

March 2021

Dear Metropolitan Baptist Church family,

I pray that the early months of this new year have been an improvement over the last. It seems remarkable to me that it has only been one year since the world changed in ways I could never have imagined. Like many of you, if I had been asked about my predictions or plans for the year 2020, I would never have imagined. The Lord told the prophet Isaiah that His thoughts and ways were far above the thoughts and ways of men, and I can see that truth clearly in the journey of the last twelve months.

As many of you know, the work here which you have so graciously prayed for and given financially toward, closed its doors permanently at the close of 2020. Upon my resignation and the arrival of Bro. Gross, we began to seek out a man to take the pastorate and lead this church plant to new and sustained growth. While there are numerous reasons for the closure, suffice it to say, the Lord had other plans.

Very soon after assembling a pulpit committee, we had a man in who desires to serve in this area, who is doctrinally sound, and is experienced in church planting as a foreign missionary. After spending time with the church: both preaching and getting to know everyone, a vote was conducted, and he was called as pastor. However, he declined this call, and privately recommended to me that the work be restarted.

A second candidate was later invited to preach in view of a call with planned meetings Wednesday through Sunday. However, after only one night, he withdrew his candidacy and also privately recommended closing and potentially restarting. This information was not initially shared with the congregation and Bro. Gross continued to preach and teach on some of the many areas of concern specifically mentioned or observed. Several members at that time approached Bro. Gross about staying in a long-term capacity but he also declined.

In short, the Lord was confirming for me what I already knew. After five years of labor here, the Lord was closing the doors of ministry with the folks in this location. 2020 clarified the truth that this was an inward focused assembly lacking in a desire to reach the lost with the gospel of Jesus Christ. The pandemic gave the people a perfect excuse to stop any attempts at evangelism or outreach. The Bible is clear that a church that is not serving the Lord is not pleasing unto the Lord. This was the unfortunate

reality of this work. While this reality was and is hard to face, painful truth is truth, and must be addressed.

Therefore, after further counsel with Pastor Turner and the men of Metropolitan as well as other godly men, I made the decision to close this work and seek the Lord's will for our ministry. For several weeks, my family and I visited churches and prayed for direction. While we enjoyed sweet fellowship with other believers, there was no peace in next steps.

It was at that time, that I was contacted by Bro. Raleigh Hill. He was the first man who came as a candidate for Mountain View and who declined the call to pastor here. He stated that he and his family had surrendered to come and start a work in the area. This led to further conversations and much prayer resulting in a new sense of direction from the Lord.

Bro. Hill has been sent out of Harvest Baptist Temple in Medford Oregon and is planting "Freedom Baptist Church" in Athol Idaho, about 30 minutes south of Sandpoint. It is our desire to assist the Hills and this church plant in whatever capacities the Lord would see fit. Already, we have had a small part in locating housing, a meeting location, and some material needs for the ministry. We hope to offer assistance in: outreach, nursery, singing, teaching and preaching, and as a source of encouragement and counsel.

Only the Lord knows how long He will have us to serve in this way, but I trust in Him to move us when He sees fit. There is an urgent need for solid churches in this part of the country and it is my desire to be a help and a blessing to every doctrinally sound church planter and plant that I can. I do not know how God is going to use us, but I trust that He will if I simply submit and make myself usable. I humbly thank you for all of your gracious support over these years and I ask that you continue to pray for us.

I know that God has not been taken by surprise by any of the events over the last twelve months and I know that He intends to bless the efforts in ways above our thinking and so we remain faithful. In closing, I would ask for your continued prayer for the folks of north Idaho. Pray the Lord would see fit to draw people unto Himself, that He would raise up a work, and that He would be glorified.

In Christ,

Harry Sheppard