

# Information is Not Enough

*Ministerial Training Institute*

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**Bible Text:** 1 Thessalonians 1:1-2:13

**Preached on:** Sunday, April 25, 2004

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Turn in your Bibles, please, to the book of 1 Thessalonians 1. I thought it would be good to give a framework for this week's pastoral theology class as we think about ministry and pray for ministry and get to know other ministers and ruling elders if we were treated to this extensive statement that the apostle makes under the inspiration of God of what real pastoral ministry is. So I want to read 1 Thessalonians 1 beginning at verse 1, right through verse 13 of chapter 2, and then I'd like to read, I don't think we've ever read from 3 John but we're going to, I want to read a couple of verses from 3 John. 1 Thessalonians 1.

1 Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 2 We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, 3 remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father, 4 knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God. 5 For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake. 6 And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, 7 so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe. 8 For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything. 9 For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, 10 and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

1 For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain. 2 But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict. 3 For our exhortation did not come from error or

uncleanness, nor was it in deceit. 4 But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts. 5 For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness--God is witness. 6 Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. 7 But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. 8 So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us. 9 For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God. 10 You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; 11 as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, 12 that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory. 13 For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.

And then the little book of 3 John, toward the end of your New Testament. 1 John, 2 John and 3 John and then the book of Jude and Revelation. There's a similar verse in 2 John but 3 John and there's no chapters, I guess this is chapter 1, but verses 13 and 14.

13 I had many things to write, but I do not wish to write to you with pen and ink; 14 but I hope to see you shortly, and we shall speak face to face. Peace to you. Our friends greet you. Greet the friends by name.

The grass withers and the flowers fade away but the word of the Lord does indeed stand forever.

On the Sunday evening of the NCIOPC Pastoral Theology weekend, I determined to take the time in the ministry to give an application of some aspect of what we call pastoral theology, which is really biblical theology applied to the pastorate, to modern culture and I wasn't quite sure what to entitle this. I'm not good at sermon titles. My first thought was to call this "Low-tech ministry in a high-tech culture," but I didn't want to use that one. The other one that came to my mind and I'll play on this toward the end, is "I could have sent you an email but..." But then I didn't think that was a good one either. So you have this bland vanilla "Information is Not Enough" for the title of the message tonight.

Let's pray as we begin.

*Our Lord, once again we do implore You for the work of the Spirit. We thank You for Sabbath days of rest and that at the same time bring great demands on us as we give You the glory that is Your due. Remind us, our Lord, that there will come a day when there*

*would be labor unto You with new bodies and new souls for all eternity, where perfect work and perfect rest will always be together, and where all will be the worship of Your name. Now, our Lord, we pray in the spirit of what we learned this morning, that You would use the things that are ministered to us tonight to further us as we walk on the highway of holiness and salvation unto the great reward of everlasting life. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.*

It's almost like being born again. In fact, it's a whole new world quite literally, the world of cyberspace and the power to get there. Your new, very powerful power or your new notebook, formerly called a laptop, you are baptized finally into the technological realm and this is not a sprinkling at all, it is utterly an immersion into this whole world of computer technology and it is an immersion that is going to involve the whole family, eventually computers in just about every room in the house, one for every member of the family. Ask me, I don't know how many computers we have in the Shishko household now and it is literally a new kingdom, it is the kingdom of information. It is the source, as some would have it, of all truth. It is a place of virtual reality, what has been called the information superhighway in which there are testaments made of silicon that are packed with information and there are old silicon testaments and there are new silicon testaments, and the old silicon testament chips get old very very quickly and the new ones are always coming down the pike. And there are even concordances for this new kingdom and this new source of information, not Young's but Google, and not Strong's but Internet Explorer, and even as Christians we'll debate the relative merits of their concordances. Those who are baptized into the realm of the information superhighway will have their deep debates about the search values of the various engines that they use.

These are new communities. They are what have been called virtual communities. In the subcommittee on ministerial training, we laugh over virtual seminaries. We wonder if they are turning out virtual ministers and what a virtual minister is over the other traditional type of minister. There are new fellowships, these are called chat rooms in which people don't even know your real name, they don't know what you look like, they don't know what you sound like, they don't know where you're from, they don't know what your background is, but they are chat rooms and I am still trying to get over the new meaning of talking to one another. Old foggy that I am, talk meant you used your mouth, you used your lips, you used thought and you spoke. Today talking to one another is done by way of instant messaging in which keyboards are used and the mouth may never be operative.

There is in this new realm, the realm of reigning, dominating technological sin, those sordid, lewd, subversive websites that many people would not ever want to be thought to have accessed, sites, for example, in which you can access information to build the very things that we are protecting ourselves against with Homeland Security, and for all I know, on eBay you could probably even buy the components for those explosives and for those bombs. There is a realm of remaining indwelling techno-sin even among godly people who use the internet so freely. There are whole new vistas of remaining indwelling sin, list certs, where men and women may communicate very freely with one another at the keyboard, whatever they want, any hour of day or night, and no sooner is

the information typed out and that very quickly, I cannot believe it is always done thoughtfully, press the "enter" button and it is quick to send whatever. I had no sooner returned from last year's General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church than messages had been sent around the world bearing false witness against their neighbor saying that the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church had condoned the teaching of justification by faith and works. Utter bearing of false witness that carried far more clout than the traditional way of doing things through the courts of the church. Remaining indwelling techno-sin going a major step beyond the privacy of the mental fantasy world, those sites, those things that are somewhere housed in even a Christian's computer that enable him to indulge himself in the worst forms of lust. Priests and mediators of the new kingdom: Bill Gates and software companies, the middle-men, the middle items between you and access to virtually deity itself. And you don't think there's offerings, you don't think there's dues? Wait until you pay for your upgrades to all of these things that you get from a software company.

Now all of this is indeed absolutely wonderful. I am still amazed by it. I think two inventions amaze me more than any other. One is how you can get a massive 747 jet loaded with megatons of things to go from one place to the other with everybody alive. I still can't get over that. I can understand something of aerodynamics and I still can't get over it. But the idea that this box can do so much is amazing and it is wonderful as an example of man's dominion over the earth, processing and transferring information, megahertz and gigahertz that can process almost like the human mind can, and megabytes and now gigabytes being able to hold information. I have all of Charles Spurgeon's sermons and many other things on one little compact disc. Amazing and wonderful it is and not inherently evil anymore than books are, but with dangers that can come with the catalyst of any new technology, and because while things in themselves are not evil, you well know that man can make things do evil things and they can foster evil, and when we're dealing with things like this, what evil can come, substituting information for wisdom and for virtue. That, brothers and sisters, is like saying food equals digestion and nutrition, the two are not equal, databases becoming equal to the truth, having final authority in matters of faith and practice.

Virtual community is not by any stretch of the imagination real community and gigabytes are not God and software is not a Savior. Faster and faster and faster access becomes the standard for what is right and what is good. The Scriptures say, "Be still and know that I am God," replacing, I am afraid, too often the sovereignty of God with the idol of the newest technology, and there are dangers to the church and to its ministry, pastors who can go into their own cyber world in which all of their research, all of their interaction, all of their thought, all of their communion except for the time where they mandated to be before the Lord's people is spent in front of a computer screen, a modern bypass meadow in which information is substituted for the ministry of transformation.

Now that's just to bring you to what we're dealing with today. What is the biblical pattern for ministry and what's the reason for it, and how do we fit it with these modern developments? Remember, brothers and sisters, that information alone is a dangerous thing. Now we may try to explain away all we want Paul's saying in 1 Corinthians 8:1

that "knowledge puff up," and we say, "Ah, but that doesn't mean that Paul is against knowledge. We're to understand we're to be transformed by the renewing of our minds." But knowledge does puff up and love, which is giving one's self, one's whole being for the good of another, that edifies. And as 1 Corinthians 13:3, it almost sounds quite modern when this book of 2,000 years ago says if I understand all knowledge, most megahertz, most gigabytes, that's broadband access to the internet superhighway, and I don't have love, it profits me nothing giving myself for the good of another.

Information alone is a dangerous thing. The blessings of the grace of God come by the coming of God in Christ to be with his people. That's the glory of the Gospel. God didn't get a modem up to heaven and communicate information to earth to save them. God came to redeem his people. "In the beginning was the Word," self-expression of God, "and the Word was God and the Word became flesh and dwelt." Another title I would love to use for this sermon, "Among us." "And we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth," what glory of the Gospel over every other religion. Here is God who is in the temple not as the glory cloud but as man and he teaches the people. Here is God who spoke as no man ever spoke, giving himself to people and he spoke as one having authority and not as the scribes.

Imagine that. Here is God who comes to your house at your party, at your wedding, and he ministers. Here is God who takes your little children and blesses them. You can imagine Jesus taking the children on his knee and blessing them and saying, "Permit the little children to come to Me and don't forbid them for such is the kingdom of heaven. Come to Me." What? Come to God, and he puts his hand on them and blesses them and here is God who didn't tell us what he would do, he bore a cross and he went to a cross and he died and people were eyewitnesses of that as well as of his resurrection and of his ascension. This is the culmination of the covenant blessing of God. It is God with us. God with us. Not simply information.

Do you understand what I'm saying if I told you if you just had the Bible, you would never go to heaven? If you just had information, you couldn't be saved. It took a God who gave himself that we might be delivered and he continues now to bring the blessings of his grace through real comings, not only by the Spirit but in his representatives, and this is what continually as I've gone through material for pastoral theology, as I thought to bring my own thoughts captive to the word of God in preaching and relate it to a computer and email that I use, these are the texts that have been illuminated for me in ways I've never ever experienced before. Let's look at some with me.

Look back at 1 Thessalonians 1:5 and remember that not even prepositional phrases are coincidental in the Scriptures. They are given for our instruction. 1 Thessalonians 1:5, "For our gospel did not come to you," with information only, "in word only but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, just as you know what kind of men we were," operative phrase, "among you for your sake." The Gospel was not just in word, it came in all of these demonstrations of the power of the Holy Spirit together with a deep heart conviction that these things were true, that they're not people who said, "We are baptized therefore we know we're going to heaven," there was an assurance that came to

them that they were God's children and that assurance was inseparable from the fact that the Thessalonians knew a kind of people the apostle and his cohorts were among them. The Spirit's work in their midst that came by the word was inseparable from the fact that these people had seen their ministers eyeball to eyeball, and the fact that they were there, like their Savior, for their sake. They were given for them even as Christ was given for them.

And of course, that language is used elsewhere in chapter 2 and verse 7, "But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children." I mean, can you imagine a nursing mother trying to nourish her child by email? It doesn't happen. The mother takes the child, puts it to her own breast and nourishes the child, and we were like that, "We were among you."

In verse 10, "You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe," among you, just "as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory." Mother and father who are, what? With their children. If we had parents who abandoned their children to let some talking head deal with them, that's parental irresponsibility. Paul says, "We were among you as a father and as a mother for your sake."

So also, don't turn there but just so you're primed to think of the language, in Acts 20:18 the Apostle Paul says, "You know how I lived among you." And in Acts 20:28 he says, "Take heed to yourselves and to the whole flock among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers." These weren't bishops over the people, these were elders among and with the people. "Shepherd," 1 Peter 5:2, "the among you flock of God." That language impregnated in the language and work of the elder.

Romans 1:8-15. Now why are all of these references to Paul's trips in here in this glorious Gospel of justification and salvation? Because these things are inseparable from that Gospel. Romans 1:8, "First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers, making request," for what? For their perseverance, for their holiness, for great strides in grace. "Making request if," top of the list, "by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you." Now wait a minute, Paul wrote this but he says, "My prayer," almost as if this was insufficient, "above all else is I want to be with you. For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established--that is," now there's a holy self-interest here, "that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me." That's beautiful. Paul's writing, he's writing under the inspiration of God. We can't send our emails that way. He's writing it out to go to Rome and you can imagine poor, weary, beleaguered Paul saying, "There's something about the way grace works among his people. I've gotta be with you. I've gotta see you and you've gotta see me as well. It's got to come. Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was

hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you," note the language, among you, "also, just as among the other Gentiles. I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also." Have you ever thought about the way these verses are there? What is verse 14, "I'm a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both the wise and the unwise," have to do with, "So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also"? Paul says, "I'm such a debtor to you. I need to be there with you. I haven't discharged my payment to you unless I come to be with you." That's how urgent it was that Paul be among his people as Christ was among his people.

Now if that's not enough, look at the end of Romans 15:22-24. "For this reason," Romans 15:22. Now here again, that glorious treatment of sin and justification and sanctification, holiness of life and dealing with Christian liberty so we don't cause a brother to stumble and now look at what he puts in here. Travel plans. "For this reason," Romans 15:22, "I also have been much hindered from coming to you. But now no longer having a place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come to you, whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you. For I hope to see you on my journey, and to be helped on my way there by you, if first I may enjoy your company for a while." Do you get the point? He wants to be with them. He is going over backwards to say, "I want to be among you."

Then in verses 28 to 32, "Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain." What an amazing statement. He doesn't give the different cities he's going to go to so he can stop and see the Holiday Inns there, he says, "You are gonna be my stopping point in Rome. That great glorious city with its amphitheater and with all of its massive stone buildings, that's irrelevant to me. You're there and I want to be there among you. That's my stopping point before I go to Spain. But I know that when I come to you," verse 29, "I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ. Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me, that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, that," in order, why do I want to be delivered, "that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you." Do you get the point? He wants to be with those people. There is something that is annexed to their redemption and his ministry to them that will not be accomplished unless he comes. Remember, preachers are, what? They are sent. They don't sit and communicate, they are sent. How beautiful are the feet of those who bring the tidings of the Gospel of peace. They go and they move and Paul's feet, what an emblem of that they were.

And then these two other texts. You know, when we come to 2, 3 John, we just fly right through them so we can get to the real stuff of the book of Revelation. Look at the book of 2 John. 2 John and then 3 John and Jude. 2 John 12, "Having many things to write to you, I did not wish to do so with paper and ink; but I hope to come to you and speak face to face, that our joy may be full." That language, "face to face," when it's used in the Old and New Testaments as most of you know, is used almost invariably for one thing, God

speaking face to face to his friends. And here John as a representative of Christ, the part of the foundation of which Christ is the cornerstone, says in a real sense, "I want to represent those face to face dealings of God with his people as I come to you." So pen and ink isn't sufficient. This is why, dear brothers and sisters, in glory the Bible will no longer be needed. You'll be face to face with Christ. He longs to be with you.

And then in 3 John, verse 12. "Having many things to write to you, I did not wish to do so with paper and ink; but I hope to come to you and speak face to face that our joy may be full," and then in 3 John 13, "I had many things to write, but I do not wish to write to you with pen and ink; but I hope to see you shortly, and we shall speak face to face." Now why is that here? It's because salvation is not by information. Salvation is by Incarnation. It is by God who doesn't just speak, he became man and dwelt with us and we saw him. And don't you ever forget it: there is nothing else in the world like it, there is no other religion in which God becomes man and comes to your house. Salvation comes by Incarnation or by way of the Incarnation of our Lord and by the fullest meaning of that word "communication." Communication in its historic meaning does not simply mean to speak. If you want to say "speak," you speak. Communication is the giving of a whole being to someone else, a whole thing, a whole entity to someone else, hence we have a communion service. "This is My body broken for you." Preaching is not enough. "This is My body broken for you. This is My blood that is shed for you." And we say in our own standards regarding the communion of the saints, each believer in Christ is bound to one another and has share in one another's or communion in one another's gifts and graces. There are the sharing of lives in God's people and, brothers and sisters, modern technology is not wrong but it truncates, it cuts off at the top that very important aspect of communication and what real communion is.

Now let's give some implications and I have four lines of them here. 1. For the church corporate. I love the term "counterculture." That's one of the vestiges of that, and I know the way it was done in the '60s was perverted but I think the term is a good one. "Don't be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." And our world would push itself into its mold in which we're basically told that the millennium is gonna come on broadband width. Now that's not so. But over against that kind of virtual community, there is a desperate need of real radical, real communion in which you as brothers and sisters in Christ are not satisfied with email but you commune with one another, practical things. Whether you do it in small groups or you do it just together by getting together in your homes with others for a meal, you are in one another's homes and you pray with one another, and you see one another, and you weep with one another, and rejoice with one another.

You know, the new thing in our modern technological world today is drive-in calling hours. Now we're going to go to calling hours for a neighbor that died the other day. Incidentally, when I leave fellowship tonight, don't think I'm violating what I preached on tonight, I've got to go to see some other people who are mourning the loss of a loved one. But this is almost the epitome of our modern technological culture and you really don't want to go into a funeral home where people are crying and you don't know what to say and you feel funny crying, so therefore there are now calling hours in certain funeral

homes where you can drive up to a funeral home, I guess you push a button, and if you want to see Mr. Whatever-his-name-is or Mrs. Whatever-it-is, that body will come forward in a casket and you can see Mr. So-and-so, Mrs. So-and-so, pay respects and then go on and do whatever you need to do. Virtual calling hours. But you see, that's reprehensible. We're meant to be with one another and to weep and even when we don't know what to say, that's part of the experience. Job's friends had all kinds of things to say and they really blew it. It would've been better if they were quiet. But the point is, they're there with one another.

But I mean that, brothers, and I mean that in this New York area. I know everybody, we're busy too and we have to stop and think, "No, God has given us a privilege and responsibility to commune with brothers and sisters in Christ and our emails are not enough." To go out for meals, to be with families, to go to Presbyterian picnics, I know you're busy, fellowship times at the church, these are the kinds of things that are needful, the one-anothering ministry that the Scriptures speak of, provoking one another to love and good works, exhorting one another, encouraging one another, speaking the truth in love to one another.

Now emails are not enough. I mean, this has gotten so bad as Pastor Reynolds pointed out, I think he did or it was in my talk with him, this has gotten so bad that there are many students today who are utterly uncomfortable being face to face with people. They can't look you in the eyeball and talk to you because they are so used to talking to one another by their instant messaging. Now do you see technology not wrong itself, but it warps the very concept of speaking the truth to one another and the whole idea of communication and, of course, even a communion service in which you and I are reminded by the giving of the emblems of Christ's body and blood, salvation is information it's giving, the Incarnation and a cross and body and blood give to you. And so it is fitting, as it was in the early church, to feast together afterwards because these are things that come from you; the gumbo that we make is an extension of the Shishko's life given to you, as are all the food that you make.

You see, that's how earthy and real the Christian faith is, and you come together and you pray and I realize even if you think you have more important things to do, frankly I don't think there is anything more important on the Lord's Day than to say, "I want to know what the needs of my brothers and sisters are." That's why we modify the way we pray, so that we can give more people opportunities to pray and share with one another. A true community, this kind of, "I long to be with you," on the general level in the church for ministers.

My dear brothers, you need God's people to communicate to you. You need to be with God's people, not just read things that they write but see the facial expressions and know what makes them tick and learn from them, being with them. Jesus knew what was in the heart of the man, we don't, and that kind of communication that comes by body language, that's so important. You won't get it in front of your computer. And they need, they need you to be there in all of your weakness, in all of your failing, with your understanding of the word of God, even wrestling and try to come up with answers to their difficult

questions. That's part of showing the ministry of the grace of Christ to them, who doesn't pop out answer 465 to their question casually. You need that, brothers, in the ministry.

Again, I know what it's like to have to get ourselves up from our study and make that pastoral visit and go to be with people, but it's bringing in a real sense what Christ is doing in you to others, always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus that the life of Christ might be manifested in you folks. We who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake. So death is working in us but life is working in you.

But notice the language. They knew Paul's persecutions. They could probably have seen the scars on his own back in which Paul said, "I'm a minister of Christ who gave Himself for sinners." And you, dear brothers, you give yourself to your people otherwise they're not gonna have any concept of what it is, that there's a Christ who gave himself for his own people.

For a session. Your rule represents Christ, the citizen King who took the garb of his citizens and dwelt in their midst. Session, sitting and governing. That's not all of it. It is in the language of Acts 20, being among God's people, shepherding the among you flock of God. My fellow elders, and you'll see why I love that term even as I speak as a minister, you get to the point, I get to the point that we're too busy with administrative duties or me even with my sermon preparation or preparing for pastoral theology classes, that we don't go to people's homes. And I don't mean just picking up the phone but there's a place for that, I don't mean just emails, but there's a place for that, that we go to the flock and are among them. Now we're not being faithful to what Christ has said, so people can see, as it were, Incarnations before them of the compassion of the Lord Jesus Christ because that is what the Gospel is all about. And I want to promise you that if we don't do that work, I guarantee you the false teachers will.

Acts 20:29, after Paul says, "Shepherd the among you flock of God," he says, "For after my coming, wicked ravenous wolves are going to come in among you to steal the flock." If you don't do it, they will. 2 Peter 2:1. Even as there were false prophets, there will be false teachers showing that the prophetic office will pass, teachers will replace it but there will still be falsity in that teaching. "Even so there will be false teachers among you, secretly bringing in destructive heresies." You see, I may not go out and work in my garden, if I do work in my garden, weeds are still gonna grow but you do your pastoral work, weeds are still gonna grow up in church life but I guarantee you, if I don't go out and work in the garden and be there in the midst of it, weeds are really going to grow, and so it's the same thing. And so for sessions, being among the Lord's people.

And for you as a congregation, do you realize the great privilege and blessing of this? I read pastoral theology treatments that ministers don't make visits today. That's basically a thing of the past. If you're in the hospital, maybe they've got somebody on staff that will come, but not the pastor. And funerals? Well, maybe there's somebody that will come and do it. Not the pastor. Not the pastor. The pastor is the chief executive officer. He is the administrator of his staff. He has more important things.

I don't see, someone asked me once, "Wouldn't you like to be like John MacArthur so that you can spend 50 hours a week just studying and writing and you don't have to be bothered with all those pastoral duties?" You see, that would drive me absolutely crazy. Sometimes pastoral duties almost drive me crazy too. But you don't want a ministry like that. You want a minister who's tears have gotten wet because he's wept with you and you want a minister that you've laughed with and rejoiced with, and you want a minister that's prayed with you in your own home as you've been broken-hearted, and you want a minister who's not always looking like he's 27 years old coming off the beach with a beautiful tan, with a great actor. Somebody who's got bags under his eyes, and somebody who's gotten weary in the work because he loved Christ and he loved the church and he loved you, and you can say, "There is one who, like Paul, daily carries about in his body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus might be manifested in our mortal bodies." I've told you so many times, Pastor Osborne's ministry in Mount Vernon, what a joy that must be, a man who carries about in his body death. No wonder there's such a power when that man preaches.

This is not a blast, that new technology, but brothers and sisters, Christianity isn't narcissism, Christianity isn't some esoteric knowledge that you get by mystery religions or by books or through the web, and now information is not salvation and communication is not communion. They're not the same things. Christ, what? Walked in love as Christ loved us and gave himself for us. I go out to another pastoral visit, another Thursday night, or another Tuesday night, another night away from the family, and I struggle all too often and say, "Lord, I would much rather be with my family," and I remind myself again, "I've got a Savior who left the glories of heaven and He came to earth for sinful filth like me. I wouldn't even have the grace to be able to drive a car to God's glory, let alone represent Him in a home if it weren't for Him." But that's the Gospel. Christ loved us and gave himself for us. Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church, giving himself for it.

And that's what the Christian life is all about, folks. For ministers, elders, all the way down, not virtual community but real community, real ministry, whatever it takes, however you do it, of giving yourself for the good of others. And yes, we're radically different. It is ministers who visit. It is elders who visit. If you will visit, if you will break into your schedule and say, "No, I've got a commitment to brothers and sisters and it's gonna cost a bit, but Christ gave His everything for me," and then the world and its virtual community can never really satisfy if longing for real community looks and says, "Behold those Christians, how they love one another."

What power there is if we can paraphrase the Apostle John, for I have many things to send to you, I have many things to communicate to you. I could have sent you an email but I hope to see you shortly that we might speak face to face that our joy might be made full. That's the glory of this book and of this God who does what the God of no other religion can do, he speaks with us face to face in Christ and he sends his ministers in his name to speak face to face to each of you.

Let's pray.

*Our Lord, what a glory is the Gospel. What wonder there is that the great God of heaven who enjoyed perfect communion with His Father and with the Spirit for all eternity, infinitely, infinite happiness, infinite delight, infinite joy, should break into that and take flesh, come through the birth canal of a woman, be placed in a feeding trough, be shuttled around for his own safety as a babe, should grow in wisdom and stature and favor with God and man in the seminary training of His first 30 years, should spend time saying, "My meat and drink is to do the will of My Father in heaven," so that He gave Himself to people even when weary and even when he had not eaten and drank. What a mercy that that God did not just speak to lepers and did not even just come to them, but He touched them and spoke to them, and spoke to women who were the outcasts of the earth and ministered to them, and took little children for whom the disciples had no time and blessed them, and took blind Bartimaeus' longing so much for their sight, would cause the crowd to part even, O Lord, as You caused the waters of the Red Sea to part, to single him out and say to him, "What would you have Me do for you?" Our Lord who ate and drank with sinners and who now eats and drinks with saints, O God, whether we be ministers, whether we be elders or deacons, whether we be non-ordained men or women, boys or girls, Lord, fill us with the fact that that Incarnation of grace and truth comes in Your people and there is a power, there is a role that can never be replaced by the power of megahertz, gigabytes, broadbands or anything else in the virtual world. Lord, let us be a holy, Christian counterculture breaking through the mechanism and the technologism of our day so that we are living breathing Christians giving ourselves, our whole beings in the real meaning of communication, not only for the saints but for unbelievers as well, and in that way, our Lord, show the reality of Your amazing giving grace. Amen.*