

Send Out.

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Preacher: Joe Hall

[0 : 00] Gather in, build up, reach out, send out. We have been thinking together about God's vision for the church, these four things that God calls his church to be and to do at all times and in all places.

What is a church? Who are we as a church? Well, we are a gathered and a gathering people. We come together to know and to worship God.

We're a building and growing people, a work in progress. We build each other up in faith, service, and love. We're a people who want to reach people, to step out with the gospel of Christ to others. And today we're thinking about being ascent and ascending people. We let people go and we give people up and we send people out to gather in, build up, and reach out somewhere else.

And we've seen from the Bible that we live out our God-given identity as a church as we answer those four calls in faithful and biblical ways.

[1 : 21] Now, you have spotted that these four calls all have a direction. They're not static. They're dynamic. So one comes inwards. Doesn't it gather in?

One goes upwards. Build up. And two go outwards. Don't they reach out? Send out. I was thinking about that.

I remembered great days out in London as a child. A great day out, if you grew up in greater London, is to visit the fountains in Trafalgar Square. And if you've seen them, they're beautiful. They're majestic fountains in the summer, at least. They spray just gallons of water into the air. And unfortunate bystanders as well. And do you know something?

They never run out of water. Incredible, isn't it? But that's just the trick, isn't it? It's the same water, isn't it, that gets kind of sucked in and pulled up and sprayed out through these fountains.

[2 : 20] It's the same water, isn't it? It's the same water, isn't it? Before I'm being sucked back in again, pulled up and sprayed out. And a bit like those fountains, right? We, the church, Christians in the church, we're constantly, aren't we, being drawn in, pulled up, and then we overflow back out.

Our evangelism and our mission, they are the overflow of our worship and discipleship. Reaching out and sending out. It's the overflow, isn't it, of our gathering in and our building up.

And as a church, we live out that cycle and repeat, don't we? In, up, out. In, up, out. And if you're thinking, hang on, how does that maths work, right?

You've got one in, one up, and two out. But, well, that's just right. I think I've told you before, there's a whole new language you have to learn when you become a parent.

For example, there's two settings on pram seats. And I would have said before that a pram seat can face forwards or backwards. But, no, that's too simple for the pram company.

[3 : 29] I learned when we had Caleb that when you put the baby in the pram, the baby can either be parent-facing or world-facing.

And that is what God wants for his church. He wants his church on earth to be in the world-facing position, outward-looking.

We can't reach out or send out if we don't gather in and build up. But if we gather in and build up and then don't actually reach out and send out, well, we're not answering his call in full as a church.

So where does this call come from to send out? And then, as we thought in weeks past, so what? Let's see, firstly, then. God calls his church to send people out.

We just read from Acts 13 and 14. That's the beginning and the end of Paul's first missionary journey. Of course, Jesus has already sent the apostles as the Father has sent me.

[4 : 41] So I'm sending ye with the promise of the Holy Spirit, hasn't he? So there's that kind of push outwards. But now the Spirit gives marching orders to some people specifically to go somewhere and to do something.

So have a look down again at Acts 13. And just ignore that heading, right, that says Barnabas and Saul on Cyprus. That's not part of the Bible text. So Acts 13, verse 2.

While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.

Then after fasting and praying, they laid their hands on them and sent them off. So being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went. You see that the Holy Spirit sets apart these guys and the church sends them off.

But verse 4, they were sent out, it says, by the Holy Spirit. So which is it? Does the Spirit send people or does the church send people? Well, that's the beautiful thing, isn't it?

[5 : 54] The church sends them out because of the Spirit's call. The Spirit sends them out by the call of the church. Both.

Fast forward to chapters 13 and 14. Saul and Barnabas go to Cyprus, Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, Derby, all these places, preaching the gospel of Christ, and basically, if you read it, living the parable of the sower.

Some listen and believe. Some listen and like it and don't believe. And some shut their ears and throw rocks at them. And then back through Lystra and Iconium, building up the churches that they just started, appointing elders in those churches.

Finally, getting back to Antioch, chapter 14, verse 26. Where they'd been commended to the grace of God for the work they had fulfilled. So right back to the beginning.

And they give this report to their sending church about that work. When they arrived and gathered the church together. We're not making it up. Okay, they gathered in.

[7 : 03] They declared all that God had done with them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. So there we have, don't we? Not just a historical record, but a pattern and a precedent.

The church was and is called by the Spirit to send some people out. But maybe you're wondering, how is send out different from reach out?

Right, they both go out. What's different? Donald helped us to see last time that we don't need to move house to reach out with the gospel.

Right, we're called to reach out where we are. We can stay and do that. But God does still call some people sometimes to move house to a new place.

And by send out, we mean that God calls the church to send believers sometimes to gather in, build up, and reach out. But in a different location, as part of a different church somewhere else.

[8 : 21] Now, what Paul and Barnabas are doing is kind of specialist work, isn't it? They were prophets or preachers and teachers in the church. But what they were doing and how they did it helps us to see why not only kind of ministers and missionaries and people with a job title should do this.

But all Christians can be part of this. And why the church then should be intentional and invested in preparing people and sending them on their way.

So look, what are Paul and Barnabas sent to do? Kevin DeYoung really helpfully says, Paul and Barnabas did three things in chapters 13 and 14.

They start new churches. They strengthen or build up existing churches. And they equip churches to carry out God's mission.

Right? They start new churches. Look, in 14 verse 1. 14 verse 1. At Iconium, they entered together into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of Jews and Greeks believed.

[9 : 32] Church. Then they build up those same churches. Look, 14 verse 21. Says, when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith.

And then they equip those same churches. Look, for God's mission. Verse 22. And saying that through many tribulations, we must enter the kingdom of God.

And they appointed elders for them in every church. So they're not finished, are they? Until they've prepared them for what God's mission will involve suffering. And put leadership in the faith.

And put leadership in place on the ground elders to push that mission forwards. And the result then of their missionary journey is that new churches have been started, been strengthened, and made ready themselves to step out with the gospel.

Now, does the church need specialists to do those things? It does.

[11:12] Need. People without a job title. Christians. People who haven't had years of training, who don't speak from the front, to be part of that too.

Absolutely, yes. Right? Thought experiment. Think how crazy it would be for Paul and Barnabas to have gone around starting new churches with no other Christians.

Right? Look, Paul, here we are again speaking to an empty room. And there aren't any Christians here. Or how crazy it would be for them to equip or build up a body of believers to build itself up in love.

Where there are no believers. Two mouths. No other body parts. We're used to thinking, aren't we, about missionaries as single units.

Individuals who go off somewhere to do their work kind of off-grid and without anyone else. And they make converts. But that's not normal.

[12:17] Historically or biblically. Paul and Barnabas went from a church to start churches, strengthen churches, and equip churches.

Right? This is the mission, not of one or two missionaries. It's the mission of the church. So we know that God still sends ministers and missionaries and gospel workers out to do that work.

But how, you ask, does God send ordinary Christians to new places to do that work?

Well, I don't know about you. I've never been in a prayer meeting where the Holy Spirit has explicitly said, set apart those two people for me to be sent out to do that work.

Have you been in a prayer meeting like that? Pretty special prayer meeting. And yet, given that that's never happened, I know a surprising number of Christians who have moved.

[13:25] To a new city or a new place. For a job. To start studying. To be with family. And they've joined another local church. Right?

Funny that, isn't it? That without the Spirit's direct command, that Christians do go to new places and join other local churches. So, is that disobedience?

Should we not do that? Well, no, you say. So, how does God normally reveal his will that believers move to a new place? How do you know when you're meant to go?

Well, in God's providence, you say. Right? Exactly. Exactly. Right? I wonder if I've been here long enough that I can get away with this.

Right? So, how many of you, by show of hands, okay, you're allowed, okay, to put your hand up. By show of hands, how many of you were born in Aberdeen or in the northeast of Scotland?

[14:27] Okay. Okay. Yeah, great. A good number. But the minority. Right? Right?

In God's providence, you were born in this area, and you've grown up and you've stayed here, or you went away and you came back. Praise the Lord. In God's same providence, all of you who didn't put your hand up, in God's same providence, he sent you here from where you were born, where you grew up, where you studied.

He sent you. And that, for most of you, will have involved leaving a local church and joining a local church. Now, that can happen in different ways, can't it?

But in the best case, if you were to think of, how would I love to leave a church? What's the best case scenario? In the best case scenario, when members of a church family move away, they are sent out with the blessing and prayers of the church for one of three reasons.

And guess what they are? To help start a new church, to help strengthen and build up an existing church, or to help equip a church to carry on God's mission on earth.

[15:49] And if we say, right, get a grip, right, come back down to planet earth, right, they are just going for work. They're just going for family.

They're just going to... Calm down. Right, we just have far too secular a worldview, don't we? God's great project in the world is growing his kingdom by growing his church.

And does he not order every detail of our lives by his almighty providence for his own glory and the growth of his kingdom?

So brothers and sisters, if you need to move to a new place for any reason, the reason behind that reason is that God is sending you from one place to another place to gather in, build up, and reach out as part of a church there.

And you might not know why there in particular, but that's where he sent you. And that's what he's called you to do. God calls his church to send people out so that they can gather in, build up, and reach out in other places.

[17:07] So, so what? How do we answer that call then to send out members and workers into new spheres of service and ministry?

Well, here are the aims we think grow out of that call. To partner with other... In the work of the gospel locally, nationally, and globally.

Thirdly, the church takes priority. It's the mission of the church. But we also recognize in some cases that we need to partner with Christian organizations, parachurch ministries, in the works of mission and mercy throughout the world.

Thirdly, to prepare and equip students and young people, particularly for gospel service in other places and contexts. Fourthly, to prayerfully rejoice when members move on to new places and churches and support them as they settle into service and witness elsewhere.

Fifthly, to prepare to plant a church in Aberdeenshire, where there's currently little or no gospel witness and few or no healthy gospel churches. All right, that's a lot.

[18:25] Press pause. We're going to go back through those in the form of questions. Four questions to think how we can help answer those calls. Firstly, how can you help us partner with others in the work of the gospel in other places?

In other words, how can we support people who God has sent to other places in their work there? The church is beautifully connected, isn't it?

We support people we've never met in places we've never been because we're part of God's global church. So how can we support that connection and that investment?

Well, this is a quick one because I've already shared with you how we can do that through our partnership fund. Right, for most of us, partnering with others in other places in the work of the gospel will be as simple as praying for them, giving money, and encouraging them in their work. And we channel those things through our partnership team here. And I've explained why. You know, when Paul thanks the Philippian church for their partnership, he's not just talking about their money, though he is talking about their money.

[19:42] He's also talking about their prayers and the fact he's so encouraged that they're keeping going in the gospel even while he's away. And he says all of that is for their benefit and their encouragement too.

So here's an example of how that looks for us. Just on Wednesday, as some of us heard from a guy called Misha, he was a missionary in Tel Aviv, and he reaches out to Russian-speaking Jews with the gospel.

And as a church, we send money and we pray for the organization he works with, and he shared with us and we prayed for him. And what was so encouraging about actually getting to speak with him was realizing that actually what Misha is doing in Tel Aviv is exactly the same thing that we're doing here in Aberdeen.

So he said everything he does, he does through the local church, and then he showed us just pictures of here's a guy that I meet up with, and we read the Bible, and he asks me questions. And here's a picture of a woman who I meet up with, and I read the Bible, and she became a Christian, and here's her getting baptized. So what a great thing, not only for us to give money to support that work, but to partner in the gospel with someone who's doing what we're doing in Tel Aviv and getting to hear firsthand that the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the world as it is here.

[21:14] So how can you be part of that? Brothers and sisters, know who these people are, know who we partner with, pray for them regularly, give money to the partnership fund that we can support them with, and take these opportunities that we try and facilitate to hear from these people and to interact with them and ask them a question that come throughout the course of the year.

And for some of you, as I said, maybe you could consider whether you've got some time, perhaps over your summer break or maybe on a holiday, to go and actually support some of the work that these people do in a church plant or somewhere else in Scotland or the world.

Closer to home, though, how can you be part of preparing students and young people for gospel service in other places? Now, we could all move on, couldn't we, in God's providence?

But there's one demographic in our church family that's more likely to have to move on at some point. And in that sense, we are ascending church, whether we like it or not.

We send people all the time, don't we, to different places. We're doing that today. And we're really thankful that lots of you students have chosen to stay. We're really, really pleased about that.

[22 : 37] But we also want to prepare you to be sent out, if that's what the Lord has for you, and to equip you to be the best church member that you could be in the new church family you're going to be part of.

So how can we all help to be part of that? Well, some of us can teach them at YF and in Bible studies, but I want to encourage us this morning that all of us can model to them gospel living and gospel service.

Ye, whoever you are, you can give the young people in our church a model of generous, warm hospitality in your homes. You can set them an example of humble and self-giving service on a Sunday in your life group.

You can show them what a Christ-centered marriage looks like or what contentment and singleness means. You can show them what raising children in the Lord involves or how to grow old graciously and uncomplainingly.

Above all, ye can model to younger Christians what being a faithful church member means. No amount of preaching and teaching on gathering in, building up, reaching out will stick unless it's actually seen being lived out by people that they look up to in the faith.

[24 : 08] And make no mistake, whether you want it or not, if you are older than a student, you will be looked up to as someone who is mature or maturer in the faith.

You are discipling them simply by being in the same church as them. They can learn gospel living and service from you or they can learn something less than that.

Ask yourself, what are they learning from my example? What am I modeling to them? And my prayer is that we as a church would be able to say to students, young adults, if or when they leave, a version of what Paul said to Timothy, you have followed our teaching, our conduct, our aim in life, our faith, our patience, our love, our steadfastness, our persecutions and sufferings.

So continue in what you have learned and firmly believed. So that by sending our young people out, we're giving another church a slice of bon accord, right?

We're grafting part of a healthy gospel church into another context by sending a church member to be a member of another church.

[25 : 31] And students, if you count yourself a young person this morning, if you're studying, if you're setting out in life, students, understand that that is what we want for you. Right?

We're already planning for the day you leave and not because we want that day to come quickly, but because you mean so much to us. Right? We want to serve you, but not only in the sense that kind of other people cook for you and you get to eat, but in the sense that you learn to cook what we're cooking, to be able to share by watching, asking, listening, learning, so that if or when your time comes to go, we can send you out as someone who will turn up on another church and on day one say, how can I get stuck in?

How can I serve? Where are the needs? How can I help? Where's the person that I can go and sit next to on a Sunday? How can I support? Right?

More than your degree, the best thing you could take from your time at uni is a course in gospel living and service. And that is what the church is here to give you, to prepare you to be sent out into life.

And linked to that, number three, how can we prayerfully rejoice when not only students, but members move on to a new place and support them as they settle into churches?

[27 : 04] Well, brothers and sisters, the Bible gives us a big enough view of the church, doesn't it, that when people move on for legitimate reasons, we should not tell ourselves that we're losing people.

Right? It's sad, but it's also good and right, isn't it? The Lord sends people to places where he knows that they're needed. So our loss is their gain. And we're big enough Christians, aren't we, to celebrate what another church gains at our expense.

And isn't that the whole pattern of the gospel? Death is at work in us, but life in you. Right? Less of us, more of you. So like the church in Antioch, when the Spirit lets us know through ordinary events and news that so-and-so is being sent off there, we prayerfully and warmly and joyfully send them off.

And remember, it was two of the preachers and teachers who were sent out from Antioch. Right? They had more reason to complain about that than anyone, didn't they?

What a loss. What a cost. But they joyfully sent them away. So I guess I'm inviting us as a church to change the way we think and speak about people like Alistair when they go, we'll really miss you, brother, and you will leave a gap in our church family.

[28 : 29] But your faith and friendship and witness will be such a blessing to the church that you go to be part of in Glasgow, and we're so pleased for them. And we'll be praying for you, and we're thankful for that.

Or if it's your turn to go one day, we'll miss Bonacord, but God's giving us the opportunity to go and build up his church over here, and that's really exciting. Please pray for us in that.

I wonder, do we have a big enough vision what God is doing in the world to tell ourselves that? And we need to, don't we?

If we're going to train gospel workers and ministers like Joe and Ben, the whole point of training people is to send them off, isn't it? To do wonderful work in other places, to equip God's church, to step out on his mission.

And that will be a lot of goodbyes, but a lot of thanksgiving too. And finally, and sort of climactically, I suppose, how can we prepare to plant a church in Aberdeenshire where there's currently little or no gospel witness and few or no healthy gospel churches?

[29 : 44] All right, I wonder what you make of this. I think planting a church is the most Christ-like thing that any church can do, because it's the equivalent for a church of becoming a mum.

I'm not qualified at all to talk really about the sacrifice that mums make, but we all recognize, don't we, that mums make some of the biggest sacrifices.

Her body is not her own fully anymore, is it? She's incubating another life. And what she eats and what she wears and when she sleeps is not really in her control anymore.

And after the baby's born, she can't be away from baby for very long, can she, without feeding, comforting, caring, crying, laughing, sleeping, on repeat.

The cost of having a baby is immense, isn't it? And not just financially, but in every way, emotionally, personally, physically.

[30 : 50] And yet, most mums don't question the worth of that sacrifice for the value of the little life that is being sustained and cared for.

When we become a mother church, we will need to give ourselves in every way to that work, materially, emotionally, personally, physically, so that another church can come into existence. We will give our most reliable people and our best resources, our time, energy, our prayers, our money, and not so that bon accord gains or grows in any way, but so that people somewhere else gain from having the gospel and growing in Christ.

Understand, brothers and sisters, we are committing to making ourselves poorer, smaller, and weaker as a church, so that people in an area with little gospel and little church would be richer, bigger, and stronger as a result.

And that's why I say that I think that's the most Christ-like thing that any church can do. And there's no question, is there, whether that would be worth it to see a new baby church born where there is now a little or no gospel witness or few or no healthy gospel churches.

[32 : 19] So how can we prepare for that? Well, forewarned is forearmed. We need to be prepared for our church body to change in awkward ways if we're going to incubate and plant a new church.

And we need to be prepared to see the inherent worth in doing that. But practically, what does that mean for you? Well, without naming any particular location, let me ask, what would you be prepared to give personally to see a new church started somewhere where people are starving spiritually for lack of gospel ministry?

Would you be prepared to leave Bonacord to go and be part of a smaller and more fragile church?

Would you be prepared personally to be part of a church where there is no coasting and no backseat, but where everyone needs to step up and step forward to serve and to reach out to neighbors, friends, colleagues, or the thing just won't take root?

Would you be prepared personally to sell your house and move to a new place to be part of that church and plug in and commit to it?

I wonder, are you personally prepared to be sent out by the church to start a new church? Not everyone should, but some of us must, mustn't we?

[33 : 55] Because that sacrifice is in the service of something priceless, new and eternal life for people who are lost and dying. And there's plenty of practicalities and details which I'm sure you're

dying to know, but brothers and sisters, without people, without you, there is no church and there is no plant.

So what an exciting way to end our series, to hear that God's vision is so big, so vast, that the result is not only a built-up and a healthy gospel church here, but a brand new church.

What a wonderful thing. So Bonacore, brothers and sisters, let's own God's vision together as we press on. End of the series, but not end of the vision.

Let's gather in, let's build up, let's reach out, let's send out, and let's pray as we do that. Gracious Father, what a great vision you've given us of your church and your work in the world.

Lord, we want to answer that call. And Father, we pray for your wisdom and help in doing that. Lord, send us, we pray, and make us ready to be sent.

[35 : 18] Lord, help us to be a sending church in the best and the most helpful possible ways. And Father, we pray in the coming years that you would show us how to do that, how to plant a church, how to send ministers, how to send people into new places that they might further your work there.

We commit ourselves to you and ask for your help in Jesus' name. Amen.