

Sabbatical Letter to The Congregation

In the past year, I have explored and been blessed to teach two in-depth Bible studies including the book of Exodus which goes into detail about what God wants for us with honoring the Sabbath and keeping it holy. Motivated by these studies and our sermon series on Sabbath in February, I think there is more to this than I am currently observing and teaching. I still hear members say the way they observe this doesn't always renew them.

Therefore, I hope to learn how to teach Sabbath-keeping better for our church family. Since our Personnel Committee's Employee Handbook encourages clergy to take a Sabbatical after serving 7 years, it has worked out that Personnel and Session approved a Sabbatical during the summer of 2022 for me. I am grateful for this opportunity to not just have a time of leave for rest and renewal, but also set up ways the congregation benefits. The plan is to invite the congregation to read a book on Sabbath while I, too, do that and more in-depth research on Sabbath-keeping. This way we mutually discover how to be faithful to the Scriptures.

I am grateful for a Sabbatical and excited about learning and discovering together. As a part of it, I plan to explore the spiritual, mental, physical, and relational aspects of this fourth commandment (Exodus 20:8-11) throughout a 10-week period during the programmatic down-time (May 23-August 3, 2022). I'm pursuing a grant to help support this financially, but even without the grant, I intend to take advantage of how we can be blessed to be a blessing and witness. Once I return, I hope to share findings through sermons on Sabbath, further Sabbath-focused Bible studies, and other spiritual practices integrating spiritual renewal for your day off so that it might be, for example, more of a gift than a day you only catch up on chores.

In these anxious times, there are things that steal our joy in honoring that which God gives to us. I need to identify what inhibits us from taking advantage of the Sabbath and to discover more ways to fulfil God's hopes and plans for us. If underutilized, Sabbath is something that can cause greater angst in people. I believe a theology that contains the richness of this Sabbath gift can strengthen our church family.

I invite us to begin this mutually beneficial Sabbatical journey now by prayer. As a means of further discussion about this new endeavor, I will be offering an educational moment after both worship services Sunday, April 18. By the end of the month, I will turn in my grant request and should hear in September if that competitive financial assistance comes through. As the year unfolds, we will learn what God has in store for us. A rediscovery of the joy of God's gift of Sabbath will be welcomed. Jesus said it was made for us (Mark 2:27)! I eagerly look forward to sharing my discoveries and experiences with you.

Grace and Peace be with you,
Mark