

Well, we've had some really good preachers this summer. We've had a nice variety. But you know what, this Sunday, Shawn is back. Yeah, let's give it up. We're very, very excited.

You know, this church, we have a policy for elders and for ministerial staff that they take us sabbatical. And sabbatical is just a day of rest dedicated to God. And so it's a time to get away, to stop, to rest, and to delight in the Lord and worship him. And so I know that Shawn and Amber and the girls have had some good time away, and we're just so excited to have them back with us. We really missed them.

And let me pray for Sean as he comes up. God, you have blessed us, Lord, with wonderful leadership. And Lord, we just thank you for Sean, Amber and the kids, and just the blessing that they are to us. God, we pray that you would continue to bless them, that the rest that they got in their time away would carry them through, Lord, that you would continue to fill up their tanks, that they could do the work that you have set out for them to do. And so, Lord, right now I pray that you would, through your holy spirit, speak to and speak through shop.

We pray that in Jesus name, amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you. Jeff.

Good to see you, dude. Jeff got to enjoy his own sabbatical as they said. Our elders do that as well. And so we haven't been able to serve together for a little bit, so it's good to be back with. So like you said, my name's Sean.

If you've started attending on May 19 or later. It's nice to meet you. I'm the lead, get to be the lead minister here at Sherwood Oaks. Been on sabbatical for the last twelve weeks and just really excited to be back with you all today. When I woke up this morning, it was before my alarm had gone off.

I looked at the clock, it was 04:10 a.m. i was, I think, nervous that I was going to sleep in because I had to wake up early on a Sunday morning in twelve weeks. So I didn't want to miss it. Adeline asked me as we were driving into church today. She said, are you excited or are you nervous?

And I was like, can I be both? Because I think the butterflies in my stomach might be from both nerves and excitement just to get back here with you, my church family and you, we as a church, we got to experience and celebrate some really cool things while I was away. Over these last twelve weeks, our middle school minister Grant Gardner got married, so he and his wife Malia are starting to figure life out, and we're excited about that.

We learned together during my sabbatical that David Schonk cannot handle hot wings. Like bro was struggling through that video. I watched it, I think, five times just because David's reaction was

fantastic. We had. Oh, just real quick, before we go to the next one, we've had the discover Sherwood Oaks class going on over the last several months now.

And there was a couple that went through the class in July, and they asked Maggie, they're like, do you really have a lead minister here at Sherwood Oaks? Or is this like a weekend at Bernie's thing where you're propping this guy up, but he's not really alive? I want you to know, if that was you that asked that question, I want to meet you after this service. That was fantastic. I got a great laugh out of that.

But we also had the Olympic torch that passed through Sherwood Oaks, which is odd because the Olympics are in Paris, but it went right through Bloomington, and our staff got to be a part of that. We all got to experience Alan Burris preaching in a track suit. And at the 930 service, you all got to hear him drop a snoop Dogg reference. And that is when I knew it was time for me to come back.

The inmates were running the asylum. I needed to come back, take control. Dad had been gone, needed to come back and straighten everything out. And when I got back to my office this week, this is what I walked into. It was amazing.

It was like one of the best welcome backs I could have even imagined. I felt like a kid walking around in a ball pit. Just all of these balloons. I have no idea how long it took them to do this, but it was a fun way to come back to my office. If we had the sound on the video, you would hear me just giggling as I walked through this.

And then right about here, you would hear me go, oh, because that thing scared me. Like, that startled me. That one startled me. Yeah. There are a lot of good things that happened over the last twelve weeks.

And sabbatical gave me an opportunity to do some things that I wouldn't have been able to do otherwise. When you have constant pace and schedule, you guys know it's hard to find time to do some of those special things that you've always wanted to do, but you can't. And so sabbatical gave me the opportunity to try some new things. So I got to go on a bike ride around France for a few weeks. And it was pretty intense.

But, you know, I ride with guys like Steve Holbrook and Joe Abram and others, and so I was ready for it. And so that was a lot of fun. Ever since I was a kid, I've wanted to compete in the Nathan's hot dog eating contest. And so I got to do that. Still kind of feeling it, the effects of that.

I took up surfing while I was gone, and that was a lot of fun.

Unfortunately, Amber was like, you can't keep that haircut when you go back. And so I had to cut it off. But maybe my favorite thing was my friend Taylor. She called me up.

She was like, hey, you're not doing anything. Won't you come tour with me? And so I got to go tour with Taylor on that shout out to Boyd, who took this crazy idea and was like, oh, yeah, I've got dreams here. None of that's true. But I really did get to do a lot of fun stuff.

And this morning, I want to just bring you all in to some of what the Lord taught me over the last twelve weeks. You know, I said before I left that I wanted my sabbatical to really be like. I wanted to experience it with my church family. And so that's why we talked about it before we gave out the prayer guide. So many of you prayed for me.

You encouraged me. Part of the reason why sabbatical was so good and restful for me was because when I left on May 12, I wasn't carrying the guilt of being gone. You all just supported me and showed me so much just encouragement and love as I went into this time. And so I want to kind of bring you all in to some of what the Lord did in my life and taught me over the last twelve weeks. And I have a feeling that some of what he taught me, at least I hope is maybe applicable in your life as well.

So Maggie's gonna come on up, and Maggie's gonna. We're gonna flip the tables just a little bit. I'm usually the one. I love doing this type of, like, teaching. I'm usually the one interviewing.

I'm the interviewer, and today I'm the interviewee. And so Maggie's gonna ask me some questions. I feel like we should have had an opportunity where you could submit questions and I could surprise Sean with them today. That would have been really fun. Oh, bummer.

We missed that opportunity. Are you nervous to be on the other side? It is different. Yeah, it is different. But just stick to the script, and we'll be fine.

Then you know what to say. That's right. That's right. Well, I just want to touch on a few things. You know, you talked about just the send off that you had from this church.

It really was so great as a partner on staff with you, to be able to see you go off in such a healthy way, just with so much encouragement from this church. It was a beautiful send off. And just while you were gone to see everybody, staff wise and church wise, just really come together and continue to encourage you. But there were words in the hallway spoken the week before you came back. I had asked a project to be done.

I said, hey, guys, this has got to be done. Sean comes back next week.

And the words were, dad's coming home. We got to clean up the house. So we got everything in order.

The wheels did not fall off. So we were just really glad that you're back. Thanks. So I want to start with an easy question. What is one word you would use to sum up your experience over sabbatical?

Yeah. When you asked me that this week, that was a really thought provoking question. It's hard to capture so many great things, like in one word, but there was one that quickly rose to the top and it was the word perspective. Sabbatical gave me an opportunity to have and find perspective on some things in life and ministry that I don't know that I would have had if I was in the daily grind of it. You know, I had to step out to be able to see it.

And so it gave me a great perspective on life and family. And that time with Amber and the girls was so sweet. Amber and I discovered the joy of taking evening walks. And that's something that I want to continue.

I dropped Adeline off. Some of you had the same experience. I dropped Adeline off at 7th grade at Jackson Creek on Wednesday. And as she was walking to school, I just was like, lord, thank you. That we had the last twelve weeks together and everything that we got to do and experience, and just gave me a perspective of how quickly things are going right and to slow down sometimes so I don't miss it.

And this might sound a little weird, but I have a feeling that a lot of us will understand what I mean when I say this. It gave me perspective of my value. And so what I mean by that is, I often times struggle with either having an inflated sense of value or a deflated sense of value. I either think of myself as too important or I think less of myself and I don't really matter. Doesn't and sabbatical gave me a chance to find a healthy place with my value as a person, as a dad, as a minister, as a leader, and, you know, listening to the guys preach and to know that the ministry was continuing, it's easy to look and be like, I am as replaceable as they come.

The Lord does not need me to do what he's doing at Sherwood Oaks. But on the other side of it, for whatever reason, he has called me to be a part of this season of life in this church. He wants me to be a part of it, and that I am so humbled by and so grateful for. And so it helped right size my sense of value. Can I add something?

You say that you felt at times that you're replaceable, but it's the sign of a good leader. Like, you can tell a good leader by not what happens in their presence, but in their absence. So while you were gone, to know that ministry continued so well is the sign of a great leader. Thanks for sharing that. I appreciate it.

And then I think the last. When it comes to perspective, Sunday mornings were, like, the most awkward time for me. During sabbatical, I'm like, I don't know what to do. I don't have, like, a church to go to. And so I took it as an opportunity to, like, watch online, join online with some of the churches that, you know, I've just kind of followed and admired over the years and joined their online worship gatherings.

Honestly, a few weeks into having lazy Sunday mornings where I'm, like, watching church in my pajamas and drinking another cup of coffee, I'm like, this is the good life right here. Like, why do people go to church? This is awesome. We're so glad you guys are here. Yes, we're so glad you're here.

But, like, why? Why are you here? And, yeah, like, I know, and we're here because we have to be, right? Like, this is. And so why go to church when you don't have to?

And I was really wrestling with that. And, yeah, there's the faithfulness, and there's the obedience. And some of you are like, I'm here because the person next to me, like, made me be here today. But as sabbatical went on, I realized, yeah, there's so many good things that happen when we gather for worship, but the community that we experience here together is unlike anything else. We share one another's burdens.

We rejoice with one another. We encourage one another. And as I was sitting on my porch sometimes on Sunday mornings, watching you know, services. I saw my neighbors out and I just. My heart broke for them that they don't have that church family and that community, like what we have here at Sherwood Oaks.

Yeah, well, you can experience things at home. I mean, you can't experience, like, the worship that we just got to experience together. You don't get to feel that the same way when you're at home. Yeah, yeah, absolutely. So we've been going through the psalms this summer.

We've had lots of wonderful sermons from lots of guest preachers and some in house preachers on that. Is there a psalm that captures your time on sabbatical from the summer? Yeah. So I planned out this series before I left, and I intentionally left the last two weeks of this series open because I knew I'd be back from sabbatical and kind of wanted to see, Lord, what do you want me to preach on? Is there anything.

I wanted to use my sabbatical as sermon fodder because it's hard to come up with new stuff every single week. So I've been praying, Lord, what is it that, is there a psalm that really captures what the last twelve weeks were? And honestly, as I was praying and processing through that, and I actually was, like, writing some notes, you sent

me a message with a verse from psalm 23. And I read the verse and I went back and I read the psalm, and I was like, yeah, psalm 23. That.

That's it. I think that's such a reminder to us that when we get a nudge from the Holy Spirit to send a message or if someone comes to your mind to send that, because I don't know what at that time prompted me to send that to you, but clearly God was working on your heart at that time, so that's a good reminder for all of us. And when you first sent it, I didn't. I was like, oh, yeah, psalm 23. Like, I know that psalm.

We all know it. Taught it, memorized it, you know, all of those things. It is. You know, if the psalms is the songbook of scripture, like, that's on the greatest hits album, everybody knows it. I was like, yeah, if I'm going to teach that first Sunday back, people are looking for a deep cut, right?

Like, let's go. And. And what I realized as I reread the psalm is, yeah, I knew it. I've taught it, recite it, but, man, I experienced it over the last twelve weeks. Like, I experienced the Lord as my good shepherd, and so that's why I chose psalm 23.

Yeah, that's great. So let's walk through this psalm together. I want to hear more about that, and I know that there's some good learnings that you've had that you can share with all of us. So, verses one through three. The Lord is my shepherd.

I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside quiet waters. He refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right path for his name's sake.

So how did you experience the Lord as your shepherd this summer? Yeah. One of the most pivotal words in this entire psalm is that fourth word in the Niv. It's not the Lord is a shepherd. It is, the Lord is my shepherd.

It is very personal. And so being able to experience, like, the Lord as my shepherd, I joked before I left on sabbatical that when people would ask me, what are you going to do? My answer was, whatever I want to do. And there's, like, joy in that kind of freedom. But I found a new joy a few weeks into sabbatical, I started waking up, and as soon as I would open my eyes, I started praying, all right, Lord, what are we going to do today?

And it just became like this adventure every day to see where the Lord was going to lead. And sometimes he would lead me to green pastures and cornfields out in Monroe county, riding my bike with friends or alone. Sometimes he would lead me by quiet waters, you know, out on the lake somewhere, floating around in my kayak. But the Lord just continued to lead me to these places and use them to refresh my soul.

And then there's that part in verse two that says he makes me lie down, and, like, I needed to experience that part of my good shepherd as well, because about six weeks into sabbatical, I was like, all right, I'm good.

Let's go. I'm rested. I'm getting antsy. There's work to be done. And the Lord's like, no, you're not done.

I'm not done yet with what I want to teach you. I think a lot of you lie down can connect with that, that it's hard to lie down sometimes. It's hard to be still. And Sabbath rest, as with sabbatical, you don't Sabbath because the work is done, you Sabbath because the Lord invites us into that. And so if we wait until everything's done or we don't want to work anymore, I don't know that we'll ever really enter into the rhythms of rest that God invites us into.

And so that second half of my sabbatical, I learned the sacrifice of Sabbath, the sacrifice of rest. And I had some projects on mine that I wanted to do, and so I started kind of doing those. And Amber came home one day, and I was pressure washing our driveway, and she's like, have we reached that point of sabbatical? Like, you're just looking for things to do. But that was all part of the refreshing and restorative process that the Lord was taking me through.

That's great. So the next verses four and five, even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil.

My cup overflows. What spoke to you from these verses? Yeah, so that darkest valley that David mentions here, oftentimes we think of that as, like, those dangerous places, and it is. And it's the hard, difficult times that we go through in life, and certainly that's it. But really, if you think about, like, the dark valleys, it was the uncertain places.

I mean, imagine yourself being a sheep, being led through a place where you can't see and you don't know where you're going, and you're just trusting that the shepherd is leading and guiding you. It's a really uncertain time. And sabbatical for me felt like a very uncertain time. I came to faith in Jesus in 1998, and then two weeks later found myself at Bible College preparing for ministry. And so I have always, they've been parallel courses.

And so this was really the first time when I was, like, following Jesus and had zero ministry responsibilities. And I didn't know what that was going to be like. What would my relationship with Christ look like apart from ministry? And I found that the Lord was leading me through that and preparing a table for me, and I was feasting on him and his word, and I would read something. And when you teach regularly

and preach regularly, the temptation is to read something and immediately start thinking, ooh, how can I share that with someone else?

And the Lord allowed me to just get past that to where I would read something. It was like, no, this is for you. And so I found a lot of joy in feeding on the green pastures of God's word at first. And then those habits started to dwindle. Maybe we've all experienced that from time to time.

We start off with the best of intentions, and then it just fades after a little bit. And I was hanging out with some friends and Josh Reynolds, who? Man, Josh asked, like, the best questions in the world. If you know him, he is fantastic. And in Josh style, he asked me, so what have you been consuming over your sabbatical?

And that was a convicting question in that moment, because I had gone from green, lush valleys to like, junk food. I was eating like rocks and twigs and stuff. And maybe you know someone in your life or maybe you've been here, when you kind of get out of regular rhythms and routines, you just kind of take whatever is easiest to grab onto. And so for me, what was easiest to grab onto is I would just open up my news app and I would start doom scrolling, reading highlights, maybe little snippets or maybe someone in your life. You walk into their house and like cable news is on twenty four seven and they're just chewing that stuff up and you see what it's doing to their soul, even if they don't see it because they're not eaten from green pastures that the Lord has for us.

And Josh's question was convicting for me. So Josh, thanks for that, man. And the Lord used that as his rod and his staff to comfort me and bring me back and lead me back to those green pastures. There's a difference between doing something for God, doing things for God, and doing things with God. Spending time for God can sometimes when we're in ministry and we're working on some teaching things, sometimes it's easy to think that when you're doing things for God, that is time with him.

And there's a very different experience when you are turning off the work brain and being able to spend time with God. And it sounds like he really taught you that over these weeks. That's great. Good. Verse six.

Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. So what did you learn about the goodness and love of God during the sabbatical? Yeah, Matt Nussbaum, who is the lead minister at Exodus and is going to be coming on staff here pretty soon. Matt told me before I went on sabbatical, Sean, you were going to find that stress and anxiety are not fruit of the Holy Spirit. And sabbatical gave me a chance to find



a more joyful pace of life.

And in that man, I just got to experience the goodness and the love of the Lord. My takeaway from that, maybe you've heard this before. We've probably all experienced this in some way where I oftentimes overestimate what I can do in a day and underestimate what I can do in a year. And when I overestimate what I can do in a day, it leads to a very hectic and chaotic pace of life where I'm just like chasing my tail around. And during sabbatical, I got to, like, just really understand there's a more joyful pace of life that the Lord is inviting me into, that he wants me to experience.

And not just me, but I think my family and our church family as well. Yeah. So I would love to be able to hear a little bit more about how this psalm speaks to our larger church family. Obviously, God has taught you a lot this summer through this psalm and been able to experience some things in a special way. So as we think about our church family and walk through the psalm in that same way, what does this say about the Lord being our shepherd as a church?

Yeah. So we've been really praying over the last four years and you've heard us say it, if you've been around for a little bit, that God, we want to walk at your pace. We want to walk in step with you. We do not want to walk one step in front of you. We do not want to walk one step behind you.

And that trust in the good shepherd to continue to lead us. And we've seen him and there have been times, honestly, I look back and I think that I was running too fast or maybe too slow. But he has been so faithful in leading and guiding our church family over these last four years and just to trust and believe he's going to continue to lead and to guide us. We talked a little bit this last week when we were kind of studying through this and talked about the shepherd and the sheep and how it's easy for us to visualize the sheep in this lush green pasture the entire time. There's just open feeding all the time.

But really in the context of the Bible, there's a lot of rocky cliffs and there was just these little patches of green grass. And the shepherd would lead the sheep to this small patch of green grass and let them feed. And then when it was time, at the pace of the shepherd, when the shepherd said, let's go to the next patch of grass, then they would follow the shepherd there. That makes me think of the same thing. But if you go too early or too late, it doesn't work.

That's a good word, Maggie. Yeah. So verse three in the message paraphrase. And this is actually what I sent you. This is what stood out to me when I was studying through this.

It says, true to your word, you let me catch my breath and send me in the right direction. So what is that direction? Where's the church

headed? Yeah, so we've got some, some good things that are coming up this fall. We've, we've been working on developing our peer counseling ministry, and so we've had about a dozen volunteers that have been going through training over the last four or five months.

And so here next month, we're going to be launching that to create more counseling services for our church, family and for our community. And so we have that coming up. We have a team of people that have been working with Ron Blue and developing a financial counseling team. And so that's going to be offering some classes and even some one on one financial counseling just to help people experience some more financial health based on the principles found in God's word. And so we're moving forward with some counseling initiatives that we know that the Lord has said, okay, let's just go to here.

And we think that there's even more on the other side that we're looking forward to seeing where he's going to continue to lead us in that we've got the unleashed network that Matt Nussbaum is going to be coming on staff and leading starting month, where we're going to just pour into churches in southern Indiana and try to be a part of whatever we can do to help raise the spiritual and emotional health of church leaders in southern Indiana. And so I'm really looking forward to that, getting off of the ground this fall. And then what else do we have? We've got some other, well, I know, too. One thing that I'm excited about is the middle school and, well, the high schoolers.

We're going to be walking through the sermon series, the Beatitudes, that's coming up. But just knowing that our church is working through some really important content altogether, I know will be really great. It's been fun. We've said the word several times and kind of our staff that we are not smart enough to do the things that God has done in this ministry season of life, because there's been so many things that have kind of converged at the same time in the same direction, which we were not aware of when we started planning these things separately many months ago or years ago when we first started talking about these things. So God is just so faithful and walking through us, and so the direction is becoming pretty clear to us as he has brought it all together.

It's been fun to watch. So we know there's a lot of good things ahead. Really excited for this fall, but let's be realistic that there will be dark valleys as this mentions in this psalm. And like you mentioned, I think the dark valleys are mostly the unknown ahead of us and in our country and in our culture, we have the next, next three or four months feel very unknown and potentially very dark. We all know what contentious feelings some of this can bring up.

So what do you think the psalm is speaking to our church in this season right now about the upcoming dark valleys and where we're at and what we can do? Yeah, I think I go to that joining idea in verse

five that you prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. And our enemy is not the people on the other side of the political aisle from us. And what the Lord is leading us to is not to be consumed by the things of this world, but to follow the voice of our good shepherd who is going to lead us through these uncertain times over the next few months, both in our country and in our world. We don't know where we are going and what that's going to look like.

And I think for me, the conviction that I have is that I want to care about politics, but I don't want to be consumed by them. And we are going through this dark valley and it's going to be easy for us to really get consumed on the things that we don't know and to be known more by our stances on certain political things and be consumed by those than to be consumed by Jesus. And so my prayer for myself and for our church family is that when people look at us, they don't see our politics first. They see Jesus. And he is the one, the true good shepherd that we are following through the unknown season ahead.

I'm going to put you on the spot because you said this in your office the other day and I thought it was such a beautiful picture and I don't want to mess it up, so I don't want to try it. The lighthouse. Oh, yeah. Yeah. You know, it's this idea that the church is this lighthouse on the firm foundation of Christ and we are calling people back to him.

And if, and if we waver from standing on the firm foundation of Jesus, we're either going to find ourselves in the chaos of the sea with, with our world and we're drowning, too. Right? And so we're not going to. We're not going to give up on those strong biblical foundation that we have been built on and that we stand on. But at the same time, we're not going to retreat from the world to where they can't even see our light and we're no good.

And so we're going to live in this tension of being on the firm foundation of Christ, shining the light of Jesus so that people can find and see him first and foremost. I love that illustration. So lastly, as we look at verse six, what hope and assurance can we as a church family, what can we take away from this psalm? So surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life. And we have seen that when you think about Sherwood oaks the last 61 plus years, God's goodness and love has followed us.

And I believe as we continue to be faithful to him, he's going to continue to lead us in the way that only he can. Yeah, absolutely. We are so glad you're back. Thank you for sharing with us this morning, letting us learn from what you have learned over the summer. So welcome back.

Thank you. Thank you, Maggie. Thank you.

I appreciate you letting us kind of process through that. And I guess really what I want and hope that we can take away this morning is that, again, these things, I don't think it's just for me. I think hopefully there's something in there that maybe you heard. You're like, yeah, I think the Lord's teaching me that as well. And this goodness and this love that the Lord is leading us to for those of us who are in Christ, we know our good shepherd is leading us to some really good places and he is with us and he is for us and he is guiding and he is protecting us.

We get to experience that and it is good. But who is it in your life that maybe is not experiencing? The Lord is their shepherd right now and they have wandered astray. They are like a sheep without a shepherd, lost and lonely and hurting and scared. Maybe they don't even know it.

We want to be a church that cares about going after people who are far from God and bringing them back so that they can experience the goodness and the love of the Lord and their life, too. And so my challenge today is maybe start praying for somebody and praying for ways that you can introduce them to the goodness and the love of God that you've experienced in your life. If you're here today and maybe you're ready to take a step into that. We have a baptism at 11:00 today, so the water is warm and ready. We'd love for you to take that step of baptism and surrender your life and invite Jesus to be your Lord and your savior.

Start following him as your good shepherd. If you need someone to pray with you, today doesn't even have to be something that is major going on. If you just want someone to speak a word of blessing over you as you enter into this next season or stage of your life, we'll have people around the room with lanyards on that would love to talk to you and pray with you. If you want to make a decision, you can find them as well. And we've got communion.

And communion is a chance when we can remember and celebrate Jesus, our good shepherd, who laid down his life for us so that we could find life abundantly in him. So I'm going to pray, and then we're going to respond. If you need to talk, if you need to pray, if you're ready for baptism, come find one of us or just share in this moment of communion and worship. God, thank you for your faithfulness to us. Thank you for your word that continues to speak to us.

And, Lord, I pray that right now, in this moment, your holy spirit will lead us and guide us and reveal to us, Lord, that message of love, of correction, of hope, whatever it is, Lord, speak that message to our hearts in these moments as we rest in Jesus name. Amen.