

THE SALTSHAKER

A PUBLICATION OF COVENANT REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

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Five Reasons Why Your Pastor Should Take a Sabbatical

By Thom S. Rainer

As most of you know, the Session has granted a sabbatical for Pastor Sean from June 27 through September 26. Our church policy grants a compensated sabbatical for our pastoral staff: after six years of continuous service, a teaching elder will be granted at least three months for a sabbatical that is to be in addition to vacation time. It is hard to believe, but as of the end of May, Pastor Sean has been at our church for six years!

During the sabbatical, he will be out of the office, away from the church, and not involved in public ministry, shepherding care, or church administration. The purpose of a sabbatical is to enable our pastors to be renewed through an extended time away spent in spiritual formation and rest, and the vital pursuit of continuing education and/or academic research and writing. Pastor Sean and his family will worship at other churches during this time, and we ask you not to contact him with any pastoral needs or ministry items. God has providentially blessed us with a new Assistant Pastor who is more than capable to work with the Session to lead the church during Sean's absence, as well as a new pastoral intern, Wilson Goins, who will help to share some of the load. Please be in prayer for Sean, Lindsey, and their family that this be a time of refreshment and encouragement, and that Sean returns to us with renewed energy and spiritual vision. And please be in prayer for Pastor Jim, as well as for Wilson, as they endeavor to minister to us in this important time in the life of our church.

This article was originally published at ChurchAnswers.com (<https://churchanswers.com/blog/five-reasons-your-pastor-should-take-a-sabbatical/>). Thom S. Rainer serves as founder and CEO of Church Answers. Dr. Rainer publishes a daily blog and podcast at ChurchAnswers.com and can be found on Twitter @ThomRainer and at facebook.com/Thom.S.Rainer. Dr. Rainer has spent a lifetime committed to the growth and health of the local church and her leaders.

The word “sabbatical” has different meanings depending on the context in which it is used. It has one meaning in the academic community, another meaning in its biblical usage, and still another in many secular settings.

For the purpose of this article, I define sabbatical in simple terms. It simply means time off for rest and/or study. The time can be a few days, a few weeks or, on rare occasions, a few months. The pastor is given paid leave for rest, rejuvenation and, perhaps, deeper study. I would love to see churches of all sizes provide this requirement of their pastor, even if it's only for a few days.

I have the opportunity to work with lay leaders and pastors. I have a pretty good view of both perspectives. And I am convinced that more lay leaders need to insist their pastors take regular breaks even beyond vacations. Allow me to provide five reasons for my rationale.

1. A pastor has emotional highs and lows unlike most other vocations. In the course of a day, a pastor can deal with death, deep spiritual issues, great encouragement, petty criticisms, tragedies, illnesses, and celebrations of birth. The emotional roller coaster is draining. Your pastor needs a break—many times a break with no distractions.

2. A pastor is on 24-hour call. Most pastors don't have an “off” switch. They go to sleep with the knowledge they could be awakened by a phone call at anytime of the day. Vacations are rarely uninterrupted. It can be an exhausting vocation, and a sabbatical can be a welcome time to slow down.

3. Pastors need time of uninterrupted study. It doesn't usually happen in the study at church or home. There is always the crisis or need of the moment. Church members expect sermons that reflect much prayer and study. The pastor's schedule often works against that ideal. The sabbatical can offer much

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July-August

Upcoming Events

For more information about any of these events, refer to our website (www.covenantreformed.net), or the church office (828-253-6578; crpchq@gmail.com).

The Lord's Supper

Please prepare your hearts in advance to take of the sacrament together.

During Morning Worship:	During Evening Worship:
July 3, 17	July 31
August 7, 21	

Meals:

July 3, Fellowship Lunch following morning worship.
August 7, Shepherding Groups, following morning worship.

Guest Speaker

On July 3, we will again welcome Dr. Steve Lawson to our pulpit for the morning.

Weekly Events

Sunday:		
Sunday School	9:30 am	
Morning Worship	10:45 am	
Evening Worship	6:00 pm	Except for 1st Sundays

Wednesday Evenings: (No activities on July 6)

Supper	6:00 pm
Bible Study/Prayer	6:45 pm

Bible Study

For Men:		
Men's Prayer Breakfast	8:00 am	2nd & 4th Saturdays
ROMEOS	8:00 am	Every Thursday
<i>(Retired Old Men Eating Out)</i>		
at Cornerstone Restaurant, Tunnel Road		
Norm Bomer's Home	7:00 pm	1st & 3rd Thursdays
For Women:		
Gail Albee's Home	9:30 am	Every Tuesday

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needed, and uninterrupted, study time.

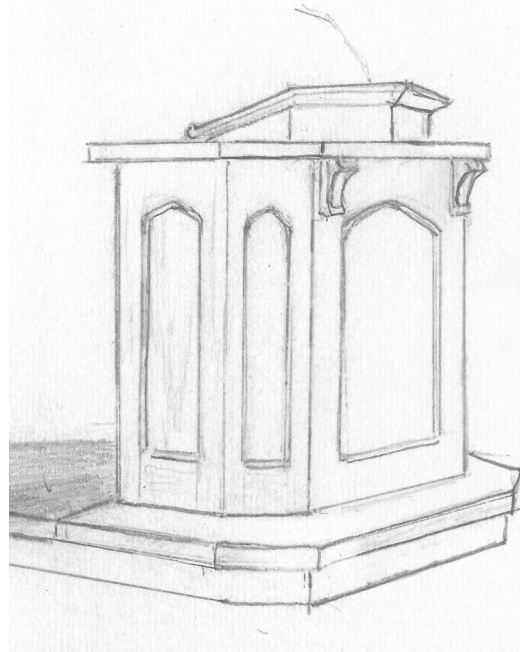
4. **Pastors who have sabbaticals have longer tenure at churches.** Though my information is anecdotal, I do see the trend. And while I cannot prove a cause-and-effect relationship, I feel confident that pastors who have sabbaticals are much more likely to stay at a church because they are less likely to experience burnout.

5. **Pastors who have sabbaticals view the time off as an affirmation from their churches.** I have heard from many pastors who share with me a sentence similar to this one: “I know my church loves me because they give me a sabbatical.” Pastors need affirmation. Sabbaticals can accomplish that goal.

I estimate that only about five percent of churches offer sabbaticals. In almost every case where I am familiar, the relationship between pastor and congregation is very healthy. I do think at least one of the reasons is the sabbatical.

The Sacred Desk

By Rev. Jim Curtis



As Pastor Sean and his family begin his sabbatical, we have decided as a Pastoral Staff to take a break from our current series through the book of Matthew. During this break (from July through September) we will embark on a short series through the Old Testament book of Esther. This story may be entirely familiar to many of you. It has been dramatized and released as a movie numerous times and is often considered by some the Disney Princess story of the Bible.

Yet, as I believe we will see, the book is far from the romanticized version of the story we may recall. Instead, the story we read of is one of deep sorrow. Esther is not just faced by the threat of genocide from the infamous Haman, but also her own personal danger in the hands of an exploitative King who is concerned chiefly with his own reputation and pleasure. She and her uncle, Mordecai, navigate around the royal court suavely... but we are met with yet another challenge: the heroes of the story don't act as we'd expect from God's faithful.

The story does include a great number of victories, however. And it is still read annually during the feast of Purim (most recently on March 16th of this year), with great joy by the Jewish people. So there is much to celebrate in

the wake of the story! After all, the great emphasis of the story points us to God's total and ultimate control—even if he's never mentioned in the book!

Why study this book, beyond the obvious reasons (it's in the Bible)? I don't believe I have an incredible answer to this question beyond that I think we will find the book is unique and uniquely applicable to our situation as Christians living as a Church in countries with varying governments around the world. The story, warts and all, is a gold mine for the Church in helping us see and address questions about how to live ethically in a world that doesn't share our values.

I also believe the book's reputation is partly earned and partly fantastical. As I said, the book's story is something which is celebrated annually. The salvation we find in the book, and God's orchestration of it, is truly wonderful. But it is a true story, and true stories don't go the way of Disney movies. In this way, I believe it's important to go and study Esther for what it truly offers, namely the story of an incredibly brave woman who was placed in an impossible position by those around her.

In this way, we are pointed to Christ and the salvation he accomplishes for us. Esther's true story reveals salvation is a messy affair. This prepares and equips us well when we see the salvation Christ offers to us is no less messy, and indeed significantly more bloody. The story aids us in seeing that nothing is quite as nice and clean as we'd like, and there are still lingering questions about the propriety of the actions we see in these stories.

At the end of the study, I hope more than our knowledge of the story changes. I hope we meet with the ugly realities of this world unflinchingly, and in the face of those challenges we stand boldly in the power of Christ. I pray we would learn from the story of Esther by way of being pointed to the salvation Jesus offers us, and learning from both how we might live in a world that doesn't see things as we do.

Preaching Schedule

Date	Morning	Evening
July 3	Steve Lawson	
July 10	Esther 1:1-12	2 Sam. 12:1-15
July 17	Esther 1:10-2:4	Psalm 51:1-12
July 24	Esther 2:1-18	2 Sam. 12:16-31
July 31	Esther 2:19-3:6	Guest Preacher
Aug. 7	Guest Preacher	
Aug. 14	Esther 3:5-4:3	2 Sam. 13
Aug. 21	Esther 4:1-17	Psalm 51:10-19
Aug. 28	Esther 5	Guest Preacher

Practical Hospitality

By Rev. Jim Curtis

Imagine, for a moment, a small diagram. A tic-tac-toe board would work well. Put your name in the middle of that board; that's your house. The top three spaces are the houses across the street, and the bottom three are houses behind yours. The two spaces on the middle row are your next-door neighbors. If you're more artistic, draw out the 4-6 closest homes to your house.

If I asked you to fill in those spaces with the names of your neighbors, could you do it?

I've asked folks elsewhere to fill out this diagram, and I think you may be surprised at the amount of people who couldn't tell you more than 1 of the names of their neighbors. I have only had a handful of people indicate they could fill out the entire board.

Recently, Pastor Sean preached on the importance of hospitality in his sermon on Matthew 9:9-17, and it has got me thinking more and more about what hospitality practically looks like. How can we really, truly practice hospitality? I believe it begins with a diagram like this. What it reveals is that names can be a powerful thing. You can pick your neighbor out of a crowd, but do you know your neighbors? You know, the people who live, celebrate, mourn, cry, laugh, play, and sleep just feet away from your own home.

Practicing biblical hospitality must have in its foundations the knowledge of people near to us, and from there it is a matter of moving towards others. Joining them in those activities listed above and inviting them into your own expressions of the same. This can be intimidating and outright terrifying. I think we all understand that feeling. Feelings of rejection, suspicion, or disdain would make even the most self-confident waver, especially if they come from the people living the closest to them! Yet, consider the alternative.

Madeleine and I have lived in Asheville for less than 6 months, and yet in that time every single person on the street knows I am the assistant pastor here at Covenant Reformed. All of them know I walk to work, and that we have two services on Sundays, a midweek prayer gathering, and that Madeleine and Charlotte come with me to these events. Yet, to the point of this piece, can I confess to you something? They found all that out without talking to me. I don't even know how much of the diagram from the start of this I could fill out!

Our neighbors are observant. You know because you've observed things about them, too. They know things about you already. Why not give them something better? Give them the real thing: go and introduce yourself. This is the first practical step toward being biblically hospitable. I think you'll find the rest comes pretty quickly after that.

Let the Children Worship

by Rev. Sean McCann



Let the Children Worship by Jason Helopoulos is a wonderfully helpful little book that will bring great encouragement to any parent who has ever struggled with their children during the worship service. The author is Jason Helopoulos, a pastor and father of two, who has a great passion for bringing the whole family of God – including squirmy toddlers and crying babies – together for worship.

In the first three chapters he lays out a brief theology of worship, culminating in the

biblical practice of including children in these services: “the church lives out its theology when it encourages and even expects its children to participate in this central event.” After laying down this groundwork, Helopoulos moves on to the meat of the book by encouraging parents – with great pastoral sensitivity – to consider the many blessings of having children in worship, as well as offering some words of parental advice. He knows all too well the struggles that parents face, and tries to bring lots of practical knowledge to bear from his own experience. And he doesn't just speak to parents, he has a whole chapter directed towards church leaders and how they can help, as well as some words to other adults who often need to practice patience and tolerance: “Congregations need to willingly and joyfully join in this great privilege of welcoming covenant children into corporate worship. And that takes some minor adjusting on everyone's part.” The book ends with some testimonies from families and children of the great spiritual benefits they gleaned through years in worship. I really would recommend this book to all of our members so that we can learn how to keep our baptism vows to our youngest members.

Personally, I want to address our parents with young children and say that we are thrilled that you are here, and that you are faithfully raising your children as part of our congregation. As a pastor, I love to look out and see little hands trying to hold hymnals and little eyes watching when mom and dad stand up and sit down. Your kids all make some noises – so what? They are joyous noises and wonderful reminders to the rest of us of God's covenant faithfulness and the blessing that children are to our church family. Their noises are music to our ears, and I pray their noises grow more numerous over time!

We have discounted copies on our book table, and for parents with young children, please take a copy free of charge!