

Glow in the Dark

October 21-22, 2017

Today we are having a family talk. If you are a guest today, welcome! You are going to get an inside look at our vision, an update and celebrate what God is doing through our ministry.

In *The Lord of the Rings* movies and books, peace-loving Hobbits lived in a place called The Shire. The Shire is a happy place, filled with the joys of rural village life. In the Shire, the Hobbits sang songs, drank ale, enjoyed feasts, connected with their families and led a simple, quiet life. The Hobbits were very content with their lives in the Shire.

But they didn't realize that outside the Shire, the world was changing around them. While they enjoyed life in the Shire, forces of darkness were growing in strength. The armies of the dark kingdom of Mordor were on the march, taking over other kingdoms one by one. They intended to conquer the world, and if they did, the warmth of the Shire would be lost forever. A few of those simple Hobbits were drawn into an epic struggle against the advancing darkness. They ventured out of the Shire and into situations they had never dreamed of before.

That reflects what is happening right now in our world. For years many Christians have been tempted to live in the "Shire" of Christian subculture. We can be part of a life-giving church, listen to Christian radio and music, and go to Christian schools. We can play softball in church leagues, read Christian books, enjoy life with Christian friends. We can live our lives in the Christian Shire and enjoy it.

But all the while, outside the Christian Shire, the darkness is growing and gaining strength. We can see it every day. We see increasing rage and division tearing at our nation's social fabric. People are criticizing each other, lashing out at each other and de-friending each other on social media. Mass shootings are now common place. We hear threats of nuclear war, opioids are killing tens of thousands. Pornography is destroying intimacy and warping relationships between men and women. Marriage and families are coming apart. Biblical moral values have been largely discarded by our culture. I could continue the list, but I don't think I need to.

The Christian "shire" is shrinking quickly - the darkness is knocking on the door and reaching into our families and friendships, too. We can't hide from this reality. It is good that we can't hide, because Jesus never called us to hide from the darkness in the first place! **We are not to fear the dark, but to advance**

and shine. He didn't instruct us to retreat and hold on, he commanded us to advance and to shine!

Matthew 5:14-16 *You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.*

“You are the light of the world.” Jesus said, “I am the light of the world” because he is the *source* of light in the world. Then he tells his disciples *you* are the light of the world because we *reflect* his light as we love and obey him. When Jesus' light shines through us, it will create change in a dark world just like flicking the light switch transforms a dark room.

We aren't to be intimidated by the darkness. We're not to fear or resign ourselves to it. If you are a follower of Jesus, he wants his light to shine through you and pierce the darkness. You are the light of North Fayette Township--- or wherever you live. You are the light of southwestern Pa. Jesus' intent is that you bring his love, joy and peace wherever you are. You can bring the hope of Jesus. You are the light of your workplace. You can help people you work with find their way back to God.

Jesus said, “You don't light a lamp and then put it under a basket.” Otherwise why light it in the first place? The purpose of a lamp is to shed light. You aren't made alive in Jesus to make sure that no one finds out about it. Jesus didn't save you so that you could avoid letting anyone know. Our purpose as followers of Jesus is to spread his light wherever we go. In verse 16, Jesus said, “*let people see...*” No hiding, but shining! No matter how dark the world gets, we have the remedy. It is the light and Gospel of Jesus.

When people stop living for themselves and begin to love and obey Jesus, there is less despair, anger and conflict in the world. When people receive new life in Jesus, it changes them just as light overcomes darkness. That's why Jesus asks us to take the light of his gospel and shine it.

After Jesus rose from the dead he told his followers: **Matthew 28:19** *“Therefore **go** and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,”* And “go,” they did. Some got up and walked across town and then across countries. Some got on boats and other got on horseback. Still others got on camels and they traveled to make disciples. Jesus said, “I want you to go everywhere on the planet and make disciples. I want you to move.”

Jesus' last words before he returned to heaven were similar: **Acts 1:8** *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my*

witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” The rest of the book of Acts shows the people of the early church *going...* first around town, then they went to the outlying areas. Then they went to regions neighboring Israel, and finally they went to the ends of the earth. The early church was a Kingdom movement.

As the church, we are called to TAKE the gospel. Whether that is going across the street or across the globe, disciples shine the light of Jesus into the darkness of the world.

It’s been said, **the mark of a great church is not its seating capacity, but its sending capacity**¹ People often evaluate churches by their size. Large churches get recognized more than small churches. Some people don’t like large churches, but many consider large churches as successful and maybe even the best churches.

You may not know this, but there are lists of the largest churches in the country. One national magazine publishes annual list of the 100 largest churches, and the 100 fastest growing churches (not always the same.) They list the size of the church and the senior pastor’s name. It’s kind of like the Forbes 500 of churches.

Pastors are very familiar with these lists. Let me tell you a secret: deep down, most pastors look at those lists and think, “Wow, wouldn’t it be awesome to be on that list...” They might fantasize about being on that list. You could say that they lust after being on that list.

The magazine puts the annual list on a fold-out page in the center of the magazine. That’s right, it is literally a centerfold! One day I was looking at that list and I realized, “This is Porn for Pastors!” Pastors all across the country are opening the centerfold and fantasizing! Let me say, it is not bad to be on the list.

Crossroads is known as a large church, and we have made some lists within our denomination. I’ll be honest, I was pleased when I saw that. But being on a list is not what motivates me. When I get up in the morning, my goal is to do what I can to fuel a movement of disciple makers. That’s what Jesus told us to do. We can’t measure a church by how people attend the worship services. A great church is one that reaches people with the Gospel and sends them out into the world. In other words, by its sending capacity.

At Crossroads, we are working at being a sending church. **Crossroads’ strategy is to send everyone with love and power.** At the end of every service, I say “*You are sent with love and power - go make disciples.*” In fact, that

¹ Mike Stachura

is written over the doors on the way out of the building. We're not just saying it. We have also designed our whole ministry strategy to equip you to grow step-by-step to become a disciples maker.

The call to light the darkness is what drives the Crossroads **Radiance Initiative**. Last year, we laid out a one-fund ministry plan approach that included four areas of special focus: developing new leaders, compassion, strategic space, and starting new churches. We challenged everyone in the congregation to pray and ask God what they should do, and then do that. Simple.

Some of you responded in very generous ways. We are right on target receiving what has been pledged and it is making a huge difference! Today I wanted to give you an update on what has been happening over the first 10 months. I can't include everything, but here are a few items:

Developing New Leaders - We developed a Core Process which is a step-by-step growth track to equip people to become a disciple who makes disciples. It is printed in your bulletin for information purposes. We have added over 40 new leaders this first 10 months: adult small groups, kids, students, worship. We have two new leaders for Encounter. We've expanded the iLead program which is a leadership training for middle schoolers that is bringing the light to public school students.

iLead started after the tragic death of a West Allegheny middle schooler. A couple of Crossroaders called a community prayer gathering that eventually led to our Elevate team being invited to create an after school leadership program for middle schoolers. Recently the WA Principal told the students, "I've been in education for 10 years, and this is the best program I've seen. I want you all to be in it." 120 are signed up!

We have also expanded our Internship program. Our first adult discipleship intern is Kathleen Stanley. We have our first church-planting resident, with two more considering it. We have 3 young adult interns at the Boyce Road campus in worship and student ministry. We're developing new leaders, and your support through Radiance is making that happen!

Church planting - We started a new non-profit church planting organization called A1:8 with the goal of starting 100 new churches in Mozambique, Western Europe and the U.S.

In Europe we are now supporting and coaching 4 church plants in France, with 2 more potential projects. We also have been invited to partner in starting a church planting center in Germany next year. In Mozambique we trained 6 people there who are planning to launch in the next several months. We also developed a partnership in Nova Scotia with a planter who plans to start next fall.

We commissioned our East Liberty campus Executive Pastor Leo Volbracht to move to Florida to start a church in one of most unchurched populations in the country. This area is the most “never-churched” population in country.

Compassion - In addition to our student Focus program and the student mission trip, we are getting ready to send a team to Houston to do Hurricane relief work.

Our Weirton campus has started an initiative called “Love the Ohio Valley” which is meeting practical needs in Weirton.

People have also been trained and activated in praying for healing, too.

Strategic Space - Thanks to the Radiance Initiative, our Cranberry campus has a new building. The campus was worshiping in a warehouse for years. That was not the ideal place for reaching that community. Thanks to Radiance, they were able to lease a church building and now attendance is up 40% from last year. They now have two services each Sunday and need to expand the parking lot.

Here at the North Fayette campus, we need more children’s space. We are planning to redesign our gym into a children’s and student space. It will have an improved lobby, lowered ceiling, carpet, warmer walls and a full video and sound system. We plan to start work between Thanksgiving and Christmas.

I want to tell you that all this is possible because of your support through Radiance. Thank you to all who give. If you weren’t around last year or want to jump in, you can start now. It’s needed and you will make a difference. Look what is happening here - the Kingdom of God breaking in!

John the Baptist once sent a messenger to ask Jesus if he was the Messiah, and Jesus said, “Tell him what you see... the deaf hear, the lame walk, the dead are raised, the poor have the Gospel preached to them.” These are things that only God can do.

I want us all to be aware that God is at work here in amazing ways! Marriages and bodies are being healed, young and old are coming to faith in Jesus, Christ-followers are hearing and following God’s direction, the poor are being loved and hearing the Gospel, leaders are hearing the call and churches are being planted. Praise God for what He is doing! This is not church as usual! I hope you are in the game and not watching from the sideline.

In *The Lord of the Rings* the Hobbit named Frodo receives a ring that is the key to destroying the invading darkness. The fate of the world rests on him, and his task put him in great danger far from the Shire. Frodo didn’t like being involved in a war against the forces of darkness. He didn’t choose to be the one

to carry the ring but the [wise wizard Gandalf explained to him](#) although that was natural, it didn't matter. Gandalf said, "All you have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to you."

That is true for us, too. We might wish we were not in a war with darkness, but we are. And we might not think there us much we can do, but there is! Jesus says, "You are the light of the world..." As a follower of Jesus, God has given you armor for the fight, and the weapons of love and power. You are part of a church that will train you to win. Light always pierces the darkness.

What will you do with the situation given to you? Next week we have a chance to shine the light by inviting someone to church. Hundreds of you have turned in cards with names on them of people you will invite. Ushers are coming now to distribute some of those cards so we can pray for them. Take one and pass the basket down. Pray for the person on that card, pray for the one inviting to have courage to do it and pray for the Lord to draw them.