



Dearest Woodlake Family,

It is with an extraordinarily heavy heart that I inform you that it is time for me to move on. Before I go any further, I need to make a few things very clear...

1. I love this church and I love you. I have cried about this decision literally every day.
2. No one has done anything wrong. I am not leaving because of anyone or anything at Woodlake.
3. God told me it was time to go.

A little back story...

In 2001, I was living in Memphis, where I was born and had lived my entire life. I felt God calling me into full-time music ministry. I searched nationwide for the place God wanted me to go. Long story short, I wound up here. I had never heard of Midlothian Virginia. I knew nothing about the area and little about the church. I had several offers, but God made it clear that He wanted me here. So, I pulled up stakes and came here, with no idea how things would play out.

Well, they have played out like a symphony. I could not be more blessed. Woodlake has been an answer to prayers I didn't even know I would have. That said, every year, I ask God if I'm still where He wants me. Every year, the answer was "YES", until this year. I prayed and I prayed and the answer remained the same. Confirmations came from everywhere – subtle, but unmistakable. If you're familiar with the story of Gideon, I tried the whole fleece thing. Got the same response. So, I am supposed to go now.

To what, I don't know!

Julie and I purchased a piece of land behind our son's home in Shenandoah County when he moved there in 2021, and we will build a house there with the proceeds from selling our house here in Woodlake. I am still awaiting God's plan for me as far as earning a living, but He has never steered me wrong. I am not going to start doubting now.

So now I need to tell you that God has a plan for you – for Woodlake UMC and for you, personally. Ask Him. Seek His will. And when you think you know what it is, walk into it with confidence! Trusting God is, in my opinion, the essence of faith. Believing that God exists is one thing. Trusting Him is where the real joy, the real peace, the real freedom is found.

If you don't have a personal relationship with our God, I pray that you will seek Him. The experience is like none other. Fair warning, relationships are always more interesting than casual acquaintance. They challenge you and push you to be more, to be better than you are. There are responsibilities and commitments in relationships – all relationships. I can promise you this, though. If you seek the Lord, He will reveal Himself. The bible says, "Seek the Lord while He may be found... and the Lord will have mercy, and the Lord will freely pardon." Alleluia!

Ok, end of sermon. Know that I love you. Know that God loves you. Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. Thanks be to God!

Peace,

Darren