

September 2, 2014

Greetings Friends! Attached you will find a statement of giving for 2014 as a tool to help you in your faithful response to our Lord with your finances for the final third of the year. That is a valuable part of your stewardship, and I want you to know that at Bethlehem we seek to be good stewards of every dollar given, working hard to ensure that we are using it at the point of greatest impact for the building of God's Kingdom. In August, at our first membership class of the fall, we had fifteen people attend. This is fifteen people who are finding their home at Bethlehem because of the work and ministry we are doing. As we went around sharing our stories, there was a recurring theme of how they were introduced to Bethlehem by Fish Fry or Preschool or Church has Left the Building or another of our Connect events and came to Bethlehem and immediately knew that this was the place for them. Two families said they had been visiting churches for two years and had not found anything they liked until coming to Bethlehem. I say this, not to pat ourselves on the back but rather to encourage each of us that we are a part of something special. Our hard work is paying off in big ways. People's lives are being transformed. Thank you for your faithfulness in this work.

I want to talk a little about another aspect of our stewardship, though, and that is stewardship of time. In particular, I want to share how I have become a better leader by how I have learned to be better at keeping the Sabbath. I have had several people say to me over the last few months that "there is something different about you now as a leader than when you first got here. You have become more focused and powerful in your leadership from when you first got here." As I have reflected on that, I realize that I have grown in numerous ways as a leader over the last five years, but perhaps the biggest impact for me has come in how I keep the Sabbath. Five years ago as the pastor of a struggling church and a new Dad, my life was a run-on sentence going page after page with no pauses or stops. I'll tell you, I was exhausted. I have come to realize that I was not created to rest, but that my life IS defined in its pauses. I think most of you know that I have a strong work ethic – I always have. I work hard. I think you also know that I play hard, too. I make no secrets about that in my life. What I have come to understand in the last two to three years is that it is also important that I rest hard, too. I have learned to do that. I attribute much of my growth as a leader in how I have become better at honoring the Sabbath in my life. It has helped me to tap into the author of leadership and better understand him as the author of my life. I say this to encourage you to work on this area of stewardship in your life, too – the stewardship of your time. We live in a 24/7 world with demands that come at us from all directions. I'll tell you, though, that the best way to combat this is to STOP one day a week, focus your attention on the God of the universe, and worship him. Slow down the speed of your life, and enjoy your family and this wonderful world we have the privilege of living in. As we continue on with this journey of Sabbath, we will be talking about it in worship on September 14. I hope you will pause and breathe deep and find your heart's true identity in the one who calls himself the Lord of the Sabbath.

Blessings,

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