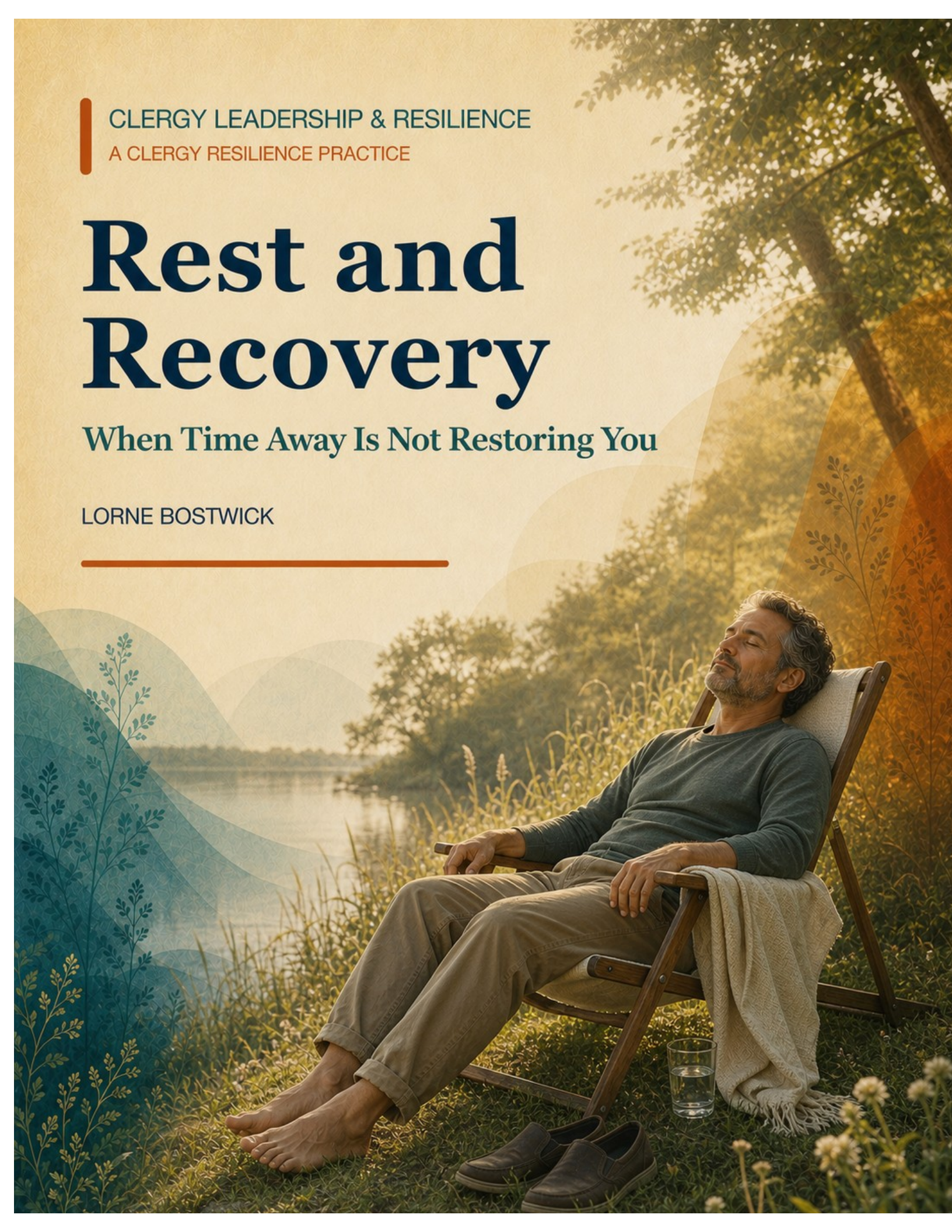


A man with grey hair and a beard is sitting in a wooden deck chair, leaning back with his eyes closed, appearing to be resting or sleeping. He is wearing a dark green long-sleeved shirt and khaki pants. He is barefoot, and his shoes are on the grass next to him. A glass of water sits on the grass near his feet. A light-colored blanket is draped over the side of the chair. The background shows a calm lake, trees, and a hazy sky, suggesting a peaceful outdoor setting. The overall tone is warm and serene, with soft lighting. There are decorative elements: a vertical orange bar on the left, a horizontal orange bar below the author's name, and stylized blue and orange floral patterns on the left and right sides respectively.

CLERGY LEADERSHIP & RESILIENCE

A CLERGY RESILIENCE PRACTICE

Rest and Recovery

When Time Away Is Not Restoring You

LORNE BOSTWICK

Rest and Recovery

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CLERGY LEADERSHIP AND RESILIENCE SERIES

Returning reader? [Skip the Series Introduction and go directly to Beginning Here.](#)

About the Clergy Resilience Series

Ministry can be deeply life-giving. It can also wear you down.

The work asks us to enter people's grief, conflict, fear, hope, illness, joy, disappointment, and change. We preach and teach, lead organizations, respond to crises, manage conflict, accompany people through suffering, celebrate with them, make decisions, and carry responsibilities few people in our congregations ever fully see.

Sometimes we do all of that while trying to make sense of what is happening in our own lives.

Over time, ministry leaves its mark.

You may notice that you are more tired than you used to be. Criticism stays with you longer. You carry other people's problems home. Saying no produces guilt. Conflict occupies your mind long after the meeting ends. Prayer has become something you do professionally rather than something that nourishes you. Perhaps you feel lonely, spiritually dry, cynical, constantly hurried, or simply beaten up.

These experiences do not necessarily mean you are failing at ministry.

They may mean that something deserves your attention.

Resilience Is More Than Endurance

Clergy resilience is sometimes understood as the ability to withstand the pressures of ministry—to become tougher, develop thicker skin, recover more quickly, and keep going.

But resilience is not simply endurance.

Nor is it another name for self-care.

Resilience is the developing capacity to remain personally healthy, relationally connected, spiritually grounded, and vocationally faithful through the ordinary and extraordinary stresses of ministry.

That capacity develops over time.

Emotional awareness helps us recognize what is happening within us. Differentiation helps us distinguish what belongs to us from what belongs to someone else. Boundaries protect what matters. Relationships keep us from practicing ministry alone. Prayer reconnects us with the source of our vocation. Rest and recreation restore capacities that ministry consumes. Attention to sleep, nutrition, movement, and physical health reminds us that our bodies are not separate from our spiritual and emotional lives. Systems awareness helps us remain grounded when congregations become anxious. Reflection and discernment help us recognize when something needs to change.

These are not techniques for making us invulnerable.

They are practices that help us remain available to God, to others, and to ourselves.

Self-Giving, Not Self-Erasure

Christian ministry involves sacrifice.

There will be nights when someone is dying and sleep will have to wait. There will be seasons when the needs of a congregation require more from us than usual. Love costs something. Vocation costs something. Following Christ has never promised a life protected from sacrifice.

The question is not whether ministry will ask something of us.

It will.

The more important question is what kind of sacrifice faithfulness requires.

Jesus' life was profoundly self-giving, but it was not indiscriminately available. He withdrew to pray. He rested. He received food and hospitality. He lived in relationship with companions. He left places where people were still looking for him. He sometimes moved toward one need while passing by another. The existence of a genuine need did not, by itself, determine what he was called to do.

That matters for pastors.

People may genuinely need us and yet their need may not always be ours to meet. Someone may be disappointed by a boundary we establish without that boundary being unfaithful. Rest may sometimes be more faithful than another meeting. Prayer may take us away from people who want our attention precisely because we need to remember whose ministry this is.

Christian ministry calls us to self-giving, not self-erasure.

Resilience helps us give ourselves faithfully without losing the self God has given us to offer.

The distinction matters because suffering itself is not evidence of faithfulness. Exhaustion is not proof of devotion. Being indispensable is not the same as being called. Allowing ourselves to be consumed by every legitimate need around us does not necessarily make us more Christlike.

Faithful sacrifice is ordered toward life.

Sometimes it asks a great deal of us. Sometimes it stretches capacities we did not know we possessed. But resilience helps us recover, learn, mature, and return. It preserves and develops our capacity to love, serve, discern, and give again.

So one question runs quietly beneath every resource in this series:

Is this helping me become more capable of faithful self-giving, or am I simply being consumed?

Start Where You Are

This series is not a training program to complete.

There is no prescribed sequence. There is no expectation that you work through every resource. You may never need some of them.

Begin instead with what is wearing on you now.

Perhaps you need stronger boundaries. Perhaps you need to understand why a particular situation makes you so angry. Maybe you need relationships in which no one needs you to be their pastor. Perhaps you need a way to recover after demanding weeks, or help sorting out what belongs to you and what you have been carrying for someone else.

Perhaps ministry has hurt you and you need to tend the wound.

Perhaps you have stopped doing things that give you joy.

Perhaps your body is telling you something you have been too busy to hear.

Perhaps you are beginning to wonder whether something about your vocation needs to change.

Start there.

Each resource in this series focuses on one dimension of clergy resilience. It is designed to be read in about an hour and practiced for approximately a month.

The reading introduces the practice.

The month is where the learning happens.

You will be invited to notice what happens in ordinary ministry, experiment with a few practices, reflect on what you discover, and gradually decide what is useful enough to carry forward.

There is nothing to complete here.

You are practicing, not performing.

If you miss several days, begin again. If a practice doesn't fit, adapt it. If you discover that the issue you started with isn't really the issue, follow what you are learning.

The purpose is not to become proficient at another program. It is to become more attentive to yourself, your relationships, your vocation, and the presence of God within all of them.

You Were Never Meant to Do This Alone

Personal practices matter, but clergy resilience is not solely an individual responsibility.

Sometimes pastors become depleted because we have developed unhealthy patterns. Sometimes we are depleted because we are serving within unhealthy systems. Often both are true.

No amount of emotional intelligence can make an abusive situation healthy. Better boundaries cannot eliminate every unreasonable expectation. Prayer cannot substitute for sleep. A vacation cannot repair chronic organizational dysfunction. And resilience should never become an excuse for asking clergy to endure circumstances that need to change.

Healthy resilience includes knowing when we need someone else.

A trusted colleague, friend, clergy cohort, coach, spiritual director, therapist, physician, mentor, or denominational leader may sometimes be part of what faithful resilience requires.

Seeking support is not evidence that resilience has failed.

Relationship is one of the ways resilience develops.

One Practice at a Time

You do not need to become perfectly resilient before you can practice healthy ministry.

Resilience develops as we live.

Notice one thing.

Practice one thing.

Pay attention to what changes.

At the end of the month, you may decide to continue the practice. You may choose another resource because something else now needs attention. Or you may simply return to your life and ministry carrying one new capacity with you.

That is enough.

Read for an hour. Practice for a month. Then ask what you need next.

Beginning Here

You took the day off. Perhaps you even took a week.

You slept later, stayed away from the office, silenced some notifications, and tried not to think about the congregation. Yet when it was time to return, you did not feel restored. You felt heavy, irritable, reluctant—or as tired as when the time away began.

This can be bewildering. Time off is supposed to help. When it does not, pastors often blame themselves. Perhaps I did not rest correctly. Perhaps I should have exercised more, prayed more, traveled somewhere, stayed home, planned less, or used the time better.

But time away and recovery are not the same thing.

Time away interrupts at least some demands. Recovery is the gradual restoration of capacities those demands have depleted. You can stop working without sleeping well, quieting vigilance, releasing responsibility, processing grief, recovering attention, or receiving anything that gives life.

Some vacations are filled with travel, household work, caregiving, family expectations, and decisions. Some days off are spent monitoring email, anticipating the next crisis, and preparing to return. Even protected time can begin under such accumulated exhaustion that the body and mind need several days merely to stop bracing.

Sometimes rest first makes exhaustion more visible. The headache arrives. The body grows heavy. Emotion surfaces. Motivation disappears. This does not necessarily mean the time away is failing. It may mean the effort that kept you functioning has finally loosened enough for depletion to be felt.

This booklet will not promise that four weeks can resolve chronic exhaustion. It cannot diagnose a medical condition, repair an unsustainable ministry position, create adequate staffing, or replace professional care. It offers a month of practice in recognizing what has been depleted, interrupting what prevents rest, matching recovery to need, and building rhythms that restore capacity over time.

The central question is:

What has ministry depleted in me, and what would actually help that capacity return?

Rest and Recovery Are Related but Different

Rest interrupts demand. Recovery is the restoration that becomes possible when demand has been interrupted and the conditions for renewal are present.

Rest matters. Bodies need sleep. Minds need periods without concentration and decision. Emotions need room to settle. Relationships need time not organized around ministry. Spirits need to receive rather than produce. No recovery plan can eliminate the need to stop.

Yet stopping alone does not determine what happens next. If the phone remains open to every concern, the pastor is still on call. If the mind rehearses unfinished conflict, vigilance continues. If time away becomes an ambitious project, effort merely changes form. If an exhausted pastor returns to an overflowing inbox, uncovered emergencies, and the same impossible workload, rest may feel less like renewal than a brief postponement.

Recovery asks a more precise question than, “Did I take time off?” It asks, “What was depleted? What continued to demand energy? What conditions would allow restoration?”

Recovery is rarely a single event. Capacity is often restored gradually through repeated periods of release, fitting forms of care, and conditions that do not immediately consume what has returned.

The Theology of Rest Is Not the Theology of Better Productivity

Christian teaching about rest begins with God, creation, grace, and creatureliness—not with strategies for producing more.

Sabbath declares that the world is held by God rather than by our uninterrupted labor. It interrupts the fantasy that everything depends upon us. It makes room for worship, delight, relationship, justice, and the reordering of desire. Sabbath may support recovery, but it is not merely a recovery technique. It is freedom from work's claim to define the whole of life.

Jesus receives sleep, food, solitude, companionship, prayer, and the care of others. He withdraws from crowds, although need remains. He also crosses interruptions and seasons of intense demand. The pattern is not a perfectly balanced schedule. It is a life in which human limits are neither denied nor treated as failures of faith.

Resurrection adds another dimension. Recovery is not always a return to the person we were before exhaustion. Some seasons change us. Renewal may involve new limits, relinquished expectations, different work, deeper dependence, or a more truthful form of ministry. God restores life, but not always by returning us to the arrangement that consumed it.

Rest is not permission to be temporarily unproductive so that you can become useful again. It is part of receiving your life as a creature loved by God.

Why Time Off Sometimes Does Not Restore Us

Time away can fail to restore for several different reasons. More than one may be true.

The Demand Never Fully Stops

The pastor leaves the office but remains reachable. Staff know to call “only if necessary,” yet necessity has never been defined. Messages are checked to prevent surprise. A congregational conflict continues through texts and private conversations. The pastor may not act, but still monitors.

The nervous system does not experience this as release. It remains poised to respond.

The Work Has No Adequate Container

Time off becomes fragile when no one has clear authority to cover emergencies, make ordinary decisions, protect boundaries, or tell the congregation what can wait. The pastor's absence simply creates a backlog.

In that setting, exhaustion is not only a personal problem. It is information about the way the ministry is organized.

The Exhaustion Is Mismatched with the Rest

Sleep may help physical fatigue but cannot by itself resolve loneliness. Solitude may restore someone saturated by people but deepen the depletion of someone already isolated. Entertainment may interrupt thinking without restoring the capacity for attention. A retreat may nourish the spirit while leaving chronic understaffing untouched.

The wrong form of rest is not necessarily harmful. It may simply be unequal to the depletion being carried.

Most exhaustion is mixed. A pastor may be physically tired, relationally saturated, spiritually dry, and morally distressed at the same time. Matching recovery to depletion does not require choosing one perfect diagnosis. It means asking which capacity most needs attention now and recognizing when several forms of care must work together.

The Body Remains Activated

After prolonged conflict, crisis, caregiving, or overwork, the body may remain braced even when the calendar is empty. Sleep is shallow. Muscles remain tense. Quiet feels uncomfortable. The pastor may become sick as soon as vacation begins or spend the first days unable to do anything.

This is not proof that rest has failed. It may reveal how long the body has postponed its response.

Time Away Becomes Another Performance

A day off can become a list: exercise, errands, household repairs, meaningful family time, spiritual practice, recreation, and preparation for the week ahead. A vacation can become an elaborate production of travel, expense, expectation, and very little unclaimed time.

Pleasure can require energy. Adventure can be restorative, but it is not the same as rest.

The Return Erases the Benefit

A pastor may begin to recover and then return to accumulated messages, additional meetings, unprocessed conflict, and expectations that no work has been delayed. The transition from rest to full demand happens in a few hours.

Recovery needs a doorway back, not a collision with everything that waited.

Exhaustion Is Not One Thing

“I am tired” can name many experiences. Describing the depletion more precisely helps identify the care it may require.

The categories that follow are lenses, not compartments. Human beings do not divide neatly into body, mind, emotion, relationship, spirit, and vocation. Depletion in one dimension reverberates through the others.

Physical Exhaustion

The body feels heavy, weak, sore, restless, or unable to sustain ordinary effort. Sleep may be inadequate, irregular, or unrefreshing. Illness, pain, medication, hormonal changes, sleep apnea, nutritional concerns, and other medical conditions can resemble or intensify occupational exhaustion.

Persistent physical fatigue deserves medical attention. Do not assume that ministry stress explains every symptom.

Cognitive Exhaustion

The mind struggles to concentrate, remember, prioritize, read deeply, or make decisions. Every choice feels costly. The pastor moves between tasks without completing them or stares at a sermon text unable to organize a thought.

Cognitive recovery often requires fewer inputs and decisions, not simply different content on another screen.

Emotional Exhaustion

The capacity to feel with others has thinned. Ordinary needs provoke irritation. Tears come unexpectedly—or not at all. The pastor can still behave compassionately but experiences an inner distance from the people being served.

Emotional recovery may require privacy, honest expression, grief, therapy, beauty, play, or being cared for rather than continuing to care.

Relational Exhaustion

Some pastors are saturated by interaction; others are depleted by loneliness. A pastor may need quiet after days of meetings and public presence. Another may need friendship in which no one wants pastoral leadership.

“Time alone” cannot be prescribed without asking whether relationships have overwhelmed or starved the person.

Spiritual Exhaustion

Prayer feels empty. Scripture feels professional. Worship requires performance. The pastor may not have lost faith but may have lost access to forms through which faith becomes personally nourishing.

Spiritual Grounding explores this dimension more fully. Here the question is whether exhaustion needs receptive spiritual companionship rather than another devotional assignment.

Moral and Vocational Exhaustion

Some fatigue comes from repeatedly acting within conditions that violate deeply held values: inadequate care, institutional dishonesty, impossible tradeoffs, unresolved injustice, or responsibilities without sufficient authority. The pastor may be tired not only from doing too much but from participating in what cannot be made right through greater effort.

Recovery may require lament, ethical clarity, advocacy, systemic change, or vocational discernment.

When Exhaustion Is Information About Fit

Sometimes recovery practices work. The pastor sleeps, steps away, receives care, and regains some capacity. Then the ordinary requirements of the call return, and the exhaustion quickly returns with them.

This pattern may indicate more than insufficient rest. It may reveal a mismatch among the pastor's gifts, competence, experience, and capacity; the congregation's needs; and the actual leadership requirements of the position.

A relationally gifted pastor may be serving a church whose size and complexity require sustained organizational leadership. A strong scholar and teacher may serve a congregation that neither values nor uses those gifts. A visionary may lack the administrative competence needed to turn vision into durable practice. A pastor may have the intellectual ability for a role but not yet possess the emotional maturity, conflict capacity, or experience the system requires. Another may possess the necessary competence but no longer have the physical capacity to maintain the pace.

Ambition can make this difficult to recognize. A larger congregation, higher salary, wider visibility, or more complex position can appear to be vocational advancement. Yet a call is not a promotion. It is a relationship among God's summons, a person's gifts and limitations, a community's needs, and a particular season.

Misfit does not mean unfit. Serving a smaller or less complex congregation is not necessarily stepping down. It may be moving toward a setting where relational gifts can be offered freely and fruitfully. The reverse may also be true: a pastor whose gifts require sustained theological engagement, community organizing, institutional leadership, or program development may slowly wither in a setting that cannot receive or support them.

Before concluding that a call no longer fits, distinguish among several possibilities:

- **Developmental stretch:** The role is demanding because competence is still growing.
- **A remediable gap:** Training, coaching, staffing, delegation, or clearer authority may make the work sustainable.
- **A structural impossibility:** The position routinely asks more than one person can reasonably provide.
- **A vocational mismatch:** The pastor's strongest gifts and the congregation's central needs do not fit well.
- **A changed season:** A call that once fit no longer fits the pastor's health, capacity, household, or emerging vocation.

Rest can help you discern among these possibilities, but it cannot resolve them by itself. Sometimes the faithful response is development or additional support. Sometimes it is restructuring the position. Sometimes it is discerning another call.

Ordinary difficulty is not evidence of mismatch. Every call includes seasons of stretch, learning, disappointment, and fatigue. The concern is a persistent pattern in which the central requirements of the role repeatedly exceed or bypass the capacities, gifts, and support realistically available.

If recovery restores you only until you return to the ordinary requirements of the role, your exhaustion may be communicating something truthful about vocational fit.

The Clergy Resilience resource **Vocational Discernment** develops this question more fully. It can help you consider whether the next faithful step is growth within the present call, a change in its conditions, or openness to another place of service.

When Exhaustion Needs More Than a Practice

Exhaustion can accompany depression, anxiety, grief, trauma, infection, anemia, thyroid disorders, sleep disorders, chronic illness, medication effects, substance use, and other conditions. Seek qualified medical or mental health assessment when fatigue is persistent, worsening, unexplained, accompanied by significant mood or sleep changes, or interfering with basic functioning.

If you are experiencing hopelessness, thoughts of self-harm, inability to care for yourself, chest pain, severe shortness of breath, or another urgent concern, seek immediate local help.

A resilience practice can help you observe and respond. It should never be used to make a pastor personally responsible for adapting to dangerous, abusive, or chronically unsustainable conditions.

A Month of Rest and Recovery

The next four weeks develop four cumulative capacities:

Recognize Depletion → Interrupt Continuing Demand → Match Recovery to Need → Build a Restorative Rhythm

During Week One, you will identify the capacities in which exhaustion is living.

During Week Two, you will notice and interrupt the ways work continues during time off.

During Week Three, you will choose recovery practices that fit the depletion you have named.

During Week Four, you will build daily, weekly, seasonal, and post-intensity rhythms that protect restoration.

Each week carries the previous movement forward. The aim is not to become fully rested in a month. It is to grow more skillful at recognizing what you need and creating the conditions in which recovery can begin.

Week One — Recognize What Has Been Depleted

Exhaustion often arrives as a single verdict: I have nothing left. This week invites greater precision without minimizing the whole.

Practice: A Capacity Inventory

At the end of each day, rate these capacities as low, mixed, or available. If the full list feels burdensome, choose the three or four capacities that seem most relevant and track those consistently:

- Physical energy
- Concentration and memory
- Ability to make decisions
- Emotional range
- Patience and compassion
- Desire for solitude
- Desire for companionship
- Spiritual receptivity
- Capacity for delight and play
- Sense of purpose or agency

Add one sentence: “Today, the greatest drain was...”

Do not use the inventory to grade yourself. Look for patterns. Which capacities recover overnight? Which remain low regardless of sleep? Which collapse after particular meetings, tasks, people, or kinds of responsibility? Notice as well what remains available; exhaustion may be concentrated rather than total.

Notice What Restores Even a Little

Record moments when one capacity returns, even briefly.

- Did food, water, movement, or sleep affect physical energy?
- Did silence restore attention, or did conversation help you think?
- Did completing one avoided task release mental pressure?
- Did music, laughter, prayer, or beauty reopen emotion?
- Did time with someone who asked nothing of you restore relational capacity?
- Did making one honest decision restore agency?

Small changes offer clues. They are not yet a recovery plan.

Separate Tiredness from Dread

Ask, “If tomorrow’s demands disappeared, would I want to sleep, play, be alone, see someone, make something, grieve, or do nothing?”

Then ask, “Am I tired because I need recovery, or am I dreading a condition to which I do not want to return?”

Both may be true. Dread can consume energy, and rest cannot repair what remains chronically unsafe or misaligned. Carry this distinction into the later weeks: recovery may restore capacity, but discernment addresses what you are returning to.

Review the Week

- Where is exhaustion most concentrated?
- What remains available in me?
- Which demands create disproportionate depletion?
- What restores a small amount of capacity?
- Does any symptom require professional assessment?

Week Two — Interrupt What Prevents Rest

Time off cannot become rest while responsibility remains active in every channel. This week turns toward the conditions that keep demand alive.

Map the Open Channels

Before your next period of rest, list the ways work can still reach you:

- Calls, texts, email, and social media
- Staff or congregational questions
- News about conflict
- Tasks visible in the home
- Sermon preparation “just to get ahead”
- Worry about what others are deciding
- Anticipation of the return
- Guilt about being unavailable

Circle the channels you can close yourself. Mark those that require cooperation from staff, lay leaders, family, or denominational partners. A boundary that depends upon others must be communicated and rehearsed, not merely intended.

Define What Constitutes an Emergency

“Call only if it is an emergency” is not a plan until emergency has been defined.

Decide in advance:

- What circumstances require immediate contact?
- What can wait until the next workday?
- Who has authority to respond?
- Who decides whether the threshold has been met?
- What information can be given to others without your involvement?

Coverage must include authority, not merely the assignment to receive messages.

Ask the person providing coverage to describe the plan back to you. This simple step exposes ambiguities before the period of rest begins.

Create a Ritual of Release

At the end of the final work period before rest:

1. Write down unfinished tasks rather than carrying them mentally.
2. Identify the first action for your return.
3. Transfer covered responsibilities explicitly.
4. Set messages and devices according to the boundary.
5. Name what will remain unresolved.
6. Say aloud, “This work exists, and I am not carrying it for this period.”

The ritual will not erase concern. It gives concern a container.

Practice a Transition

Do not demand immediate relaxation. Give the body and mind a bridge: change clothes, shower, walk, stretch, sit in the car for five quiet minutes, listen to music, or mark the transition with prayer.

Notice how long it takes before internal urgency begins to lessen. The delay is useful information, not failure.

Review the Week

- Which channel was hardest to close?
- What fear appeared when I became unavailable?
- Was my coverage real or symbolic?
- What did my body do as demand decreased?
- What organizational change would make rest more possible?

Week Three — Match Recovery to Depletion

This week connects the Week One inventory with the Week Two interruption of demand. Choose recovery for the capacity that is actually depleted.

Recovery is an experiment, not a test you pass. One attempt may be too brief, poorly timed, or overwhelmed by accumulated fatigue. Notice whether a practice restores even a little capacity—and whether repetition changes the pattern.

If Physical Capacity Is Depleted

Consider sleep regularity, food, hydration, gentle movement, medical care, reduced stimulation, and genuine physical ease. Exhaustion does not always need a strenuous fitness plan. Sometimes the body needs permission to stop compensating.

If sleep remains unrefreshing or fatigue persists, seek medical assessment rather than endlessly adjusting self-care.

If Cognitive Capacity Is Depleted

Reduce decisions and inputs. Choose familiar food, a simple route, a repeated activity, or time without news and social media. Let another person plan. Engage in something absorbing but undemanding: a puzzle, gardening, handwork, a familiar novel, or uncomplicated play.

Scrolling may interrupt work while continuing to flood attention. Notice whether the mind is quieter or merely occupied.

If Emotional Capacity Is Depleted

Choose a setting where emotion need not be managed for others. This may include journaling, therapy, art, music, grief, laughter, or conversation with someone who can listen without requiring you to become the pastor.

Numbness may be protective. Do not force feeling. Create safety and let emotional range return gradually.

If Relational Capacity Is Depleted

Ask whether you need less contact or different contact.

If saturated, choose privacy without apology. If isolated, seek mutual companionship, recreation, or a community in which your role is not central. Recovery may come through being unknown for an afternoon or deeply known by one trusted person.

If Spiritual Capacity Is Depleted

Receive rather than lead. Attend worship without responsibility. Let someone pray for you. Walk in creation. Sit before a candle. Read poetry or a short passage of Scripture without preparing to teach it.

Do not turn spiritual recovery into remedial work for a pastor who has failed devotionally.

If Moral or Vocational Capacity Is Depleted

Rest may quiet immediate fatigue, but moral distress often needs truthful speech and meaningful agency. Talk with a wise colleague, therapist, spiritual director, supervisor, committee, or denominational leader. Name the contradiction clearly. Identify what must change, what can be resisted, and what may require departure.

If capacity returns during time away but disappears quickly under the ordinary requirements of the position, revisit “When Exhaustion Is Information About Fit” and consider working through the **Vocational Discernment** resource.

Design One Recovery Period

Choose one depleted capacity. Plan a period of thirty minutes to half a day with three parts:

1. **Release:** What demand will stop?
2. **Restore:** What activity or condition fits the depletion?
3. **Receive:** How will you notice what returns without measuring success?

Afterward, ask only: “What is slightly more available now?”

Repeat the period at least once if possible. Recovery is easier to assess as a pattern than as a single experience.

Review the Week

- Did the recovery practice fit the depletion?
- What did I choose from habit rather than need?
- What restored capacity rather than merely distracting me?
- What form of recovery requires another person's help?
- What depletion cannot be resolved without structural change?

Week Four — Build a Restorative Rhythm

Recovery becomes more possible when it is woven into ministry rather than postponed until collapse. This week builds a rhythm at several scales and identifies the people who must help protect it.

Daily: Complete the Stress Cycle

Choose a brief practice that helps the body and mind register that one period of demand has ended:

- Walk for ten minutes
- Stretch or move
- Sit without input
- Speak with someone safe
- Write down unfinished work
- Listen to one piece of music
- Pray a brief prayer of release

The daily practice does not erase fatigue. It prevents every day from remaining psychologically unfinished.

Weekly: Protect a Genuine Interruption

Design a weekly period in which ordinary ministry demand stops. Include:

- Clear beginning and ending times
- Defined emergency coverage
- Closed or limited communication channels
- At least one activity that matches your common form of depletion
- Some unclaimed space
- A restrained reentry plan

A Sabbath may include worship, delight, relationship, and rest. It should not become a crowded demonstration of how Sabbath ought to look.

After Intensity: Plan Proportionate Recovery

Certain forms of ministry carry predictable aftereffects: funerals, Holy Week, crises, conflict meetings, travel, retreats, major programs, and seasons of caregiving.

Do not wait to see whether you will be tired. Schedule recovery when the intensity is scheduled. The greater the demand, the more deliberate the recovery may need to be.

Ask:

- What capacity will this likely deplete?
- What can be removed afterward?
- What coverage will be needed?
- What form of restoration fits?
- How gradual should reentry be?

Seasonal: Take Time Long Enough to Descend

Some pastors spend the first days of vacation merely becoming aware of their exhaustion. When possible, take periods long enough for vigilance to lessen and desire to reappear.

Longer time away is not a luxury that substitutes for weekly rest. Nor can weekly rest compensate indefinitely for the absence of vacation, study leave, or sabbatical. Recovery needs several rhythms.

When Recovery Requires Extended Time

Some forms of depletion cannot be addressed within a day off, a vacation, or even a well-protected weekly rhythm. After years of sustained ministry, a pastor may need an extended period in which ordinary responsibility is genuinely relinquished and deeper renewal becomes possible.

A sabbatical can make room for rest, spiritual renewal, study, creativity, travel, family relationships, vocational reflection, and renewed participation in the wider world. It is not simply a long vacation, and not every week must produce a measurable result. Its shape should respond to the pastor's needs, the congregation's life, and the purposes they discern together.

A sabbatical is also not emergency treatment for collapse. When exhaustion includes serious illness, depression, trauma, abuse, or a dangerously unsustainable system, medical care, therapy, leave, conflict intervention, workload change, or vocational discernment may be needed. Nor should a sabbatical return a renewed pastor to an unchanged arrangement that will immediately consume whatever has been restored.

A sabbatical requires congregational partnership: preparation, funding, coverage, decision authority, communication, boundaries, and thoughtful reentry. Without that shared work, the pastor may remain responsible from a distance or return to an accumulated crisis.

The forthcoming Clergy Resilience Guide on **Sabbatical** will offer a fuller treatment of discernment, congregational preparation, possible uses of the time, family considerations, funding, boundaries, and faithful reentry. Here it is enough to recognize that extended renewal may be an appropriate part of a sustainable life in ministry.

Reentry: Do Not Spend the Recovery All at Once

Before returning:

- Review only what truly requires attention
- Leave margin in the first day
- Avoid scheduling the hardest meeting immediately
- Ask the person providing coverage for a concise briefing
- Protect the first evening from unnecessary work
- Expect some transition rather than instant full capacity

If every absence creates an avalanche, the congregation's systems need attention. A pastor cannot solve a structural coverage problem by becoming better at relaxation.

Name the Shared Responsibility

Healthy recovery requires more than personal discipline. Governing boards, personnel committees, staff, and denominational leaders share responsibility for:

- Adequate time off and encouragement to use it
- Real emergency and decision coverage

- Workloads that do not routinely exceed human capacity
- Protected vacation, study leave, and sabbatical
- Reentry practices that do not punish absence
- Attention to understaffing, conflict, and role confusion

Rest is personal. The conditions that make rest possible are communal and systemic.

Hold One Recovery Conversation

Choose one person or group that has authority to influence your working conditions. Share one pattern you discovered during the month:

- The capacity most regularly depleted
- The demand that continues during time away
- The form of recovery that helps
- The coverage or workload change needed
- The next period of rest that should be protected

Keep the conversation concrete. The purpose is not to prove how exhausted you are. It is to translate personal insight into shared responsibility.

Review the Week

- Which rhythm would make the greatest difference now?
- What needs to be placed on the calendar?
- Who must participate in providing coverage?
- What intensity needs planned recovery?
- What does my exhaustion reveal about the ministry system?
- What conversation is needed to make recovery more sustainable?

Beyond the Month

You will not always know what kind of recovery you need. Experiment. Notice. Revise.

Some days require sleep. Others require movement, solitude, friendship, beauty, play, prayer, grief, medical care, or a decision long postponed. Sometimes recovery means returning to work with renewed capacity. Sometimes it brings enough clarity to recognize that the work itself must change.

Use four questions regularly:

- What has been depleted?
- What demand needs to stop?
- What kind of restoration fits?
- What rhythm or structural change would protect what returns?

Do not wait until all capacity is gone before asking them.

A Pastoral Word

Your exhaustion is not proof that you are unfaithful, ungrateful, undisciplined, or unsuited for ministry.

It may be the honest response of a finite person to sustained demand. It may reveal grief, illness, isolation, moral distress, inadequate support, or work that has exceeded its rightful place. It may be asking for sleep. For help. For change.

God does not love you only when your capacities are available to others.

You are permitted to stop before everything is finished. You are permitted to receive care without turning it into preparation for more service. You are permitted to discover that what once restored you no longer does. You are permitted to seek conditions in which life can return.

Recovery is not becoming useful again as quickly as possible. It is receiving, with patience and truth, the life God is restoring in you.

A Closing Practice

Place both feet on the floor. Let your hands rest. Notice where effort remains in your body.

Ask quietly:

What am I carrying that can be set down for now?

Do not solve it. Name one thing.

Then pray:

**God who neither slumbers nor sleeps,
release me from the belief that everything depends upon me.
Give rest to what is weary, care to what is hurting,
and courage for what must change.
Teach me to receive my life as gift,
and to trust the work I cannot carry to your keeping. Amen.**