

TRUTH COMMUNITY

- TEACHING GOD'S PEOPLE GOD'S WORD -

The Pastor, His Pulpit and His People

1 John

TheTruthPulpit: March 13, 2011

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The message that I have today is coming out of 1 John, and this is a message that in some ways has been in preparation for over 10 years or so. I had the opportunity for a few years to teach Greek at the Master's Seminary. Toward the end of the year, we would always go through 1 John because the great text is accessible to new students of Greek. And going through 1 John with seminary students gave me a particular opportunity to go over certain things repeatedly and in the context of preparing men for ministry as they do at the Master's Seminary and the very limited role I had in that gives you an opportunity to talk about pastoral issues and the role of the pastor with men in preparation for ministry. What I came to learn, which is not what you would necessarily think just reading through 1 John occasionally from time to time is that what you have in 1 John is you have an apostle showing forth what it is like and what it means to be a pastor. And it has been on my heart for a number of years to pull all these things together and this turned out to be the opportunity to be able to do that.

1 John is often described as a black and white book because it sharply contrasts so many important themes—light and darkness, sin and righteousness, love and hatred, truth and error. And he states them in these black and white terms and in these dogmatic ways that people come to think about 1 John as being a black and white book and a measure of dogmatism present in it.

But the truth of the matter is when you read it carefully over time as we had the opportunity in GraceLife to go through it over an extended period of time, it is something that I really want to call to your attention in the afterglow of the Shepherds' Conference which is fitting for the occasion. And these are things that have just come to the surface of my mind over the years and it is very much on my heart to lay these things out as much as the aspiration of my own heart is primarily and secondarily whatever would mean for those of you that are here today because the more that you study the epistle of 1 John, the more you would realize that the apostle John is providing a model of pastoral leadership in what he writes.

As he wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to real people with real problems facing real false teachers who were causing real spiritual issues in their lives, the apostle John shows what it means for the man of God to lead the people of God. I want to frame this along two different lines for you. I have titled this message The Pastor, His Pulpit and His People and just kind of looking at what a pastor looks like, how he should think about himself in relationship to his pulpit, how he should think about himself in relationship to his people, what those relationships look like and what are the convictions that drive the man of God.

It is a little superfluous to speak on these things in light of everything that has happened on this campus over the past several days, but this is what is on my heart to share with you today and it kind of flows out of the teaching that we have been doing over the past several months out of 1 John.

Two parts for this morning:

1. The Pastor in the Pulpit

What does the pastor look like, what is a godly pastor, what is the biblical pastor while he is in the pulpit?

It goes without saying that a good pastor puts the Bible front and center not his clever stories, his sense of humor that comes out. But a good pastor, a godly pastor, a pastor submitted to the Lord Jesus Christ, the man whose conscience is captivated by the word of God is not going to be able to do anything other than put the Bible in front of his people. His convictions won't allow anything else, his conscience demands it from him and his desires are all in that direction, he puts the word of God front and center.

As Phil was preaching on Wednesday from the text, the apostle Paul told Timothy to “preach the word in season and out of season.” And what you see in 1 John is an apostle who does exactly that. And the pastor who wants to be a faithful man of God can look to the example of the apostle John and follow his example and be right in the center of what God would have him to do. The truth of the matter is that this whole message over these 45 minutes or 75 minutes or whatever it turns out to be (I'll keep my watch out here) this whole message is a sermon illustration. This whole message is simply an illustration of what the pastoral role is as seen through the actions of the apostle John.

What does a pastor in the pulpit do? Three things that I want to call to your attention, three sub points of this role, the pastor in the pulpit:

A. The pastor speaks about Christ

The pastor speaks of Christ. John, as he teaches in this letter, is so full of Christ as he speaks, so full of the Lord Jesus, putting the person of Christ on display, putting the work of Christ on display and in that he gives us a model for what a pastor should do when he is in the pulpit.

I want to show you some passages to give you a flavor of this. John opens talking about Christ. Look at the first two verses of chapter 1 as he is speaking about Christ. The first words out of his mouth are about Christ, he says:

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands concerning the word of life. And the

life was manifested and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us.

He opens up talking about his personal experience as an apostle with Christ. He walked with Christ for those three years and saw Christ and His miracles with his own eyes, he heard His teaching with his own ears, he held the flesh of Christ in his own hands, his whole apostolic ministry grew out of his own experience with the Lord Jesus Christ. That's the way it is for a godly pastor, he steps in to a pulpit only after he has been walking with Christ himself. The godly pastor would walk with Christ if his pastoral role is taken away from him because Christ is the primary affection of his heart bar none.

John opens up speaking about Christ and it goes on throughout the letter. I can only illustrate this for you with certain select passages, I can't go through all of them for the sake of time, but look at chapter 1:7, he says:

If we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

He is hardly in to the letter before he is talking about the atonement, talking about the forgiveness of sin that is available through faith in Christ and His shed blood. Look at chapter 2:1, he says:

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins.

Speaking about Christ in His heavenly session at the right hand of the Father where He intercedes for those that He came to save. Chapter 4:9 where he says:

By this the love of God was manifested in us that God has sent His only begotten Son in to the world so that we might live through Him. And this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Chapter 5:11-12, he says:

The testimony is this that God has given us eternal life and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life, he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.

And so John, from beginning to end in this epistle is speaking about Christ. He has Christ front and center in what he is saying. He opens up talking about Christ, he concludes by talking about Christ and Christ fills everything in between including the implications for the lives of believers of what the life and death of Christ meant because God loved us in Christ, we love one another. It is all a Christ-centered theme that occupies his teaching.

What I am saying to you this morning is that that is what the godly pastor does as well. The godly pastor understands that his role is to put Christ forward not himself and he is delighted to put Christ forward first and foremost because Christ is the primary affection of his own heart. That's all he wants to talk about when he has the opportunity to get up and speak, he wants to talk about Christ.

And so John proclaimed the person and work of Christ, the good pastor speaks as Christ's ambassador. And you see the parallel in the words of the apostle Paul as well when in 2 Corinthians, chapter 4:5 he said:

We do not preach ourselves, but we preach Christ Jesus as Lord

And that's just what Paul said in his own manner of testimony. John illustrates for us in the way that he wrote to the people that were looking to him for apostolic leadership in the midst of their struggles.

And so the biblical pastor, the godly pastor for those of you that are not pastors or in church leadership here today, the only kind of pastor that you should follow is the pastor who points you to Christ not to his clever stories, not to earthly politics, not to mere human morality. Ask yourself, where is the centrality of Christ in this man's ministry and you will have a litmus test by which you evaluate whether a man is trustworthy to follow as one who speaks for God or not.

B. The pastor speaks with authority

The pastor speaks with authority and you see that in the epistle of 1 John. John teaches with an authority that is befitting the word of God. Speaking as an apostle, directly commissioned by Christ Himself and sent in to the world, John teaches with authority. He uses the word "commandment" 14 times in these 5 brief chapters. He uses the imperative mood another 10 times. And so as you read through the epistle of 1 John, you see a man speaking about Christ and you see a man speaking with authority. Look at chapter 2:7 to see this illustrated:

Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment, which you have heard from the beginning...

The old commandment is the word which you have heard. On the other hand, I am writing a new commandment to you which is true in Him and in you:

...Because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.

Commandment, commandment, what I am writing to you is the commandment of God—speaking with authority, saying that this commandment is true. Chapter 3:23, see this again, where John says:

This is His commandment that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another just as He commanded us.

The call of the gospel is a commandment to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, all men everywhere are under a divine commandment to repent and believe in Christ. The pastor is more than happy to speak in that way, not that he can be the boss, not that he can elevate his own authority, but that he might faithfully represent the authority of God as it is expressed in the gospel and as it is expressed in the written word of God. Chapter 5:3, again from beginning to end you see this. Actually we will start at verse 2 here:

By this we know that we love the children of God when we love God and observe His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments and His commandments are not burdensome.

The pastor recognizes that he is a man under authority, he speaks with authority and yet he is not burdened down, he does not have a ton of bricks on his shoulders as a result of the commandments of God. He expresses the heart of the psalmist, he says “I delight in your commandments.” And a good pastor speaks with authority and he teaches his congregation, he teaches his flock to be under the authority of the word of God and he teaches them that that’s the most delightful place to live life that anyone could live in this earth—under the authority of God, under the authority of Christ, under the authority of the divine word of God.

And so the good pastor speaks in a manner that transcends the opinion of his audience. He is not concerned to cater to the fleshly desires, the carnal desires of his audience. He is not concerned to cater to their opinions about what they think about him, not that he is a jerk or anything like that, but he speaks with authority. He realizes his primary obligation is to the authority of God, and so he conducts himself in the pulpit in a manner that reflects that and is worthy of that. He is not trying to be cool, he is not trying to be popular. If popularity comes, well and good, but that’s not the goal, that’s not the aim, that’s not the thing that motivates him.

The apostle Paul said in Titus 2:15:

These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you.

And the man who stands up and speaks in tentative terms, the man who gets up and makes light of the opportunity to stand between heaven and hell as it were as he speaks to his audience is a man who is training his audience to disregard the word of God. If the pastor treats it lightly, if the pastor treats the word of God lightly, if the pastor treats the pulpit lightly, then the people are going to treat it lightly as well. And there is going to be no end of shame at the judgment seat of Christ for the man who did not uphold the authority of the word of God in the way that he conducted himself in the pulpit.

The godly pastor speaks with authority, not to advance himself, but to uphold God’s word and so he is not interested in the carnal desires of his audience. The godly pastor is not worried about conducting surveys of his audience to see what they want. He knows that what God wants is what is expressed in His word and he wants to be the vehicle of that and trust God to use that as He sees fit in the lives of those who hear it. The godly pastor answers to the authority of God, the authority of scripture and his teaching reflects that.

So the pastor in the pulpit is speaking about Christ, he is speaking with authority, thirdly, I like this point, not that I didn't like the first two:

C. The pastor speaks with balance

The godly pastor speaks with balance and you will see what I mean by this as we go through. John teaches both the positive and the negative side of truth as he goes through this letter. He teaches the positive side that builds up. He teaches from the negative side, he exposes error. He does both of these equally well. Notice how he states both sides of the equation as he sets forth the test of what a true Christian looks like. For those of you that have been here, it is well known, it is often stated that John sets forth a moral test for the true Christian shown true Christianity as expressed in obedience to the commandments of God. He sets forth a social test that true Christians love one another, they love God and love one another. He sets forth a doctrinal test about the true belief in Christ—moral, social and doctrinal tests. Notice as he is teaching these things that he states it positively and he also states it negatively. These are not exhaustive, but it is enough to give you the point. Look at 1 John 2:3, showing that the godly pastor speaks with balance and here in the moral test, 1 John 2:3-4, he says:

By this we know that we have come to know Him if we keep His commandments.

States it positively, states it in a positive way. Then he states the negative:

The one who says I have come to know Him and does not keep His commandment is a liar and the truth is not in him.

The social test of love. Down in chapter 2:9:

The one who says he is in the light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. The one who loves his brother abides in the light and there is no cause for stumbling in him.

The one who says he is in the light, but hates his brother—darkness. The one who loves his brother abides in the light—positive and negative side of it.

And the doctrinal test about the true confession of Christ, look at chapter 2:23, he says:

Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father.

If your Christology is wrong, you are not a Christian:

The one who confesses the Son has the Father also.

Negative and positive, positive and negative, this is true, this is not true. And so sometimes you need to look for a man to see not only what he affirms, but what he denies to get a true read on what he really stands for because a good pastor should establish truth and he should also expose

error, but it is not just one or the other, not simply being positive all the time, sometimes error needs to be confronted and exposed and refuted. Titus 1:9 says:

An elder must be able both to exhort in the sound doctrine (set it forth in a positive, definitive sense) and refute those who contradict.

The man of God, the godly pastor recognizes his responsibility to do both and manifest the ability to do both.

Now, little word of application here, this is all one big illustration, but a word of application here just to illustrate what I am concerned about. Those of us that love the truth, that love scriptural truth or concerned about error, we need to be careful about so-called discernment ministries who point out error that are not known for their own systematic exposition of truth, either a discernment ministry or a pastor who is only known for pounding on error. That kind of approach to ministry over time is doomed to become self-righteous, critical, imbalanced and even petty over time as you continually look for the next person to criticize. Martyn Lloyd-Jones understood this when he said this and I quote:

“A most thorny problem is that of the place of polemics in a sermon and in preaching. The polemic element is obviously important...” Polemic in the sense of your attacking error. Now continuing the quote: “and it has it very definite place. But I am simply warning now against the danger of too much polemic. Whenever there are two dogs fighting, a crowd always gathers. If you attack various things and appeal for money to help you to do so, you will always get people to support you, but it is negative, it is destructive, it does not build up a church. You cannot build up a church solely on polemics. The people of God need to know the truth in its pure form and the pastor needs to be careful not to bring in errors that his people are not acquainted with simply to stir them up and concern them about things that otherwise would not be concerned about.”

Here at Grace Church it is important for us to be able to do that because so many people look to the teaching that comes from our senior pastor to be able to discern things. But the godly pastor is careful about how much polemic he addresses to his people or he would turn them in to critical people, no more for how much they hate error than how much they love God and how much they love Christ and how much they love one another. But the godly pastor is aware of his need for balance and the apostle John shows you how to avoid that imbalance. He refutes the error that he was confronting at the time in a bigger context of declaring Christ, declaring Christ with authority and declaring the truth, there is a context to his attack on error and so he speaks with balance when he is in the pulpit.

Having said all of that and not having said anything new to any of you in what I have just said, what I love about the apostle John who is often called the apostle of love, what I love about this letter that I think is not emphasized enough in some of the exposition that takes place is that John shows us how a biblical leader handles his relationships as well. He shows us how a godly leader, a godly pastor relates to his flock so the next point:

2. The Pastor with His People

The true pastor, the godly pastor, the biblical pastor is one who shepherds the flock in the context of personal relationships with his listeners. He loves his flock, he loves his sheep. Whoever heard of a true shepherd in biblical times that was indifferent to the needs of the sheep? Whoever heard of a pastor who is indifferent to the needs of the people that are in front of him except for that we see all around us in the so-called evangelical church today. No, no. The godly pastor loves his flock. The godly pastor loves the people that God has given him to shepherd. I want to show you this in three different ways here today.

A. The godly pastor expresses affection.

He expresses affection for his people. I am not talking here about physical affection. I am talking about the way the pastor uses his words to communicate sincere love for those that follow his leadership. Notice how the apostle John addresses his readers as he goes through from beginning to end this thread of affection is woven all the way through what he says to them. Even beginning in chapter 1:3, his concern is that they would join in the fellowship that he enjoys with the Father himself. In chapter 1:3 he says:

What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also so that you too, may have fellowship with us. And indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

I want you to share in this fellowship. I want you to participate in this life of Christ with me. John is concerned to see his people participate in that life of Christ and that is the concern of the godly pastor as well. If he is walking with Christ, if he knows something of the sweet savor of being a Christian, the sweet savor of being assured of salvation, he knows something of the sweet savor of joy and sanctification and assurance of salvation, he can't help but want to share that with the people that are in front of them—that's what motivates him, he wants that for his people.

John shows that, look at the terms with which he addresses his readers, chapter 2:1:

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin.

My little children, writing as an apostle probably around the age of 90 at this point. He is entitled to call everybody children at that point. But addressing them with the term of endearment, a term of affection, he uses it in chapter 2:12, he says:

I am writing to you little children because your sins have been forgiven you for His name's sake.

(Chapter 4:4) You are from God little children and have overcome them.

(Chapter 5:21) Little children, guard yourselves from idols.

It is not just that he calls them little children, he uses this term, beloved as well. Chapter 2:7:

Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you...

This is how he speaks to his people “beloved” “little children”

(Chapter 3:2) Beloved, now we are children of God.

(Chapter 4:1) Beloved, do not believe every spirit...

Chapter 4:7: “Beloved”

“Beloved” all in the context of these writing about the love that Christians should have for one another that flows from the love that Christ has bestowed upon us. He is not writing to them as theological students, he is writing to them as a man who loves them and that’s why he addresses them like that—little children, beloved, elsewhere he calls them brethren, showing that the energy of his heart goes toward them in love, in affection, in a fatherly concern for their well-being. John did not see his audience as students in the pursuit of theology, although theology was driving everything that he was saying. He did not treat his audience as disinterested students and him as the disinterested teacher. He was practically married to them in the affections of his heart. He loved them, he protected them as a shepherd protected sheep. He was concerned for their individual spiritual lives—that’s what a godly pastor does.

The idea that a man could be a pastor and be harsh and bitter and demanding and being an overlord to his congregation is totally foreign to what the Bible presents about what a pastor should look like. And if you are under domination of a man like that, feel free to leave and to get out from under that kind of abusive leadership because it is not the pattern that the Bible sets forth. Listen to how the apostle Paul addressed the readers in Thessalonica in 1 Thessalonians 2:7-8, he says:

We proved to be gentle among you as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. Having so fond an affection for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives because you have become very dear to us.

That is what the godly pastor is like, he loves his flock, that is the biblical model. By contrast, Peter wrote and warned against the contrary, 1 Peter, chapter 5 when he said:

Shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion but voluntarily. Nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples for the flock.

Don’t lord it over them. God did not give you spiritual authority so that you could be the lord over the people that are in front of you. God gives pastors spiritual authority so that they could use that to be a blessing and a benediction to the people that are in front of them—that’s what the

godly pastor wants to do. It is not about accruing accolades to himself, it is not about him. The godly pastor is motivated by the desire to see God bless the people that are in front of him.

Young pastors especially need to heed this. Your people are not inconvenient interruptions to your sermon preparation, they are the reason for your ministry. And a pastor who as an ongoing manner resents his people, is in constant conflict with them, is a pastor who needs to get out of that ministry—not just that ministry, but to get out of the ministry altogether. If you can't love your flock, you should not be in ministry, you should leave because as Peter shows us, as Paul shows us and as the apostle John illustrates for us throughout this entire wonderful letter of 1 John, the heart of the spiritual leader toward his people is one of undeluded affection. And he realizes, is happy to embrace the difficulties, the conflicts that the people bring to him, he overlooks that, he is happy to look beyond that, he is happy to look beyond the flaws and the sins of his people because there is an overarching, encompassing affection that he has for them that they would share in the spiritual life that God first gave to him—he wants that for the people in front of them, that's what a godly pastor does, that's what motivates him.

Now, many of you will know that there is a trend in the so-called evangelical church today for prominent pastors to multiply their presence with satellite campuses so that they are speaking in one place, but broadcasting on a video screen in multiple other locations and still calling it church. I don't know, some of them are still calling themselves pastors. Listen, that's not good. An image on a screen is no substitute for a pastor with his flock. You meant to embody the things that you teach and you embody them for people in the context of personal relationships.

There ought to be no question in the mind of someone who has been in your church for any length of time—“My pastor loves me, my pastor cares about me. Now I know he fails in lot of ways. He is not a very good speaker, he is not this or that. But you know what? I know he loves me.” Some of you men here that are pastors, you manifest that. I see that in my brief relationships with you but only once or twice a year, I see it flowing out of you and it is wonderful to know that you are like that. A man of God who can look in to his heart and say, “You know, I love my people” he is the man who is where he needs to be.

Now, the same principle of affection condemns out of hand the so-called visionary pastor who forces out (and I've heard too many of these stories to stay silent on the issue) who forces out long-standing church members who simply don't want to go along with the brilliant change that he is trying to bring to their church and so he forces them out so that they are out of the way. He is a kind of pastor by road grater, anything that is in the way, he just plows them out of the way, he lets them know they are not welcomed, that he does not care what their music preferences are or anything like that—get with the program or get out is the idea, it is the way it fleshes out. Of course, they would never state it that way in public, they just carry it out that way in private where men can't see it for the evil that it is. The word of God absolutely condemns that. If that is your approach to pastoral ministry that it has got to be the implementation of my vision and whoever that is in front of me that is in the way needs to get out, you are the one who should get out—that's abominable. You are not called to ministry for that purpose.

The gracious pastor, the loving pastor finds a way to stretch his arms around everyone that is in front of him, he doesn't want anyone to leave. He wants everyone to be under the sound of the word of God. He wants everyone to be under the sound of a faithful minister, and if they must leave, then it breaks his heart. He is not standing at the door with his foot in the back, trying to push them out. Jesus Himself said "Blessed are the peace makers". Proverbs speaks about "The man whose ways are pleasing to God makes even his enemies to be at peace with him." How much more a pastor with his flock in front of him should be able to find some way to make peace with the people in front of him. Come on, let's just call this for the corporate advance that it is and stop abusing the word "church" and "ministry" for something like that—shameful, absolutely shameful.

But, having said that, let's come back to what John is doing. John exposed this, the wickedness of those kinds of things, not by declaring it so much, but by his own personal example. "Beloved, Little children, I am writing these things to you so that you know joy, holiness and assurance of salvation" You can see by the themes that he emphasizes, he just wants the spiritual well-being of the flock that is in front of him—that's what a pastor does. Bitterness and conflict is something that does not find a safe harbor in his heart. He loves his people too much to stay in conflict with them. So the pastor with his people is one who expresses affection.

B. The godly pastor expresses affirmation.

A good pastor affirms his people especially in their struggles and conflicts. The good pastor, when he sees his people in front of him going through a hard time, going through trials, going through temptations, having fallen in to sin, being persecuted for their faith, a good pastor understands that when that is happening to people in his flock, that is his opportunity to step up and affirm them and give strength to them and to strengthen their hand. John wrote to believers that were discouraged, believers who were trying to walk with Christ in the midst of a hostile world, believers who had teachers telling them that they were not in the secret in crowd that maybe they were not true believers after all. And John takes his apostolic pen, he takes his position of spiritual authority and writes to encourage them and strengthen them lest they would be overwhelmed with sorrow. I love this about this letter, look at 1 John 2:12 and put yourself in the shoes of the reader here who has been told that maybe he is not a Christian, who is struggling with doubt, who is lacking assurance of his salvation, who is downcast, and the apostle John whose head rested on the chest of Jesus Himself, the apostle John writes and says this to him:

I am writing to you little children because your sins have been forgiven you for His name's sake.

Wow, the apostle John just affirmed my salvation in categorical terms without qualification, he said categorically, I believe in your salvation, your sins have been forgiven. He not only affirms me, he loves me, I think I can take another day with that wind in my sails. John does this all the time in this letter. Chapter 2:20:

You have an anointing from the Holy One and you all know ...

He is contrasting his readers with those who went out and showed that they were not truly of the faith. He says:

You have an anointing from the Holy One and you all know. I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie is of the truth.

The whole reason I have written to you my little children is because you are in the truth. I know that to be true about you and I am happy to state it to you, I am happy to affirm you in that. Look at chapter 4:4 where he says:

You are from God little children and have overcome them because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.

(Chapter 5:4) Whatever is born of God overcomes the world and this is the victory that has overcome the world, our faith.

Affirmation after affirmation, after affirmation in the context of overflowing affection. And his readers get this word from the one that they esteem, the one who carries apostolic authority, the one who loves them and says your sins are forgiven, I know that you are in Christ. How blessed are the people who have a pastor like that.

See, a good pastor, a godly pastor, a biblical pastor, understands that he has a unique position to strengthen his flock, not anything priestly, but the good pastor affirms his flock publicly in his preaching on anything and everything he can and he affirms them privately in his counseling and his conversations. He thanks them, he loves them, he affirms them. The apostle Paul could say to Timothy when Timothy was starting to shrink away from his calling, in 2 Timothy, chapter one, even as he was correcting Timothy, he said:

I am mindful of the sincere faith within you which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and I am sure that it is in you as well.

The congregation feeds off that affirmation and is better able to stand firm for Christ in trials, temptations and persecutions. Oh pastors, oh pastors, if you see your people walking with Christ, but yet they are stumbling or struggling and you know that they are in Christ, but they are having a hard time, step in to the gap and affirm them and love them and encourage them, be the vessel of God's mercy to them, and know that as you are doing so, you are just walking in pattern that the apostle John set for you 2000 years ago. The godly pastor expresses affection, expresses affirmation:

C. The godly pastor expresses aspiration.

The apostle John teaches us that spiritual leaders set forth spiritual goals before their people, they seek spiritual good of their people. The good pastor points out to them spiritual qualities to aspire after which they might otherwise miss in the distractions of this hostile world.

John does this as he sets forth the very purposes for which he wrote, chapter 1:4:

These things we write so that our joy maybe made complete.

(Chapter 2:1) My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin.

(Chapter 5:13) These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.

Joy and holiness and assurance, setting forth for them the aspirations of a godly heart, setting forth goals for them to strive after, spiritual gifts for them to enjoy. The good pastor (took me a long time to understand this and try to embrace a little bit in my own teaching) the good pastor, the godly pastor is not at all satisfied to stand up and deliver what he thinks is a good message and be indifferent to how it is received by his audience. The good pastor preaches so that there would be a spiritual impact on his flock, that they would grow in joy, that they would grow in their sanctification, that they would grow in to a more settled assurance of their own salvation. The good pastor is mindful that this moment in the pulpit is one that is passing and that times and life are going to come where spiritual metal is tested. He is going to be mindful that one day he is going to stand beside the death bed of his flock and he is going to want them to be manifesting confidence in Christ at that moment, a sense of joy and confidence that the next stamp is going to be crossing over in to heaven and for them to enjoy that confidence even in their greatest moment of earthly distress—that's what he cares about, that's what he wants for his flock.

I got an email from someone, this man was supposed to be at the Shepherds' Conference, but he had to fly home, his father was dying unexpectedly, so he had to leave on Saturday before the conference even started. He wrote that his dad was a man faithful in ministry and all of this. He got home in time and he said "Don, his last words to us were 'It is well with my soul'." That's what a godly pastor wants, he is mindful of the big picture and he wants his flock to walk in that kind of assurance and glorify Christ and know the benefits of walking with Christ. He sets forth those goals and knows to hold up that standard, knowing that the Holy Spirit will work in the hearts of his people who would say "That's what I want to pursue." So he sets forth the aspiration of the godly life for his people.

That's the pastor in the pulpit, pastor with his people. If you are a pastor, John really gives you a wonderful blue print for biblical ministry, it is the one that I come back to again and again and again.

What about the rest of you, those of you that are not per say in spiritual leadership? What does this mean for you, pastor in the pulpit, pastor with his people? Paul's words in 1 Thessalonians seem to be a fitting conclusion for the rest of us, where he said:

We request of you brethren that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, in that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another.

If you were to ask the pastor of this church, John MacArthur, he would tell you that Grace Community Church is filled with people who do exactly that. The pastors of this church are blessed with people who show that kind of appreciation and love, GraceLife is filled to the walls front and back, left and right with people who do this and I thank God for you. This is what ministry is supposed to look like, this is what the pastor does when he is in the pulpit and with his people. And as the pastor lives that way, you are seeing for yourselves the things that God would have you incorporate in your own lives as well. All of this, simply a pale reflection of what the Lord Jesus Christ has already done for us on our behalf. So it is with gratitude to the Lord that we embrace this high calling.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank you for the wonderful gift that you have given us in Christ. And thank you for your wisdom in establishing spiritual leadership in the church to model what this is supposed to look like for the rest of us. Thank you Father for those godly pastors in years gone by that have affected us, that have influenced us for Christ with their teaching and with their love, thinking even of the first pastor I knew as a new believer Father, who loved me and embraced me as an outsider come in to his church, thank you for that, Father. Thank you for these men that are here, who embody this. Father, strengthen their hand in ministry. Give them the grace and encouragement they need to live out these things.

Thank you Father for the wonderful people of GraceLife who show such love and encouragement to the Bible study people and their pastors as well. Lord, we are people richly blessed and we realize that all of that is a blessing from your hand and we thank you for it. And now we ask you to give us grace that we might excel still more. And Father, if there would be one or two in this room who do not yet know Christ, Father I pray that your Spirit would draw them to Christ, to convict them of sin and lead them to faith in Christ, that they too would join in his fellowship that we enjoy one with another.

We love you Lord so very, very much and it will be the culmination of all of our aspirations to be with you in heaven around the throne, seeing you face to face. Oh Father, the joys of this fellowship are simply the narthex to the greater blessings that still await us. We thank you for that and look forward with anticipation to the culmination of our salvation that we enter in to that inheritance that you have reserved for us in heaven. How great a salvation you have given us, how great is your grace to each one of us. We humbly bow and thank you. In the name of Christ we pray. Amen.