



Why I'm Taking a Sabbatical

A Story

A young man moved to a logging town and applied with a lumber company to be a lumberjack. The foreman agreed to hire him if he could meet the daily quota of five trees a day for a week. The young man went to the hardware store, bought himself the best axe he could, and showed up for work early the next morning. The foreman pointed out some trees and told him to get to work.

By the end of that first day, he'd chopped down ten trees. The foreman was impressed & told him to be sure to come back and pick it up at the same place the next day. At the end of the second day, the young lumberjack had cut down nine trees. The foreman was again impressed. On the third day, his production dropped to eight and he was bone-tired. He'd to put in a lot more effort that day with fewer results. He figured the trees must be harder wood and things would be better the next day. But on the fourth day he only cut down seven trees. The fifth and sixth days he barely managed to cut down four trees, one shy of the required five.

The foreman said he had to let him go and asked why his production had dropped off so much. The young man said he had no idea. He just knew he was giving it every ounce of strength he had. The foreman said, "Let me see your axe." The young man handed it to him. He looked at the head. Its edge was dull, rounded by six days of hard work. He said to the young man, "This axe is dull. Didn't you ever sharpen it?"

The young man replied, "I never had time! I was too busy cutting down trees."

I'm Dull!

Spiritually, emotionally, physically, relationally - I'm doing well. But *intellectually*, I feel dull. Please understand that I'm **NOT TIRED** of pastoring, nor am I tired of First Irving! I just need to sharpen the axe. So I'm taking some time in July to do that.

I'll be engaging in conversations, conferences, mission research, worship services and staff meetings which will allow me to add some new insight into preaching, leading and pastoring. I'll be getting some training that will allow me to learn new skills that will equip me to be a more effective leader for our growing church. I'll be using the full month of July to do that - which means, I won't be in the pulpit, here or anywhere else, preaching or teaching. I'll be taking a sabbatical.

What Is A Sabbatical?

A sabbatical isn't a vacation. It is a time of rest, but not inaction. A sabbatical is hiatus from church work to engage in activities that brings renewal.

College and university professors often take a sabbatical after several years of teaching. It makes sense why they would. They are charged with the task of preparing youth, not for yesterday, but for tomorrow. Yet the task of instruction is

full time. Professors have no time to keep current with the contemporary state of their field. So they take a sabbatical every so often to study and get caught up with their field. That way their instruction stays relevant and fresh.

My role as a pastor is somewhat similar. The truths I'm called to teach are timeless, they don't change. But the world I'm called to reach with those truths does change and I need to make sure I'm being effective in communicating that truth.

The Personnel Team has seen the value of a sabbatical because the principle of the Sabbath is found in God's Word. Not only was Israel to observe the weekly Sabbath, they were to keep the Sabbath year every seventh year. The principle of resting from one's regular work to devote their self to a special focus and dependence on God is clearly seen in scripture. This is my seventh year at First Irving.

I'll Be Back

As I have planned for the sabbatical, I have done my best to anticipate all the questions and concerns that may arise. One of the most prominent questions is that some may assume that this one-month rest is a kind of "separation"; that I've become disillusioned and that I'm looking elsewhere. Let me respond to that - NO WAY! I'm coming back, although a few people may be disappointed to hear that! I know God has called me to First Irving. My goal is to be a more effective pastor right here, not somewhere else. As Schwarzenegger said with a heavy accent, "I'll be back!"

What Am I Doing In July?

I need time to be able to read and study in some areas I just don't have time for now. I'll be engaging in learning activities that will provide some new tools to lead First Baptist Irving into the future God has for us. I'll be spending some time with men I respect as being great and godly leaders.

I will observe some great, faithful churches in action (FBC Jacksonville, FBC Orlando) as well as some new, frontline churches (Watermark, The Village Church).

I will be attending an Apologetic Conference in California for four days to learn some new insight and culturally relevant issues through a biblical worldview lens.

I am travelling to China to do some research on the underground Church that is thriving there. I plan to connect with some leaders and see firsthand that works of God there. First Irving has two missionaries on the field in China, Adrian Vann and Amber Goodloe. I will be staying with Adrian a few nights in Shanghai. I will also take a trip to Mongolia to touch base with our Global Impact Partner there.

I will count on your gracious prayers as I take this sabbatical. I appreciate the church allowing me this time and I commit to return ready to lead our church as God leads me.

John Durham