

I'm not sure if you know this, but I really enjoy these monthly communications. They allow me to think differently about what our congregation either needs to know or should know. Of course, we can never communicate everything, but as I prepare over these next few weeks for my sabbatical, there are three things I've been re-learning in this season that I thought would be valuable to share.

First, is the importance of being deeply connected into a life group. Since God brought us to Fargo-Moorhead, every other Tuesday night Nikki and I gather with others from church. We eat together, laugh together, pray together, study together, and often times cry together. We absolutely LOVE our community. And we protect it because it's where we feel safest. In fact, I still think that at the core of humanity is this truth: *we long to be fully known...in all our brokenness...and yet fully loved*. Life Groups can provide a community where we experience God's extravagant love for us, which is vitally important to the health of a church. But community is not the end. What do I mean? Well, Jesus had twelve guys he walked with, talked with, ate with, studied with, prayed with, even cried with. Sound familiar? Jesus had a life group! But his group was unique in that while they were always growing together, they were also reaching lost people together. From town to town, think about how the disciples both *experienced* God's love, while also learning how to *express* God's love? What I'm learning is that community and mission are not separate. They go hand in hand. So, in this next season our life group is trying to discern, how do we protect our community while opening it up at the same time (meaning live missionally)? It seems paradoxical, but it's what Jesus did. And we're excited to discover together, no matter how many times we fail. But that takes time, so I'm also learning I need to say no to other things in life to give space to the community of our life group. But I encourage you, if you're not connected, reach out and let us help you!

Second, is the importance of practicing spiritual habits/disciplines. Years ago, I used to love journaling. I'd spill out my prayers, thoughts, even doubts onto paper so often I filled up a dozen journals. And then somewhere along the line...it stopped. I'm not sure if I got too cool, or simply too busy. But it stopped. And I lost a rhythm that was vitally important to my soul. We'll be doing two different series this summer, one of which is about spiritual habits. If it's true that it takes 21 days to build a habit, then taking 21 days this summer to look at Jesus' spiritual rhythms can help us step into line behind Jesus as we allow the Holy Spirit to transform us. Here's a brief glimpse into the summer series:

- **21 Days with Jesus:** What role did Scripture play for Jesus? How often did he break away to be by himself? And what role did material things have in his life? We'll start the summer by learning from and practicing the spiritual disciplines of study, solitude, and generosity. How do these open doors for us to be transformed by the Spirit? And how might God be opening up my eyes to see people around me differently?
- **[Extra]Ordinary:** As Christians we are torn between the ordinary and the extraordinary. On the one hand, we long to be a part of something bigger. On the other hand, we feel we are far too ordinary. The result can be boredom or restlessness. But what if extraordinary was actually found in the ordinary? The Bible is full of characters who are less known...but that doesn't mean they were less important to God, or to his story! As we look throughout the bible at unknown characters, this series will challenge how we view God, ourselves, and our environment.

- **21 more Days with Jesus:** We'll end the summer by learning from and practicing Jesus' habits of Prayer, Service, and Fasting. The idea is to move into the fall semester, praying and fasting around our Vision, ready to serve.

Third, is the importance of rest. After God finished creating the universe, it says that on the seventh day God "rested." Of course, because God is infinite, he never runs out of strength, and thus he didn't need to rest. But knowing his creation would not hold the same quality of infiniteness, he instituted a Sabbath rest (Ex. 20:8-11; Lev. 25). The Sabbath was designed as a rest from all work and purposed to help us reconnect with God and others. Let's be honest though...how often do we really do that? Our brains, hearts, and feet keep moving at an alarming pace even when we're supposed to be resting! Is it possible that many sources in our culture that promise rest actually make us thirstier? Like drinking salt water instead of fresh water? How many times have you said, "I need a vacation from my vacation?" We need rest. No, we need *real* rest. Because we are not infinite. Real rest engages the goodness of God's creation and refills our minds, bodies, and very souls with the goodness of God's design. Rest is part of what helps us flourish. So, I humbly extend my gratitude to you, the staff, and the elders for the blessing of a sabbatical. I'm excited to be able to rest, replenish, and be restored, so that I'm fully ready for this next season as God continues to lead. And as a leader, I want with all sincerity to lead as a Humble Guide from a place of fullness, saying, "Follow me as I follow Christ." I kindly ask, would you invest in me this summer by praying for me? I would be humbled, honored, and delighted! If you would,

- Pray for my time with Jesus - that as I jump into the spiritual habits of Jesus with you (from a distance) that I am enthralled and amazed by the goodness of Jesus in my life - not because I'm a *leader*, but because I'm a *follower*. Pray that my identity is found in Christ as a son of God, not a Senior Pastor.
- Pray for my time with just Nikki - that we get uninterrupted quality time to build our friendship and marriage around Jesus.
- Pray for my time with the whole family - that my time with Eden and Josiah is deeply engaging, life giving, and ripe with spiritual opportunities.

I'll start Monday June 9th and return Sunday August 31st. I'm surrounded by a fantastic team who can help you in my absence, so feel free to reach out to other pastors, staff, or elders. While I won't be at church, I will still be in the area some, so if you see me, don't feel you need to avoid me. Please say hi. My humble request would be, "no talking shop." I'm excited to share what about the experience when I return!

As I conclude, I'll add one final tip: What I'm learning is that what I need in my mid 40's is not what I needed in my early 40's, which is different than my 30's, 20's, etc. As life changes, sometimes what we need to be refilled changes. So, I encourage you, in whatever season you are in, to rediscover what you need to live and lead well.

Much love,

Pastor Seth