

MERRY CHRISTMAS TO YOU FROM ALL OF US!

We're thankful for the Christmas season - for the time we can spend together with family and friends, reflecting on the coming of our Savior long ago and anticipating his glorious return. As we look back on 2023, we've got a lot to be thankful for. We've had adventures, we've learned, and we've made memories that will (hopefully) last a lifetime. Many of those experiences came as a result of our sabbatical this summer. If you'd like to read more about that time, check out the back of the letter, where we'll share more about this.

Our ministry at Forest Springs has continued to be a source of encouragement and challenge, as we seek to support the growing ministry of Forest Springs and its affiliate sites. This summer, things looked very different, as we stepped out of the normal summer rhythm for eight weeks. Getting back in the fall meant a return to our "normal" ministry - helping care for the ministry engagement planning for the four Forest Springs ministry locations (Forest Springs, Oak Forest, Cedar Bay, and Wood Lake). We are blessed to be a part of this ministry, and to see how God is at work in each of these locations.

ON THE HOME FRONT



- ▶ **Lucas (11)** is thriving at home this year as a sixth grader. He's excelling in math and reading and enjoying the freedom of schedule that comes with doing school at home. He grew a ton as a runner this fall in cross country, and he's been loving his first year as a trumpet player in our local school band.



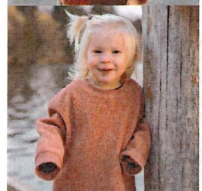
- ▶ **William (9)**, currently a third grader at our local elementary school, is always providing us with interesting facts he is learning at school and in the books he devours. He has joined a 3-on-3 basketball league with friends from school and is looking forward to winter tournaments. He and Ava are also currently working up a piano duet for Christmas.



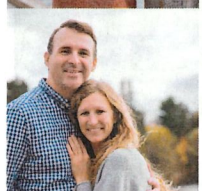
- ▶ **Ava (8)** is a delightful young lady, who is reveling in her 2nd grade public school experience and in helping around the house. When she's not playing school or doctor with her sisters, she enjoys letter-writing, crafting and baking with Mom.



- ▶ **Natalie (6)** is reaping the fruit of perseverance in her homeschooling, and has really taken off reading recently. She loves playing outside, coloring, and helping care for her little sister. She has jumped into learning the violin this year and can be heard carefully practicing "Twinkle Twinkle, Little Star" or "Jingle Bells."



- ▶ **Phoebe** just turned two in November, and has found her voice, often singing and playing right alongside her bigger siblings. She has a sweet and funny little personality, likes to snuggle and make jokes, and has a serious fear of missing out if she thinks something fun is happening without her!



- ▶ **Leah** is an amazing home-school teacher and coordinator, and has also taken to exploring the Ice Age Trail in our region. She completed over forty miles in October alone! **Jake** still serves in varying ways in our church, built a new chicken coop this fall, and usually has some project (or book) that he's right in the thick of. It is not easy to carve out time and attention for each other during these busy child-rearing years, but God is holding us together.

Our Sabbatical Update

This summer, following the busy youth camp season, we were allowed the incredible opportunity to take a sabbatical from camp. After almost twelve years of full-time ministry, a break from the norm was welcome, and we game-planned a time that we hoped would be encouraging, restful, and an awesome time together as a family.

Our first leg took us **west to Montana**. We spent a week with family at Montana Wilderness School of the Bible, and were able to catch up, explore some beautiful country, and experience some amazing moments. Our second week took us to Glacier National Park, where we were able to explore the park, have some incredible animal encounters, and rest in one of the most beautiful places we've ever seen. We then headed to central Montana, to visit family and spend a bit of time at the Upper Missouri River Breaks, where Jake, Lucas, and William paddled over fifty miles of the Missouri River.

Our second leg of the trip took us **south to Texas**. We had been invited to visit another camp near Dallas and while we were there, decided to combine the visit with family and friends in the area. The oldest three kids were graciously invited to their own mini "Texas camp" with Leah's brother and his wife, who showed them amazing hospitality. Meanwhile, Mom, Dad, and the two little girls headed to visit the other camp. There, Jake was able to meet with many of their staff, who graciously gave insight into running creative teams in a multi-site camp setting. It was a huge blessing - to be able to learn and observe and ask lots of questions.

We wrapped up our sabbatical time at **home**, resting in our own spaces, and reflecting on the beauty and calling "in our own backyard." This was an incredibly valuable time in which we were able to discuss and reset our pace of life and build some new, good habits that prepared us to return well to our regular rhythms. We had planned on visiting some friends in Chicago for a third leg, but postponed that part of the trip until mid-October. During that trip, we were able to spend time in a different context, and discuss our new rhythms with wise counselors.

We spent eight weeks focused on **rest, renewal, and reframing** our lives. It was truly a gift to be able to gain different perspectives on our family and ministry pace and vision. Thank you to those who gave generously (and hosted us!) to help us make this happen, and thank you to all those who prayed for this time. We are so grateful for our support network of people like you!

Jake, Leah, Lucas, William, Ava, Natalie, & Phoebe

The Andersens

Photos from top right to bottom left: fresh picked huckleberries; on the shore of Grinnell Lake; mountains at dawn; one of many trail hikes; scoping out wildlife; spending time with Leah's extended family

