

Over the past several years, King David's words in Psalm 37 have been the fuel for the fires of my prayers to our Lord. Verses 3–7 have exhorted me to “Trust in the LORD, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness. *Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act...Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him.*” In the intimate moments of silence and solitude with our Heavenly Father, I experienced what I can only best describe as a “stirring” of my heart. In fact, both my wife, Laura, and I sensed this “stirring” both individually and together. We asked many questions; we waited; we fasted and prayed; and we sought counsel from a few of those near to us whom we are confident love and fear God with all their hearts. Through the process of evaluating this increasing stirring, Laura and I believed God was guiding my path to pursue being a Lead Pastor-Teacher and Elder.

This discovery was exciting and terrifying, joyful and painful since we recognized that this would likely mean that the Lord was not only giving us more clarity about our direction in ministry, but it also meant that he was likely preparing to send us on a new adventure to minister away from our church home at Valley Bible. Over the past 7 months, Laura and I have invited our sons—Judah and Benjamin—and our daughter—Alethea—to join us in prayer to seek God's wisdom for our next steps. After many moments around our table reading the Bible, praying, having candid conversations, and shedding tears, we opened our hearts and hands to submit ourselves to the plans of our Lord—wherever he may lead us.

Jesus had this to say about prayer in Matthew 7:7–8, “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.” In January of this year, we began knocking to see if the Lord was opening a door for us to walk through. In our search, we discovered a church who had similar biblical convictions to Valley Bible and who had a DNA related the kind of family community and love manifested in diversity that we enjoy in our church. I had been warned by some friends who had embarked on similar journeys that the process to become a Senior Pastor at a church could be both lengthy and painful, since it likely would require multiple “no's” before finally receiving a “yes.” I wasn't searching for a job, but I was seeking to answer the Lord's call. And, after multiple interviews with just one church—yes, just one—and after a weekend spent candidating with that church, and after much prayer and counsel, I have accepted the call to be the Senior Pastor and an Elder at Fairfax Bible Church in Northern Virginia near Washington D.C. The simplicity and clarity the Lord has given us at times has been startling. Jesus promised to answer us when we “ask, seek, and knock,” but our mustard-seed-sized faith often recoils when God actually does what we ask in his name. *The nerve of God to answer our prayers!* However, we are confident that the Lord has blown the door wide open to us after we have spent much time “asking, seeking, and knocking” to discover his wisdom and direction for us.

The Nicosias' last Sunday at Valley Bible Church will be May 1<sup>st</sup>, and my last day as Associate Pastor will be May 6<sup>th</sup>. The Elders of Valley Bible Church—Pastor Larry Howard, Pastor Tim Vahlstrom, Chuck Latibeaudiere, Edwin Chandra, Jeff Joya, and Randy Osti—have been aware

of the potential of this transition for our family and for our church since early February. These men, while we all feel sad at the idea of having to say “goodbye,” have been extremely supportive and caring of us. I am so thankful for their patience and grace with my family and me through this process, and I will be forever grateful for the opportunities they have given to me to assist them in shepherding Christ’s flock, preaching his gospel, and being poured out for the sake of the mission of God’s kingdom in our community.

I am sure this news may come as shocking, sad, and even disappointing. It’s as difficult to deliver this news right now as it is to receive it. I *love* Valley Bible Church. Laura and our kids *love* Valley Bible Church. My mother, Nancy (who eventually will move to Fairfax, Virginia, as well to be with us) *loves* Valley Bible Church. It’s where we found shelter when we were spiritual refugees. It’s where Laura and I were married (in fact, Pastor Phil Howard married us right there in front of this stage). It’s where we grew as disciples in Christ. It’s where we’ve enjoyed some of our deepest and sweetest friendships. It’s where we learned to serve and where we discovered our spiritual gifts. It’s where our kids heard the gospel and were baptized. *Valley Bible Church is our family*. And, as the Nicosias begin the process of replacing our current house with a new one, as we look for new schools, and market places, and restaurants, and coffee shops, and learn to shovel snow in the winter, and discover the quickest routes to get around our new city, there is one thing that could never be replaced—and that’s *you*, our family at Valley Bible Church. We are *adding* a new family at Fairfax Bible Church, but *you* could never be replaced in our hearts!

Laura, Judah, Benjamin, Alethea, Mom, and I recently read Acts 20, where Paul, on his voyage to Jerusalem, said goodbye to a group of people, the Ephesians, whom he loved so dearly. Since he didn’t have much time to spend with them, they left the city and met him at a nearby port town. He expressed his love for them and they expressed theirs for him since they didn’t know if or when they would ever see each other again. Acts 20:36–37 describes them praying, weeping, and embracing because of their love for one another. And after that encounter, Paul got in his ship and sailed away for Jerusalem in obedience to Christ. The Nicosias aren’t gone yet—you’ll have us around for another month (And, we want to spend time with you!). I’ll get several more opportunities to preach from this pulpit and lead our Small Group and Laura will still be ministering to our babies and their families for a little longer. But as May 1<sup>st</sup> approaches we’ll pray, we’ll hug each another, and I’m sure we’ll shed some tears...and then the Nicosias will sail away. And, while this is sad to consider, I also rejoice in it. For, if there were no prayers, no embraces, no tears, and no sadness it would mean there were no partnerships, no friendships, and no love between us these past twenty years. Our sadness reveals *the depth of our love* for one another. And that love—the love we have enjoyed at Valley Bible Church—makes all the tears and sadness worth it.

We love you, family, and we will never cease praying for you. And, since we are here this morning not to focus on any one of us, but to worship Jesus and hear from his word, let’s pray right now to express our thankfulness to our Father and ask the Spirit to prepare our hearts to receive the message of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ from the Scriptures.