

“An Accumulation of Seasons”

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

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I stand before you today with a variety of emotions and a lump in my throat. I want to talk to you about my future and yours.

Last Thursday evening, I announced my retirement to the deacons. That same day a letter was mailed from the office to our members informing them of my plans. Today, I wish to share what will be the first of many ways I'll attempt to express my deep love for you and profound appreciation for the opportunity to be your pastor.

Before I go any further, I want you to know this decision has come after months of prayerful consideration and discussions with peers whose counsel I value. I have never traveled down this road and knew I needed to talk with others who have. They have helped me make this decision.

I have also consulted the scriptures, and I spent time pondering Ecclesiastes 3:1-8. Once again, Solomon's poetry reminded me that life is a journey, an accumulation of seasons through which we move.

“There is a time for everything and a season for every activity under heaven.”
(Ecclesiastes 3:1) Wise advice and wise is the person who knows what it is time to do.

I have told you on many occasions the hardest decisions I make are usually between two good choices. This has certainly been true for me in recent weeks. I love being a pastor, especially the pastor of this historic church, but like you, I also love my family.

To be candid with you, I have found myself repeatedly saying no to invitations from family members to do something or to go somewhere with them. The day will come when I won't be able to do what they are asking, and I don't want to live with the regret I suspect I will feel.

This decision is not all about me, however. My life as a minister never has been.

It is time for our church to have a pastor with a fresh set of eyes and ideas. I know what God sent me to do at First Baptist, and I have tried my best to be faithful to that calling.

I also know what First Baptist needs moving forward, and I am not the one to make these dreams come true. I don't possess the skills or knowledge your next pastor needs and will certainly have.

This is why one of my goals for the last year has been to prepare the church for the next transition. More than anything, I wanted the church to enter this season of transition from a position of strength, confidence and hope.

I feel we are now ready to embark on this new journey. Just about every piece of the puzzle has fallen into place, and as Solomon would say to us, "It is time."

There are three things I want you to know as I share this news with you today.

I have made this decision at a time when my love for you and appreciation for you is higher than it has ever been. And it started on a mountain peak.

The tie that binds us together is strong and always will be. We will forever be linked as friends, dear friends.

Your kindness will never be forgotten by Jackie or me. It is your hospitality that drew us to you and our precious memories that will draw us back many times to visit.

Kentucky will always be our home and all roads lead to Frankfort. We'll travel this way frequently and come to this sacred space where heaven and earth meet.

I cannot thank you enough for giving me the privilege of being your pastor for almost seven years and for opening your hearts and lives to Jackie and me. It is our relationship with you that we cherish most. It is our friendship that will last throughout all eternity.

I echo Paul's sentiments when I say, "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you." (Philippians 1:3) Thank you for being so good to us.

I have made this decision at a time when my confidence in you is greater than it has ever been. You have exceeded all my expectations.

In my time with you, you have responded to every need that has been brought to your attention, and you have met every challenge. I have no doubt this will continue under the leadership of this excellent staff and a new pastor.

My confidence in you is rooted in two things. The first is your strong desire to make hope visible to the least of these living among us.

The ministries we are engaged in at First Baptist are some of the most innovative and effective I have ever participated in and witnessed. When it comes to being the presence of Christ through social ministries that give people hope and lift them out of despair, First Baptist is in a league of its own.

We are not like any other Baptist church in Kentucky that I am aware of. We have nailed down our mission, purpose and uniqueness and know why we exist.

For us, the call to follow Jesus is a call to value love over hate, serving over being served, sacrifice over self-indulgence, truth over deception, justice over injustice, inclusion over exclusion, generosity over greed, humility over arrogance, forgiveness over revenge, healing over hurting and peace over violence.

Our call to follow Jesus is a call to be passionate about confronting evil, righting wrong, lifting up the lowly, liberating the oppressed, healing the sick, feeding the hungry, comforting the grieving, giving people another chance and building bridges of goodwill, understanding, reconciliation and hope instead of erecting walls of suspicion and hate.

I am confident you will never forsake this calling. It is imbedded in your DNA, and it is why God is using you to make the world a better place for all people.

The second reason I have so much confidence in you is because of the staff who remains to lead you through this transition. My colleagues and dear friends are competent, committed, conscientious, responsible, trustworthy, industrious and in touch with the Spirit of God.

They are poised and ready to lead, and I know you will follow. You love, appreciate and trust them as much as I do.

My decision to retire at this time is also grounded in God's goodness and faithfulness.

I am convinced God believes in you as much as I do and will lead you through this transition. God will take each step with you and provide what you need.

This is due in great part to the kind of church First Baptist is. First Baptist is the church that says yes to divine challenges when other churches say no, and every time we have said yes, God has, too!

I have always loved hearing you sing Thomas O Chisholm's hymn, 'Great is Thy Faithfulness'. You sing it with a profound sense of certainty and gratitude.

Keep singing it. Keep humming it. Keep praying it. Keep believing it.

And then, sing it once again on the day you call your new pastor.