



March 30, 2025

*For everything, there is a season. (Ecclesiastes 3:1)*

Dear River family,

On Sunday morning (3/30/25), with much sadness in my heart, I announced that my season as The River's Lead Pastor is coming to a close. Because of my affection for you all, this has been one of the most difficult decisions of my life. I want you to be aware of two major factors that have informed my discernment.

As I look within, my clear sense is that I am needing to give attention to the condition of my soul. For more than 18 months, a significant portion of my energies have gone toward the exploration of harm experienced by River youth (2014-19). This has been and remains very important work. But, it has been both exhausting and painful. Moreover, the investigation comes in the context of a series of challenges over the last handful of years, each of which has been personally wearying. On a cultural level, the COVID pandemic and the intensification of political polarization both increased levels of isolation, irritation, and conflict in the church. On a personal level, the decline and passing of my father two years ago introduced a season of grief. As one challenge bled into the next, I began to feel like I was losing track of my soul. In a recent time of prayer, I heard the whisper of the Spirit, "He makes me lie down in green pastures." Simply put, it has not been possible for me to adequately tend to the health of my soul while in this current role and context.

While I have been looking within (to the health of my soul), I have also been looking ahead. On the horizon, I can see a new chapter of The River's story. That chapter has not yet begun. But, it will begin in the not too distant future. As I've prayed about the chapter ahead, the Lord has impressed upon my heart the words of T.S. Eliot, "Next year's words await another voice." While I have dearly loved pastoring The River, my deep inner sense is that articulating God's words for "next year" is the task for "another voice" - a new leader with a fresh anointing to mobilize God's people to bear witness to the healing power of the gospel for the blessing of all who are suffering in our increasingly harsh and hostile world.

My announcement is made with sadness because of my affection for you all. But, my sadness is exceeded by hope for the chapter that is coming. I pray that each of you will find your place in the story that will be written by the author and perfecter of our faith.

There are so many more words to be said. For now, I simply want to thank you for the great honor of allowing me to serve you these 24 years.

Grace and peace,  
Brad Wong,  
*Lead Pastor*