
Subject: Reconciliation Process / Pastor James Sabbatical

Date: Wednesday, January 16, 2019 at 10:02:24 AM Central Standard Time

From: Harvest Bible Chapel



Dear Harvest Family,

We have tried a variety of different strategies to address external criticisms over the past several years. It has become apparent that these efforts have failed to fully identify and address our personal failures, sins, and errors in leadership, thus perpetuating a continuation of the criticism. In prayerful reflection upon all that has happened and how we got here, a private meeting of the Executive Committee of the Elders on Monday, January 14, led to the decision to be part of a peacemaking process that seeks both reconciliation and change where needed, which was reviewed by the entire Elder Board last night.

We are reminded of these biblical imperatives:

“So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”

Matthew 5:23-24

“Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.’” Matthew 7:3-5

In an effort to invite others to join us, we are working with two highly respected ministries (modeled after *“The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Conflict,”* though not directly aligned with the organization of that name) that specialize in helping churches resolve issues in God-honoring ways. The peacemaking process will include:

- The selection of a team of experienced and highly respected conciliators

and organizational consultants who will guide us through an objective and comprehensive review process.

- Reaching out to individuals who have left our fellowship or have complaints against us, listening carefully to their insights and correction, and asking God to enable us to confess our sins and make needed changes in our leadership.
- Thoroughly examining our church's organizational, financial, management, and leadership policies and practices, and making whatever changes are necessary to ensure that every area is being managed according to professional best practices and in a way that honors God.

While we had hoped that successful audits and re-examined/confirmed ECFA compliance would help heal some relational wounds, it simply hasn't happened. As part of the peacemaking process, Pastor James is taking an indefinite sabbatical from all preaching and leadership at our church in Chicago. He has recused himself fully from any direction of this peacemaking process, other than to participate when and how requested. He may continue preaching at Harvest Naples through some of the winter months and will be on sabbatical, pending the completion of the reconciliation process and a full report to the congregation. Please be in prayer for Pastor James and Kathy through this season.

We are asking the Lord to lead us as we engage in this peacemaking process. The Lead/Campus Pastors will continue to lead the day-to-day ministry of the church, and we ask for your support as they do so. Campus Pastors will be present and available during normal Wednesday ministry tonight on all campuses.

– The Elders of Harvest Bible Chapel

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From Pastor James:

“For a long time I have felt unequal to all but the preaching task at Harvest. I have battled cycles of injustice, hurt, anger, and fear which have wounded others without cause.

I have carried great shame about this pattern in certain relationships that can only be called sin. I am grieved that people I love have been hurt by me in ways they felt they could not express to me directly and have not been able to resolve. I blame only myself for this and want to devote my entire energy to understanding and addressing these recurring patterns.

I have long known and taught it is not about the messenger, it is about the message and I am grateful for a time of extended sabbatical, during which Harvest will be in capable hands. I may continue preaching at the Naples Campus through some of the winter season and have postponed all writing and leadership to begin in earnest now. I will continue this focus as long as it takes and participate wholeheartedly as requested in the process shared above.

Please pray that this welcomed time of sabbatical rest will lead to needed changes in me and a fresh opportunity to reconcile with others in God's time.

Christ is all He promised to be and more... "He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me by still waters. He restores my soul" (Psalm 23:2-3). Please pray for me and Kathy as we step away from the work, so God can do all He wants to do in the worker."