

## Post Sabbatical Story 19 February 2023

A few weeks ago, during my sabbatical, my family had the opportunity to go to Puerto Rico. We had an amazing trip. The air and water temp was 80 degrees in January. In the mornings Oliver, Asher and myself would go surfing, while Lindsay, Stella and Merrick would drink coffee and watch whales splashing in the ocean. We did so many fun things together— we surfed, snorkeled crystal clear water, hiked, rode horses and went to sleep each night to the sound of the wind and waves. Puerto Rico was awesome! But I did have one humbling moment during the trip. One morning when I was surfing by myself the waves jumped up in size. It was pretty big. I was surfing at this spot called Middles, and this wave is known for being a challenging wave when it gets big b/c breaks on a shallow reef. At first I didn't realize how big it was until I was out in the line up. But that didn't stop me, because I kinda like these type of conditions because they get my adrenaline flowing and I feel alive. On the first wave that I tried to catch I quickly realized that I wasn't going to make it and that I going to go "over the falls" as we like to call it. I tried to quickly pull back my board out of the wave, but this wave was so powerful it just consumed me and took me with it. I ended up falling in an awkward way and wasn't able to take a breath as I was free falling in the lip of the wave. Then I hit the water and went straight to the bottom and got pinned on the reef. I couldn't move because the weight of all the water was holding me down. I clearly remember looking up through the crystal clear water with the sun light beaming down on me and thinking two thoughts: "Don't freak out or you will die," and "I guess this is how it ends." Once I realized that I was still alive, I freaked out and started swimming for the surface. Right before I made it to the top I inhaled some water and came up choking on it. Later that evening, as I was reflecting on the moment, I thought, "that would have been pretty irresponsible to go on sabbatical and die surfing." But thankfully, I didn't die and I actually had a fantastic sabbatical.

Today, I want to share some things that I learned from my sabbatical.

I had four goals/prayers for my sabbatical.

***The first goal was simply to rest— Mentally, Emotionally, Physically and Spiritually.*** I needed time to allow my soul to catch up to my body. Over the the last twenty years I have run too hard and for too long without a significant break. A sabbatical is an extended time of rest where you are forced to be unproductive, and for a recovering workaholic, this was both a challenging and an amazing experience. Sabbatical was challenging because I love to be productive, I like meetings, I like checking off to do lists, I like to see results. And when you are truly resting you are not productive. My sabbatical was amazing because I experienced real rest; deep rest. It's hard to put it into words how good I actually felt and how clear my perspective on life was, so I'll share a few things to try to make sense of how good it was. I was able to sleep through the night for the first time in a few years. I was fully present to whatever moment I was in. I had a deep sense of gratitude for life, for all the little gifts in each day. My physical energy and drive for life were restored. This sabbatical gave me rest for my soul.

***The second goal was to enjoy my family without the pressure of leading a church.*** One of the challenges of any job where you have leadership responsibilities is that the work never really ends and it's easy to take the work home. I've struggled with this for a long time. Sabbatical gave me the time and space to focus on my family, and it was successful. We had a lot of quality time and fun over the

last three months! One practical thing I learned from this time is that I need to apply the same energy and skills that I use to lead Live Oak Church to my family.

***The third goal was to test and strengthen my call to be a pastor, and to gain fresh vision for myself and Live Oak Church.*** The statistics on pastors and ministry leaders burning out, being disqualified and leaving the church are not good. I believe the main reasons for this are that serving in ministry over a lifetime is really hard, and that pastors are carrying things they should not be carrying and running at an unsustainable pace. Before my sabbatical I had first hand experience in this, but the good news, for me and for Live Oak Church, is that this sabbatical has provided me the time and space to test my calling, to wrestle with God and gain a fresh vision for how to live well personally and vocationally as a pastor. I am more confident than ever about who I am, what I am called to do and how I am called to do it.

***The fourth goal was for the church to grow stronger without me.*** One thing that I have struggled with as a leader is caring too much about everything and getting in the way by doing too much. At face value, "caring too much" and "doing too much" don't sound like bad things. It might even sound helpful. But in reality, an over-functioning leader creates a leadership bottleneck that prevents others from participating in meaningful ways. I've struggled and worked on this for a long time, and I've actually grown significantly in giving away authority and leadership to people who are trustworthy and responsible. But before Sabbatical, I still suffered from the disease. Sabbatical removed me from the leadership equation. And as a result our elder leader team (Hunter, Jay, Mr. Wilson), our staff team (Hailey and Michael) and many church members stepped up to lead and run the church while I was gone. They did a fantastic job and I am incredibly thankful for each of them! To me what is happening at Live Oak Church is like the picture found in Ephesians 4:15-16...*"We will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing full of love."*

Thankfully, all of my goals and much more was accomplished by taking a sabbatical. And I am incredibly thankful.

Now I want to tell you about something that I learned on my sabbatical that might be helpful for you — ***I learned A NEW WAY TO THINK ABOUT TIME that has changed the way I approach my life.*** I have to give credit to my favorite pastor, Eugene Peterson, and Mark Buchanan for this this fresh insight about time.

The Greeks understood time in two ways, the first is Chronos and the second is Kairos.

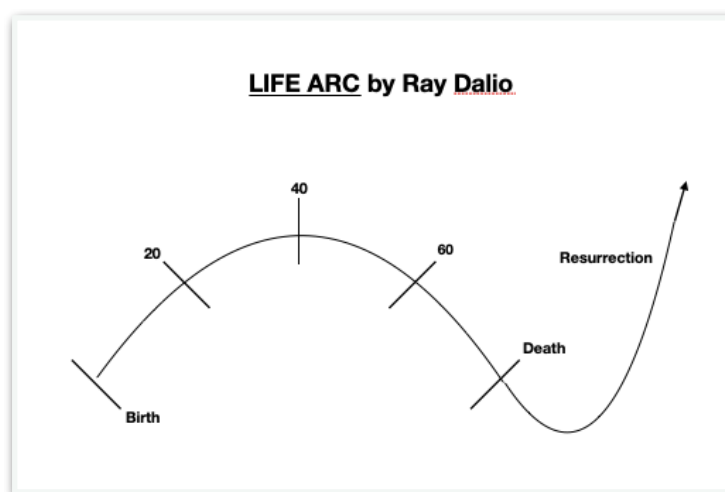
***Chronos is thinking about time chronologically, one moment after another, in minutes, hours, days, weeks, months and years.*** The Greek word chronos comes from a minor god of Greek mythology. Chronos was considered a nasty little god that was gluttonous, always consuming and never satisfied, a cannibal who ate his own children. Chronos is the god of those who are driven in life. People who know they have limited time and so they run faster and work harder to get things done! The result? More stress, more anxiety and sleepless nights. The Bible describes this as "working for the bread of anxious toil." Seeing your life through the lens of Chronos at best is a tool to manage time and at worst is an anxiety driven motivation to get more done.

**Kairos is thinking about time as a gift, season or opportunity.** Kairos is when my friend Pete sends me a one day 50% off sale on all my favorite surf brands. Now is the time to save money! Kairos is when Jesus came on the public scene and announced, "God's Good News, saying, The time promised by God has come at last! The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!" Mark 1:14-15 NLT Now is the time to be saved! Kairos is when Jesus said, "Pay Attention— keep watch! For you don't know what day your Lord is coming." Matthew 24:42 NLT Now is the time to pay attention because you don't know the season of Jesus' return! Kairos sees Chronos as an opportunity to make the most of time, instead of time as a race you cannot win.

But as cool as this sounds it creates a tension, most people don't get to live in a sabbatical state of rest without the pressures of real life, or without a watch. So the obvious question is, **How do we approach time as a gift when we live in the reality of the clock and the calendar?**

The answer is to ask yourself two questions:

**What Time Is It?** Chronological time is a reality that every human has to live in. And every person is given a limited amount of it, so you need to know what time it is. Psalm 90 is the ultimate chronological time scripture, "Seventy years are given to us! Some even live to eighty. But even the best years are filled with pain and trouble; soon they disappear, and we fly away...Teach us to realize the brevity of life (to number our days), so that we may grow in wisdom." Psalm 90:10-12 (NLT) In America, the average age of death is 78 years old. Of course some people live fewer years and some people live many more, but the point is that every person has limited time to live. The Psalmist says, "teach us to number our days so that we gain a heart of wisdom." Eugene Peterson says wisdom is "skill in living." Realizing that life is short and that we have limited time makes us wiser. Knowing what time it is helps you live with vision and intention and to make the most of your life. So you need to ask yourself, What time is it today, what season of life am in today? And, What time is it literally today, so that you're on time to work.



**What Is This Time For?** The first question helps locate you within the reality of time. This question, what is this time for, helps you make the most of that reality. The apostle Paul said it this way, "Awake, O

sleeper, rise up from the dead, and Christ will give you light...Be careful how you live. Don't live like fools, but like those who are wise. (Making the best use of the time) – make the most of every opportunity in these evil days. Don't act thoughtlessly, but understand what the Lord wants you to do." Ephesians 5:14-17 NLT We have to wake up to reality, life is short and the clock is ticking. Don't live unwisely by trying to beat the clock or by wasting the precious gift of time! The solution is to wake up and realize that Life is a gift from God and to make the most of it for His glory! Ask yourself, What is this time for? What is this season of life for? As a twenty-something you have unique opportunities that someone in their forties may not have. Don't waste them, go explore the world! If you have a home full of small children your life is going to be a little slower and require more of your time and attention. But remember, this season won't last forever, so don't let it slip by. What season are you in right now and what does it look like to make the most of the time for the glory of God? If you do this, your life will be filled with so much more meaning, and you will actually be fully awake and present to enjoy it.

What season are you in today? What is this season of life for?

What time is it today? What is this day for?

Prayer– Lord, teach us to number our days, to know what time is it, so that we live wisely on this earth. Wake us up to the reality of time, help us to know what each moment of time is, so that we make the most of our days for your glory. Amen.