

# What I Did On my Summer Vacation (a.k.a. My Sabbatical)

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## Hebrews 4:6-11

<sup>6</sup>Therefore since it still remains for some to enter that rest, and since those who formerly had the good news proclaimed to them did not go in because of their disobedience, <sup>7</sup>God again set a certain day, calling it “Today.” This he did when a long time later he spoke through David, as in the passage already quoted:

“Today, if you hear his voice,  
do not harden your hearts.”

<sup>8</sup>For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. <sup>9</sup>There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; <sup>10</sup>for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from their works,<sup>[b]</sup> just as God did from his. <sup>11</sup>Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience.

## Luke 14:1-6

<sup>1</sup>On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the Sabbath, they were watching him closely. <sup>2</sup>Just then, in front of him, there was a man who had edema. <sup>3</sup>And Jesus asked the experts in the law and Pharisees, “Is it lawful to cure people on the Sabbath or not?” <sup>4</sup>But they were silent. So Jesus<sup>[b]</sup> took him and healed him and sent him away. <sup>5</sup>Then he said to them, “If one of you has a child<sup>[c]</sup> or an ox that has fallen into a well, will you not immediately pull it out on a Sabbath day?” <sup>6</sup>And they could not reply to this.

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Gratitude for my sabbatical.

- The guest preachers; Cal, Greg, Jeff, Lu, Sara, Phil
- Shaye, Molly, Gary, Stephanie & Easton and the church council
- All of you

Today, I want to share with you just a little bit of what I did on my “summer vacation.”

PART I – Education

For many years, I've been able to communicate "OK" via Spanish, but never fluently. I decided to participate in a Spanish language immersion program, believing it would teach me a lot about the language and get me closer to be fluent. I lived in Cuernavaca, Mexico at a language institute for just under 5 weeks.

Fue genial. Desde el momento en que me desperté por la mañana, hasta que me fui a la cama por la noche, mi mundo estaba completamente inmerso en el idioma español. Aprendi mucho.

I learned a lot about the Spanish language, but I'm still not bilingual or fluent – that is still a work in progress. I am beyond grateful to my teachers at the school; Esther, Rocio, Jerzen and especially Raul.

The education portion of my sabbatical turned out to more than verbs, tenses, or idiomatic expressions. It was about being an alien in a foreign land.

- Exploring 3 de Mayo
  - Grocery shopping
  - Pharmacy – picaduras
  
- EXPERIENCE
  - Privilege
    - White, male, English speaker
    - Never felt fear, dual fear/empowered
  - Hospitality
    - So show your love for the alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. (Duet 10:19)
    - So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household... (Eph 2:19)

As I return to my work as a pastor, volunteer and member of this church community, I have a deeper knowledge, understanding and respect for the aliens among us, those who risk their lives for something better. Besides improving my language skills, I have improved my heart skills – caring and loving for my fellow humans, particularly the aliens among us.

- Stole – cinturón from Tepotzlan

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### PART III – RELATIONAL

- Jumping ahead to part III but will go back to part II

- Spent time travel the US and Canada visiting family and friends, many of whom I hadn't seen in a while because of COVID.
- Oddly enough for me, it was during my relational time that I relaxed and reenergized. I thought it would have happened as part of my spirituality focus, but when I stopped to simply be with friends and family – to really BE PRESENT.... It was then that I physically, mentally, and emotionally felt relaxed and re-energized.

I spent days simply sitting with people for whom I cared and loved. Without any agenda or purpose other than to be together.

- “What do you want to do today?” – Whatever
- “Should we go out to eat or cook?” – Whatever
- “I thought we might do \_\_\_\_ today, what do you think? – Sounds great!

I felt the freedom to just be....

- I leisurely read books and scripture.
- I slept in – a lot.
- I took walks with no regard to time or distance.
- I prayed more and with greater intent because – I just could.
- I waxed on with others about life, God, joys, concerns and my sabbatical and how THEY were playing a role in it.
- I had to appreciate .... Ps 16:11
  - You make known to me the path of life;  
you will fill me with joy in your presence,  
with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

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## PART II – SPIRITUALITY

The second part of my sabbatical was a focus on spirituality. Former church members, Larry and Livvy Gibb had done a pilgrimage about a decade ago on the Camino de Compostela in Spain and suggested I consider it as part of my sabbatical. It looked amazing and so I did it – and it was amazing.

The “Camino” is a network of pilgrims' ways or pilgrimages leading to the shrine of the apostle Saint James in the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in Galicia in northwestern Spain, where tradition holds that the remains of the apostle are buried.<sup>1</sup> For many, the Camino is a spiritual path or retreat for one's spiritual growth. It's also popular with hikers.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Camino\\_de\\_Santiago](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Camino_de_Santiago)

The Camino pilgrimage has been done by many famous people in history, Charlemagne, St. Francis of Assisi, Dante and Chaucer. In more recent times the Camino has been popularized by the book *The Camino*, by Shirley McClaine, who walked the entire path in 30 days when she was in her 60's. More recently, in 2010, a movie called *The Way*, starring Martin Sheen re-popularized the Camino for many.

Of the many routes in the network, I took the most popular way, called, "The French Way," because it begins in France. It's approximately 500 miles, but I did have enough time for that (or enough energy), so I opted for a more modest distance of approximately 130 miles, walking from Leon, Spain to Santiago, Spain.

I participated with a tour company called Fresco Tours – (clean bed/bathroom vs. hostels). The first day was a non-walking day, but an introduction to our journey by our guides, Ana and Sandra (Danny) The group of pilgrims on this journey would consist of 12 ---

- Myself
- Edna & Dennis – Orlando
- Barb from Phoenix & her dear friend, Kim from Minnesota.
- Pat & Sharon from Philadelphia
- Lily from Tucson and her friend Don from MI.
- Dan and Kimberley from Greeley, CO
- Julianna from Boulder.
  - (medal)

The twelve of us began a journey together that was a once-in-a-lifetime experience (at least it was for me). As the 12 apostles we were heading out to the ends of the earth – so too were we (Finisterre, Spain). Like the 12 apostles did we proclaim the gospel? Well, not exactly like the apostles, but in a way, we did...

In those 130 miles, we would sometimes walk together, sometimes alone and often in different pairings depending upon the terrain and how aggressive we felt. We walked an average of 9-15 miles each day for 10 days straight. The path took many forms – flat, wide, narrow, rocky, steep up/down, in mountain, fields, through villages, farms and cities. Along major thoroughfares, across highways, beside railroad tracks. You name it! There was a very hot day, some very chilly and misty mornings, some good temperate and lovely days and then the rainy days.

I stood on hillsides and stared at the vast beauty of God's work that laid before me. There were amazing sunsets and sunrises – each unique, perfect and deserving adoration.

I paused in rainy forests, to smell the earth and to listen to rustling leaves. I thanked God for speaking to me – to listening to me. I was (and am) grateful for all I had – and even for what I didn't have.

As we walked, we talked and shared our lives and histories with one another, as well as our hopes for the pilgrimage and our days ahead. There were aches and pains, tears and strains, but also laughter, joy and companionship. We broke bread together – a lot of bread +++++.

This was our gospel that we shared and spread.

## FOREST BATHING<sup>2</sup>

- When I began thinking about my sabbatical well over a year ago, the term “forest bathing” popped into my head. Have you heard of it?
  - The term emerged in Japan in the 1980s as a physiological and psychological exercise called *shinrin-yoku* (“forest bathing” or “taking in the forest atmosphere”). The purpose was twofold: to offer an eco-antidote to tech-boom burnout and to inspire residents to reconnect with and protect the country's forests.<sup>3</sup>
  - The sounds of the forest, the scent of the trees, the sunlight playing through the leaves, the fresh, clean air — these things give us a sense of comfort. They ease our stress and worry, help us to relax and to think more clearly.<sup>4</sup> They help us to RECHARGE.
- This was something that piqued my curiosity regarding my sabbatical and helped in my decision to walk the Camino.
- One day on our journey when we finished walking – guides tour of Samos
  - The Cypress Chapel – Samos Monastery
  - 300-year-old Cypress Tree; 85 feet tall – cypress symbolizes immortality and hospitality<sup>5</sup>
  - Spoke of this place, this tree as an important part of Forest Bathing – HUGGING this tree
- As soon as I heard Sandra say “forest bathing” – Connected to my previous thoughts – God ordained this journey.

I was fortunate to be walking in the final courtyard of the cathedral (the END of the journey), arm in arm, with Barb. [Hard journey for her; falls, bruises, etc.]

- As we entered the courtyard she began to cry.

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<sup>2</sup> Homiletic Online, “Wilderness Bathing,” 6/19/16.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/article/forest-bathing-nature-walk-health>

<sup>4</sup> <https://time.com/5259602/japanese-forest-bathing/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://artsandculture.google.com/story/the-abbey-of-samos-and-the-cypress-chapel-xunta-de-galicia/BQWBeCxEBAPjLA?hl=en-US>

- I thought – odd to be crying, but I can understand why YOU would be crying
- I then burst into tears myself.
  - It hit me – the magnitude of why I had done. Of what “WE” had done.
- Hugs, photos and pure “awe” that we all felt.
- The weight of the centuries upon centuries of pilgrimages by hundreds of thousands of humans came crashing down upon me and it was amazing.

#### That final night

- Pilgrim’s Mass
- Botafumeiro
  - Thurible (metal censor) for burning incense
  - Largest in the world (180 lbs – 5.2 ft tall)
    - Contains 88 pounds of burning charcoal and incense
  - 8 *tiraboleiros* (priests) to pull the rope and swing the botafumeiro (up to 50 mph)

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#### Prayer of La Faba

- Written when (?), by a pilgrim?
- Posted in a Church in O Cebreiro, Spain

Although I may have travelled all the roads,  
crossed mountains and valleys from East to West,  
if I have not discovered the freedom to be myself,  
I have arrived nowhere.

Although I may have shared all of my possessions  
with people of other languages and cultures,  
made friends with Pilgrims of a thousand paths,  
or shared albergues with saints and princes,  
if I am not capable of forgiving my neighbor tomorrow,  
I have arrived nowhere.

Although I may have carried my pack from beginning to end  
and waited for every Pilgrim in need of encouragement,  
or given my bed to one who arrived later than I,  
given my bottle of water in exchange for nothing,  
if upon returning to my home and work,  
I am not able to create brotherhood  
or to make happiness, peace and unity,

I have arrived nowhere.

Although I may have had food and water each day,  
and enjoyed a roof and shower every night;  
or may have had my injuries well attended,  
if I have not discovered in all that the love of God,  
I have arrived nowhere.

Although I may have seen all the monuments  
and contemplated the best sunsets;  
although I may have learned a greeting in every language;  
or tried the clean water from every fountain;  
if I have not discovered who is the author  
of so much free beauty and so much peace,  
I have arrived nowhere.

If from today I do not continue walking on your path,  
searching for and living according to what I have learned;  
if from today I do not see in every person, friend or foe  
a companion on the Camino;  
if from today I cannot recognize God,  
[the God of Jesus of Nazareth]  
as the one God of my life,  
I have arrived nowhere.

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AMEN