- Congregants will often lessen their dependency on the minister. They will better understand the ongoing balance that is necessary between the work of the clergy and the work of the laity. They may realize their own need to draw closer to Christ during this extended season of pastoral leave. Having come to expect the minister to be there for them, people may discover that their dependency needs to be on God instead.
- Sabbaticals help retain ministers who know the flock, the community and the dynamics that have taken years to achieve. Churches can expect to see longer pastorates when sabbaticals are given. Retention of ministers goes up when a pastor and congregation learn to care for one another. Many ministers leave their posts due to stress, unresolved conflict or a sense of burnout. Without time off and time for renewal, ministers leave exhausted, depressed and defeated. The Billy Graham School of

Missions, Evangelism and Church Growth has consistently shown that “the most effective, growing churches are led by pastors with a long tenure. Pastors who ‘stick with’ a church through good times and rough times gain a level of credibility and respect that allows them to challenge the church to take risks necessary for growth.”

- Churches find a refreshed minister upon his return.

Taken from: The Pastor’s Advocate Series – “Sabbaticals for Ministers: The Benefits for Pastors and Congregations”
http://media.focusonthefamily.com/pastoral/pdf/PAS_Sabbaticals.pdf

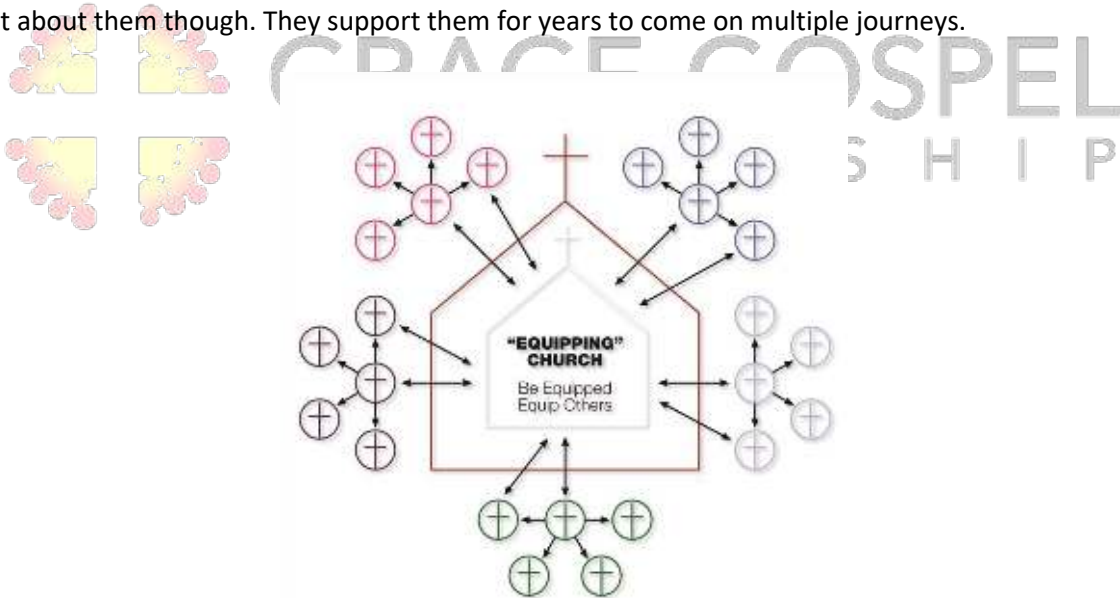


Pastor John's Project Theme

The policy adopted by the Board of FBC calls for a specific project that will be the focus of the sabbatical. I am choosing to focus on understanding how to move the Equipping Church as we understand it in our mission to becoming a sending and multiplying church. If we are truly equipping every person who attends FBC according to our mission, then sending others out on mission in the world (both locally and globally) will be a natural outcome.

Animals, plants and humans have all been designed to reproduce themselves. It's in their DNA. If we can expect that in animals, plants and humans, why shouldn't we expect that in the Church, the Body of Christ? Unfortunately, we can't.

The Bible makes it clear that we are called to equip others. Eph. 4:11-16 describes not only the goal of equipping (a strong, healthy, growing, mature Body of Christ) but also the way it's meant to be done (healthy leaders equipping the people to do the work of the ministry). The expectation is that intentional investment/discipleship is being done (2 Tim. 2:2), but the second part of GOING OUT is just as important. In John 17 Jesus prayed for his disciples that they would realize their call was to go into the world AS DISCIPLES TO MAKE DISCIPLES (cf. Matt. 28:19-20). The Jerusalem church flourished as they began to live this out. Also in Acts 13 we see the healthy church body at Antioch doing this very thing as they send Paul and Barnabas out on their first missionary journey. They don't just send them out and forget about them though. They support them for years to come on multiple journeys.



We have been using this diagram to describe this same biblical model of equipping/sending over the years, but are we really living it out yet? To some degree we are, but I don't believe it's become our culture yet. Is it because we have not been equipping properly? Is it because our processes are not set up adequately to engage more people in missional endeavors? Are there other reasons for this disconnect? If THIS (Equipping Diagram) describes our goal, what will it take to make it a reality? That is why I want to study the elements that go into having a healthy equipping church, and how to maximize the missional potential of Frontline Bible Church.

The ultimate project objective is to formulate an assessment of the Scriptural and organizational requirements of the equipping church as it relates to our mission, and to offer possible strategies for how we can better send equipped people out into the world for eternal impact. Equipped Christians know they have a mission to live out as uniquely gifted followers of Jesus Christ. Sometimes those gifts will be used right here at Frontline and in the communities where our church families live. Other times individuals will feel called to ministries outside of Frontline, both here and abroad. Our job is to equip every person to live out their mission, wherever it may take them, but how can we do that even better and what is my role in it?

This study of the equipping church will also allow time to analyze the possibility of planting a new church at some point in our future, whether through partnerships with outside efforts or planting one ourselves. It is a fact that we need more Grace churches, especially ones who are discipleship-oriented. We play a unique role in the Grace Gospel Fellowship as one of the only GGF churches actively focused on equipping disciplinarians. I will be working through the available information on creating missional churches but with a keen eye toward our theological distinctives. What is transferable? What is not? How can we create healthy GRACE churches right here and elsewhere? Not only will this benefit our congregation, but the greater Grace movement as well.

During the sabbatical there are a number of planned tasks, events, trips, and trainings that, while diverse and dissimilar in many respects, all have elements and focal points that will contribute towards the project objective. The final assessment will draw from the experiences, learning, interactions, and reflections that take place during the sabbatical and will reflect the best understanding of the Spirit's leading in this area. The assessment will not include a detailed plan of future actions but will offer a broad framework of how God could work through us to accomplish His mission for Frontline.

Focus Areas

There are three selected areas in which the sabbatical plan will aim to equip me for even more effectiveness in being the Lead Pastor of an equipping church. Achieving significant progress in becoming equipped in these three areas constitute the primary goal of the project aspect of the sabbatical time. The areas of focus: 1) taking sufficient time to hear from God HIS agenda for how He wants us to fulfill the mission He gave us, 2) gaining much more subject-matter-expertise on the topic of the equipping church through trainings and experiences with other equippers, and 3) researching and experiencing other church planting efforts to learn the requirements for what it would take for us to be actively involved in church planting.

Hearing from God

If Frontline is really God's Church, then carving out time to understand His agenda for our mission is critical. Just because one equipping church is doing something doesn't mean we should do it as well. Every church is uniquely gifted to fulfill God's agenda in the place and time He has them, and we do a disservice to the Body when we don't fulfill our unique role. Do we understand our uniqueness? A

prayer throughout Scripture was that God would open the eyes of people to see what He is doing and wants to do. I want to hear from God more in this area for even greater effectiveness as Frontline.

Equipping subject-matter-expertise

Whether through the 8 module Exponential course, conferences or interviews/visits with other pastors and churches, it is my goal to immerse myself in the subject of the equipping church. Even though I pastor an equipping church, I feel there's so much more I need to learn about it. What are the critical elements that equipping churches have in common? What do they do that we don't do? What don't they do that we do? What is the Bible calling us to as an equipping church?

- *Creating missional disciples*

Does our current process help people understand the gospel's relevance to their life today? Does it help them figure out their own mission emphasis? Does it challenge them to live it out?

- *Organizational Structures and Processes*

Are we set up currently to run more of a "Collect and Consume" model vs. the "Equip and Send" model. Are there organizational structures and processes that lend themselves toward equipping churches and not toward program churches? I want to discover and evaluate multiple organizational models that can be compared with our own to see how they work

Sending/Planting

How does a church know if it is able to/ready to multiply itself by planting another church? What are the guidelines or principles that can be used to help us evaluate our own readiness for such an endeavor? What is MY role when it comes to sending and planting? Is my personality and giftedness more conducive to certain roles than others in the process? I hope to discover these and include them in my final assessment.

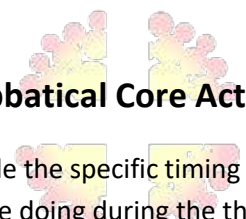
Methodology

Listed below are the ways in which I will be gathering and processing the information and experience regarding this project.

- **Time with God** – Numerous times in the Gospels we see Jesus getting away to be with the Father. Even though He had limited time before the crucifixion, He made the time to commune with the Father in order to understand and pursue His agenda. I intend to use the time away from normal ministry activities to pursue a deeper listening relationship with God and His Word. As we see multiple times in Scripture (Moses, Elijah, Jesus), God would bring His servants away to reveal further instructions for them. I want to create space for God to speak to me during this time through His Word and others. This will be done through daily

time spent with Him, going to Israel for spiritual and educational reasons, as well as taking an intentional prayer retreat at a monastery in Portage, MI.

- **Reading/Studying** – I look forward to reading books and taking some online courses on the subject. There are wonderful resources readily accessible on the subject and I want to spend large blocks of time digesting what I can.
- **Interviewing others** – There are plenty of others out there who are doing what we’re trying to do as a church, and I want to meet with them. Whether it’s other pastors or ministry leaders, I intend to have both formal and informal interviews throughout the sabbatical time to question them about what works for them and what can be done here.
- **Journaling** – I will be keeping a running log of my activities as well as processing my thoughts. Even though I am mainly a verbal processor, I have found on 1-day prayer retreats in the past that writing out my thoughts as they happen is helpful for understanding myself and what I’m learning.
- **Reporting** – I will be meeting with Brian Johnson roughly twice per month in order to share with him the things I’m learning as well as taking the opportunity to process questions and concerns I’m feeling along the way. Brian will be passing along many of these things on a yet-to-be-determined basis to the board to demonstrate accountability and good-faith for the project’s stated outcomes.



Sabbatical Core Activities – July 17-October 16, 2017

GRACE GOSPEL FELLOWSHIP

While the specific timing is still being finalized, here is a bulleted list outlining the wide variety of things I’ll be doing during the three month period.

1. Experience a cross cultural mission trip with Jared to Paraguay. This is a brand new field for GMI, and they are working hard to build missional communities among the Muslims in their area. The purpose of this trip will be to see how they equip from the ground up in order to create sustainable, reproducing, missional communities of believers. During this trip I plan to focus on:
 - a. The equipping process used in this field to move the completely unchurched into those fully trained to “be the church” including what they are learning and doing each step of the way through this process.
 - b. Review how they are structuring their church for multiplication.
 - c. Understand how they are equipping their people to engage into the unchurched communities around them.
2. Completion of the 8 module equipping church course from Exponential focused on the practical aspects of helping a church become more missional in all that they do.
 - a. This course will train on the practical aspects of being an equipping church including the most effective organizational structures for being an equipping church.

- b. It will also provide space to explore the key ingredients others have identified as necessary in the individuals and organization that are equipping / sending.
 - c. The plan is to do this course earlier in the sabbatical to allow it to help define the big picture and develop questions to ask while moving through the other aspects (such as interviews) of the exploration into the equipping church.
 3. Attend church services of at least 7 other churches over the sabbatical. Ideally, a good balance of these will be in equipping focused churches. These times will consist of:
 - a. Gaining experience seeing church through the perspective of being a visitor. After being in the same church for so long, it is helpful to practice seeing through a visitor's eyes.
 - b. Evaluating how they execute their Sunday morning services. Identify practices that they are doing to see what practical things might help FBC become better in executing our Sunday morning time.
 - c. Seeing if it can be easily identified whether each church is an equipping or program church. If an equipping church, further delve into what encouragement, training, and celebration methods are being used to further their equipping mindset through their Sunday services.
 4. Conduct interviews with 5 pastors actively engaged in an equipping church and church multiplication. I do not know at this time which pastors these will be. These interviews will be focused on the following questions:
 - a. How do you define and describe your mission/vision to others as an equipping church?
 - b. How do you measure if equipping is being successful? What metrics do you track?
 - c. What does your equipping process look like? Is it the same for everyone?
 - d. What do you see are the critical points in the equipping journey?
 - e. What things would you like to try but haven't been able to yet?
 - f. How do you organize your church structure to support the equipping model?
 - g. What have been the biggest obstacles in equipping your people?
 5. Read at least 3 biographies (or autobiographies) of people who have followed God's agenda and equipped others for eternal impact:
 - a. This reading will be to gain additional inspiration, ideas, and encouragement from those who have already gone down the path of listening for God's agenda and equipping others to live lives that matter forever.
 6. Take trip to visit Israel with Melinda. This trip will provide an opportunity to see the context out of which much of the Old and New Testament comes.
 - a. Since we believe the Bible is God's main tool for equipping people today (Bible is our church's middle name after all), this trip will provide an opportunity to gain a new level of understanding into the culture and surroundings of the land where many events in the Bible actually occurred. This first hand awareness of the geography, culture, and

history will be greatly beneficial in equipping others to have a more nuanced understanding of the Bible.

- b. This trip will also provide another extended time away from the “normal” conditions in the United States and hence provide another opportunity to hear from God regarding His agenda for Frontline Bible.
7. Complete a 3 day silence fast at a Monastery. This will be scheduled for a time near the end of my sabbatical. The focus of this time is on:
- a. Listening and hearing from God regarding His specific agenda for Frontline Bible Church – directions, opportunities, and course corrections.
 - b. Digest and process the main themes and observations from the sabbatical. Without outside influence and distraction, this is a space of calm to gain deeper clarity and insight into all God wants to form in me and in our church from this sabbatical season.

Basic Schedule of Activities by week: (subject to change)

- Week of July 17 – boot camp @ GBC preparing for Exite Trip. Leave for Paraguay on the 20th. Bring a book to read on the trip relating to my topic.
- Week of July 24 – Exite Trip in Paraguay
- Week of July 31 – Arrive home from Exite Trip on Wed. Aug. 2. The rest of this week will be spent reconnecting with my family and reflecting/journaling about the experience in Paraguay. We will pick a church in the area to attend on Sunday for evaluation.
- Week of August 7 – Work through Modules 1-3 (10 units) of Exponential’s “Becoming a Level 5 Multiplying Church”, Begin reading a second book related to the sabbatical topic. Meet with Brian re Paraguay trip. Attend church service for evaluation per the sabbatical proposal.
 - Module 1: Becoming a Level 5 Multiplying Church
 - Module 2: Finding your Starting Point
 - Module 3: Looking To Your Future
- Week of August 14 – Work through Modules 4-6 (12 units), Attend church service for evaluation per the sabbatical proposal. Meet with a ministry leader/pastor for an interview.
 - Module 4: Understanding the Core Components of Change
 - Module 5: Shifting Your Paradigms
 - Module 6: Beginning to Understand Level 5
- Week of August 21 – Work through Modules 7-8 (8 units) Attend church service for evaluation purposes.
 - Module 7: Embracing the Tensions 5
 - Module 8: Give God the Credit
- Week of August 28 – Meet with Brian re Exponential courses. Have meetings with multiple pastors from recent church visits for interview; Read another book for project.
- Week of September 4 – Make travel preparations and Leave for Israel Sept. 8.
- Week of September 11 – Tour Israel per the sabbatical proposal, Interview host pastor regarding his church as it relates to my sabbatical project.

- Week of September 18 – Return from Israel Sept. 19. Spend remainder of week catching up with life and children, as well as process and journal ALL the things we were able to experience in Israel, including sifting through and cataloguing pictures. Attend church service for evaluation purposes.
- Week of September 25 – Meet with Brian re Israel trip learnings. Spend week reworking through previous learnings as well as compiling findings and thoughts. Attend church service for evaluation purposes.
- Week of October 2 – Do the silence fast at the Benedictine Monastery in Portage, MI. Attend church services for evaluation purposes.
- Week of October 9 – Take week off.
- October 16 – return to former work schedule Monday morning.

Measurable Outcomes:

- There will be a final assessment presented back to the church which will:
 - Document the “aha” moments that God provides during the spaces set aside to listen to Him and His agenda for Frontline Bible and for me. Specifically I’m looking for greater clarity as to what God is saying about our unique calling and mission as a church and for me as Lead Pastor.
 - Present the expertise gathered through the course work, interviews, and reading on the equipping church.
 - Identifying the critical elements of what needs to be done in an effective equipping church.
 - Identifying the things that equipping churches are doing that aren’t critical elements but appear to be potential ideas for the future.
 - Recommending key things that we are doing already at Frontline Bible and need to continue as well as the things that we need to consider doing to be a more effective equipping church.
 - Present the guidelines and principles for sending / planting:
 - Knowing when we as a church are at the point of being ready to multiply via church plant, multi-site, etc.
 - Knowing when to encourage people to be sent out to a new mission field whether that is local or global.
 - Knowing my role as Lead Pastor when it comes to sending and planting based on factors such as personality and giftedness.