

Happy Thanksgiving, Cedar Grove Family!

Recently I was reminded, again, of how God works through simple obedience. A young man walked into our church service on September 14th, unsure of what to expect. He had come to VBS and a few Sunday services as a child, although he hadn't been here in years. One day, a young man who worships, serves, and gives, happened to run into him around town and said, "*Hey, you should come to church again.*"

That was it. A simple invitation.

All these years later and that young man returned on a Sunday, several weeks ago. That very morning he raised his hand, indicating his desire to surrender his life to Jesus, and to be made new. Recently, he was baptized, beaming with joy and eager to begin living out his new life with his church family.

I will never grow tired of watching the light of Christ ignite in a person's life amidst us. Additionally, this story reminds me that our God uses ordinary, but faithful, people — *like so many of you* — to accomplish His miraculous work. With God, ordinary + faithful = miraculous!

This story of this young man represents one of many stories that we've been witnessing in 2025. The Scripture that comes to mind is Acts 13:47–49, which feels like a banner over our church. It reads:

***"I have made you a light for the Gentiles,
that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'
And the word of the Lord spread through the whole region."***

If you are devoted to Christ you don't need to become a light; God has *already* "made you a light." Salvation and the word of the Lord are spreading through us. By God's grace, and through your invitations, your prayers, and your generosity — Cedar Grove has grown roughly 50% just this year. Friends are bringing friends. Families are bringing neighbors. Most importantly, people are hearing the good news and are encountering Jesus, who is compelling them to say "yes" to Him in beautiful and unexpected ways.

Since so many of you have been shining Christ's light, we found ourselves with a *wonderful problem*: we ran out of room. Therefore, this Fall we added a third service. I had hoped that 50 of you would help us jump-start the 8am service. (Me of little faith. Ha!) Every week I see seats filling up with new faces — people who are finding hope, wisdom, courage, and Christian love.

For those of you who are new to Cedar Grove: Welcome! You belong here and are as much a part of our church family as anyone else. Let me encourage you: this isn't a time to dip your toe in the water. Stagnancy breeds stagnancy, however, movement breeds movement! So don't just watch; participate in what God is doing among us. Your presence, your kindness, and your gifts matter immensely. The best time to start serving, connecting, praying, giving, and inviting is NOW. If you think I'm being a bit intrusive, I assure you, the enemy wants you on the sidelines. Jump in!

In addition to benevolence and local ministry partnerships (ex: Shepherd's Gate, Young Life, City Serve, etc.), here is a glimpse of what God has allowed us to accomplish together in 2025:

- Global missionary support, including a \$50,000 gift to Mike Silva International.
- A brand new parking lot, which is now more functional, safer, and welcoming to guests.
- Renovation of our upstairs space where students worship, grow together, and have fun!
- Paying down \$200,000 of our mortgage, positioning us more strongly for future ministry.
- A variety of facility, property, and resource improvements, which God has entrusted to us.
- And of course, staffing, funding every ministry, every Sunday, every kids class, every Bible study, every Men's Huddle, every counseling appointment — *and all of the unseen but critical expenses that keeps the lights on, the coffee brewing, and the gospel shining.*

All of this, in just one year! THANK YOU!! Cedar Grove does not exist without you.

I believe we may be standing on the cusp of seeing even more souls regenerated, more lives transformed, and more spiritual fruit produced. There are many spiritually dead, dry, and malnourished people in the East Bay. So, as we prepare to step into a new year, I'm asking you to join me in helping us finish 2025 strong. It will position us to launch into 2026 with confidence, anticipation, and readiness for whatever God may have in store.

Therefore, if you are able, would you prayerfully consider...

1. making a special year-end financial gift to help us continue advancing the gospel?
2. setting up faithful, recurring giving (if you haven't already) which will allow us to steward wisely, plan accordingly, and minister effectively?

Your generosity fosters stories like the young man who gave his life to Jesus through an invitation. It fuels children hearing about Jesus and God's love for them every Sunday. It teaches students what it means to find their identity in Christ. It means adults discovering the wonder of God's grace. It means marriages being strengthened, people in crisis receiving help, missionaries being sent, and the word of the Lord spreading "through the whole region." (Acts 13:49)

Church family, your generosity is making an eternal difference. Your light is shining. Don't let it dim.

Thank you for loving Jesus, loving His church, and loving this community so well. Thank you for locking arms with us in this most important mission, which Jesus entrusted to His people long ago..."to the ends of the earth"...and right here in our own backyard.

All for Jesus.

Joel