

July 1, 2010

Family,

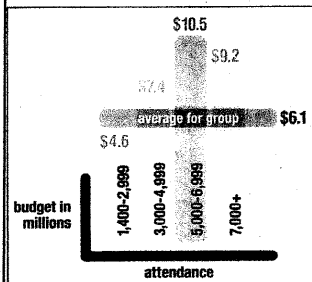
I can tell summer is in full swing! Temperatures and humidity are at an annual high, predictions of tropical storms are front-page news, vacations are being enjoyed, and our giving has plummeted. Most understand the first four on the list, but the last one is what consumes me as we continue to minister to people, pay our air conditioning bills, and meet payroll.

As you read this letter, I need you to read it as if I was sending it to only you...

It is 4:30 AM. The house is quiet and dark except for the glow of my computer monitor. I have been up since 3:30 AM with another sleepless night. As the leader of I have to wear many hats: pastor, teacher, counselor, prayer warrior, theologian, boss, coach, strategist, financial planner, business owner, entrepreneur, and chief architect of . You may not understand some of those, but those are the roles I carry every day.

I spoke to the church this weekend about the financial situation at . As you know we don't talk about money enough at . Typically you respond in usual fashion and give to meet the need. This weekend was different; you didn't. Giving was \$10,196 behind budget again. That is \$118,500 behind budget for the year. I have prayed and prayed.

My heart is heavy for Ocala. My city consumes my thoughts and prayers. It breaks my heart to see not just the need, but also the economic brokenness. I know I am a pastor, but I am also an entrepreneur and business leader. I am focused right now on the second part of our City strategy. We have moved forward in taking care of many needs, but we also must focus on growing Ocala economically. God is stirring and putting together some amazing opportunities. There is much more to come on that in the next months.



I have heard around town that some people call us the "rich church." That's hilarious and ridiculous. I want to put this mindset in perspective like I did last weekend. Here is a chart of average budgets of churches last year based on attendance. average attendance year to date is 3,000.

Our annual budget is \$2.5 million. That is between \$2.1-4.9 million below average. In other words, we are operating with 50% of the average budget of churches our size. If we were an average household, we would be considered at poverty level.

Ocala, Florida

[REDACTED]

Our staff took pay and benefit cuts last year. But because we eliminated positions, they carry heavier loads than ever before. They have endured more change during the last year than any church staff I know. And they have never complained! You have no idea what God has given you in our staff.

You will not find another staff in the country that works as hard *for* as little. And works as hard *with* as little in their operating budgets. We have over 300 preschoolers every weekend. We have three times as many preschoolers as the average church size in America. Do you know what their annual budget is? \$5,000! That's \$96 a week for 250 preschoolers. Elementary is the same. We have approximately 400 of them - \$20,200 or \$388 a week. We have 225 middle school and high school students, and their budget is less than I had as a student minister 20 years ago in Ocala.

The question that I keep asking is this: if everyone gave like you do, would [REDACTED] be here next week? There is a real possibility that we will not be one day if you as the church don't step up. I am not asking for you to give a little more next week. I am asking you to rearrange your finances and trust God with your money. If He doesn't have your money, He doesn't have your heart. I didn't say that, Jesus did.

Here is the bottom line: we need to double our giving immediately. This next season of my leadership will be my greatest challenge as Pastor of [REDACTED]. As you can tell by this letter, my heart is heavy. I need 3,000 people to partner with me to truly build a great city. I am not going anywhere, but I do need some sleep!

After fifteen years at the helm of [REDACTED], I still have a passion and dream for Ocala. Difficult times are the times of greatest opportunity. Pray with me. Give with me. Love people with me. Serve with me. One life at a time, we will build a great city.

And after fifteen years I know that with God's faithfulness and your obedience to Him, [REDACTED] always rises to every challenge.

After 3 cups of coffee, it's 6:00 AM and it's time to go to work.

Making it Hard to Go to Hell from Ocala,

[REDACTED]

Lead Pastor

[REDACTED]

Ocala, Florida [REDACTED]