

THE SEIBERT'S SABBATICAL

-A Short Summary-

So.....if we (Werner & Debbie) had to describe our recent season of sabbatical in one word, that word would have to be, "MINDBLOWING!" It was beyond belief to see how God went before us to put into place everything for this once-in-a-lifetime experience! We also shake our heads in awe of the way our A.E.C. family continued to love, believe, pray and support us during our absence! Only with the Holy Spirit's presence in each heart can a thing like this happen!

ISRAEL - Our adventure began with a two week tour of the Holy Land. "Tour" might not be the right word. It was more of a spiritual pilgrimage for us. Those who have gone before us have said that scripture "comes alive" once you have been there, you go from reading the bible in black & white to technicolor. That is the absolute truth! Now, when we read about Armageddon, Mt. Carmel, the Sea of Galilee, Jericho, Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Nazareth, Joppa, Gethsemane, the wilderness...and on and on...we can picture it in our mind's eye perfectly because we've been there! While this is amazing, the truly mind-blowing part is that Jesus met with both of us, individually, in a special way every single day! It was as if He were smiling and saying, "Thank you for coming and letting me show you some of my favorite places!" And with the Israeli flag billowing everywhere, we heard clearly the Lord saying, "See...I always keep my promises!" Our hearts burst! It was so incredible we'd like to host a trip with our church family sometime.

TIME ON THE HILL - Our time in Israel was unbelievable, but not restful. We had begun the trip already exhausted with church & school responsibilities, so a few days at home afterwards was a welcome relief. In between each sabbatical adventure were days spent "up on the hill" as we call it. Our home is a true blessing from God. During Sabbatical, one of Werner's goals was to have daily extended time with the Lord. One morning he wrapped himself up in blankets and went out in the field to watch the sunrise to thank the Lord for His creation and gift of a new day. While home our days were filled with outdoor chores, spent time reading books, praying and video journaling. Werner enjoyed hikes with Jack (in spite of a bad fall while up on Phantom Trail) and went fishing. One unexpected blessing during this season was that Werner was able to take time to grieve over the loss of his father & mother, something that took place years ago, but was not fully experienced. He transported a memorial bench near the river and spent time processing and thanking the Lord for his parents.

CROW AGENCY - The next part of the sabbatical was a volunteer service project for our Native brothers and sisters at the church in Crow Agency. As is the case with most ministry, what was planned to bless others turned out to be a blessing and encouragement to us beyond measure! Werner was amazed to hear the testimonies of the father/son pastoral team (Ken & Kenny PrettyOnTop). What a blessing these two father/son pastors have been to Crow Agency, pray for them and church. A lifelong friend was made while working shoulder to shoulder with the "Spirit of Life" church's handyman. It took a while for Hartford (Crazy Horse) BearClaw to warm up to Werner, but before long laughter & love was shared. We have never been more humbled than when, at the end of the week, Werner was presented with a Pendleton blanket by Crazy Horse, in spite of their very humble home. Mind blown, heart burst, head bowed, tears...in thanks to Jesus!

-OVER-

OREGON CITY/BEACH - Family is so important to us that we could not help but share a portion of this blessed season with them. Our month-long stay in OR. was filled with giggling grandchildren, painting, dog tricks, car repairs, reading bedtime stories, visiting old friends, eating new recipes, throwing balls, household chores, watching new family traditions in the making, singing all together in the car, celebrating VBS with our grandkids, Toys-R-Us trips, Dairy Queen-chocolate dip cone, worshipping alongside our daughter at her church, laughing at old home movies and on and on! We spent 1 week at a friend's beach house in Waldport. A very meaningful moment was when we were able to present our daughters with "thank you" gifts for all the sacrifices they had made down through the years to be "pastor's kids." Tears were shed. We love you Aubrey, Jamie and Sarah.

ALASKA/CALIFORNIA – To top off our month away, Werner traveled with college buddies to the Kenai Peninsula of Alaska. These "4EVER" FRIENDS, as they call themselves, have been adventuring together, every other year, for the past eight years. This year the family of one of the fellas hosted and provided a fishing adventure for the group. A highlight was having humpback whales surface and spout 35 feet from the boat! Fishing for halibut /salmon, hiking, laughing, sharing, praying, kayaking, wildlife spotting, all surrounded by God's majestic creation (second only to Montana's beauty, of course) was perfect. Not to be outdone, Debbie spent this time in Southern California with our eldest daughter (Aubrey) and her husband (Travis). She reports that our two new "grand-doggies" are the smartest & cutest in the world!

BACK TO MONTANA/PRAYER RETREAT - The drive back to Montana from Oregon was physically brutal, but a desire to get "home" made the miles fly by while driving all night. We were like a couple of old horses headed for the barn and so had to be careful not to speed! ☺ Visiting other congregations on Sundays had been a blessing as it reminded us of the larger family of God. Werner has always enjoyed encouraging and praying for other churches. However, we missed our church family terribly, especially after receiving the news of Caleb's move to Billings. We were very happy for him but heart-broken for us, sad for us and glad for the Hamilton's. Once again, God's timing was perfect as the last week of Sabbatical was scheduled to be a time of quiet solitude, reflection and prayer. Using Werner's dad's 1972 camper, he was able to be alone among the trees, close to the running river, listening to the Lord. Debbie was gearing up for the school year to begin, praying, as well, for her students. Werner comes out of this sabbatical with some important insights & truth. Werner knows people will ask, "So what has God told you, share something great you learned." Well to be honest, Werner tried to slow down and really enjoyed extended time being at Jesus' feet. Werner is once again processing Gods UNCONDITIONAL love for him/us and the need to share that love with everyone. Other points that Werner has said on Sabbatical repeatedly is: Life is very short. Live each day to the fullest. Life is way too busy, we (I) need to slow down. Family is important so we need to spend as much time as we can together. Because of this sabbatical, we have a more passionate love for our Lord, for His Word, and for His people. We want you (AEC) to know that we will be here for you, whatever the future holds. We believe God wants us at AEC, so we're not going anywhere Lord & You willing!

Finally, how does one say thank you to those who stood in the gap, carrying more than their fair share of the prayer and workload so that our church body continued making a difference in the community and the world, even while the pastor was away? May the Lord, Himself, repay you... a hundred-fold! How do a pastor and his wife let each and every one of their church family know how much they mean to them... how much they are loved and appreciated? The Lord REVEAL Himself more to you daily, bless you, and SING over YOU! We will be sharing sabbatical stories for the rest of our lives! Our hope is that this summary will answer at least some of the questions you might have. Once again, THANK YOU, from the bottom of our hearts! And, IT IS GREAT TO BE BACK !!!

Love, in the Lord,
Pastor Werner and Debbie