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QuietWaters

C O M P A S S

May 2011, Volume 16, Number 1

INSIDE

From Empty to Full

Drinking Again from
God's Life-Giving Waters

QuietWaters



QuietWaters Ministries

The comprehensive ministry to pastors, missionaries and other Christian leaders and their families.



QuietWaters Leadership Counseling Intensives

A one or two-week counseling program to create transformational change in the Christian leader conducted at our Colorado Retreat Center.



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Family, marriage, and church leadership retreats with internationally recognized speakers to encourage and edify ministry couples and lay leaders.



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Professional and confidential, 24/7 phone consulting for pastors and other Christian leaders provided by contract to denominations and ministries.

RESCUED BY REST

RENEWING CHRISTIAN LEADERS

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Alarming Growth

from the President *Jim Schlottman*



The number of pastors and missionaries coming to QuietWaters stressed and burned out is alarming. Don't get me wrong we want more pastors and missionaries who are in need of our program to come. The alarming part is the growing number and the intensity of their burn out.

One of the answers to reducing the amount of burnout they are experiencing is sabbatical counseling through QuietWaters. More and more pastors are coming to us as a part of their sabbatical, and more and more churches are providing the time and money for pastors to take a sabbatical. However, we are not seeing mission agencies provide in the same way. In this issue we are addressing the need for sabbaticals and rest.

Often pastors ask me what they're going to do when they're not in their counseling sessions during the Leadership Counseling Intensive. I jokingly respond that I'm going to introduce them to a new concept for pastors—REST.

Jason Nelson addresses the subject of rest from the perspective of having been an addict, "intoxicated with the drug of self-sufficiency." He writes in his article, "I discovered that I was like the people of God in past generations who were relying on human strength and refusing to enter the rest of God. I didn't want to be that way anymore. It was obvious that I needed to start living the line 'In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength' (Isaiah 30:15)."

Colin Vander Ploeg shares that, "I was not experiencing life to the full. I was nearing exhaustion and burnout. No one really noticed it at the time, except my wife." Then he tells you about his personal sabbatical experience and the role of the QuietWaters Leadership Counseling Intensive in that.

Vander Ploeg says, "Have you ever tried to sleep well when you have a lot on your mind? Well, over the next two weeks, through this highly personal and deeply penetrating counseling, all I had in my heart, mind, emotions, and soul began to open up by the Spirit's leading."

Right after his QuietWaters time, he wrote, "Realizing that many pastors seek this kind of place only after there has been some major crisis in their lives, I want to highly recommend to all pastors to be proactive about their self-care, repair, and growth work. I was not in a major crisis but was burdened and tired, running on empty. So I added QuietWaters to my sabbatical plan. It was an invaluable investment in my personal life and ministry, present and future. There I found a completely safe place to open up and unload. I came away with a clearer understanding of myself as a follower of Jesus and as a servant among His people."

He ended his comments with a direct word to you: "What will the Lord do for and in you in such a time and place as this?"

In this issue we are providing ideas for those in decision-making roles and those interested in planning a sabbatical. So take some restful time as you read this issue of *Compass*. ■



The Renewal
CIRCLE

For information about becoming a member of The Renewal Circle in support of this ministry, please call 1-866-5-WATERS.

For additional information, contact QuietWaters Ministries in one of the following ways:

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"He leads me beside quiet waters."
Psalm 23:2

RESCUED BY REST

by Jason Nelson

Onward with my crutches and my boot. I had just finished another amazing experience at Starbucks. On my way out of the store I remembered how Starbucks is about the sensory and relational encounter just as much as the coffee. The coffee was superb, a cinnamon dolce cappuccino, with the perfect blend of espresso, steamed milk and froth, laced with a thread of cinnamon and brown sugar. But the experience was even better. It was an hour of inspiration. The inspiration was rooted in many things. Conversing about life with my friend Eric. Peering out the front window at the city street. Hearing the crackling of steaming milk for cappas and lattes. Sharing community with a beautifully diverse group of people. Smelling the aroma of coffee. Feeling the buzz of activity on a Friday night. Gazing at the abstract art called **The Matrix**. The experience was rich. More than these things, there was the emotional touch of healing, laughter, wonder, peace and warmth.

This time I couldn't leave without marking the occasion somehow. After browsing at the vast array of Starbucks' products, it was obvious the clear tumbler with the logo was for me. No doubt, I desperately needed to eliminate my burden on the environment from my unnecessary consumption of plastic water bottles. This was a moment of marking a good time, steeped with positive change. My Starbucks experience concluded at the cash register. And it ended

I could succumb to the temptation and drink the cup of self-sufficiency at any moment. That's right, self-sufficiency, not alcohol. Intoxication can apply to more than alcohol or drugs. The word intoxicate goes back to the Latin word toxicum, which means "poison." We can poison ourselves with pretty much anything. Prior to November of 2005, I was poisoning myself with the toxic belief that everything depended on me.

abundantly. There was one more surprise conversation with a group of young people who were visiting with the barista. They made sure I knew the tumbler would keep my coffee really hot, like no other tumbler they have seen. I made sure the barista knew I was paying Starbucks to market their product. But I told her it was worth the \$10.95 to keep their unique business model going. "You know you've arrived when other people pay for your marketing," I told Miss Barista. We laughed together. Walking out the front door, little did I know that something else would mark this night even more strikingly.

Eric and I exited the Starbucks onto Clinton Street feeling energized. I couldn't help but go on and on about how fabulous it was to be in the city that spring night. I raved about the excitement the city offered and the blessing of the wide range of people. Eric agreed. It seemed to us that being around strangers offered something treasured compared to the familiar surroundings of our rural town, even though nothing can top the intimacy of shared relationship with people year after year. Perhaps my excitement was overhyped because this was my first night out in 11 weeks. Just the day prior I was released from the complete rest my doctor had prescribed while I recovered from a surgically repaired Achilles tendon that had ruptured in my right leg. No surprise, it was a basketball thing, but that's another story. I was in crutches and a boot, but I was free to move!

As I hobbled to Eric's Jeep in the security of his presence to pick me up if I fell, I took one last look at my surroundings, hoping to catch a final glimpse of the excitement the night offered. But instead I noticed something peculiar down the street. One young woman was helping another walk down the sidewalk. What was unusual was that the woman being helped was completely intoxicated. She could not stand up on her own. She swayed like a kite in the wind, back and forth, putting enormous strain on her friend's body as they tried to walk. I pointed it out to Eric, and we stopped to watch for a moment. The situation only got

worse. The intoxicated young woman fell to the ground and lay flat on her back. Her friend scrambled to get her cellphone and appeared to be making a call for help. At that point, we decided we should step in.

By the time we got into the Jeep to catch up with them, both were back on their feet and proceeded to take a turn and walk dangerously down the sidewalk of a major city street. Pulling up next to them, we rolled down our window. Eric asked, "Ladies, do you need any help?" The coherent friend emphatically said, "Yes! Will you take us to Hillcrest?" "Yes, get in," we responded. Maggie, the one who was intoxicated, tried to resist, but her friend won out as they got into the Jeep. Maggie's mumbling and weak body didn't stand a chance against her friend's vehemence. I must admit, part of me was grateful for the friend's willingness to accept help in a desperate situation, but the other part of me wondered what we were getting ourselves into. I was prepared for anything. I kept the window rolled down as a security blanket even though I was inwardly embarrassed of doing so. What was I thinking? I guess I liked the idea of an easy escape. I feared that Maggie might start forcefully resisting while we were driving. Or what if she vomited all over the Jeep, including us? There's only one more appalling substance than vomit! Worse yet, would she pass out as we drove, causing a detour to the ER? I thought *I don't want to revisit the horror of my injury*. These things raced through my mind. But what was I going to

The high level of activity, busyness, responsibility and stress I was experiencing in ministry and life was crushing me. My body hurt. But guess what? Those things were not the problem. The problem was an internal situation of brokenness. I was not trusting God and living in his presence.

do with the open window, jump out or something? I was in crutches and a boot. I was in a vulnerable place myself. So, I prayed.

As we traveled the approximately one mile distance down and back up the big hill to the dorm, neither Eric nor I said a word to the women, nor did they say anything to us. We listened to their conversation in the back seat though. "Maggie, when we get home you have to go to bed!" exclaimed the friend. To which Maggie insisted, "No!" This kind of back and forth went on for three rounds. Other words were exchanged between them that missed each other because it was like two people speaking foreign languages. The friend would say, "This happened because you drank too early without eating anything." To which Maggie would reply, "No, I ate poop three times." One person was coherent,

and the other was not. Eventually we arrived at the dorm to find we weren't the only emergency in the area that night. There was a big red fire truck blasting its horn and flashing its lights at the neighboring dorm. Thankfully our situation was stabilizing. Maggie's friend got them out of the Jeep and said in a heartfelt way, "Thank you very much." Again, Eric as the spokesperson responded, "God bless you." We watched as they walked toward the dorm, grateful that Maggie's collision with the tree on the way was not a car in the busy thoroughway where we picked them up. She waved her arms as if treading water to get out of the mess of branches. They finally made it into the dorm. Our part was over. Yet I wondered *Will Maggie go to bed?* Will she rest in order to come back to her true self? Maggie may not have been able to understand her friend's urging, "Maggie, when we get home you have to go to bed!" But I heard it loud and clear. "Maggie, when we get home you have to go to bed!" "Maggie, when we get home you have to go to bed!"

The urging of Maggie's friend to get her to rest struck a chord with me because I was like Maggie once. I was intoxicated. As a matter of fact, I was intoxicated much of the time. But I am not intoxicated anymore. I am recovering. They say you never fully recover. Instead, you're always recovering. That is an accurate description of me. Recovering. I happen to be in a good place now, but I know I'm just one temptation

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away from falling back. I could succumb to the temptation and drink the cup of self-sufficiency at any moment. That's right, self-sufficiency, not alcohol. Intoxication can apply to more than alcohol or drugs. The word intoxicate goes back to the Latin word toxicum, which means "poison." We can poison ourselves with pretty much anything. Prior to November of 2005, I was poisoning myself with the toxic belief that everything depended on me. As a life-long Christian, I am not saying that I didn't believe in the Gospel of grace. I'm talking about my behaviors, not my beliefs. There's a difference. I behaved as if everything depended on me. Self-sufficiency instead of trust. I was like Maggie. I was intoxicated. The high level of activity, busyness, responsibility and stress I was experiencing in ministry and life was crushing me. My body hurt. But guess what? Those things were not the problem. The problem was an internal situation of brokenness. I was not trusting God and living in his presence.

It's stunning to me that my turning point from intoxication occurred in the same city as my brush with Maggie. When I was dangerously intoxicated with the drug of self-sufficiency, in prayer God whispered to me and some friends that I was going to be invited into something very unique and different, but that it would be good, and it would be not only for me but also for others to receive. I was to step into "rest." Rest, what did that mean? The only thing God revealed was that it was a broad rest, like repose, and its opposite was

I discovered that I was like the people of God in past generations who were relying on human strength and refusing to enter the rest of God. I didn't want to be that way anymore. It was obvious that I needed to start living the line "In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength" (Isaiah 30:15).

self-sufficiency. I decided to go away to the city to pray about what to do. It was there that I studied rest in God's Word for the first time. I discovered that I was like the people of God in past generations who were relying on human strength and refusing to enter the rest of God. I didn't want to be that way anymore. It was obvious that I needed to start living the line "In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength" (Isaiah 30:15). I spent two days in that city trying to understand how this newfound rest applied to me and to what God was inviting me. At the end of my stay, I stopped at a Korean church and tucked myself into a discreet classroom while about 20 people were having a prayer service in the sanctuary. I asked God the question over which I had been procrastinating for two days because I was afraid of the answer. I asked God point blank what he wanted me to do.

The answer changed my life forever. *Jason, I want you to take off the month of November and rest.* What? Are you kidding me, God? Rest for 30 days! And not work! I was raised by my parents that working is the way to everything. If I was anything, I was a hard worker who thrived on outworking everybody else. I didn't have much talent, but I had the guts to work hard. How could I not work? The brilliance of God came through in that simple invitation because he met me at my point of greatest weakness. The crazy thing is, I said yes. Just like I hope Maggie said yes to resting from her intoxication, I said yes to resting from my intoxication. I entered 30 days of rehab. The rehab was simple. Wake up every day, seek God and rest. It was God's program, and I must say his shepherding was absolutely masterful. My crisis point came just three days into the rest. The first three days were relaxing, but then it hit me that this was not going to be like a long weekend. This was 30 days! I was fuming mad that the Lord couldn't just fix me. He had allowed unrest to happen in my life. Why couldn't he just make it go away? I had a 2-hour gripe session with God, taking out my frustration on our vacuum cleaner, cleaning every corner of our home while crying out. After all, I needed something to do.

I got to the point where I had nothing else to say. My soul was quieted. I sat still for the next hour in silence, waiting for God to do something. I left the place where I sat in silence and parked my truck at the edge of town. My prayer changed from that of an entitled adult to a humble child. I prayed, "Lord, I will enter your rest,

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I entered 30 days of rehab. The rehab was simple. Wake up every day, seek God and rest. It was God's program, and I must say his shepherding was absolutely masterful.

God's love washed over me and took away what I believe is the greatest hindrance to rest. It is the epitome of self-sufficiency. Distrust. In place of distrust, God planted his peace and rest that would carry me throughout the month. From this peace and rest, I found myself sitting for hours in God's presence each day, in complete silence but experiencing an over-whelming, tangible sense of his presence, like the forceful flyover of the fighter jets. God was present and speaking, and I was receiving Spirit to spirit.

What I discovered about rest is quite simple: In God's economy, rest equals his presence and living in his presence.



but you have to show me you are with me.” After just a moment of silence, I heard a rumbling, howling force of wind behind me. I quickly recognized it was the sound of aircraft. I looked up, and three F-14 fighter jets flew right over me in plain sight. My heart melted. I knew the Father, Son and Holy Spirit were with me. Saying nothing, I simply wept. God’s love washed over me and took away what I believe is the greatest hindrance to rest. It is the epitome of self-sufficiency. Distrust. In place of distrust, God planted his peace and rest that would carry me throughout the month. From this peace and rest, I found myself sitting for hours in God’s presence each day, in complete silence but experiencing an overwhelming, tangible sense of his presence, like the forceful flyover of the fighter jets. God was present and speaking, and I was receiving Spirit to spirit. This would have been enough, but I wanted to understand rest in God’s Word, so I read and studied every verse on rest. I found over 110 uses of rest with a variety of 27 words to describe it. What I discovered about rest is quite simple: In God’s economy, rest equals his presence and living in his presence.

For over five years now, I have sought to live in God’s rest. In a way, it has been one long honeymoon with God. The joy meter in my life has been higher than I could have ever imagined. This is not because the externals changed in my life. In fact, the externals have worsened. More busy, more pressure, more stress,

I have learned some things about rest along the way. There are specific things we must be and do to cooperate with the rest of God. The first and most important one is to enter God’s rest. Just enter it. It requires a conscious step on our part. Then, God will show the way.

more pain and more task. This is the Western world in which we now live. The challenges of leadership are skyrocketing. But remember, my journey was never about the externals. It was about the internal. My internals changed. I have a brand new engine, and it never wears out because it runs on God’s presence and power and not my own. I continue to uncover the grace of God as I live in rest. I am constantly surprised that my expectations for myself, whatever they might represent are always higher than God’s expectations. God shows me that I am forever secure in him and that he will provide what I need. My part is to wait on him. I can enjoy his presence and be intimate with him in the journey.

I have learned some things about rest along the way. There are specific things we must be and do to cooperate with the rest of God. The first and most

important one is to enter God’s rest. Just enter it. It requires a conscious step on our part. Then, God will show the way. The book of Hebrews in God’s Word says to make every effort to enter the rest. Perhaps at another time or in another way, I can share some of the other tactics of rest, but I’m still learning myself. I continue to wrestle with resting and to learn more than I thought possible about rest. Recently, as I passed my five-year anniversary of rehab, I needed a reminder of rest. God and I celebrated our rest anniversary through a debilitating injury, the ruptured Achilles tendon I previously mentioned. It was an answer to my prayers for renewal. So, God gave me crutches and a boot and an 11-week journey of rest just like the eleventh month I experienced five years ago. On complete bodily rest in my crutches and my boot, I slowed down and entered a deep rest again. My latest insight is that I need my crutches and my boot all the time. Not for walking, but as a reminder that I need to slow down, and I need weakness, in order to keep receiving God’s rest. My crutches and my boot are about to come off. But what they represent will not. Onward with my crutches and my boot. ■



Jason Nelson

Executive Director of Ministry
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From Empty to Full

by Colin Vander Ploeg

In John 10:10 Jesus says, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (NIV). In early spring of 2010, I was *not* experiencing life to the full. I was nearing exhaustion and burnout. No one really noticed it at the time, except my wife. By other people’s standards I was doing well in ministry. I am a relatively capable preacher, pastor, and teacher, appreciated by our congregation. I was under no pressure to move on to another church nor was I under attack by any parishioners. I was well supported in all kinds of ways. But I was creeping downward, wondering if this was all there is to my life. Something was missing for me. I did not, thankfully and by God’s grace, have some big ministry meltdown or moral failure. In fact I shared what I was experiencing with my leadership board so they would know what was going on.

It was a very difficult year of dealing with some serious pastoral-care situations, along with the usual ministry work that continued its normal unrelenting pace. At least that is how I was experiencing it. These situations impacted me in ways I did not understand.

What to do? I could have pretended that things were okay and that I just needed my yearly vacation to unwind and get ready for another year. I could have ignored the telltale signs of depleted personal energy and blamed it on others: their demands, their dysfunction, their lack of understanding of all I was dealing with. I could have started pondering a change of ministry location, though that would have been difficult for my family at our particular stage in life. Or I could have admitted that I was

in need of some help to unpack the tiring dynamics at work that were weighing me down.

Thankfully the church I serve had recently instituted a policy on providing their pastors with a sabbatical. I applied for and received approval to take my accumulated time for a sabbatical: four months followed by one month of my usual family vacation. In hindsight, I have to say, this sabbatical came just in time.

Refueling at QuietWaters

A colleague warned me before I left that I would find I was far more exhausted than I realized. He was completely right. Once I was released from all my pastoral duties, I let myself feel how empty I actually was.

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By the Lord's urgings, I had booked the QuietWaters Ministries two-week Leadership Counseling Intensive in Parker, Colorado. Upon arrival I was welcomed by the host couple, and the next day I met with my assigned counselor for the first time. After our introductory meeting, his advice to me was "Get some rest."

Have you ever tried to sleep well when you have a lot on your mind? Well, over the next two weeks, through this highly personal and deeply penetrating counseling, all I had in my heart, mind, emotions, and soul began to open up by the Spirit's leading. It did not take long for me to move past the events of ministry that I was so sure were the cause of my exhaustion to deeper issues of my life tied in part to past experiences and in part to my present way of relating with others. It was a humbling and healing process in a completely safe place. The journey was at a pace that fit me and yet did not let me avoid dealing with the "stuff" of my life. I began to experience real rest as I engaged feelings and patterns of thinking and being of which I had only been vaguely aware.

My two weeks at QuietWaters for a Leadership Counseling Intensive was not only a great place to start a sabbatical but a watershed time for me in my personal life and ministry. What I realize now is that I had slowly, over the previous dozen years of ministry, been losing my vision for my life with the Lord. It wasn't that

Near the end of my two weeks at QuietWaters, I gave my counselor two descriptions of how I sensed I had moved personally through my time there. One was a picture of me arriving as a potted plant. My roots were packed tightly in a container. I received rain and sunshine from the Lord's hand but could grow no further than the walls of the container. Through my sabbatical time at QuietWaters, I felt as if I had been taken out of the pot and God had gently yet purposefully planted me in a new garden of His choosing. At first my roots were still tightly packed together, but now they were beginning to stretch out into the surrounding soil. The same sun and rain still nourished me, but now there was space to grow.

I was losing my faith. I was simply losing steam, feeling like I was spinning in place, weighed down by something I couldn't identify. Through the counseling process (which is just as much spiritual direction as it is formal counseling), I moved from thinking that my fatigue was situational to understanding that my weariness was more deeply connected with some unhealthy and unhelpful ways I dealt with things within myself. And so I was set on a path of healing and renewal ... or as Jesus put it, a path of life "to the full."

The QuietWaters Leadership Counseling Intensive is so effective because you have nothing else to deal with during the two-weeks save your reasons for being there. You are taken care of by a loving and nonintrusive host couple. They uphold you in prayer even without knowing what you are working on in counseling. All you are dealing with is held completely and professionally confidential. Hospitality is gracious and timely. The spacious facilities in which you stay are so beautifully crafted that they support restfulness and reflection. There is time and space to listen to the Spirit in His Word and in your own soul, no matter how tired your spiritual ears may be.

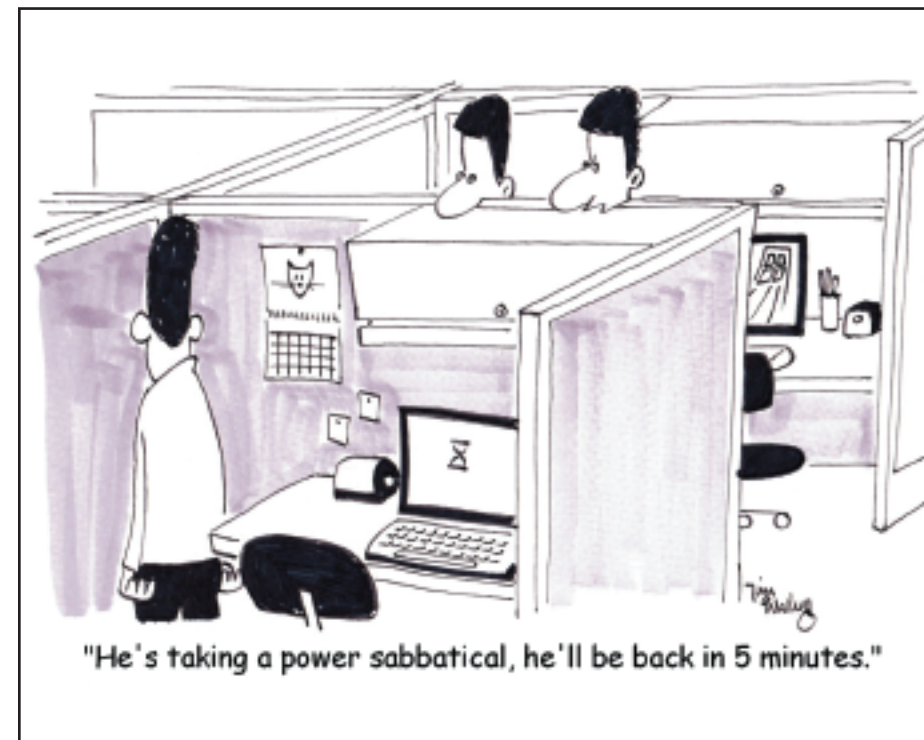
Space to Grow on a New Path

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arriving as a potted plant. My roots were packed tightly in a container. I received rain and sunshine from the Lord's hand but could grow no further than the walls of the container. Through my sabbatical time at QuietWaters, I felt as if I had been taken out of the pot and God had gently yet purposefully planted me in a new garden of His choosing. At first my roots were still tightly packed together, but now they were beginning to stretch out into the surrounding soil. The same sun and rain still nourished me, but now there was space to grow.

The second image was that of me travelling along and facing my near burnout as a fork in the road of my journey in life. Through my sabbatical, and particularly through the two-week Leadership Counseling Intensive, the Lord lifted me off the left path, my default path, and placed me a few steps along the right path. I could still see the other path heading off to the left, but now I was taking small steps down the right path, a new path. Once back to work, by the Spirit's prompting, I enrolled in a local program called Freedom Session and have spent the last year continuing down this road.

These two images still picture well what has changed for me in ministry and in life since my sabbatical. I have been amazed at how a renewed vision for my life is forming as I continue to follow Jesus toward His promised fullness of life. As I look back at my sabbatical, I can honestly say that this gift from the Lord, through my



church council and congregation, of time and space to look inside myself was life changing. It changed my journey. I am growing again in ways I did not envision prior to the sabbatical. Members of my council and congregation affirm to me that something is different. Even a couple of members who were not in favor of my sabbatical (they saw it as a long vacation and nothing else) came to me a few months after my return to tell me that perhaps they had been mistaken and that the sabbatical was well worth it! That made me smile to my Lord.

Since that time I have encouraged colleagues to invest in their ministries, in their relationships, and in their own hearts and souls through QuietWaters. It is an investment that pays dividends

for years to come. If you are planning a sabbatical, I highly recommend contacting QuietWaters to explore the possibilities of entering into a guided journey of rest, reflection, and restoration. Ask the Lord Jesus if this is a step He wants you to take. And listen to the people around you and to your own heart. Perhaps the Spirit is leading you beside quiet waters. ■



Colin Vander Ploeg

Pastor
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Drinking Again from God's Life-Giving Waters

by Jim Schlottman

In the Lilly Endowment announcement about their 2011 National Clergy Renewal Program, they state that the program seeks to strengthen Christian congregations by providing an opportunity for pastors to step away briefly from the persistent obligations of daily parish life and to engage in a period of renewal and reflection. Renewal periods are not vacations, but times for intentional exploration and reflection, for drinking again from God's life-giving waters, for regaining enthusiasm and creativity for ministry.¹

These renewal periods—sabbaticals—are a time away. “At daybreak Jesus went out to a solitary place” (Luke 4:42 NIV). That is just one of several verses showing that even Jesus needed time away and pastors are finding that including QuietWaters as part of their sabbatical gives them that precious time.

Why should I take a sabbatical and why should my congregation give me a sabbatical? How can I take the time away from work? How do you do sabbatical? Those are the questions I'm asked when pastors call about including our Leadership Counseling Intensive in their sabbatical plans. So let's begin with the why.

In May 2010, Duke University conducted a study titled the Clergy Health Initiative that surveyed 1,726 Methodist ministers in North Carolina. They compared these clergy with their neighbors. In the study, the

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ministers reported significantly higher rates of arthritis, diabetes, high blood pressure and asthma. Obesity was ten (10) percent more prevalent in the clergy group.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America reported that in their survey, sixty-nine (69) percent of its ministers reported being overweight, sixty-four (64) percent reported having high blood pressure and thirteen (13) percent were taking antidepressants.

Couple that with a 2005 survey of clergy by the Board of Pensions of the Presbyterian Church that took special note of a quadrupling in the number of people leaving the profession during the first five years of ministry, compared with the 1970s.²

The cost involved in the search and employment of a pastor far outstrips the cost of a sabbatical—as they say, pay me now or pay me later. So there are ample reasons why congregations should not only permit sabbaticals, but they should be encouraging their pastors to take sabbaticals.

As a pastor you know the biblical basis for sabbatical comes in part from Exodus. “For six years you are to sow your fields and harvest the crops, but during the seventh year let the land lie unplowed and unused” (Exodus 23:10—11a NIV).

More and more, denominations are encouraging their churches to provide sabbatical time to their pastors. The Lilly Endowment through their National Clergy Renewal Program, The Louisville Institute through their sabbatical Grant for Pastoral Leaders Program, and others provide funding for pastors to take sabbaticals.

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ministry. During a season of personal renewal, study, and reflection pastoral leaders embrace the gifts of time and Sabbath for their lives and ministries. As they are renewed and strengthened, so are their families, and so is the Church.”³

As one person who oversees retreats and sabbaticals said: “I believe that pastors would do well to be encouraged to see a Mentor or a Counselor for the ‘15,000 mile service’, during their sabbaticals.”

However, one farmer made the comment that he couldn't understand why his pastor should get this extra vacation. He had second thoughts when I mentioned that God grants him a sabbatical every winter, right after harvest.

I've had pastors tell me that they were too busy to take a sabbatical. Eugene H. Peterson in his book “The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction” has an answer to those “busy” pastors. “But if I vainly crowd my day with conspicuous activity or let others fill my day with imperious demands, I don't have time to do my proper work, the work to which I have been called. How can I lead people into the quiet place beside the still waters if I am in perpetual motion? How can I persuade a person to live by faith and not by works if I have to juggle my schedule constantly to make everything fit into place?”⁴

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Do you still think you are too busy? If so I'd recommend reading Peterson's whole book.

How do I do a sabbatical? How do I drink again from God's life-giving waters?

Sabbaticals should not be an afterthought or a response to an emergency. They should be carefully planned so as to have maximum benefit. However, over fifty (50) percent of the pastors who come to QuietWaters as part of their sabbatical are here to address a crisis in their ministry.

Commenting on clergy's approach to planning a sabbatical, Dr. Frank Nieman, former dean of the School of Applied Theology in Oakland, California observed that, “what they say they want isn't what they need, and what helps one doesn't help another.”⁵

To begin your planning you need to identify the basic objectives of your sabbatical before planning what to do. In all aspects of life, form follows function. I've identified six objectives of a successful sabbatical.

- Cultivate your relationship with God so that your life is intimate with God. Remember that God loved you so much he gave His son. How much more intimate can you get?
- Cultivate your prayer life deliberately, with discipline and intentionality. Some may think they have a prayer life when they pray from the pulpit or at a hospital bedside. Prayer is being in a deepening conversation with God as He reveals Himself to you.

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- Cultivate your ability to speak the Word of God that is Scripture. That cultivation requires time in the Word. As Eugene Peterson says, "to speak the Word of God involves immersion in biblical studies. You need reflective hours over the pages of Scripture as well as personal struggles with the meaning of Scripture. This is the only way you can speak God's Word with authority." Peterson goes on to say that this kind of preaching is a creative act that requires quietness and solitude, concentration and intensity. Those are provided by taking a sabbatical and also a Sabbath.
- Cultivate your ability to really listen to God. The true outgrowth of learning to listen to God is your ability to listen to others.
- Cultivate your leisure time—Learn Leisure. "Leisure is a quality of spirit, not a quantity of time." (Peterson)
- Cultivate rest. Rest is not sleeping, but rest in God is simply, "Be still, and know that I am God" Psalm 46:10 (NIV). The benefits of rest are expressed well by Isaiah, "In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength," (Isaiah 30:15 (NIV).

Lis Van Harten, Director of Sustaining Pastoral Excellence and Sustaining Congregational Excellence for the Christian Reformed Church in North America, suggests, "Having significant amounts of time to 'do nothing/ whatever the pastor wants to do' is life-giving and should be part of a sabbatical."

Many of the pastors that come to QuietWaters come because they are facing a crisis in their marriage or ministry. I wish pastors would make the decision to come for an Intensive as a way to prevent a crisis. Often when I'm listening to a pastor share the crisis, I think to myself, "Why didn't you come to me a year ago, before you had to experience so much pain?"

A common way to approach renewal leave is to divide it into three blocks. One person labeled his blocks **Rest** (which included sleeping late, exercising, yard work, reading for pleasure, visiting friends, family time and work with a counselor; **Renewal** (focused study); and **Rebirth** (travel, more focused reading, plans for return).⁶

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In our video about QuietWaters Ministries, Pastor Steve Vander Molen says, "I see QuietWaters as a ministry to help us to dig deep wells in dry places and of course the well is God and His Holy Spirit working within us, but QuietWaters I think is a wonderful tool used by God in various ways to help us receive refreshment from the wells that God provides for us and in sometimes very challenging ministry." Vander Molen is saying in another way what the Lilly Endowment describes as "drinking again from God's life-giving waters."

In summary:

Why is a sabbatical necessary?

- Ministers reported significantly higher rates of arthritis, diabetes, high blood pressure and asthma.
- Obesity among pastors is ten (10) percent more prevalent in clergy.
- Sixty-nine (69) percent of ministers reported being overweight
- Sixty-four (64) percent of ministers reported having high blood pressure.
- Thirteen (13) percent of ministers are taking antidepressants.
- The number of ministers leaving the profession during the first five years of ministry has quadrupled.
- The cost involved in the search and employment of a pastor far outstrips the cost of a sabbatical.
- How can ministers lead people into the quiet place beside the still waters if they are in perpetual motion?
- How can ministers persuade a person to live by faith and not by works if they have to juggle their schedules constantly to make everything fit into place?"

What are the objectives of a sabbatical?

- Cultivate your relationship with God.
- Cultivate your prayer life.
- Cultivate your ability to speak the Word of God.
- Cultivate your ability to listen.
- Cultivate your leisure time.
- Cultivate rest.

What is a sabbatical?

- A stepping away briefly from the persistent obligations of daily parish life.
- It is engaging in a period of renewal and reflection.
- It includes times for intentional exploration and reflection.
- It is for regaining enthusiasm and creativity for ministry.
- It involves any extended absence in the career.
- It is to fulfill some goal, e.g., writing a book or traveling extensively for research.

Foundations that fund sabbaticals for pastors:
 Lilly Endowment Inc.
 Louisville Institute
 The Henry Luce Foundation, Inc.
 Sparta Community Foundation
 c/o Grand Rapids Community Foundation
 Trinity Wall Street
 (formerly Trinity Church)
 Wheat Ridge Ministries

- It provides a chance to step out and step back from the pace and pressures of ministry.
- It provides clergy the opportunity for learning, growth, and recreation as they learn the habits and practices that sustain them in and for meaningful ministry.
- It is a season of personal renewal, study, and reflection.
- It helps clergy become renewed and strengthened so that their families and the Church are renewed and strengthened.

- It is complete freedom to do nothing.
- It is an extended period of time for renewal, enrichment, study, spiritual growth, travel, skill development, research, and experimentation.
- It is a time to dig deep wells in dry places and of course the well is God.
- It permits the minister to receive refreshment from the wells that God provides.
- It allows ministers to be proactive about their self-care, repair, and growth work.
- It is an invaluable investment in personal and ministry, present and future.
- It provides a clearer understanding of self as a follower of Jesus and as a servant among His people.
- It is a time away from distractions and pressures of ministry.
- It is a time to receive new directions and horizons.

When are you going to be drinking again from God's life-giving waters? ■

Notes:

¹ Lilly Endowment announcement about their 2011 National Clergy Renewal Program <http://www.clergyrenewal.org>.
² The New York Times, *Taking a Break From the Lord's Work*, by Paul Vitello, published: August 1, 2010.
³ The Louisville Institute, Sabbatical Grant for Pastoral Leaders <http://www.louisville-institute.org/Grants/programs/sgpldetail.aspx>.
⁴ Eugene H. Peterson *The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction*, Eerdmans, William B. Publishing Company, October 1993
⁵ A. Richard Bullock and Richard J. Bruesehoff, clergy renewal, *The Alban Guide to Sabbatical Planning*, An Alban Institute Publication 2000, page 18.
⁶ A. Richard Bullock and Richard J. Bruesehoff, clergy renewal, *The Alban Guide to Sabbatical Planning*, An Alban Institute Publication 2000, page 19.



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