

Leader's Guide

Strengthening the Family

Sabbatical Report: How I Spent My Summer

Isaiah 6:1-9a

Pastor Sebastiano Rosa

August 23, 2026

Conversation Goal

To help group members reflect on Sebastiano's sabbatical story and the larger Strengthening the Family journey, recognize where God may be inviting them to slow down and deepen their relationship with Him, allow the Holy Spirit to reveal areas that need refinement, and respond by intentionally strengthening their relationships with God and with others.

The goal isn't to evaluate Sebastiano's sabbatical or simply celebrate his return. It's to allow his testimony to become an invitation for our own spiritual examination and response.

Synopsis

After a summer sabbatical focused on rest, renewal, and strengthening his family, Pastor Sebastiano returned with a testimony of God's faithfulness and a renewed sense of calling. Through time spent in Scripture, prayer, travel, family relationships, and simply slowing down, he discovered that being refreshed and refocused also meant being refined; recognizing that his spiritual disciplines and ministry activity had begun to replace rather than deepen his relationship with God. His challenge to the congregation was simple but profound: **love God, love people, and be willing to say, "Send me" when God calls us to build loving, caring relationships within His church.**

1. Where have you seen God at work?

Discussion Question

When have you recently experienced a moment where you were especially aware of God's goodness?

Teaching Point

Sebastiano described several moments when he became particularly aware of God's presence: his daughter's wedding, standing before the Tetons, time with his family in Sicily, watching Molly

and Caleb choose baptism, and reflecting on Paul's faithfulness in Rome. What tied these experiences together wasn't simply that they were beautiful or memorable. Slowing down allowed him to actually notice God in the midst of them. Sometimes God's presence isn't absent; we're simply moving too quickly to notice it.

Follow-Up Prompts

- What tends to help you notice God's presence?
- What tends to distract you from noticing Him?
- Are there ordinary places or experiences where you could become more attentive to God?
- How might gratitude help us recognize God's presence?

Additional Scripture

Psalm 46:10 — "Be still, and know that I am God."

Psalm 19:1-4 — Creation declares God's glory.

Psalm 103:1-5 — Remembering and recounting God's goodness.

2. What happens when we create space for God?

Discussion Question

What might change in our relationship with God if we intentionally slowed down enough to listen for Him rather than simply trying to accomplish more for Him?

Teaching Point

Sebastiano went into sabbatical expecting refreshment and refocus. Instead, God showed him something deeper: refinement. He realized that he had become increasingly caught up in *doing* (Bible reading, prayer, sermon preparation, ministry responsibilities) while his actual awareness of God's presence was diminishing.

It is possible to do things for God while becoming less connected to God. Even spiritual disciplines can become performance if we lose sight of the relationship they're intended to nurture.

Follow-Up Prompts

- What makes slowing down difficult for you?

- What tends to fill the space when you have unstructured time?
- What's the difference between practicing a spiritual discipline and simply checking off a spiritual task?
- Where in your current life might you need less activity and more attentiveness?

Additional Scripture

Luke 10:38-42 — Martha and Mary.

Psalms 131:1-2 — A quieted and stilled soul.

John 15:4-5 — "Remain in me."

3. How does seeing God more clearly change how we see ourselves?

Discussion Question

As Isaiah became more aware of God's holiness and presence in Isaiah 6, he also became more aware of his own need for God. Sebastiano described a similar experience during his sabbatical, slowing down and becoming aware of areas where his relationship with God needed to be refined. As you become more aware of who God is, what might He be revealing about you?

Teaching Point

Isaiah 6 gives us a picture of what can happen when we truly encounter the holiness of God. Isaiah doesn't begin by examining himself. He first sees God - high, exalted, holy, and glorious. And in the light of God's holiness, he suddenly sees himself more clearly: *"Woe to me! ... I am a man of unclean lips."* That is an important spiritual insight: **the more clearly we see God, the more honestly we can see ourselves.** God's presence doesn't merely comfort us; it can expose what needs to be surrendered, confessed, or changed.

But Isaiah's story (and Sebastiano's) doesn't end with self-awareness or conviction. Isaiah is cleansed, then called. In the same way, God's purpose in showing us ourselves isn't to leave us discouraged or condemned. He reveals what needs to change so that He can transform us and make us more available to Him.

Follow-Up Prompts

- Have you ever had a moment when becoming more aware of God also made you more aware of something in yourself?
- Is there an area of your life where God may be giving you greater awareness right now?
- Why is it significant that Isaiah is cleansed before he is sent?

Additional Scripture

Psalms 139:23-24 — *"Search me, God, and know my heart..."*

1 John 1:8-9 — Honest confession leads to God's forgiveness and cleansing.

2 Corinthians 3:18 — As we behold the Lord, we are transformed into His image.

4. How does our relationship with God change our relationships with others?

Discussion Question

Sebastiano ultimately reduced his challenge to two things: "Love God, love people." What would those two things look like in your life right now?

Teaching Point

Our love for God should overflow into the way we love people. As He shapes us, we become more compassionate, patient, forgiving, and willing to pursue peace—even when that means setting aside our own preferences.

A strong church family isn't built primarily through programs or agreement, but through loving, caring relationships. When we move toward one another, listen well, forgive freely, and welcome others intentionally, people don't simply hear about God's love—they experience it through His people.

Follow-Up Prompts

- Who are the people God has placed closest to you right now?
- What would loving them well actually look like?
- Is there someone you're being invited to move toward rather than avoid?
- What gets in the way of loving people well?
- How does our relationship with God affect the way we treat difficult people?
- What would it look like for our church to become increasingly known for the way we love people?

Additional Scripture

Matthew 22:37-40 — Love God and love your neighbor.

John 13:34-35 — The world recognizes Jesus' followers by their love.

Romans 12:9-18 — Genuine love and living at peace with others.

5. Where is God sending you?

Discussion Question

If you were to sincerely pray Isaiah's prayer, "Here I am. Send me," what might God be sending you to do in this season of your life?

Teaching Point

Sebastiano said he wasn't going to ask everyone to sign up for a ministry position or volunteer for a program. His challenge was more fundamental: **"Send me, Lord, to building, loving and caring relationships in our congregation."**

That means "send me" might look like:

- pursuing reconciliation,
- encouraging someone who is hurting,
- welcoming someone who is new,
- investing in a younger person,
- reaching out to someone who feels disconnected,
- strengthening a marriage,
- being more present with our children,
- choosing relationship over convenience

Follow-Up Prompts

- Who immediately comes to mind when you hear "send me"?
- What is one thing you could do this week that would make someone feel loved, seen, or welcomed?
- What's keeping you from doing it?
- Who could hold you accountable?

Additional Scripture

Ephesians 2:10 — Created for good works God prepared beforehand.

Matthew 5:14-16 — Let your light shine.

Galatians 5:13 — Serve one another humbly in love.