

---

Dear Immanuel Family,

It is hard to describe how much our family loves the Immanuel family. You have loved us, cared for us, and nurtured us in so many ways. Our children have flourished here. Our friendships here are very real, and we owe an incredible debt to those who have poured into us. Every family experiences tension, and our church family tension has been very real and very public in recent months. To feel this tension as we walk through the halls and as we worship together has been disheartening. Unfortunately, at present we do not see this abating, but only increasing.

Knowing this, Ashley and I have spent considerable time thinking and praying about what is best for the church; about what will diffuse the current situation and allow Immanuel to heal. We want to do what will help the church unify. With that clarity, I have decided to resign as your pastor. Our last Sunday will be April 7<sup>th</sup>. Please know that this has not been an easy decision, but a decision that came with much prayer, tears, and godly counsel.

Over the last two weeks, we've had a growing sense of peace that, as best as we can discern His will, this is God's direction for our family. We are not stepping into another ministry, but stepping aside to allow this process of healing to begin. God has confirmed His direction through prayer, conversations, and His Word, especially the promise of Luke 12:32 where Jesus lovingly told His disciples, "Fear not, little flock, for it is *your* Father's good pleasure to give *you* the kingdom." (emphasis added).

He will provide for our family, and He will provide for the Immanuel family. While I am grateful to have this clarity and its accompanying peace, and while we do believe that this is His direction, we are sad to be leaving so many dear friends. We have never loved a church more. So many have prayed for us, cared for us, and bore our burdens along the way. There is no way that we could be more grateful for all that you have done. Thank you. You have our never-ending gratitude and respect.

Easter reminds us that God brings new life from hard seasons! Ashley our children leave with the peace that this hard day will bring hope, healing, and many blessed days for our church. Please know of my deep love for you, and the singular honor it has been to have been your pastor these years. We pray every blessing on Immanuel.

May the God of peace be with you all. Amen. (Romans 15:33)

Grace and peace,

Steven Smith