

(Education for Exultation) Set Apart Rick, Randy, and the Rest for the Work

by John Piper

The Holy Spirit's calling on Saul and Barnabas resulted in an unspeakably powerful and successful spread of the church in Asia Minor, and similarly, God is calling individuals from Bethlehem to leave and be a part of another vision.

Duration: 44:08

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Acts 13:1-5

Topics: "Church Growth", "Spiritual Expansion"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses a defining moment at Bethlehem church where three strands of providence are coming together. The first strand is the growth of children's and youth ministries, which has led to the need for educational expansion and a new building. The second strand is how to handle the growth in the church services. The third strand is the focus on releasing, sending, and church planting. The speaker acknowledges a mistake in attendance statistics, but also mentions that there are other visions in the making for the church's future.

Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from Desiring God Ministries is available at www.desiringgod.org Acts chapter 13, 1 through 5. Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers, Barnabas and Simeon, who was called Niger, and Lucis of Cyrene, and Manan, who had been brought up with Herod the Tetrarch, and Saul. And while they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.

Then when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia. And from there they sailed to Cyprus.

And when they reached Salamis, they began to proclaim the Word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they also had John as their helper. I begin by asking your forgiveness for making this different this morning, because I believe in the Word of God.

I believe in preaching and exposition and expository exaltation at the center of worship. And I'm not going to do a lot of it this morning, because I sense that we're at a defining moment in the life of our church. And I'm going to spend maybe 10 or 15 minutes on this text, and I'm going to step back and tell you why I believe it's a defining moment.

What three providential strands are coming together at this time, the critical nature of it, and how you can fast and pray tomorrow towards God's leading in it. Father, I ask for your help in the brief handling of this text, and the more expansive explanation of this moment in the life of our church. I ask that I speak nothing but the truth, and I speak it in a way that will be music to the ears of your people in giving life and hope to their souls, and that you will be the center of it, and that it will all feel blood-bought by a glorious Savior that we learned about last week, and that you would move in this congregation to do the kind of calling that we're about to talk about, and that more would be done than we could ever imagine for the cause of Christ here and around the world, because we've taken the moment to do what we do this morning.

Through Christ I pray, amen. Three observations from this text. Number one, the Holy Spirit chose a couple of these teachers and prophets for a new ministry while they were worshiping and fasting.

Let's read that and make sure you see it. Starting at the beginning there of Acts 13, Now there were at Antioch in the church that was there prophets and teachers, Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, and Mana'an who was brought up with Herod, the Tetrarch, and Saul. While they were ministering to the Lord, that is while they were worshiping and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.

So the Holy Spirit does a calling work and instructs the church to do a setting apart work. There's a divine work and a human work here, and that's the way it ought to be with church planting and missionary sending and ordination. There's a divine work, Holy Spirit acts.

But He doesn't act without involving humans in the action. In fact, the perception of the call is perceived with the mind, it's perceived with the heart, there's a human involvement there. And when He instructs them to set apart, they don't do that without getting God involved.

You see that in verse 3, Then when they had fasted and prayed, so they're not going to just say, Okay, the Holy Spirit said do it, let's do it. No, it's not that simple. We will fast and we will pray as we and before we do this thing.

So they're looking up to God saying, I believe we discerned you God to do this, but now we cry out to you, give us the right attitude, give us the right demeanor, give us the right spirit, give us everything we need to do this as we ought to do it, because we think you said do it, help us and then they do it. So God acts and humans act together in this. And that's the way settings apart ought to happen.

And I don't think it's a coincidence here that the setting apart happens in worship and in fasting. Because the setting apart is to the spread of worship. You see the connection? They're in worship, the call comes because it's a call to spread worship.

That's what we're about, spreading a passion for the supremacy of God in all things, for the joy of all peoples, shorten down the spread of worship. So in worship, the spirit moves, calls, they pray some more, get involved with God some more and then they spread or they send and they set apart. Why? So that

Paul and Barnabas will go plant churches in Asia Minor, where there will be worshippers of Jesus Christ, where there weren't any worshippers before.

My own experience testifies that God uses corporate, intense, God-centered, spiritually empowered worship to guide people. Crucial points in my life. I look at these students around here.

When I was 18 years old, maybe 17, I can't remember. Let's see. Just compute here a minute.

When I was 18, I turned 18 January, still wasn't sure where I was going to college in 1964. And God landed on me in White Oak Baptist Church during worship, on the left-hand side, that would have been this side, about three-fourths of the way back with the word Wheaton College. Not Johns Hopkins, not Emory.

It was as clear as a bell to me and it came in worship. It happened also with regard to leaving teaching at Bethel College. There have been about two or three major moments when in addition to all the horizontal strugglings and prayings and wrestlings, a critical moment in corporate worship comes with power and you sense yes to something.

Some call, some decision, break a relationship, get in a relationship, or something big and it comes with power. And I think here we see that happening. They're in worship and they're in fasting and the Holy Spirit moves and says, I want these two, let them go spread worship elsewhere just like you're doing now.

Second observation from this text. These two men that the Holy Spirit touched and called were proven men. I don't know much about Manan and Lucius and Simeon.

I assume they were good men. But I do know something about Saul and Barnabas. Saul, the whole book of Acts is built around his ministry.

We don't have to say anything about Saul slash Paul. Maybe we need to say a word about Barnabas. He may not be as familiar.

If he were more familiar, more kids would be named Barnabas in this church. Chapter 4, verse 36, he is well known among the apostles and they nickname him, his name is Joseph. They nickname him Barnabas, son of encouragement.

You don't get a nickname from the apostles unless you're pretty proven and pretty well known in a ministry. Or we see him in chapter 9, verse 27. Who but Barnabas, son of encouragement, comes in alongside Saul when he's newly converted and nobody believes him and he's an outcast and he said, I'm real, really, I believe in Jesus.

And they don't want to have anything to do with him. It's Barnabas, Mr. Son of Encouragement comes in alongside. Alright, I'll get you in there and we'll work this out.

Or thirdly, chapter 11, verse 22. Here's the church in Antioch exploding because of the church being planted owing to the sufferings of Stephen and they have no leaders. And so the church in Jerusalem says, who are we going to send? Let's send the Son of Encouragement.

He always encourages people. So there goes Barnabas off to the new church plant in Antioch. And fourthly, in chapter 11, verse 30.

When the church in Antioch has to send money for the poor saints in Jerusalem and they're wondering, are they going to feel bad about this because we're treating them like a welfare case and will they receive this gift in the right spirit? Who should we send? Let's send Mr. Son of Encouragement, Barnabas. So we know something about Barnabas. And when the Holy Spirit moves on these five teachers and prophets He says, I want Saul and I want Barnabas to leave the church and do a new thing.

So here Rick and Randy down here getting ready to be sent away. That's where this text is coming from. These were not men that when they were gone the church said, whew, they're gone because they didn't do anything to cause trouble anyway.

That's not the way they spoke about Saul and Barnabas. They were the kind of men that the church probably said, say what, Holy Spirit? You can't take them both. Maybe we got one of them right, but you can't take them both.

That's the kind of men they were. Third observation. The result of this calling was an unspeakably powerful and successful spread of the church in Asia Minor.

You know what happened. Saul and Barnabas head out. They go to Cyprus, Salamis planted church, Pergamum, Antioch, Pisidia, Lystra, Iconium, Derby.

And they come back through strengthening the saints. And there for the first time the church is penetrating into the totally unreached Roman pagan culture because some group fasted and prayed and heard God say, let the best go. And we are the beneficiaries 2,000 years later of that prayer meeting.

End of exposition. That's the sermon. Now, we are at a point, I'm calling a defining moment in Bethlehem for three strands of providence, call them that, are coming together and the elders are wrestling with how they should be woven into a strong ministry rope for the future and it's not completely clear to us on some counts.

Let me tell you the three strands and I'm going to ask you at the end of this service to fast tomorrow and pray for a very crucial meeting and some other things. Strand number one. This is the familiar one.

In 1997, the elders knew it was coming, they could see it. The children's ministries were burgeoning. The youth ministry was burgeoning, about 75% growth in children's ministries over the last three years since then and 55% roughly in youth teenage ministries since then.

And we knew we had an old dilapidated sanctuary. It served us well, thank you God, for 115 years. Bless you old building and farewell.

And we'll have some wonderful service before this is over in which we thank God for a thousand baptisms and a thousand weddings and funerals and many of you are going to shed tears when that building goes grunge under those awful machines but it's got a goal because it's not worth repairing and we knew that and there's a mindset in the church, that's okay, we can handle that. Our hearts are not in buildings but it's got to be replaced by something, you know, four or five stories tall that'll cost four or five million dollars and that was the banner, education for exaltation in 1997. We saw it coming, we started planning for it.

That's one strand. We made a real bad mistake and you can't do anything about finitude but here's the mistake we made. I went back yesterday and got out the documents.

There's a document called SumDoc, summary document. Got about five documents in it. They all summarize what was going on in those days and I read them and I read 18 assumptions that we listed.

Wrote them down, 1997 and the most surprising one to read now is the one about attendance statistics concerning this service. Here's what I read. 1998, 1296 in worship.

1999, 1399 in worship. 2000, 1510 in worship. 2004, break the 2000 mark and be ready to move with phase two.

Well, last Sunday there were 2100 people in worship. Four out of the seven Sundays this year we've been over 2000 and we're four years early and the elders didn't expect that. We saw it coming last fall.

That barrier was broken way back earlier last year. And so the second strand is not simply that we have to have for the sake of the vision we have concerning how to do children's ministries on Wednesday and Sunday and in families and during the week. We need that old dilapidated thing to come down and be replaced by something bigger and more effectively useful.

We got a problem in this service because we're four to five years ahead of schedule on our timeline. We just missed it. We don't know what happened.

Why has there been 78% growth since 1997? We don't know what's going on. And so that strand too, and tomorrow night at 7.15 the elders and those blessed guys have been meeting until 11 and 12 at night. Over and over they met on Valentine's Day night until 11.30. Can you imagine the marital problems we have created? This is very dangerous.

So Noelle and I did our Valentine's thing on Thursday. Thank you for our Thursday date. To the Science Museum.

We didn't even go to Pizza Hut. But I won't get into detail there. To another place.

That's strand two. What do we do with this room full right now? Do we turn people away at the doors? We can handle parking by ramps and stuff. Thank you.

Bless you if you park in the ramp down beside the Strutware building. Bless you. 55 of you parked in the ramp and walked three blocks last Sunday when it was cold.

Thank you. Thank you. Here's strand number three.

This is the one we're about this morning. And I think they're all going to come together in some incredibly exciting way. And the elders need to have wisdom to see it.

Third strand is this. We've said as a church for years you can't just expand and expand and expand on this corner. You've got to figure out a way to spread the vision and spread the people and plant churches and re-infuse life into churches.

We've got to figure out a way to do that. And we've always said that, said that, said that, said that. We've done a little bit of it.

Not very programmatically or very effectively in terms of size. Now, God has seemed to be doing something more. And the elders, I think, are just trying to play catch-up ball with what God is doing these

days.

Which perhaps is the way it ought to happen anyway. Back in 1997, we called one of those five documents that I read, the Gideon Venture. And all we meant by the Gideon Venture, remember Gideon had some Amalekites, no, Midianites to defeat.

And he had 10,000 men. And the Holy Spirit said another surprising thing. Not just send away two, but send away 9,700.

That was the Gideon Venture. And we said, well, what would correspond to that? And we said, no debt. That would be the Gideon Venture.

Five million dollars between now and September 2001. We move into it in the fall of 2001. No debt.

That's impossible. So the Gideon Venture. But it did not occur to us as clearly as it does now that God, maybe, in that word Gideon Venture, was saying, I really mean Gideon.

Namely, at the moment when you need the people to give the most, send them away. That's what God's doing. That's what God's doing.

This morning. So I'm calling you, lots of you, to leave Bethlehem. This morning.

That's the point of this service. To leave and be a part of another vision. Let me tell you the vision.

Here's what's happened. Grace Church Richfield is at 7101 Nicollet Avenue South, about halfway between the crosstown and 494. Straight south on Nicollet.

Very easy to get to from here as you go. And they've been without a senior preaching pastor for over two years. Paul Dreblo, who is a part of our church, has been the interim there for a couple of years.

And during that time, the elders, two of which are here, and I'll introduce them to you in a moment, crafted a document called, which you're going to receive in your hands as you go, the Chief End of Grace Church Richfield, which was shared with us May of last year at Chuck Sedum's house on the third floor of his dwelling. And I read this with amazement because it was a magnificent document. It's about three pages long.

And it is a beautiful, God-centered, Bible-saturated, visionary, mission-driven statement of what life in Christ and life in a church can be and should be. And when I read it, I thought, this can be a very wonderful foundation for some kind of partnership if the two churches ever want it. In March, before that meeting, I think it was, Kenny and Paul Dreblo had been talking about whether there should be any kind of alliance or partnership between Bethlehem and grace.

And they presented it to the elders. The elders brought that document to us. They said, here's who we are.

Does that look like some way to talk? And we came away from that saying, does it ever? In July of last summer, they took that document, those elders, to the whole church at grace and said, are you willing, as a church, to say, yes, this is who we are, can we move on this? And the church united around that in a formal way. In August, August 15 of last year, the church was asked, second step, are you willing for us to go to Bethlehem and dream with them about some kind of partnership or alliance that would be mutually beneficial to both our churches? And the church also gave a green light to that. Now, the next step

happened in a most remarkable way, which caused me to choose the text that I chose today, because I believe Acts 13, 1 to 5 happened to us in October 19.

We were in a room, as you walk through from here to the other old building that's going to come down, and there's an A104, that's where our staff meets and prays on Tuesdays. And we were meeting and praying, and the elders had sent an email to Sam, or I don't know who got the email, anyway, it was brought to us as a staff, and read to us. And the email said, here's what our church has done in July, here's what our church has done in August, and we are now formally presenting to you a desire to form what I believe they called, quote, partnership for rebirth.

So a desire to see a new vision happen there at Grace Church, Richfield. And it involved possibly just a lot of possibilities, nothing in concrete yet, possibly sending a preaching pastor, possibly infusing worshippers and workers there, and so on. Now, at that moment, we could have, as a staff, simply said, good idea, let's keep talking.

But that's not what we did, we said, this feels so right, and so momentous, let's just pray. So we went to prayer, and when we were done praying, we looked up, and we looked at each other, and three of us almost simultaneously said, Rick Gamache. Now, Rick, who's sitting here, who prayed a minute ago, has been here for 12 years.

Rick is the manager for theological consultation, or whatever we call it, in Desiring God Ministries. He runs the bookstore, if you've ever loved that bookstore, you owe its stocking to Rick Gamache's vision for it. And he's a graduate of Bethel Seminary, and he's taught the joint heirs class for some time.

And we looked at each other and said, Grace Church should be told, and Rick should be told, they should talk to each other. Now, we could have left it at that, but instead, staff meeting was over, it was time to go to lunch, and I said, look, before we go, let me just go get Rick. This feels so big, let me just go get Rick, and tell him what's going to happen with the rest of his life.

And I went to get him, he was working in the bookstore, I said, I want you to come to the staff meeting, because we think we just heard from God about your future, and we'd like to pray over you. And so we sat him down in there, and said, look, we don't have time to tell you what's been going on for all these months, but we think God is calling you to present yourself, if they'll have you to be a candidate for the pastorate at Grace Richfields, so let's pray. And we prayed over him, and laid our hands upon him, and sent him on his way.

Now, to collapse the story into a sentence, on January 30th, Rick preached his candidating sermon at Grace Richfields. On February 6th, two Sundays ago, the church voted, yes, this is the pastor, if he'll come. And last Sunday, the church voted that I could be free to do what I'm doing now, namely recruit as many of you as I can to go with him to Grace.

They're eager and ready for God to move here on that decision. Rick has a wife, Delaine, who was sitting in first service right down there, four children, Bronte, and Thaxton, and Cosette, and Yaroslav, whom they just adopted, and who's had a couple of surgeries since they adopted him. And there were other names that arose during that prayer time, and one of them was Randy Westland, who's sitting here, and his wife, Kathy, who's not in this service either.

And Randy has felt, along with Rick, the same kind of call, and so these two men will go out from us to be part of the eldership team at Grace Richfields in the coming month. So the question is, how many of you will go with them? Now, before I issue a very concrete call to prayer and fasting tomorrow, I want Rick to come and take a few minutes to share with you. So, Rick, why don't you take whatever time you need to say what's on your heart.

I just want to take a couple of minutes to give you a peek into the window of how God led us to Grace Church Richfield, us being Delaine and I. This is a peek behind the scenes of the history that John laid out for you, as it related directly to me and Delaine. And I hope that it's going to prove helpful and hopeful for those called to go to Grace Church Richfield, whether it's five of you or 50 of you, and for those called to stay. These are a series of journal entries, handwritten by my wife Delaine, and they represent the means by which God more than likely won't lead you to Grace Church Richfield.

Because on June 15, 1998, first entry in front of me, God very plainly, very plainly, in the context of word-saturated prayer, and in response to a sermon preached from this pulpit by Brent Nelson, declared to Delaine that we would be leaving Bethlehem for the pastoral ministry shortly. And that was nine months before the elders of grace ever came to the elders of Bethlehem and said, could we work on a partnership? Now, I think God does that very rarely. And one of the reasons I think that he does that very rarely is because when he does that, it's so subjective.

And that kind of subjective perception leaves us with almost no sense of confidence that what we've heard was really from God. So what I have here in my hand is a year's worth of my wife's prayerfully expressing her doubts, her frustrations, her agonizing over the spontaneous word that the Lord just dropped in her mind that I didn't share. Now, I knew that God had stirred in Delaine some kind of sense for a new venture in ministry, but I didn't know that these journals existed until I was well into the search committee process at Grace Church Richfield.

Delaine very wisely, I think, simply put her hand to her mouth, wrote in her journal, and prayed very, very hard. But I knew enough of this stirring in my wife so that when Pastor John came and took me out of the bookstore and explained to me this vision for Grace Church Richfield, I stood dumbstruck just thinking over and over again, my wife is a prophet, my wife is a prophet, my wife is a prophet. But still, there was no direct declaration from God to me.

So I went to the only place I know to go when I'm looking for God's leading. I went to the Word. And I judged my motives and my qualifications for the task that I was apparently being called to by it.

And I prayed the Word, specifically Romans 12, 2, that I would not be conformed to this world, but that I'd be transformed by the renewing of my mind so that I may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. So God's will concerning me and Grace Church Richfield needed to be proved. And that to me meant it needed to be examined, it needed to be verified, and then finally in the end it needed to be accepted by my mind.

By my mind, a renewed mind, not ordinary thought processes, but the thought processes of a mind that's been renewed and transformed. And transformed by the Word. So in utter dependence on the Holy Spirit, I learned everything I could about Grace Church Richfield to see if it was the right fit.

I sought wisdom like James encourages us to in faith without doubting. I didn't just want to put my hope in external compliance with instructions God may or may not have given to my wife. In the end, I still had two

really good choices before me.

Ministry with Desiring God Ministries or ministry with Grace Church Richfield. And as I prayed, and as I delved into the Word, something very wonderful and something very startling happened. I examined the Word, myself, Grace Church Richfield, mainly through that wonderful Chief End document that I hope you all read.

I verified what I sensed was happening by prayer, reflection, counsel, pulpit search committee process, and finally I embraced that which I desired more. Startlingly enough, shockingly enough, the pulpit at Grace Church Richfield. And the reason it's so startling to me is because I love my ministry at Desiring God Ministries.

And I love my co-laborers. And I love my co-laborers on staff at Bethlehem Baptist Church. And as I look out at you all, my heart overflows in affection.

And it was also startling because this desire, even though it was all-absorbing and encompassing, which is the way that Charles Spurgeon defined a call, an all-encompassing, all-absorbing intense desire for the work, even though that was there, I still felt pangs. Delane wrote on that day in June 1998, this is exciting and painful if we are to leave our beloved Bethlehem. To leave would feel like birth pains.

And it does. And I don't doubt that for you, five or fifty who are to come to Grace Church Richfield, that the decision to leave Bethlehem will be painful. It will be painful.

But I know that if you go prayerfully to the Word, if you come to the informational meeting on Wednesday night at 7 o'clock and then the infusion meetings on Sunday nights at Grace Church Richfield, in utter dependence on the Holy Spirit, seeking to be transformed by a renewing of your mind to prove what the will of God is, then your desire to stay or your desire to go will be God-shaped. And that God-shaped desire will be your guide. So, here's my prayer for you all.

And it's been for some time. And I know I speak for Randy Westland and for Mark Alderton and John Huspenny, the elders at Grace. Paul wrote it to the Colossians and we say it now to you.

Since the day we heard of the infusion of worshipers from Bethlehem to Grace Church Richfield, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will and all spiritual wisdom and understanding so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God, strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience, joyously giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. Now, as we move towards a closing challenge, let me just remind you, make sure you have your ring book and that you get your packet and especially that you get Rick's letter. This letter is really crucial and you'll see a staple to it, the chief end of Grace Church Richfield here.

So after lunch today, sit down on your favorite chair and read this and then put it in the sermon section of the book. Let me close by calling you to pray and fast tomorrow. Here's what I would like you to do.

Defining moment. Here's the way I would put the defining moment most concretely as it relates to the third strand. First strand, educational expansion, new building, lots of money.

Second strand, how do you handle the growth in this room, in these services. Third strand, the releasing, sending, church planting strand and this is not the end of the story. I know of two other visions in the making right now in this church that are going to result in the same kind of thing probably.

So the third strand goes like this. Can we as a church over the next 10 years, say the 10 to 15 latter years of the Piper time, as I transition toward retirement in 11 to 12 years or whatever you let me stay till, I'm 54. Can we increasingly become a centrifugal as well as a centripetal force in the cities? It's relatively easy to be a centripetal force, produce some good worship and good music and clear preaching and people tend to come.

But it's not easy to be a centrifugal force because as we've heard, leaving is hard if you like people, if you like the way things are done, if you like whatever you like about it. And so the question is over those years, can we spin off people to other churches or plant other churches? That's the big question and that's the third strand and there's got to be a connection between strand three and strand two, it seems to me. Otherwise, you're stuck with ever greater expansion on one site which seems like it's just got to stop somewhere and yet God doesn't ever intend us to stop growing.

The Lord added unto the church daily as many as were being saved. It would be a sin not to see that happen regularly. But it doesn't have to be here.

It doesn't have to be in this location. So that's the key question. Now here's what I want to do.

I'm going to invite Rick and Randy to stand here and Mark and John to come stand here. Any of our elders, other elders, would you just come? I didn't tell you I was going to do this but any other Bethlehem elders, come and line up behind them here. A good many were in the first service.

I don't know how many are in this service but if any of you is in this service and not working elsewhere, come in with us. This is Mark Alderson and John Huspenny. They're the elders who have been so significant in crafting the document, working it through with their people and in mightily trusting God in these years of transition at grace.

Now, I'm going to pray for them while we put our hands on them right now. And when I'm done praying, while your heads are still bowed, I'm going to ask you to raise your hand if you'll commit to two things. Usually it's just one thing.

Will you pass on one meal tomorrow and during the time you might have spent eating, breakfast, lunch or supper, pray for 15 minutes of that for two things. The elders meeting tomorrow night. It feels very big and we have not been able to get the kind of breakthrough we want in how these three strands come together.

We have been taken off guard by what's happened in recent days and we're just not sure how all the pieces fit and God is not the least confused about this and we need to just get in tune with Him. So pray that. Number two, would you pray, Lord, am I one of the goers? Make it plain.

And Lord, send the group that should go. It's those prayers. Prayers for the elders, prayer for the sending and I'll ask you in a minute to just commit to that.

We're not asking for any commitment to go this morning, that's premature. Wednesday night, 7 o'clock, while I'm teaching in here, Rick and these guys will be in there and you can ask them every question that's in your head right now in the fellowship hall and then there'll be follow-up meetings down at Grace and

you'll be able to think it through, pray it through, discuss it through. You may be teaching a Sunday school class right now, you may be leading a small group, you may be on the elder council, you may be on the staff and God says you go and we'll accept God's leading.

So let's pray. Get in place, you guys. Let's get on them, elders.

Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you for these brothers. The rocks that have endured, the winds at Grace there and now stand ready for a new day. We pray that you would honor their faith and their labors with joy and with a passion for God in all things, for the joy of all Richfield and all the southern suburbs and all the nations.

Would you be on Rick and Randy as they go out from us and on their wives, Delaine and Kathy, and on their children, oh God. And would you be at work in this room right now to quicken desire to be a part of something new, some venture, something unpredictable. God, it's not a life of ease that you call us to.

Grant that our people would say, yes, where you are calling and we leave the number to you because you know exactly how many would be good for them and how many would be good for us to say farewell to. We don't know that number, you know the number. You do the number, oh God, according to your great wisdom and love for both churches, I pray.

And now while your heads are still bowed, I just think it would be helpful for you to make a commitment. Lift your hand if you'll fast like I ask you to tomorrow, one meal. Thank you so much.

That's a lot of prayer that's going to go up tomorrow. You can put them down and we elders will be counting on that tomorrow night. And now, Lord, we commit our lives to you as you dismiss us in your grace.

Through Christ I pray, amen. Thank you for listening to this message by John Piper, pastor for preaching at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Feel free to make copies of this message to give to others, but please do not charge for those copies or alter the content in any way without permission.

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