



Dear friends and family,

January 12, 2024

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year! I'm finishing up a three month sabbatical and wanted to get caught up with you with all that I've gotten to do during this special season.

"Sabbatical" means taking a rest, in my case, from ministry. Cru gives all their missionaries a three month sabbatical after five years of full-time ministry— but this was my first one in 42 years, and I wasn't sure what to expect. I put my "out of office" message up and delegated all my work. Then I turned my focus to rest and some spiritual renewal and personal development. I feel that I got to invest my time in some good ways— here's a short report!

Give thanks to the Lord, For He is good.

For His lovingkindness lasts forever.

One immediate benefit was the **luxury of unstructured time**- if I wanted to spend an extra hour in Bible study and read those extra few articles, I could. If I wanted to sit over a lunch with someone until they stopped talking, I could. The blessing of free time has been wonderful and I am so thankful for it!

Goal 1: Connect more with people of other faiths.



One of the original reasons I joined staff with Cru was because I loved talking about God with others. Through the years, this desire and motivation has continued. Now I have a desk job, which I find very fulfilling and exciting... but I don't have many opportunities to connect with others of different faiths face-to-face. This fall, there was an opening in our church's English as a Second Language (ESL) Advanced class and I got to craft/teach 11 sessions with this small group of immigrants. The fun! The challenge! So

many conversations and laughter. The adults in the class were from 9 countries and we enjoyed talking so much. Plus I got to meet with a few of them privately to have some spiritual conversations. I loved the teaching and new relationships but now that I'm going back to work, I had to give up the class.

Goal 2: Get our bedroom ready for the repairs and painting.

Last year we discovered that a corner of our house was settling! We noticed our wallboard in our bedroom was cracking in pretty distressing ways. Over the summer we got some piers installed under our house to keep it from settling. But now we are up to the visible part— getting the cracks fixed and the bedroom painted. The decisions about a contractor, paint, bedspread, all of it, felt so overwhelming, I have been so glad for the extra time to work on this big project. The preparation work has entailed cleaning out the bedroom/ under the bed/closet, ugh. We finally have made the decisions, and are hoping the work will be done this month.

Goal 3— Start exercising.

After working at a desk for 15 years, I was starting to be bothered by creaky hips and knees. A Planet Fitness opened near us and I joined. I've gone nearly every weekday this whole sabbatical and I'm glad to report how much better I feel. My hips aren't hurting and I can get up from a chair without grunting. I plan to continue

working out– the gym has a new trainer who has given me some targeted exercises. I can't believe it, but I'm enjoying them. The sabbatical freedom to get this new routine started has perhaps changed my life?!

Goal 4– Grow in my faith and trust in God

I already have good external habits of Bible study and prayer, what I wanted to grow in is intimacy with God. By that, I mean some combination of both feeling close to God and trusting God when I don't feel His nearness. I read "Invitation to Solitude and Silence" by Ruth Haley Barton and found it to be very helpful. Without the content of my work to think and pray about, I had a lot of extra "brain space" to use to think, pray, and sit with God silently. I find I have become more sensitive to hearing from God.

A specific growth area came from an experience. Alan and I were to fly to Baltimore together over New Years Eve to attend our nephew's wedding. Alan got sick with a bad cold and cough and at the last minute decided he couldn't come. That very morning as I had been praying about the decision, I "heard" God say that I was to and put on my big girl pants and **be courageous**.

Honestly, the trip rattled me, and I got actually anxious to face doing all those (to me normal) things unexpectedly *on my own without Alan*. What a perfect opportunity to trust God to be courageous with late night driving in a new vehicle in a new city. In the end, the trip went along smoothly and I had a really good time seeing our kids and all the relatives. Having to wrestle with the anxiety and choose courage was a spiritual growth step for me.

Other special blessings! – time with the kids and grandkids! We have three grandsons now– it's a joy to be with each one.

Good time with my dad and sisters over Thanksgiving. I got to have some extended time with my dad, who is celebrating his 90th year!



Starting back to work on Jan 16:

I'm glad to say I'm eager to get back to my work. The emails that others weren't sure how to answer have piled up and I'm chomping at the bit to lean into them.

PLUS– in a week, **I'm going to Thailand to work at a Midyear conference** for our international interns and staff. I'll be flying by myself (LAX, Hong Kong, Bangkok) and then taking a shuttle to the conference location. Could you join me in praying for some things?

- No turbulence/ my heart would be full of faith as I travel... and some sleep on the 30 hour trip there.
- The seminar I'll be doing will be used by God to recruit many of the interns to serve with us in God's kingdom.
- I'll have wisdom from God as I meet/coach three American staff serving in Asia.

Thanks again for your faithful investments in my ministry! This season of sabbatical was a great gift-we want to thank YOU for your love and support.

Sheri Penman

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