

The Goodness and the Groaning of Growth

by John Piper

The sermon emphasizes the importance of growth and the challenges that come with it, but also highlights the need for humility and dependence on God.

Duration: 52:04

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Acts 2:41-42, Acts 2:46, Ephesians 3:20, 1 Timothy 3:1-13

Topics: "Church Growth", "Faithful Giving"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of keeping one's word to the Lord. He encourages the congregation to continue giving financially even during the summer season. The preacher also urges the church members to prioritize prayer and fasting, specifically asking for wisdom and unity among the elders. The sermon addresses the potential growth of the church and the need to adapt to the distinct needs of different communities.

Transcript

Acts chapter 2 verse 36. Let all the house of Israel know therefore for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified. Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, brothers what shall we do? And Peter said to them, repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself. And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them saying, save yourselves from this crooked generation. So those who received his word were baptized and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

And they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and fellowship to the breaking of bread and prayers. And awe came upon every soul and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common.

And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all as any had need. And day by day attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

So you're probably looking at that text and that title and saying where's Romans 10? We were supposed to finish Romans 10 today. Great way to bring the summer in with completing a chapter in Romans and it's not there. What happened? Well, what happened was an elder meeting on Tuesday night in which we felt the weight of these days the next seven weeks so keenly that the elder said to me, I think you better change your plans and address the issue of where we are as a church, where we've come from, where we are, where we're going and root it in the scriptures and bring them up to speed as to what is happening among us.

So my aim is to do that and to call you to seven weeks of prayer and fasting and I'll give you the details of that later. Let's pray. Father in heaven, I pray that you would come and rest upon this people with the weight of glory.

It's a glorious thing to be the church of Jesus Christ. Now unto him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly beyond all that you ask or think through the power at work within you, to him be glory in the church. In the church.

To him be glory in the church. To him be glory, to you be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever. Oh Lord, I long for you to be glorified in the church.

We're a little fragment, a little expression of that global reality and we want to be faithful. We want to discern your leading and so I'm asking Lord for now and the next seven weeks that you would arrive in a new kind of shepherd-like way among us so that the elders sense more clearly and with more certainty how you're leading us in the crucial decisions that are before us and I ask that you would put upon the people now this morning a sense of happy burden so that they would walk with us through these weeks, whether they're on vacation or whether they're at home, they would walk with us in fasting and prayer so that we would discern our next steps. I ask this now in Jesus' name.

Amen. Now you see the title of the message, the goodness and the groaning of growth. That's the way some of us feel, all of us from time to time and some of us more than others and I want to make sure that you hear it in the right way.

Growth is good and blessings are on us and they bring these blessings groaning and I'm going to mention at the end of the message ten blessings that are on this church of the dozens that could be mentioned and I stress that because I don't want you to hear the word groaning as synonymous with complaining because what you're going to hear is that all fruitful, divine, blessed work of God comes through groaning. There is no other way to minister in the fallen, futile church. Let me give you an example of that from Paul.

He was a church planting, missionary apostle and stunningly successful, right? And in 2 Corinthians chapter 11 he was cataloging his ministry and here's what he climaxed that list with. 2 Corinthians 11.28, and apart from all the other things there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. Now we're talking about stunningly successful ministry.

He's planting churches through Asia Minor and Greece and he'd love to go to Italy and on to Spain and God is blessing and the church is growing and Paul is suffering and he's saying there is on me the daily pressure of my anxiety for all the churches. That's the only way blessing comes. So don't hear me saying that the elders are groaning, that they're complaining or that they want to run away from it.

We embrace it. There's no other way to lead. There's no other road but the Calvary road.

But do hear me, we need you and we need you praying and fasting for the next seven weeks. That's what I will call you to and need to give some background for that. So let's go to the book of Acts chapter 2. We're going to jump in here right after Peter's message to the great crowds that had gathered for the Pentecost about fifty days after the resurrection of Jesus.

He's gone now for ten days or so and he's preached and God has acted. Let's start at verse 41. So those who have received his word were baptized and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

Now that is phenomenal sudden church growth. Three thousand people and it didn't stop right there. Chapter 4 verse 4. Many of those who had heard the word believed and the number of the men, now that's a gender specific word in Greek.

We're talking men, not women. So double the number. The men came to about five thousand.

So even leaving room for the fact that many of them on Pentecost were from out of town and left, we're talking ten thousand people within months. And you got eleven men who got a scramble to train leaders, get them organized, get them into houses, somehow do worship, somehow do pastoral care, somehow mobilize for missions, somehow care for the needy, no government welfare, everything falls on these eleven. And my question is how'd they do that? That gives some realism now to verse 42.

And they, these thousands, devoted themselves, we'll come back to that word in a few minutes so mark it, devoted themselves to the apostles teaching. So there are eleven apostles and no printing presses, no email, to the apostles teaching and fellowship to the breaking of bread and prayers. Now how'd they do that? I don't doubt that they were already at work training elders.

They show up pretty soon in the book of Acts, but at this point we've got eleven plus the hundred and twenty men and women who were praying in the house when the Spirit fell and boom three thousand the first day and thousands. Now before we make any comments about their management of this growth, we need to hear this as good. It's obvious but it needs to be said that when Luke is writing these things and saying there's three thousand, there's five thousand that they were adding to the church daily, that's good.

Luke was not saying I wish this hadn't happened and this caused a great burden, this made people groan, this made people confused, they didn't know what to do. There's not a peep of that. This is just glory.

This is glory. God has come down. People are being rescued from perishing.

This is really good that the church in Jerusalem grew like this. And my guess, and I think I have basis for the guess, is that there was chaos, absolute chaos in the church in Jerusalem. And I don't think it ever stopped being chaos.

They did pretty good caring for their poor people at the beginning. They were selling things and sharing things, but it got so bad so fast Paul had to collect money from all the churches in Greece and Macedonia and bring it there because everything fell apart in Jerusalem later on. It was just one administrative mess, which is the only way the church will ever be.

I don't know of any period in history or any church in the New Testament that was not a messy church. Now here's the evidence I'm acting on. Chapter 6. You can go there with me if you want to.

Acts chapter 6. Let's read the evidence of the mess. Verse 1. Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, and you can feel the weight of that as you go on, that's what's causing the wonderful problems. The disciples were increasing in number.

A complaint, now the word there even sounds like groaning in Greek, gongousmos. It's an ugly word. Gongousmos.

A gongousmos arose by the Hellenists, those were the Greek speaking Jews, against the Hebrews, those were the Aramaic speaking Jews, because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. It was the proverbial crack through which people were falling. So from the beginning you have these eleven trying to not only manage pastoral care and corporate worship and mobilizing in missions and caring for children, but they had to care for the social needs of the widows because they didn't have any government to fall back on and so trying to put all that together, it wasn't working.

And so verse 2, the twelve summoned the full number, I have not a clue how they did that, we're talking three thousand people, unless there's some other understanding of that that I don't know. They summoned the full number of the disciples and said, it's not right that we should give up preaching the word of God and serve tables, therefore brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty but we will devote ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the word. Now don't misread that by saying, well why are you elders spending so much time on these diddly administrative things anyway because you ought to be praying and preaching and evangelizing and let others do this, that's not what happened here.

Sure, you let others do it, once you figure it out, the elders, that is the apostles here, got together, they heard the problem, widows are not being fed and it looks like an ethnic thing. Well, we'll fix this and the plan they came up with was seven, where'd they get that number, I don't know, seven, spirit filled, that's a good biblical thing and do it, now we'll go. But they structured it, now the elders at Bethlehem right now are really resting at that level of structure, vision for how this church should be set up so that the blessings can be shepherded well.

Back to verse 42, devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayers. Now my question is, how did 11 plus some other leaders emerging manage 10,000 people in Jerusalem? I have two observations and this is our question, just make sure you feel the relevance of this for us as elders right now, this is how do you manage the 3,000 folks or so who come here and we need to shepherd you, you need to be known by somebody, a name, you need to be cared for and loved and you need to be stirred and sent to do missions and ministry and evangelism, you need to get some little Christian under your wing and bring them along, you need your marriage helped and notice in verse 47 that there never was a settling time here, so many people have the mindset in church of settling, that is, alright, we got these 3,000, now let's figure out these 3,000, good, it never happens that way unless you quit doing your job. Look at verse 47, and the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

In other words, there never was a moment when Peter could catch his breath and say, alright, we got our hands around these 10,000, now here's the way you do 10,000, and say no, no, no, no, no, you get 10% this month and 10% that month and they're all baby believers and don't know anything except Jesus is Lord and should I get out of bed with my girlfriend? That's all they know. There never was a moment where you could settle in and say, oh, good, I like churches of 50, or I like churches of 100, or I like

churches of 500, or I like churches of 15,000 in Louisville, Kentucky or wherever. It never ever should be that way.

There should never be a settling in, saying, oh, we got this figured out, this number, we know how to do this number, not unless you quit caring about the lost. So here's my first observation. I said I had two observations about how they might have gone about it.

The first one comes from the parallel text to verse 42 in verse 46. Look at the way 42 and 46 go together, I think. I said we're coming back to that word devoted, they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching in 42.

Now, in verse 46, it says, and day by day, attending. Well now, in the Greek, that's exactly the same word as in verse 42, devoting. So I'm going to translate it that way so you can see the parallel.

In 42, they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. In 46, they devoted themselves to the temple and to breaking bread. And that reminds you of verse 42? They're eating, receiving food with glad and generous hearts.

So here's what I see. I see this, how are they going to get the teaching of these 11 apostles? They haven't had time to do any seminary education or spread it out very far. They've got 3 to 10,000 people to be disciplined, and it says they devoted themselves to the temple.

Now, if you go to chapter 3 verse 11 and chapter 5 verse 12, you read sentences like this. They were all together in Solomon's portico. Now, Solomon's portico is a big court running along the east side of the temple.

Now, they said all. Maybe it's a loose all. Like, we have 3 services.

You get there at 9 o'clock in the morning, there's 2,000 of you. And then at 10 o'clock in the morning, there's another 2,000 for the hour of prayer. And then about noon, you get another 2,000, and that's about 8,000 because some are sick and babysitting and other things.

And so that's what they meant by all of them in Solomon's portico. However, my first observation is there were big group meetings and there were house meetings. That's a big observation.

And that's probably the way it's always been from time to time throughout the life of the church, at least in the early church, it seemed like they needed to have this big group meeting for whatever reason. Let me read you F.F. Bruce's comment on this. Day by day then, in the weeks that followed the first Christian Pentecost, the believers met regularly in the temple precincts for public worship and public witness while they took their fellowship meals in each other's homes and broke the bread in accordance with their master's ordinance.

And so it appears that, first observation, to manage all these people, they had some big gatherings in the temple and lots and lots and lots of little gatherings, no doubt, in the homes of the people. And somehow they began to manage the burden of all these new converts, teaching them, giving the pastoral care, practical social service care for those in need. And remember this, no telephones and no clocks.

Just staggers the mind. How do you do that? Can't call anybody up to tell them that the meeting's cancelled or is happening. And there's just hundreds of them all over the city.

And there's new people being saved right after the worship service. Outside the temple, somebody professes faith and says, what now? I'm a Christian. And they say, well, uh, about 500 paces down this little alley where there's kind of a grayish house and the rocks are falling off the edge.

Take a right, count six doors and be there about dawn tomorrow. That's hard. We think we got it hard.

That's hard to plant churches like that. That's hard to get 10,000 people organized into some kind of thing when you can't call anybody on the phone, you can't email anybody and you can't tell them it's at five o'clock and not a minute later. It's just incredible that they could pull this off with 10,000 people in Jerusalem.

And I don't think they did pull it off. I think it was chaos. I think it was a mess from the get go.

And we see lots of evidence of that. Here's my second observation. In the New Testament, including the book of Acts and the epistles, God gives us almost no detail as to how to do it.

Okay, big group gatherings do some of that. Little group house gatherings do some of that. Have some goals like care for the saints, build their faith, train them in the way they should go, get everybody praying, do evangelism, do missions, going to reach the nations.

And there'll be elders and deacons, period. That's all I tell you. That's it.

Not how many elders, not how to choose them, not how many deacons, not how to choose them, not what they did in any detail. No organization here spelled out in the New Testament. I don't think that's a divine oversight for this reason.

I think God inspired a book that flexible so that the church could be designed for the Fulani of Cameroon and the Warani of Ecuador. And I think God inspired a book that flexible and the medieval Vikings of Scandinavia and the underground church in China and the nomadic Fulbi who are always moving in Chad and the many cultures of the Twin Cities. That's, I think, why he does not tell us how a church should be structured in detail because if it was perfect for a synagogue-based Jewish group ready to break out into a pagan-based Antioch, ready to break into Greece and Athens and Corinth, ready to break into Rome, ready to go to Spain, ready to go over there to that pagan place called England, up into these Teutonic warrior tribes of Germany.

If it was going to be one thing perfectly structured for one of those, it'd never work in the other one. And so while there are elders and while there are deacons because there are spiritual needs and there are physical needs, that's about it, which leaves the elders of this church on our faces in perplexity. This is not written on the sky.

It's not written in the Bible. Two campuses. One thing is written for us.

Don't be conformed to this world, but be transformed in the renewing of your minds that you may prove what is the will of God for this church, what is good and acceptable and perfect. So get on your faces and get changed, elders. Get changed.

Get your minds so saturated with the Bible. Get your minds so filled with the Spirit. Get your hearts and minds so full of love for this flock, so broken for this city that when you're on your face long enough and you've humbled yourself before me, I'll make it plain how to do church in Minneapolis.

And it isn't plain. That's why I'm calling you to seven weeks of prayer and fasting. We need your help.

We feel very urgent about this. Let's look at an example of what happened when that happens in chapter 13. Want to go to 13 with me? Here's a situation in Antioch.

Now, know this. It wasn't any big strategic plan of the apostles to get to Antioch. They failed.

They heard Jesus say, you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth, and they camped in Jerusalem until God struck them down with a persecution from Stephen. It cost Stephen his life to get the church moving to Antioch. Nobody was out evangelizing among the leaders of Jerusalem.

They were disobedient. God was blessing the socks off of them in their disobedience. If God didn't bless disobedient people, I'd be a dead man.

But they got there because he dispersed them, and they went everywhere because of the persecution of Stephen preaching the gospel. They land some of them in Antioch, and lo and behold, what do they do? They preach the gospel not to Jews only, but also to Gentiles, and the grace of God is on them. They got to get help.

They go to get Barnabas from Jerusalem. They reach up to Paul in Tarsus, and they meet, and a mighty thing happens in Antioch until chapter 13. That's where we are.

Now, there were in the church in Antioch prophets, teachers. It's pretty dense, in fact. Barnabas, the good old encourager.

Simeon, who was called Niger, probably an African. Lucius of Cyrene, another ethnic group. Manan, a political outcast, member of Herod, the Tetrarch.

I mean, this is a very interesting group of people. And Saul, we know him as Paul. A lot of power there.

While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, this is where I'm pleading with you to be with us, the Holy Spirit said, set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. And after fasting and praying, they laid their hands on them and sent them off. That was a stunning development in the early church.

I dare say there are not many events in world history of more significance than that moment. Does that sound like an overstatement? The reason I say it is because what happened there when they were saying, we worship you, we don't eat, we need you more than we need food, come, show us what it means to be the church in Antioch. And God says, I want Saul and I want Barnabas to start a kind of mission that you never dreamed of.

And they're going to go to Cyprus, and then they're going to go up into Asia Minor, they're going to cut over into Macedonia, they're going to come down through Greece. Paul hoped he would get to Spain, and the world has never been the same. You're a Christian today because of that prayer meeting, American.

You're a Christian today, I believe, because of that prayer meeting and that mission. When I call you to fast and pray over the next seven weeks, I'm not thinking small, I'm thinking history. What should we do? What should we do as elders? We've kind of backed up a few steps to look at it for these next weeks.

How should we deal with the implications of a thousand people, possibly 15 miles north at County Road J, in a separate campus, 2,000 here, in one church with one eldership, with increasingly separate and distinct needs of that suburban community and this urban community? What will that be like over five years with the video feed? How should we manage the growth downtown? Now, this service is just comfortably full, it's not too full, it's just full. If a visitor walked in, they would say, well, shoot, it's just too crowded. Which means that right now we need a third service here.

We will have a third service this fall, there's no doubt about it. When? I don't know. Sunday evening, Saturday evening, Sunday morning? It's going to happen.

Or, should we get on the stick as elders and plant the south campus now while we plant the north campus and have the preacher every third Sunday in a different place? Or, stay here and shoot the feed that way? Or, multiple preachers? Or, the questions mount. What becomes of church planting if we do it that way? Kenny is investing unbelievable energy and time in thinking north campus. Meanwhile, church planting is a stepchild, has to be.

He can't do 80% that and 80% this. If we do a south campus over the next couple of years, one year, what becomes of church planting? Knowing all the while that church planting doesn't solve local crowding. No church has ever proved that sending people away in church plants keeps the local base from growing.

What are the effects of the multi-campus strategy on racial diversity and racial harmony if the video preaching puts another cultural barrier in the way? What about the possible excessive prominence of one preacher? What should they do with me? They wrestle with this with tears. What's Piper's proper role here? What about the fact that all of us on the Council of Elders would love not to beat our heads against the table for years trying to figure out growth and management instead of devoting ourselves to evangelism and discipling new believers and caring for broken marriages and getting in the lives of teenagers and mobilizing missions? There are proactive, glorious things we want to spend our time on and we're constantly banging our head against. What do you do with all these people? You hear the groaning? Call it shouting if you want to.

And we're not walking away from the issue. We're pleading with you. It looks to me like God wants us on our face.

I don't know why God doesn't make it clearer to us. I want you to know this though. I do not assume that the problem is not here and in the Council.

I do not assume that there is a fog because there's sin here. So I seek my face, that is, I lay down my face and I seek the Lord and we do as a council often. Oh God, is there pride? Is there lust? Is there greed? Is there fear of man? Is there any hidden sin on this council or in this staff that would hinder your plain revelation of the next steps? We're not asking for a history to be written for us.

We just want with confidence and surety with biblical roots to know how best to lead the people in the next steps. So I ask you to join us for the next seven weeks. I will be gone all of those weeks in conferences in Scotland starting tomorrow and Ireland and England and Maryland and Georgia and North Carolina and then some vacation and we'll be back on July 28th.

And I pledge myself during those weeks to be fasting and praying with the rest of you. Here's the plan. Wednesday morning at 6.30 out there in the Commons or either in the Fellowship Hall.

I know there's a women's group that meets out there. They're surely welcome to join us or we can do our separate thing, doesn't matter. 6.30 to 7.30, Kenny and other elders will lead any of you who are willing to come and just seek the Lord and skip breakfast and newspaper and do that.

That's the plan. Seven of those Wednesday mornings. Tomorrow night the elders gather for the first of what will probably be, not all the elders, a subgroup drawing in some others for seven weeks of weekly brainstorming, Bible storming, heaven storming to say, God show us the way we should do church, the best structure for multiplying one of the elders sat beside me at the meeting on Tuesday night and halfway through the meeting as we were talking about these things he slipped me a note and he said, at the present growth rate we will be at 18,000 in ten years.

We're not building for 18,000 people. We're not going to build an 18,000 person sanctuary or a 10,000 person sanctuary. So, you know, the response to that should not be, ha, no way, because we've got 18% without Pentecost.

When Pentecost arrives here and revival shows up, it'll be 36, 56 and it ain't going to be in one building and it ain't going to be with one little structure here. The question is, who can manage that? Now don't come back at me with, let God manage it. Don't manage God.

You come be an elder you've got to have some place. Doesn't have to be here to be in the park. You just got to tell people where to go and they may not want to go there.

And then you got to come up with another idea or kick them out. And there's nothing in the Bible that says they don't want to go here, kick them out. So you deal with real people.

No, you don't manage the Holy Spirit. He just calls you to lead. That's all.

So I said I would close with ten blessings because I want you to know that as much as this may sound like murmuring, it's groaning and not murmuring and not complaining for several reasons. I've already given you one about the nature of leadership, the nature of the Calvary Road, but the other is God's blessing is so abundant in and through our imperfection that if we are not dominantly, not subordinately, but dominantly thrilled and thankful, we should be stoned. So here's some of the blessings that should make us leap for joy.

Number one, I am amazed and thrilled that we have total unanimity on the search committee, the Council of Elders, the Racial Harmony Task Force, and all the caregivers with the candidate that we will present to you in mid-August for the pastor for counseling. Three years in the making, hard times along the way, we have our man. And if you say, well, why are we waiting until August? It's because we learned our lesson and we need to take all these weeks to help you know him.

He'll be here several times and doing seminars. We'll mail you more stuff than you ever wanted to receive in the mail. And there'll be more meetings than you want to come to so that when the vote comes, you will know everything, absolutely everything you need to know.

And we are fully confident that you will be as excited as we are. And the reason I'm so excited about that is because if you wait three years for a staff person and you know that it's one of the most urgent needs in this church so that in two years from now, there will be hundreds of you so deeply trained and so wrought upon by the Holy Spirit for how to love people and get your arms around hurting marriages and depressed people and addicted people that we will have so much healing going on in this church that we will really

have growth problems. And that's the kind you ought to have, is broken people finding a healing community and we think we've got the person who can be the Barnabas type and come in among us.

That's number one. Number two, Ken Curry of Campus Outreach and his wife and five children and nine self-funded associates arrive in a few weeks, plant themselves here to make Campus Outreach Minneapolis a reality. It's on hundreds of, I don't know, maybe 60 campuses in the South and now we'll plant it all through the Twin Cities.

So student evangelism and discipleship from a reformed perspective. And the reason I'm so excited about that is not just what's going to happen on the campuses, but because that many gifted, aggressive, bold, in-your-face evangelists and discipleship people who are good one-on-one will spread like fire, I believe, all through this church and we'll all be better evangelists because of it. So that's number two.

And they're on their way. I talked to them on the phone yesterday. You can pray for Holly, the one whose support is lagging, of the nine.

So pray for Holly. Number three, last night's 20-something group, the first one of what we pray will be an ongoing ministry. I'm thrilled that the 20-something people, there's hundreds of them in this church, saw fit, get together, dream a dream, become a ministry of people who don't want to waste their lives.

Fourth blessing. We just graduated eight guys from track two of TBI, the Bethlehem Institute, on into ministry. The class coming in this fall is 16, not eight.

So two classes would be 32, which means at any given time, there are going to be 32 seminary guys pouring their lives into this church and then absorbing whatever we can give them. And it's just total confusion. That's all I know to give them.

And then, except a few things about God I know, which I'm very happy to know. And then we send them out. And they go, that is a remarkable blessing.

Number five, several weeks ago, someone unknown to me and beyond any pledges gave \$400,000 to that new building and the education for exaltation. I don't know who you are. And if you're in the room, just know this.

I wept like a baby in front of my computer when I read that email from Sam. And I just said, Lord, I'm so sorry for the times I've been doubting and unsure. And I just pledge myself to trust you that you can see to it that that can happen.

And more important things can happen than the finishing of that building debt free, which is what we intend to do. Number six, we have a team of people. You wonder where Chuck is? Chuck and Eric and John Govey and Paul Springer and Andy Lang, and I'm forgetting one or two others, are in Myanmar right now.

They left on Wednesday. Carol tells me that they got all their stuff through. And they're there among the Kachin people trying to give a doctrinally faithful, God exalting, dynamic worship experience so that the Kachin people can put all the truth issues and the emotion issues and the style issues together for their culture and then penetrate Bangladesh and China and Laos and Cambodia and be a powerful movement for Christ.

And Brad is going to take a big group of kids and older folks to Uganda in a few weeks to work among the AIDS orphans. And that's the tip of the iceberg of what's going on in missions this summer. And that leads me to number seven.

If you were to look on this part of the worship folder right here with this list of foreign missions, you don't know this, but I know this. I know how many of these people are members. And I went through and counted them.

They're not all members. Some people don't even go to our church, which is the way you do. You support a lot of missionaries, not just your own.

Well, 90 of these folks, not counting the children, are members of this church. Many of them grew up here and went out from here. And I simply stand in awe of that because, you know, when something, when a blessing builds up over the years, you just start to take it for granted.

You have 90 missionaries that come from our church? That's the way church is, right? No, that isn't the way church is. My dad is an evangelist. He doesn't travel anymore.

He's 84, but he's been in, I don't want to say, thousands of churches around the country. And he told me one time when I told him about the TBI, he said, Johnny, you don't know what you have, son. There are pastors that I've been with who would give their lives if one young man would grow up and enter the ministry in his church.

One young woman would come out of the church and be a missionary. They'd give their lives. They could have won.

You don't know what you have. And that's true. We don't know what we have.

It could vanish in a minute if God were to lift His mercy from us. 90 people, \$1 million in a mission budget you'll go over next year. They're in this room right now.

I could point to different ones. They love you for your support. The existence of this church is the existence of 90 teams of missions in vocational, cross-cultural missions.

That is no small blessing. Oh, forbid God that we elders would ever bellyache or complain. And number eight, the BUI.

You don't even know what the BUI is. I'll do another hand thing like I did in the first service. BUI stands for Bethlehem Urban Initiatives.

If you have any idea what that is, raise your hand. See, hardly anybody. Well, the BUI was created a year ago by the, maybe two years ago, by the elders to provide funding for urban ventures, urban missionaries.

And there are two who have been commissioned already to be urban missionaries through the BUI. Well, we will make sure that this ignorance problem gets changed. Kenny and I are talking about this and we'll let you know more.

We'll commission those folks publicly, but the urban venture of BUI is great. Two more quickly and then I'm done. Number nine, I said earlier and I want to say it again, the growth of the people coming is a blessing, not a problem mainly.

So don't walk away saying, Piper really resents growth. Fear that you would hear that. It is a gift of God.

It is a charge. It is a stewardship. And hear this, I don't feel proud about that for several reasons.

One, Paul plants a Paulist waters and God gives the increase, but the main reason is most of that is not conversion growth. Now, I scolded us in the first service because of that, because I would like us to be more fruitful in evangelism. A woman came up to me after the service with tears and she said, now look, I know and I agree, but please don't belittle what's happening in the lives of those of us who have come here already thinking we're Christians and finding out here that we hardly knew what it was to be a Christian.

So I don't want to belittle the good that's God doing. I don't want to sound ungrateful. I just want to be more fruitful in evangelism and we will be.

I mean, it's no accident that Sherard's leading a prayer time on Monday night laying hold on the Lord to say, both in racial diversity and in evangelism, make us more fruitful. It's no accident that we're in the parks on Wednesday night. It's no accident that we went to Northrop Auditorium or that we go to the, there are efforts, but oh, how much more fruitful we could be.

Finally, let us rejoice for every son and every daughter who once was lost and now is found. I leave a very happy pastor and husband and father in a couple of hours. I don't leave discouraged.

I leave burdened and I'm inviting you to share the burden for seven weeks. I'm inviting you to complete my joy and here's some ways to complete my joy. John Piper the preacher is leaving town for seven Sundays.

If you're not here next Sunday to hear Dustin Shromick sitting over there, you should be shot. And not because of legalism, but because of foolishness. I would sit rather in that service than any service in the world next Sunday.

That puts a big burden on Dustin, but I'm not worried about that. And he has a word for us. And if he doesn't, you'll get one this week.

And right on through the summer, my colleagues have a message for you. Don't you leave this church. Vacations are fine.

That's all right. And the second thing that would complete my joy is giving through the summer. Here's how I do it.

I just suggest it for you. I'm going to be away on three paydays. All right.

So I wrote checks, my usual amount, three of them, put them in the right envelope with the right, close it up, put in another envelope, close it up, put on the outside, the date to be given, gave them to my secretary. I said, deposit my money on the day and not before, because I go bankrupt if you deposit this before. So one at a time, you go in.

Therefore, I will be away and this church will not miss any of my little giving. Will they miss yours? There's so many people who in summer, they get this idea that we'll just do a \$1,500 vacation and we'll catch up in the fall. You won't catch up in the fall.

Never. Keep your word to the Lord. There's no reason we take a dive like this during the summer in finances, which we always do.

That doesn't have to be. If everybody thought about the implications of vacations are good, I'm looking forward to one, but that's not an excuse not to give. And finally, come on Thursday or Wednesday and if you can't, pick another morning, another time, pick a meal.

Or if you're diabetic and you can't do the food fasting, fast from television for an evening and devote 20 or 30 minutes to saying, oh God, give the elders a breakthrough. Help them to see what the next step should be. How do you strategize for 3,000 to 10,000 folks? And how does it spread? How do you do church planting? Should there be multi-campus? What should it all look like? Give them wisdom, oh God, and give us unity as a church in that.

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