
A FREE RESOURCE FOR PASTORS

Micro Retreats

*Seven structured liturgies for renewal that fit inside a
workweek.*

By Matt Heerema and Eric Schumacher

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The Walkabout · The Closed Door · The Early Hours
The Mentor Walk · The Silent Half-Day
Iron Sharpens Iron · The Sabbath Afternoon

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Seven Patterns

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Each liturgy runs 2–5 hours. None requires travel, a spiritual director, or a free week. They are designed to fit inside an actual pastoral calendar, not an idealized one.

PATTERN 01

The Walkabout

A shared half-day outdoors: movement, conversation, silence, and Scripture.

DURATION

4–5 hours. Recommended start: 11:30 AM.

WHO IT'S FOR

A pair. Works for any temperament, though extroverts will find the conversational structure especially natural. Best with a trusted friend in ministry.

THE SCHEDULE

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| 11:30 AM | Shared lunch (a local spot or packed). The meal is not incidental. It opens the conversation before the trail. |
| 12:30 PM | Begin the walk. First hour is open dialogue. No agenda. Follow what surfaces. |
| 1:30 PM | Shift to silence. Walk without talking. Observe what's around you: light through trees, a bird, a slope, the sky. Let creation do its work. |
| 2:15 PM | Resume conversation. The silence will have changed what you bring back. |
| 3:00 PM | Find a place to sit. Read a psalm or a short passage together. Then pray together, briefly, over what came up in the walk. |
| 4:00 PM | Done. |

WHAT TO BRING

Bible or a single printed passage. Water. No earbuds. Leave the phone in your pocket or in the car.

WHY IT WORKS

Movement changes the quality of conversation. Something about walking side by side, rather than sitting face to face, reduces the pressure to perform or resolve. The silence in the middle is not awkward. After an hour of real talk, quiet feels like a gift. Creation has always been a second book. Pastors who spend most of their week indoors and in-person often forget this.

SCRIPTURE ANCHOR

Psalm 19. Creation speaks; Torah speaks; the same God is behind both.

CLOSING PRAYER PROMPT

Pray over whatever surfaced in the silence: what you noticed, what you didn't expect, what you were given.

PATTERN 02

The Closed Door

One declared no-meeting block per week or fortnight: your office, your interior work, your door shut.

DURATION

3–4 hours. Any half-day. Morning preferred.

WHO IT'S FOR

Solo. Any temperament. Especially suited to the pastor whose calendar has no white space and whose week feels like constant outflow.

THE SCHEDULE

Block the time This is not a soft request on your calendar. It is an appointment with yourself that you do not reschedule for pastoral care, staff needs, or email.

First 30 min. Silence and orientation. Sit. Do not open a browser. Do not check your phone. Let the noise of the week settle.

Next 60–90 min. Journal or pray. Write what's actually happening in you, not what you're supposed to be feeling. Pray out of that.

Next 60 min. Personal organization. Review open commitments. Process your notes. Write the list you've been avoiding. This is not busywork: clarity is a form of rest.

Final 30 min. Read Scripture for yourself, not for a sermon. Close with a brief prayer of release.

WHAT TO BRING

Journal. Bible. A list of open items if your mind needs to purge first. Phone on airplane mode.

WHY IT WORKS

The objection to this liturgy is always the same: there's too much going on right now. That objection is the reason to do it. A pastor's interior life is the source of everything the congregation receives. Neglect it long enough and the sermons start to feel hollow even before they leave your mouth. The Closed Door says: the work will wait. This is also work.

SCRIPTURE ANCHOR

Mark 1:35. Jesus withdrew before the busiest days, not after.

CLOSING PRAYER PROMPT

Offer back to God the open things you named: the weights you listed, the commitments you examined.

PATTERN 03

The Early Hours

Extended morning prayer before the day's weight arrives.

DURATION

2–3 hours. Pre-office. Before email, before obligation.

WHO IT'S FOR

Solo. Any setting: home, a quiet room at the church, a coffee shop before it fills. Better suited to people with a morning temperament, though the pattern does not require it.

THE SCHEDULE

Rise early Rise earlier than usual. The specific time is not the point. The point is priority: you give the morning to God before the morning gives itself to everything else.

First 20 min. Silence. Do not read, write, or pray yet. Sit with God before asking anything of him.

Next 45–60 min. Praying through the day ahead. Name the people you will see. Name the meetings, the hard conversations, the decisions. Pray over each one specifically.

Next 30–45 min. Scripture reading. Read slowly, without extraction. You are not preparing a sermon. You are being fed.

Remaining Free prayer, journaling, or continued silence. Let it close naturally.

WHAT TO BRING

Bible. Journal. Coffee or tea, if that's part of how you start. Nothing else.

WHY IT WORKS

Charles Spurgeon recounted Martin Luther's practice: three hours in prayer on the hardest days, not the lightest. Whether or not the exact quote is Luther's own, Veit Dietrich confirmed Luther prayed three hours daily. The theological

logic is simple and consistent across centuries of pastoral wisdom: what you cannot pray over, you cannot do in faith. The morning prayer does not shorten the day. It reorders it. Everything that follows happens inside of something already laid before God.

SCRIPTURE ANCHOR

Psalm 5:3. Morning prayer is an orientation, not a transaction.

CLOSING PRAYER PROMPT

Surrender the outcome of the day: not just the outcomes you fear, but the ones you are counting on.

PATTERN 04

The Mentor Walk

A walk structured around one question and one challenge.

DURATION

2–3 hours. Any time of day. Outdoors preferred but not required.

WHO IT'S FOR

A pair: mentor and mentee. The mentee does most of the talking. The mentor does most of the listening. Most useful when the mentee is carrying a specific and live challenge.

THE SCHEDULE

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| 15 min. | Walk and warm-up. Light conversation. Let the transition happen. |
| 60–75 min. | The mentee shares the challenge. The mentor listens. Full attention. No advice yet. Occasionally ask a clarifying question. The mentor's main job in this phase is to help the mentee hear themselves. |
| 30 min. | The mentor responds. Not with a solution, but with what was heard. Observations. A reframe if one is genuinely useful. One or two questions the mentee has not yet asked. |
| 15 min. | The mentor brings the prepared question. This is a question the mentor crafted before the walk, rooted in what they know of the mentee's life and patterns. It may not be directly connected to the presenting challenge. It often cuts deeper than the challenge did. |
| Closing | Pray together. Specifically. By name: the challenge, the fear under the challenge, the person the mentee is becoming. No generalities. |
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WHAT TO BRING

Mentor: one prepared question, written down. Mentee: the challenge, named clearly before you arrive. Both: walking shoes and an unhurried afternoon.

WHY IT WORKS

Mentorship often happens around tables and in offices. It defaults to advice-giving. This liturgy inverts the ratio: more listening, more movement, less resolution. Walking removes the pressure to arrive at answers. The physical movement gives the mentor somewhere to look when the conversation gets heavy, which allows the mentee to say the harder things. The prepared question does the deep work that the presenting challenge often obscures.

SCRIPTURE ANCHOR

Proverbs 20:5. Counsel draws out what is deep in the heart. The mentor's role is not to pour in but to draw out.

CLOSING PRAYER PROMPT

Pray over the mentee by name: the challenge they named, and the person God is forming through it.

PATTERN 05

The Silent Half-Day

No input. No output. Presence.

DURATION

3–4 hours. Any time. Any setting without interruption.

WHO IT'S FOR

Solo. The most natural for introverts; the most necessary for extroverts. The most countercultural pattern in this collection.

THE ORIENTATION

There is no schedule in the ordinary sense. The half-day has an orientation, not a program.

Arrive Turn off the phone or leave it elsewhere. No podcasts, no music, no sermon prep, no to-do list.

Begin Slow Scripture reading. Read a short passage four times, slowly, letting different words surface. You are not studying the text. You are being with it.

Continue Let what comes next come. It may be journaling. It may be a slow walk. It may be sitting in a chair watching light move across a room. It may be sleep, if your body has been running a deficit.

Purpose There is no productivity goal. There is no outcome to measure. The purpose is presence: to be with God without asking him for anything in particular.

Close A brief prayer of gratitude is enough.

WHAT TO BRING

Bible. Journal, if you want it. Nothing else.

WHY IT WORKS

Most of what a pastor does is output: preaching, counseling, leading, planning, responding. The interior life drains in the direction of others, which is right and good. But the drain has to be addressed. Silence is not the absence of activity. It is the context in which formation happens. Eugene Peterson wrote that pastoral work is not primarily about technique but about who the pastor is becoming. Silence is where that formation has room. You cannot rush it. You can only make space for it.

SCRIPTURE ANCHOR

Psalm 46:10. The imperative is to cease striving. The recognition follows the ceasing.

CLOSING PRAYER PROMPT

Offer God the silence itself: not what came out of it, but the act of stopping.

PATTERN 06

Iron Sharpens Iron

Three peers. Structured sharing. Specific prayer.

DURATION

3–4 hours. Any time. Optional shared meal before or after.

WHO IT'S FOR

Three people in similar roles: pastors, ministry leaders, church planters. The group should have enough trust to be honest and enough consistency to meet more than once. This is a peer pattern, not a mentor pattern.

THE SCHEDULE

30 min. Settle in. If there is a meal, this is it. The meal is warm-up, not the main event.

60–75 min. per person The structured round. Each person answers three questions in turn. The others listen without cross-talk until the person is finished: (1) What is hard right now? (2) What is God doing? (3) What do I need prayer for?

5 min. after each Brief clarifying questions. Then move to the next person.

30–45 min. Group prayer. Pray for each person specifically, using what they named. Not general encouragement. Not pastoral language. Specific intercession over the actual things.

Close

WHAT TO BRING

Nothing required. Some groups use a shared journal or a running document of what has been prayed over. Optional.

WHY IT WORKS

Pastors are rarely in rooms where they are the ones being tended to. Most of ministry runs the other direction. This liturgy does not require vulnerability in the abstract. It gives vulnerability a structure: three questions, a time limit, ears that are actually listening. The prayer at the end matters more than the conversation. The conversation is preparation for the prayer. When someone prays for you by name, using your actual words, something shifts. It is hard to explain. It is easy to experience.

SCRIPTURE ANCHOR

Proverbs 27:17. Iron sharpens iron. The sharpening requires contact: actual friction between real things.

CLOSING PRAYER PROMPT

After praying for each person, close with a single prayer for the group itself: for the friendship, and for what each person is carrying back into their congregation.

PATTERN 07

The Sabbath Afternoon

Permission to stop. Not as a technique. As a theology.

DURATION

An afternoon: 2–5 hours. Home or outdoors.

WHO IT'S FOR

Solo or with a spouse or family. This is the only pattern in this collection that is not structured around ministry productivity, ministry relationships, or ministry formation. It is structured around being a human being.

THE ORIENTATION

There is no schedule. That is the point.

Sleep if you are tired. Walk if you feel like walking. Cook something you enjoy cooking. Read a novel. Play with your children. Sit with your spouse without an agenda. Pray loosely, not with a list. Watch the light change outside. Eat something good.

None of this is a reward for finishing your work. The work is not finished. It will not be finished. That is not the point.

Eugene Peterson described the pastoral life as organized around two movements: pray and play. Both are resistances. Prayer resists the efficiency of functional atheism. Play resists the efficiency of workaholism. The Sabbath afternoon holds both: it says God is not waiting for you to produce anything, and neither is this afternoon.

WHAT TO BRING

Nothing you need for ministry. Everything else is permitted.

WHY IT WORKS

The pastor who cannot stop is quietly teaching his congregation that God's economy runs on output. He is wrong, and they will learn it from watching him. The Sabbath is not a productivity strategy. It is a confession: that God is God and you are not. That the kingdom does not depend on your hustle. The Sabbath afternoon holds that confession in a specific, embodied way. You are not useful right now. That is fine. That is good. That is, in fact, the whole point.

The most common objection to this liturgy is guilt. The liturgy does not resolve the guilt. It asks you to act anyway, to trust that God is not keeping score in the way your anxiety suggests. You may need to take this liturgy on faith before it begins to feel like rest.

SCRIPTURE ANCHOR

Genesis 2:2–3. God rested. Not because the work exhausted him. As a declaration about the shape of good work.

CLOSING PRAYER PROMPT

Give thanks for the afternoon, specifically. Name one thing from it.

Which Pattern?

Three questions. Follow the path.

How much time do I have?

Two hours or less

The Early Hours or a shortened Closed Door. Both compress to a single focused block. The Early Hours can work in 90 minutes if your morning is tight.

Three to four hours

Any pattern works. This is the native length of most patterns.

A full morning or afternoon

The Walkabout, the Silent Half-Day, or Iron Sharpens Iron. These patterns need room to breathe.

Am I alone or with someone?

Alone

The Closed Door, The Early Hours, The Silent Half-Day, or The Sabbath Afternoon. These four are built for solitude.

With one other

The Walkabout (a friend) or The Mentor Walk (a mentor/mentee pair). The Walkabout assumes rough peer relationship. The Mentor Walk assumes a defined directional relationship.

With a small group of peers

Iron Sharpens Iron. Three is the right number. Two collapses into a mentoring dynamic. Four or more dilutes the speaking time enough to reduce honesty.

With a spouse or family

The Sabbath Afternoon. It is the only pattern designed for that context.

What do I most need right now?

I am depleted and running empty The Silent Half-Day or The Sabbath Afternoon.
These are patterns of receiving, not doing.

I am carrying something specific and need to process it The Mentor Walk or Iron Sharpens Iron. One gives you a mentor who listens. The other gives you peers who pray.

Spiritually thin but functionally fine The Early Hours or The Closed Door. These rebuild the interior life from the inside without requiring you to name a crisis.

I want renewal through creation and friendship The Walkabout. It is the most joyful pattern in the set.

I feel scattered and need to recollect The Closed Door. Organization and prayer in the same block. The list is not the enemy of the spiritual; it is often the gate.

These seven liturgies are not exhaustive. They are starting points. The best micro retreat you ever take will probably be one you adapt or invent. The only requirement is that it be real: a genuine pause, not a productive pause dressed up in retreat language.

Begin with whichever pattern you are most likely to actually schedule.

Matt Heerema is Lead Pastor at Stonebrook Community Church in Ames, Iowa. Eric Schumacher is a biblical counselor and pastoral ministry director for the Baptist Convention of Iowa. This resource grew from a single afternoon they spent together: lunch, a trail, two hours of conversation, and a stretch of silence neither of them planned.

The Walkabout · The Closed Door · The Early Hours
The Mentor Walk · The Silent Half-Day
Iron Sharpens Iron · The Sabbath Afternoon

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