

ALTO



REFORMED CHURCH

ARTICLES

A Sabbatical?

By Pastor Kevin Van Wyk

“I can state without wavering that the single greatest need of the church today is the restoration of ministers. What is required is a quite different approach to their life and work. It is a matter of leading them into a massive shift of the dynamics of their personality under God, and one that cannot be done by more books and conferences. They need to be taken out of the circulation for a sufficiently long time to re-vision and re-structure their lives in communion with Jesus and his kingdom.” Dallas

Willard, <https://www.soulshpherd.org/sabbatical-guide-pastors/>

Let me state from the beginning that I am very grateful that the Consistory has acknowledged the challenge of ministry Dallas Willard addresses above and is allowing me to take a sabbatical.

What is a Sabbatical?

Sabbatical comes from the Hebrew word *shabbāth* meaning to rest. However, much of the world thinks of sabbatical in the academic context where professors take a year away from teaching to focus on research, travel, and writing. (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sabbatical>)

This misses the origins of the term and practice. The word means rest, not work

differently. The practice or spiritual discipline of resting on the seventh day is based on Genesis 1 and Exodus 20. The practice of resting on the seventh year is found in Leviticus 25.

Leviticus 25:3–4 (NIV)

³ For six years sow your fields, and for six years prune your vineyards and gather their crops. ⁴ But in the seventh year the land is to have a year of sabbath rest, a sabbath to the Lord. Do not sow your fields or prune your vineyards.

While sabbaticals for ministers can focus on different things, including study, prayer, strategic planning, writing, research... I intend to first honor the original intention of rest to the Lord. I hope to live into Psalm 23, enjoying the Shepherd, green pastures, and quiet waters.

Repeatedly, I've been told this should be a time of rest, a refreshing of my soul. This goes against my need and drive to accomplish tasks. "Get r done" is very much our culture's mentality (and mine), but God calls believers to come and rest (Matt. 11:28).

Some of what I've read says the pastor should "do nothing." Well, that's not possible nor what God intends. As a "rest to the Lord" that means this should be a devoted time of seeking God through spiritual disciplines like prayer, bible study, worship, fasting, journaling, solitude, and fellowship. It is not an extended vacation to binge watch basketball and The Andy Griffith Show. Both will be tempting. (I do believe these are acceptable in moderation.)

I also intend to develop as a pastor in a few key ministry areas. The Alliance Ordination Team which I serve on has developed an incredible resource which links 184 competencies to books, courses, and training videos. I hope to read and watch the "Suggested Resources" and other resources that fit the competencies in Pathways 2.0. This will further equip me to serve as a mentor and coach for the Alliance, equip the ministry candidates at Alto, and advise the Global Ordination Team as we develop pathways for elders, deacons, youth pastors, worship leaders and other ministry roles. The particular areas I plan to focus on in Pathways 2.0 include Spiritual Formation, Leadership/Admin, Biblical Interpretation (Logos Bible software training), Preaching, and Worship. You can read more about these areas by reading my AMEN articles from last

year.

As we move into this time, starting in February, I have a couple suggestions.

First, engage in the church. This is a great opportunity for you to step up in ministry.

Support those that are stepping up, like those preaching, caring, visiting and leading.

I also encourage you to join me in seeking God. While you may not be able to step away from work, you can carve out some space for spiritual disciplines

Equipping Young Adults & Families

By Tim Fennell

This month, I wanted to give a short update on some of the amazing things happening around the church with our young adults. I am sorry for the technical difficulties with my video during the Congregational meeting. In December, we will return to the regular programming for the AMEN article.

Earlier this month, we had Friendsgiving. It was simply a night for our young adults to get together and fellowship. We had a fire pit and a pie-tasting contest. Issac and Liam Glewen's pies won! But let's give a shout-out to Sheri Glewen, who was the master baker behind the pies! It was such a great night of laughter and fellowship, and it was a packed house of college-aged young adults. In December, we will be doing the Ugly Christmas Sweater party, which all of us are looking forward to.

This fall, the young adults small group began, and both groups are doing the series "Facing Anxiety" on RightNow Media. Libbi has been leading the girls, and it has been so amazing to hear and see her pour into these girls. She is doing such a wonderful job, and the girl's group has already grown, with more girls possibly joining.

Since moving here, I have had the pleasure of getting to know Ryan and Nolan Lenz well. This summer, they began a bible study for their guy friends from around Fond du Lac. These young men are from many different churches and church backgrounds. Ryan and Nolan asked me to join on Tuesday nights; it

has become my week's highlight. Even in a short time, I have seen this group of guys grow immensely in their faith and take what they have learned out into the world. We recently read the book of Jonah together, and I got to see them realize the possible theological implications when the scripture states, "The Word of the Lord came to Jonah." Quickly, John 1:1-5 came to mind for the group, and one of them burst out, "Is that Jesus?". They all began to point out the different aspects of God's character in the narrative, which helped some of the new guys to understand God's grace represented in the story. I am very thankful for these ten guys who continue to encourage each other and point one another to Christ.

Some of you may know that I have begun to do prison ministry, thanks to Jerry Medema. I am preaching a Dodge Correctional once a month. Admittedly, I did not expect what I found behind those walls. There are 2000 men who have the possibility of hearing the Gospel every week. About 60 attend the service, which the Chaplain, Dr. V, facilitates. God has equipped Dr. V for this work. He loves these men dearly and does everything he can to show them the love and grace that Christ has shown us, even when he has to watch over the pagan and other religious services. His work is hard, and you can see that his heart aches for these men to know Jesus. But on the other hand, those 60 men in the church service are on fire for the Lord. I was blown away by their faith and knowledge of scripture. One gentleman recited Romans 8 from memory, and another asked the hard questions to understand sanctification better. You could feel the Holy Spirit's presence in that room. I feel so blessed to have the chance to talk, pray, and teach with these men. And I'm sure they will teach me much in return.

Equipping Youth Update

By Randy McDaniel

"At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"² And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them³ and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.⁴ Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." – Matthew 18:1-4 (ESV)

These verses are powerful! They have been used to support different beliefs

anywhere from God's salvation of children to we must literally become like children if we are to be saved. What is for sure is understanding these versus is important, or we will *never* enter the kingdom of heaven (V.3).

So, what was Jesus saying? What was He getting at? How do I become like a child? When we look at the context of this passage, we see a transaction between Jesus and His disciples. Some powerful things happened leading up to this. Peter confesses Jesus as the Christ, and our Lord declares that confession is what He will build His church upon that the gates of hell will not prevail over (Matthew 16:13-20). Then shortly after that Peter turns around and rebukes Jesus for revealing to them He will be killed and raised from the dead (Matthew 16:21-23). Can you imagine that? Rebuking Jesus? Yet, we do it more often than we want to admit. Doing, thinking, and/or feeling something opposite or against what the bible says. Ignoring certain parts because we may not like them or understand them. We all love Peter because we relate with Him. We love the Lord, but too often put our proverbial foots in our mouths. Our Lord is abundantly gracious, loving, and forgiving!

Six days later, Jesus takes Peter, and James and John (the sons of Zebedee) where He transfigures revealing His glory and majesty. God the Father speaks from the heavens declaring Jesus His Son. Elijah and Moses appeared talking to Jesus. In this one revelation, Jesus is, beyond any doubt, revealed as God, and that the resurrection is real. Peter, our beloved brother, is so overwhelmed He wants to make tabernacles for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. God bless Him, he tries.

A few more things occur, but then we come to our passage. I say all that to show the disciples were getting it. They were coming to saving faith in Jesus. They realized He was not some mere prophet, good teacher, or moral person, but the incarnate, only begotten Son of the Father. Then they have a human moment. In this genuine belief Jesus is the Messiah, they anticipate the kingdom of heaven even more and want to know who of them will be the greatest in it. As you know, the Jews were well aware of Old Testament prophesy and knew that Messiah would bring in the kingdom age in which all sinners would be judged and cast away, righteousness would reign, and the world would forever become like the Garden of Eden. These blessed hopes were distorted as the religious leaders believed and taught this would be accomplished by military action led by the Messiah, and Israel would be

exalted.

So, in our passage Jesus lovingly does not answer the disciple's question. Instead, He calls to Him a small child, puts the child in their midst, and tells them if they don't turn and become like children, they will never enter the kingdom. Ouch! Our Lord then answers the question saying those who humble themselves like the child in their midst is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Our Lord is stressing there is no room for arrogant, prideful, worldly thinking in His kingdom. That, like children, we must be humble. Children are completely dependent on their parents for everything. They are blessings, a joy, and our heritage, but really offer nothing in terms of social advancement, military endeavors, economic growth, etc. They are dependent on their parents to provide all they need, protect them, teach them, and train them. There is no arrogance or pride in that. We too, like children, **MUST** become this in relationship to God through Jesus. This is only accomplished by a full surrender to Jesus, a full commitment to His lordship, and a full conviction and assurance in His death, resurrection, and divinity. That faith is what God graciously gives His grace of salvation through (Ephesian 2:8-10).

Jesus goes on to give some examples of what this humility looks like in action. He shows we are to take great care for the children that are within His kingdom (the actual children, the new believer, the weaker brother), to do nothing that hinders them, and to be merciful and forgiving to them always seeking to grow them in edification of the Word (Matthew 18:5-35)

All of this is something we all need to continually repent and diligently obey. I encourage everyone to read these passages and pray about them asking our heavenly Father to fill us with His Spirit and conform us to the true image of our precious and glorious Lord and Savior Jesus. To Him be all praise, honor, power, majesty, and dominion!

The teens are continuing to learn about the parables of Jesus. We have studied the blind leading the blind (Matthew 15:1-20), the parable of the lost sheep (Matthew 18:1-14), and the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matthew 18:15-35). They have seen how it is not the failure to do traditions added to biblical commands that defile someone, but the sinful nature within them that produces sin. They learned how this tied in with Jesus' other parables of the sower and

the desperate need for a savior and a new nature given only by God. They have learned how the greatest in the kingdom is one who is humble, bears their brother or sister in Christ's burden, shows no partiality, does nothing to hinder their belief in Christ, and seeks to show them mercy by coming to them when they sin and lovingly correct them.

Bible Club at Waupun High School on Friday mornings continues to see an average of 15-20 teens. Praise God! They are continuing to learn how to be assured we are spreading the correct message about Jesus. This month we have been looking at Jesus specifically and the message He preached. We have looked at the Beatitudes, repentance, and the costliness of discipleship.

On October 27th and 30th, the youth groups held a special offering for Rolling Hills Community Church (an Alliance of the Reformed Churches congregation in Zellwood, FL). They suffered thousands of dollars' worth of storm damage due to hurricanes Helene and Milton, and are a low budget church. The deacons graciously contributed to the offering as well, and we were able to send them \$1,460 to aid them in their costs.

On November 17th and 20th, the middle and high schoolers collected non-Thanksgiving and Thanksgiving items for the Waupun Food Pantry. They collected several shampoos, conditioner, soups, turkeys, stuffing, and much more. They helped Terri Respalje stock the shelves with the new items they collected. Thank you all for your generous donations. The items will greatly help those in need and those who are less fortunate.

We have seen new teens coming to both youth groups, and some who had come sporadically, or once or twice, coming consistently. Praise God!

Continue to pray that God brings teens to saving faith, increases the faith of those who are His, and equips us all to lead them and walk with them.

Equipping Children & Families Update

By Lynnae Loomans

As we start the month of December thinking of all the presents to buy and our

schedules getting busy with family gatherings and sports there are a couple reminders:

- Dec 11th - No bible class (there is K-5th grade Sunday School Christmas program practice 6-7:30pm)
- Dec 15th is the Christmas Program at 6:30pm

MESSAGES

Thank you to our church family for your prayers, cards and well wishes that you extended to us during my hip surgery. We praise God for His gift of healing. A special thanks to our Shepherd, Chad Loomans, and his son Jett for your visit and for bringing the prayer quilt from the church. It is great to be a part of the family of God.

-Phil and Lynette

Thank you for prayers, cards, visits, gifts of food, and assistance with transportation following my surgery. Above all, praise God for healing.

-Lillian Schouten

Thank you to the Stork Committee for the card and ReachOut Books gift card for the arrival of Calvin. We are so blessed and thankful for such a loving church family to raise our boys in!

-Nate & Jenna Bille

Thanks for all the prayer, cards, and other concerns shown to us over the past few months. God is faithful and he is guiding us through each day. Please continue to pray for us in the following months. Ron goes for scope in Dec. and Jean will be starting treatments soon. We keep *Trusting the Lord*.

Proverbs 3: 5 & 6

-Ron and Jean Vande Zande

We are so blessed to have such a caring, praying church family. We appreciated all of the prayers, cards, and visits after Brian's kidney surgery. The pathology report came back clear and no further treatment is necessary. God is good and prayers were answered.

-Brian and Jackie Tenpas

EVENTS

December Events

- Monday, 7:00pm
Dec 02
Women's Worship Night
Please join us for a night of worship and prayer as we "make room" for the savior of the world.
- Sunday, 6:00pm
Dec 08
Caroling in Alto
Spread the joy of Christmas with us as we walk around Alto singing carols and delivering cookies to our neighbors.
- Sunday, 9:30am
Dec 15
Mixed Choir Cantata
Join us as the Mixed Choir presents "The First Noel - Celebrating the Birthday of a King!".
- Sunday, 6:30pm
Dec 15
Sunday School Christmas Program
You're invited to "Chosen Too: Jesus Chose You" where the 3 year olds - 5th graders will share the story of Jesus' birth.
- Tuesday, 4:00pm
Dec 24
Christmas Eve Service
Join us as we celebrate the birth of our King!



NEWS

Library News

Another Thanksgiving season is upon us and as we reflect on the blessings God has given us this year, I also want to include our church library! In our very secular world it is a true blessing to be able to go down and check out a large variety of God inspired fiction and non-fiction books, books for our teens & children and also DVDs for all ages! We have reserved a spot on our "new

book" shelves for New & Recommended Non-Fiction books, check it out!

Coming next month are 3 new series from some of your favorite authors! There is "The Heart of Cheyenne" series from Tracie Peterson about life in the frontier West. A series from Liz Tolsma set in France during World War 2 and a 3 book series from Karen Witemeyer, "Texas Ever After", as well as a few new inspiring non-fiction titles! Thank you and enjoy!

New Member

11/17/24 - Lucas Bresser