

God at Work: Men at Rest

By Ben Bowen

One of my favorite things to do is to sit in a hot tub. While percolating in one a few weekends ago, I spoke with a man on my left that I hadn't spoken with in two years, and that takes me to my assumption that roughly half the church wonders what do the men do on men's conference. Ready for it? Upon our arrival, we check in and make our way to the larger gathering. To the amusement of other hotel guests, most men strip down to a loin cloth and begin running up and down the hallways, albeit slightly slower than their mental images of themselves.

Actually, the retreat is a men's conference and the large gathering is a sea of comfortable long sleeve button downs and jeans and a few t-shirts proudly worn as trophies rescued from the discard pile.

This year's conference had a rhythm to the four primary sessions—welcome, excellent music, Scripture reading, a lesson and table discussion. By the way, I enjoy singing even more than sitting in a hot tub. Before Dr. Phil Ryken taught through the life of Hezekiah, a group of men, each voicing different characters, read out loud the rather lengthy passages, bringing 2 Kings to life.

While meal times were the time to meet other men, the small group tables of 8-12 men each were the same during the weekend. Here, deeper interaction and engagement with the material unfolded as we shared excitement or frustration with where we felt we were in life. There seemed

to be a nice gradation of thoughts from younger whippersnappers full of energy molded by others who have lived longer.

Men had different reasons, desires and hopes for the weekend. Some had no expectations, and simply trusted God to work. A soundbite I found particularly hilarious came when a younger man described where he was in life, obviously using the metaphor of an automobile's status. After saying a few things, he firmly concluded, "In front of me, I've got a lot of road, and a big engine."

A large block of time on Saturday was filled with activities or nothing at all. Those who needed to sweat had access to a rec center with court time. A couple of men joined me as we walked in the cold along the edge of Lake Geneva, pleasantly surprised to discover a tiny creek. You know that noise sound machines call "bubbling brook?" We found where they recorded it. But being men, some of us didn't have hats and gloves so we returned. A lot of men had time to slow down and play cards or a board game. There are always board game guys, and they always bring their games. You know who you are, and yes, you won.

There was a Ping Pong table and though I never saw Senior Pastor Josh Moody in action, I assume his forehand is deadly, given how many times he has turned pages in Romans. (Now that he's preaching from Genesis, I assume he wants to work on the reverse.)

Before Saturday's free time, men chose two of four workshops to attend that encouraged growth in prayer, purity, understanding the Bible and how to communicate cross-culturally for Christ. Again, some took needed time to quietly read, rest or pray.

The pool seemed less of a draw than past years, but it is near the pool where I found the wonderful hot tub. Back to percolating. To my left was Chris, and I almost broke out in laughter realizing the last time we talked was two years earlier, to the day, in the same hot tub, way back on Men's Retreat, uh, Men's Conference. Time flies, and as silly as it is, that soak is a small example of one way I benefited from the conference. A different place and extended time together afforded occasions to meet, encourage and be encouraged by other men from the church.

From my perspective, the entire event ran smoothly and provided opportunities for men to eat, compete, serve, rest, learn, connect and worship God together. I hope Men's Conference can add momentum to a growing culture of discipleship at our church. To those who planned and the many that remained in Wheaton and did double duty to allow the men to leave, thank you. If you know of someone who went on the conference, ask him what has stuck with him upon returning. And, Chris, see you in two years.