

Bobby Rau Sabbatical Report

April 21 - July 14, 2025

Introduction

“It is good that a man quietly wait. Take time to be separate from all friends and all duties, all cares and all joys; time to be still and quiet before God... the little season of silent worship will bring a peace and a rest that give a blessing not only in prayer, but all the day.”

Andrew Murray, *Waiting on God*

I want to start by expressing my gratitude for the opportunity to take a sabbatical. I am deeply thankful to everyone who stepped in to cover my responsibilities, especially Pastor Craig. This time was a gift, not something I felt entitled to, but something I received with deep appreciation. It was a time to reconnect with God in a meaningful way. I realized even more deeply how good and gracious He is and that He is the abounding source of joy and peace in my life.

In this report, I'll share what I did during my sabbatical, the lessons I've learned, and my thoughts moving forward.

What I Did

Physically

I didn't prioritize health during my sabbatical, but I was able to enjoy more rest, particularly getting more sleep, which I found refreshing. I also spent time in the weight room with a friend and went on regular hikes. It was a blessing to have the space to focus on my physical well-being and to be present in God's creation during those moments.

Relationally

One of the greatest blessings of my sabbatical was the opportunity to deepen my relationships. I spent more time with friends, enjoying activities like hiking, disc golf, and board games. I am deeply thankful for the friendships I have and the time spent together.

I was also able to invest more in my relationship with my kids—picking them up and dropping them off at school more often, going on dates, and simply being present with them. I've noticed they've become more connected with me, and I attribute some of this to the sabbatical.

Kayla and I also enjoyed more evenings together, something we both deeply appreciated. Additionally, we had the chance to go on a few vacations, including a camping trip and a visit to Texas to see my brother. It was a special time as he and I share similar roles in our respective churches, and we had meaningful conversations about ministry and life.

Another key relational development during this time was my work with a counsellor. I had five sessions focused on growing my empathy toward others. These sessions have helped me shift from asking questions to offer help to asking questions to understand others better. I also realized I've sometimes idolized my own character, which has hindered my ability to love others fully.

Mentally

During my sabbatical, I had the opportunity to read and listen to a number of books, which were both inspiring and thought-provoking. Some of the books I explored include *Eternity is Now in Session* by John Ortberg, *Creating a Healthier Church Culture* by Ronald W. Richardson, *Waiting on God* by Andrew Murray, *Life Together* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Hidden Potential* by Adam Grant, *The Rest of God* by Mark Buchanan, *Becoming Dallas Willard* by Gary W. Moon, *Living in Christ's Presence* by Dallas Willard, and I also started *Life Without Lack* by Dallas Willard.

Each book provided valuable insights, but a few stand out. *Waiting on God* was a particularly meaningful devotional, and I'd highly recommend it to anyone seeking to slow down. *Creating a Healthier Church Culture* helped me understand how toxicity can enter church environments and how to address it, which has been a practical takeaway for my ministry.

My favourite book, however, was *Living in Christ's Presence*. I ended up listening to it twice, as it's best experienced as an audiobook (it's based on a conference). I found myself pausing often to reflect on the ideas presented, which shaped much of my deeper thinking throughout the sabbatical. Primarily it was regarding the present availability of the Kingdom of God in my life and how following him is the best way to live.

Spiritually

I had ample time to engage with Scripture, reading it in larger chunks and reflecting more meditatively. I spent extended periods in solitude and prayer, which deepened my connection with God. As I read through the Gospels, I often paused to imagine what it would have been like to be a part of the stories, reflecting on the personal implications of each passage.

One of the most challenging yet rewarding experiences was a three-night solo retreat, where I spent time away with only my Bible. This time was particularly stretching, as I intentionally didn't use devices and distractions.

Through the solitude and quiet, I experienced the overwhelming goodness of God. His love has been a constant source of peace, and he faithfully pours out His love and generosity to me.

What I Learned

During my sabbatical, three Bible passages stood out as especially impactful. These verses became a focal point for much of my meditation and reflection, drawing on my personal experiences and insights gained from various books. The passages were:

- **Matthew 11:28-30** – Jesus invites those who are weary to come to Him for rest, offering a yoke that is easy and a burden that is light.
- **John 15:5-8** – Jesus describes Himself as the vine and us as the branches, urging us to remain in Him so that we may bear fruit.
- **Psalms 23** – God is our shepherd who provides, guides, and comforts us, assuring us that we lack nothing.

In reflecting on these passages, I was reminded of God's immense grace and goodness. In Matthew 11, Jesus invites those who are weary and burdened to come to Him for rest, demonstrating His loving kindness in offering peace to our souls. John 15 reminds me of His generosity, as He makes it possible for us to bear fruit when we remain in Him. Psalm 23 reveals God's goodness as our shepherd, who provides for us and guides us with infinite love and care. All three passages emphasize being present with God in every aspect of life.

This doesn't mean life will be free of pain or hardship, or that we will experience blessings in the way our culture defines them. But it does mean that no matter what is happening, I can experience peace and joy because God is in control, and He loves me.

One of the ways this has become real for me is in understanding the concept of an "easy yoke." If I am yoked to Jesus, my role is simply to walk beside Him, following His direction and pace. If I try to go in a different direction or at a different speed, I will strain against the yoke. This frees me from the pressure of results. My focus should be on faithfulness in walking with Him, trusting that He is carrying the weight of the journey.

Similarly, John 15 reminds us that our role is to remain in Christ. Bearing fruit is not something we strive to do directly; it's the natural result of remaining in Him. This shift in focus has helped me prioritize being with Christ, allowing Him to shape me into someone who bears fruit.

Psalms 23 speaks of lacking nothing. In a world driven by a constant pursuit of more, this is a radical statement. But if God is our Good Shepherd, and if He knows us and loves us, I can learn to rest in His provision. I don't need to be overwhelmed by desires because I trust that God will provide what is best for me. Whenever I feel a sense of lack, I've made it a spiritual discipline to remind myself, "I do not lack..." Whether it's a green light or a peaceful bedtime with the kids, this practice has helped me surrender to God and experience His peace and contentment.

One specific instance highlights how I've grown during this time. Early in my sabbatical, I remember feeling peaceful and joyful after a time of solitude. But when I stepped into my home and was met with the chaos of kids needing things from me, my peace quickly vanished. I realized I wanted a peace that transcended external circumstances. Toward the end of my sabbatical, we were babysitting for friends, so the house was extra chaotic, and the kids were loud and demanding my attention all at once. Instead of being overwhelmed, I calmly spoke to each child, maintaining peace without forcing it. Looking back, I noticed how different this response was from my usual reaction. Through solitude, counselling, coaching, and reflecting on Scripture, I was able to remain peaceful in a difficult situation. While I haven't "arrived," this moment was a clear example of the growth I experienced during my sabbatical.

As I've grown in peace and emotional maturity during my sabbatical, I recognize that this is all because of God's grace. It is His loving presence that has allowed me to remain calm in the chaos, and His generous Spirit that continues to shape me into the person I am meant to be.

Thoughts Going Forward

Although my sabbatical wasn't primarily focused on what I wanted to do in church ministry, I took the opportunity to spend time with God and reflect on the future direction of my work.

As I move forward, I am more convinced than ever of God's goodness and grace. The opportunity to serve Him in ministry is a gift. I was excited to return. I deeply missed the staff and the people in our church, and I found myself appreciating the Mennonite Brethren confession and denomination even more. After attending various churches and denominations, I gained a renewed gratitude for the foundation we have here at Ross Road.

One area I feel particularly renewed in is the launch of our microchurch campuses. While I know this will be a gradual process, I am excited about the possibilities for people to be discipled and to discover Jesus in new, relational environments. I look forward to exploring this idea with leaders and starting to pray and plan through the fall for a microchurch campus launch.

Additionally, I am eager to start an intentional discipleship group that will focus on maturing spiritually together. This group would include reading books, following a Scripture reading plan, and committing to mutual encouragement, confession, and growth. Through the summer, I plan to explore how to shape this vision into reality.

Conclusion

I am deeply thankful for God's overwhelming goodness, grace, and love throughout my sabbatical. His generous provision made this time of rest and reflection possible, and His constant presence has been a source of peace and strength. As I return to ministry, I do so with a heart full of gratitude for His faithfulness and a renewed desire to serve Him with all that I am.

I've learned that true peace and fruitfulness come from staying rooted in Christ, and that my role is to walk faithfully beside Him, trusting that He will carry the weight.

As I return to ministry, I am excited about the work God has for me at Ross Road. My passion for launching microchurch campuses and fostering intentional discipleship has been reignited, and I look forward to seeing how God will move in these areas in the months to come.

Thank you for your support and for allowing me this time to refresh and reconnect with God. I am eager to continue serving alongside all of you, with a renewed sense of purpose and energy.