



# MACARTHUR BLVD

## BAPTIST CHURCH

### COMMUNITY GROUP MINISTRY

### The Winter Break: A Plan of Action and a Path to Rest

#### Three things leaders can do in December

**1. Take a break! Use the month of December as a “leadership sabbatical.”** Take a break from your regular Community Group leadership duties for that month. However, just like taking a weekly sabbath requires preparation in the days leading up to it, you’ll also need to work diligently in November to truly unplug in December.

- **What about on-campus groups?** On-campus Shepherd Leaders are encouraged to do the same thing! What will you and your group members do during that time? Take time to be encouraged and poured into by going to an Equipping class as a group. Equipping classes are great to attend with your group even throughout the year if you feel there is a particular topic that would be helpful such as parenting, stewardship, or discipleship. Identify a 6-week block that your group can break and attend an equip class together.

**2. Use your leadership sabbatical to build (or rebuild) a sabbath rhythm.** We’re not resting well if we simply replace the work of leading a community group with other work. When leaders stop leading community groups for a month in July and December, they free up space in their calendars and their heads, so they can build new sabbath rhythms or rebuild eroded ones. Consider reading “Practice Sabbath Delight” in Peter Scazzaro’s *The Emotionally Healthy Leader* ([bit.ly/practicesabbath](http://bit.ly/practicesabbath)) to help you answer practical questions like: What can I do that would bring me delight because it feels like play? What will make this Sabbath day different from business as usual on the other six days of the week? What do I need to do (or not do) to protect my ability to rest on this day?

**3. Use your leadership sabbatical to take a thorough personal inventory.** David Murray, in his book, *Reset: Living a grace-paced life in a burnout culture*, writes:

What should we be checking for? Our cars have warning lights that we can look up in our owner’s manual. But what do the “warning lights” look like for [us]? What are the danger signs that our current pace may prematurely end our race? [The self-assessment consists of a checklist arranged in multiple categories. Whereas the physical category might have the most ticks for some of you, for others of you, it might be the emotional or mental, or another category altogether.] God has designed us all differently and knows which warning lights will best get our attention. But as some of us can’t (or won’t) see warning

lights, even when all of them are flashing red and blue right in front of our eyes, why not ask your [spouse] or a friend to go through these lights with you and give you a more objective outsider's viewpoint?

We have provided you with PDFs of two self-assessments, customized for men and women. If you have access to a printer, it might help you to print off the self-assessment and work through it, marking and jotting down notes as you go. We encourage you to share your results with your male or female hub leader. (The men's assessment can be found at [bit.ly/realitycheckassessment](http://bit.ly/realitycheckassessment), and the women's assessment can be found at [bit.ly/selfexamination](http://bit.ly/selfexamination).)

## Five things leaders can do in November

**1. Set a multiplication plan in place (where applicable).** The relaunch in August is an ideal time for groups to multiply. Getting all the logistics and pastoral concerns nailed down in November will make multiplication flow much smoother in August. Ideally, your people would know the plan for August before they are sent into July. Make it a goal to complete your multiplication plan by the end of November. Who will lead the multiplication in August? Who will assist the multiplying leaders? If the leaders multiplying are currently helping you, who will replace them as your new co-leaders in the fall? In August, who will be hosting the group that is multiplying out, and who will be hosting the sending group? What personal conversations still need to be had as you prepare for gospel goodbyes? What decisions still need to be made? Are you continuing to spend time praying for and discussing multiplication as a group? Where do you need to lean more on the help and wisdom of your hub leader? Do you need to review the multiplication resources that have been shared with you from the *Shepherd Leader Field Guide*? Where are you stuck, and how can your hub leader and the elders help you shepherd this process well?

**2. Schedule your restart.** Before breaking in December, schedule on your calendar and communicate clearly a hard restart date for August. For example, "Our group will resume our regular gatherings on Tuesday, January 6th, at 6:30 pm, for dinner at the Johnsons. Please mark your calendars, and bring meat to grill and a side to share."

**3. Schedule a series of sabbaths.** Schedule a time on your calendar in November to sit down and prayerfully choose and set aside one day a week throughout the month of December to serve as a weekly sabbath—a day to pray and play, a day with no "have-to's," a twenty-four-hour block of time in which you, in the words of Peter Scazzero, "stop work, enjoy rest, practice delight, and contemplate God."

**4. Create pairings of relational pursuit.** As a leadership team, set aside a time in your calendars to sit down in person or connect over the phone on a conference call and create "pairings of relational pursuit" for the month of July. Here's what that looks like:

- In other words, minus the leaders, select roughly half of your group to serve as "pursuers, inviters, and hosts," and then match each of them up with someone for them to pursue, invite, and host. You could match based on support—pair people who are a good fit, similar affinity, comfort level, and chemistry. Or you could match based more on

challenge—the opportunity to cross-age or stage-of-life divides, background and culture divides, or divides of newness and seniority in the group itself.

- The pursuers could invite the pursued to something as big as a sit-down meal or something as small as a walk-and-talk around the lake.
- Once you've matched everyone up, personally contact the pursuers, ask them to commit to reaching out to those you've assigned to them, and put one planned get-together on the calendar for July. For example, you might say, "Karen, although we are taking a break from formally meeting as a group in July, it's important that we don't cease being a gospel community to one another. With that in mind, would you make it a goal to spend time with Ashley at some point in July?" If you want to help them prepare, you could send them the document below titled, "10 Questions to Help You Listen to Others".
- Lastly, if this sounds exhausting or overwhelming, the chances are there's someone administratively gifted on your leadership team or in your group as a whole for whom contacting everyone, and helping facilitate this pairing and pursuit, would sound energizing and exciting! Enlist their help, and delegate as much of this initiative to them as possible.

**5. Commission people to throw a party.** Ask someone, or better yet, several people, to plan, extend invitations to, and host a party for the group sometime in the month of December. Throw a barbecue or a block party. Invite your neighbors and friends. Invite your "three." Jeff Vanderstelt gives some helpful guidance on "partying with purpose" as a community group ([bit.ly/missionalparties](http://bit.ly/missionalparties)). Similarly, Tim Keller offers this advice:

As a community, we not only speak the gospel, we live it through hospitality and deeds of love and kindness. [So] plan an event as a group to which you can invite your non-Christian friends and work colleagues. This is an opportunity for your friends to spend time with your Christian community and for you as a community to practice hospitality. In the Old Testament, hospitality is part of normal and common practice. For example, in Genesis 18, Abraham is quick and ready to offer hospitality to the strangers who arrive near his home.

When Jesus sends out the twelve disciples, he expects that they will be shown hospitality (Mark 6:8–11). We are also called to "practice hospitality" (Rom 12:13) and to "offer hospitality to one another" (1 Pet 4:9). This verse also tells us to do hospitality "without grumbling." Genesis 18:5 tells us the goal of the one giving hospitality is to refresh and encourage others. Hospitality done well is generous, uncomplaining, loving, and refreshing. It does not make guests feel like "guests" but like members of a family. Hospitality provides a feeling of security, warmth, safety, and love.

As you plan your event, think about the atmosphere, the process of welcoming guests, food—everything that will make your guests feel relaxed and comfortable. This event will involve time, planning, and prayer. As a group, decide on the type of event you would like to host and when in the following weeks you are able to host it. Make a list of

action steps for the event and divide these responsibilities among the group members. Pray for your event, for all the preparations necessary, for your friends to come, and for God to use the event to further his kingdom and bring more people into his household.

As leaders, you should fully delegate the party planning (if possible or if it's a drain for you) and absolve yourself from all obligations related to the party besides showing up and enjoying good fellowship and missional friendship. Allow yourself to rest and receive, to be served by others. Remind yourself how much you love these people and enjoy spending time with them. Remind yourself that you're not in a transactional relationship with these people— where your significance is only found in what you can give them, whether that's wisdom, counsel, support, prayer, or pastoral presence. Remind yourself that you are all adopted brothers and sisters of your heavenly Father, from whom all good and perfect gifts come. We are co-heirs and co-recipients with Jesus. We are fellow beggars in a bread line and a kingdom of priests.

### **Three things group members can do in December**

1. Focus on throwing one great party,
2. move towards whoever you've been matched within your pairing of relational pursuit by your leaders, and, lastly,
3. move toward anyone who is suffering, lonely, traveling for work, or otherwise vulnerable to temptation. Make sure no one is alone on the holidays.

### **What if there's a crisis in the group in December?**

If care needs arise during your leadership sabbatical, you will need to exercise prayerful discernment as you decide how best to respond or step in. Unfortunately, there simply isn't a one-size-fits-all approach for how best to respond to care needs within your group when you are in a season of rest, so communicate well with your hub leader and the Spiritual Formation Pastor if needs arise, so they can help you discern how the body as a whole can and should respond.

### **Additional thoughts for navigating the holiday season**

- Family tensions are a tricky thing to navigate, and the holidays seem to bring all of those tensions and hurt together in unique ways. It is always important to be aware and have eyes to see where group members have struggles in these areas and to be honest about where you yourself have wounds too. Russell Moore has an excellent post about our hearts around holiday family tensions, and I recommend everyone read it (and re-read it!) as needed this season—both for yourself and others ([bit.ly/holiday-family-tensions](https://bit.ly/holiday-family-tensions)).
- Finances can often be a tough tension to navigate, especially as the holidays approach and there is more temptation to overspend as well as their seeming to be more “needs” pulling with travel expenses, hosting family, etc. This is a great time as leaders for you to live a good example of biblical stewardship financially and also to be mindful of those families who overspend or are struggling financially going into this season. If you know that you have a family in need of guidance on either end of the spectrum, please make sure you inform your hub leaders of any conversations that you plan to have with families/individuals for guidance.