

Letters of ENCOURAGEMENT

God Loves You



No Matter What

October 15, 2025

A Note from Pastor Jon

Friends,

Just over twelve weeks ago, I stepped away from day-to-day ministry for the first time in twenty years for a season of renewal leave. Before I left, I shared my hope to reconnect with my roots — to return to the places of my childhood, revisit the spaces that formed my faith, remember the mentors and friends who shaped my journey, and rest long enough to breathe deeply again.

My prayer was that this time would restore my body, mind, and soul — preparing me not only to look back with gratitude over twenty years of ministry, but also to step forward with fresh energy for the next twenty.

Now, I return to you grateful, renewed, and eager for the work God still has for us together.



My first week away was one of quiet decompression with my wife, Jennifer, in the Hocking Hills. That week was a gift. We laughed, hiked, shared quiet space, and remembered who we are outside of schedules and responsibilities. It reminded me that before I am a pastor, I am a husband, a father, a friend, a child of God.

In early August, Jennifer and I traveled with our youngest children to Virginia. That trip was another deep joy. They got to see the streets where I once played, the schools I once walked into, and some of the places where my faith first took root. In some spaces, I felt the sting of distance — traditions I've grown apart from, mentors no longer living, relationships that have shifted. Yet I also felt deep gratitude. Those roots remain part of my story, even as they've changed. They helped make me who I am, and I carry them still.

There were also sweet days spent with our adult children, our granddaughter, and even the newest addition to our family — Isaac's kitten, Mars.



While I began this leave focused on reconnecting to my roots, I soon realized that a line from Master Oogway in *Kung Fu Panda* captured what I truly needed to learn:

“Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, but today is a gift. That is why it is called the present.”

I had been so focused on reconciling what was lost in the past and preparing for what might come in the future that I was missing the gift of the now — the ordinary grace of the present moment.

It didn't happen all at once. I can't point to a single turning point. But somewhere along the way, I began to notice myself slowing down — being more present with my family, more aware of the small joys right in front of me. My soul began to settle.

That settling found its fullest expression when Jennifer and I renewed our vows on our 18th anniversary this September — a sacred reminder that love, like faith, is renewed not only by looking back, but by choosing again, here and now.



So I return to HUMC carrying Master Oogway's wisdom with me, determined not to lose sight of the gift of the present.

I return deeply grateful — for the ministry that continued in my absence, for the ways you cared for one another, and for how you supported Pastor April. I asked you to be patient with her as she led, just as you were patient with me while she was on her renewal 2 years ago.

From all I've seen and heard, you did just that. **Thank you.**

And thank you for the grace of allowing me to step away. Not every pastor serves a community that understands the importance of rest and renewal. You gave me that gift, and I promise you, it was not wasted.

While the present is a gift, ministry always calls us to cherish the now while keeping an eye toward what God is unfolding next. So I return not simply to pick up where we left off, but to walk with you into the next chapter — fully present, deeply rooted, and open to what's ahead.

Indeed, though the focus of my renewal shifted, I can say with confidence: my roots are deeper, my spirit is rested, my gratitude is overflowing, and my imagination is alive with new ideas for how we can continue to live out our calling as a brave, inclusive, Spirit-filled community.

This next season will still be about tending both roots and branches — honoring where we've come from while reaching toward what God is making new, all while savoring the gift of the present. Together, we will keep telling the story, keep being and building community, keep serving our neighbors, and keep walking toward the kin-dom of God.

Six years ago, I began ministry among you. Twelve weeks ago, I stepped away to reconnect with my roots. I return now more convinced than ever that the truest roots and the richest gifts are right here — with my family and with you.

Thank you for your patience, your love, and your partnership in ministry. I've missed you deeply. And now, with renewed energy and hope, I'm ready for this chapter and the ones still to come, together.

With love and deep gratitude,

Pastor Jon



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