

Gospel Ministry

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[0 : 00] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.! For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

Paul sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him.

And when they came to him, he said to them, You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia. If you remember that, that's back in Acts 19.

Verse 19, I was serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews. How I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable and teaching you in public and from house to house.

Remember he taught in the synagogue in the hall of Tyrannus. Testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance towards God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

[1 : 21] And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me.

But I do not count my life of any value, nor as precious to myself. If only I may finish my course in the ministry I've received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

And now, behold, I know that none among you whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again.

Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of you all. For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.

Verse 28, Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.

[2 : 39] I know that after my departure, fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock, and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things to draw away the disciples after them.

Verse 31, Therefore, be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night and day to admonish you even with tears.

And now, I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel.

You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who are with me. In all things I have shown you, that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.

Verse 36, And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. And there was much weeping on the part of all.

- [3 : 51] They embraced Paul, and Paul kissed them, being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again.
- And they accompanied him to the ship. It's the word of God. Just a fabulous speech, sermon, whatever you want to call it, in this book.
- Well, over the past six weeks, there's only been one thing worth talking about in the world of sports. The last dance. Over five straight Sunday evening, ESPN has released a documentary about the Chicago Bulls' chase to win the 1998 championship and complete their second three-peat.
- Spoiler alert, they won. They got the three-peat. But the last dance, it includes tons of never-before-seen footage of the Bulls and extensive interviews with the team and with its leader, Michael Jordan.
- You know, this documentary has done a couple things. For one, it has established for all time that Jordan is the GOAT. He's the greatest of all time. My wife asked me what the GOAT means the other day.
- [5 : 06] He's the greatest of all time. LeBron is not going to dethrone him anytime soon or ever. And this documentary has actually made me a Michael Jordan fan.
- Now, I grew up in the 80s and the early 90s, and so I was a little bit of a fan boy for a little season, then I dropped the Bulls. But it's made me a fan of the way he plays the game and to some degree, the way he leads.
- Episode 7 was most insightful to me. It covered Jordan's intensity and how hard he was on his teammates. And I got a couple quotes for me, quotes for you.
- One teammate said, don't get me wrong, Jordan's a jerk. He crossed the line numerous times. And the documentary has footage of the things he would do.
- One guy played a horrible game. Jordan wouldn't let him eat afterwards. So he definitely did some things and crossed the line. Another teammate said, was he a nice guy? He couldn't have been a nice guy.
- [6 : 06] With that kind of intense mentality, you can't be a nice guy. He was difficult. After these interviews, the director interviews, Jordan says, do you think your intensity caused you to not be liked by the team?
- Jordan said, and I quote, winning has a price. Leadership has a price. I challenge people when they didn't want to be challenged.
- Once you join the team, once you join the Bulls, you live at a certain standard that I play the game. You ask all my teammates, the one thing about Michael Jordan is that he never asked me to do something he didn't do.
- When they showed that part of the footage, they showed Jordan beating the whole team in suicides. In 98, when he was what, 36.
- When people see this, they're going to say he wasn't a nice guy. He was a tyrant. Well, that's you, Jordan said, because you never won anything.
- [7 : 09] I wanted to win and I wanted them to be a part of it. He concludes, look, I don't have to do this interview. I'm only doing it because this is who I am. That's how I played the game.
- That's my mentality. With tears in his eyes, he said, if you don't want to play that way, don't play that way. Very intense scene. Interviewed a few weeks afterwards, or a few weeks ago, the director said there were only two things that brought out deep emotion in Michael Jordan.
- His family and his philosophy of life. He said, and I quote, his philosophy, how he lives his life, he's so adamant about that that he gets emotional.

This morning, we come to a most staggering speech of the apostle Paul in the book of Acts. It's the only speech of the apostle in the book of Acts addressed only to Christians, and it's emotional.

Paul is addressing the elders of Ephesus. He's aware, this is the last time he'll see them face to face, but camaraderie and friendship is not what mainly produces emotion in the apostle's heart.

[8 : 16] Paul is unpacking and defending his philosophy of life. Paul is telling us what makes him tick, the way he lives, the way he thinks following Christ ought to look.

And all throughout, he points to his example. Like Jordan, he never calls his followers to do something he doesn't do. More importantly, just like our Lord, he never calls his followers to do something he doesn't do.

And that's why I'm threading through this speech. He says, you know, you know, you know, you remember when I was in Ephesus, you know what I did. You know how I worked with my own hands.

And this is a speech, love, for pastors. You know, it is a behind-the-scenes look at this apostle. I don't know about you, but I love even the interview of the last stanza, just behind the scenes at the inner workings of this team.

Well, this is the inner workings of our apostle Paul. It is for pastors. It is also for churches. That they would see how pastors and churches are to relate.

[9 : 15] But more importantly for us this morning, it is for all of us. Paul is uncovering the heart of a gospel-shaped person and calling us to follow him in so many ways.

Where we're going this morning is give yourself wholly and continually to Christ to gain life's greatest rewards. blessings. Give yourself wholly and continually to Christ to gain life's greatest rewards.

And, you know, I'm going to kind of capture the layeredness of this message for us this morning. I'm going to have a word to pastors, a word to us, a word to the congregation, and a word to all.

I think this text preaches to me. And you need to overhear it. This text grabs me by the shirt and you need to overhear it.

It addresses anybody who would be a pastor or a pastoral resident here, any man that would stand up and serve in this church, whether next year or ten years from now, this text is for me and I think you need to overhear it.

[10 : 26] So the biggest chunk of our message will be this point as we see Paul unpack what ministry in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ is to look like.

And he calls pastors first to serve the Lord. Look down at verse 18. He says, you yourself know. You remember when I told you, he points to his example again and again. You yourself know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I sat put in Asia, serving the Lord.

Serving the Lord. He said, from the first day I arrived, I was serving the Lord. And it gets even better in verse 24. And when he's defending his philosophy of ministry, he says, his life boils down to his service.

Look in verse 24. I don't count my life of any value nor as precious to myself. If only I may finish my course and the ministry, literally the service that I received from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now that's just, that's a staggering statement. My life equals my assignment from the Lord. Now that's not just true for the apostle. It can be true for you.

[11 : 33] My life equals what the Lord has called me to because I'm serving the Lord. You know, we often talk about serving in such a way that we emphasize how we're serving.

You know, we take a spiritual gifts survey so that we can get down our gift and figure out how we're called to serve the Lord. But that's not what stands out to the apostle. It's not about how he's serving but who he's serving.

It is the Lord. As I reminded you in the first message in the book of Acts, when it says Lord most often in the book of Acts, it's referring to the Lord, Jesus Christ.

So Paul is saying, I am serving the Lord. You know what Paul's, or his favorite title for himself was? Not apostle. Because he often underscored apostle with the one most unworthy to be an apostle.

The last apostle. His favorite assignment to himself was a bond servant of the Lord. A slave of Christ.

[12 : 34] Who are you? This is true of every Christian. Whether your daily work is filled with spreadsheets, assembly lines, building projects, child rearing, or whatever.

If you receive your place as a calling from the Lord, you can render whatever you do as service to him. So don't throw in the towel if your station is not what you want.

Find something to do for the Lord Jesus Christ. But this is also true of pastors. Knowing we are serving the Lord Jesus Christ is meant to produce in pastors an all-consuming willingness to go wherever and do whatever he commands.

He's the Lord. That's the point. Yeah, it reminds me of that parable. We've only done what is our duty. We are unworthy servants. You know, we think, well, on this side of the cross we shouldn't think that.

Well, that's not true. He's the Lord. He commands. He calls the shots. Our responsibility is to obey him with all our heart. Look down in verse 19. He says, he was serving the Lord with all humility and with tears.

[13 : 43] Later, it reminds us that he said, I proclaim to you, verse 31, I did not cease to admonish you with tears. This is what it looks like.

Paul's not after a personal gain or a personal power or a personal influence. Paul's not trying to build a personal platform. Paul is trying to pour out his life for Jesus Christ.

And the takeaway for us is churches do not exist to serve pastors. They don't exist to give pastors a place to use their gifts or a place where they can be taken care of.

Pastors exist to serve churches and to give everything away to serve the Lord. That's an amen in the Thomas family, you know. That's why Paul keeps telling them, you remember, I wasn't a burden to you.

I wasn't a burden to you. So much of evangelicalism or just the church it brought is upside down on this. Serve the Lord.

[14 : 47] Do not shrink from suffering is the second thing he says to them. Do not shrink, you know. In reminding them of his example, Paul's saying, he's reminding them how he did not shrink from suffering.

He said, I serve the Lord with humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me because of the plots of the Jews. If we just roll back the tape in our study of Acts, these Jews have taken him out.

Paul barely finished his speech in the whole book. He didn't stop because of fear of man. He stopped because they stopped him mid-sentence and beat him, drug him out of town, left him for dead, chained him up.

And now, as he makes his way to Jerusalem, he knows more suffering awaits him, but he does not shrink. The point is, Paul here is supposed to remind us of someone else, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Look in verse 22. He says, now, so this is like the transition, what's going on? Paul says, now I'm about to go to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit.

[15 : 53] Sometimes we think the Spirit only leads us into green pastures. Not true for Paul. Not true for Jesus Christ. Constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me, except that the Holy Spirit testifies me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me.

Sometimes finding the will of God is not looking for an open door, but a closed one. Because that's the one you should walk through to honor the Lord. So he doesn't shrink.

I think what Paul would say to me and say to pastors that pastoral ministry is not the hardest job, but it does bring with it a degree of suffering that pastors must not shrink from.

You may ask, what is that? That's a great question. I think one thing, and often what it is, is the daily anxiety. You remember in 2 Corinthians 11, a good pastor has a daily anxiety because he's watching while others are sleeping.

John Flavel, one of my favorite Puritan writers, says, pastors are fittingly compared to the toil of men in harvest, the men in the field, to the labors of a woman in travail, birth pangs, and to the agonies of soldiers in the dangers of battle.

[17 : 15] What's the image behind all of those? We must watch while others sleep. Pastoral ministry is a watching ministry.

We must not shrink. Thirdly, Paul says, proclaim the gospel. You know, after reminding them of how he served the Lord and how he commits to not shrink from suffering, Paul reminds them again and again of how he proclaimed the gospel to them.

I pointed that out. Acts 19, he said he stayed there two years and then at the end of Acts 20, Paul says, I was with you three years. The point is, he did a lot of proclaiming to you in public from house to house.

He's proclaiming and in this text, in this speech, Paul says seven times how he preached to them. He declared to them. He taught them. He testified.

He testified. He proclaimed. He declared. The point is clear. The pastor is called to proclaim. He's called to proclaim.

[18 : 15] He's called to, the idea behind this is of a herald. The pastor is a herald. He's bringing news of what he's heard. He rides into town to testify and announce that something has happened that you need to hear about.

John Stott says it like this. The herald of God comes with an urgent proclamation of peace through the blood of the cross and with a summons to men to repent, to lay down their arms and humbly accept the offered pardon.

The pastor is not called to give us kind of warm fuzzies but to herald news. The pastor is called, the herald, the pastor is called to witness.

That's the word testify. Literally, martyr. Martyr is a person who dies to testify. That's where that word comes from. The idea behind that word is of a courtroom.

The idea is that Jesus Christ stands on trial in the 21st century in the midst of quarantine, not before a Sanhedrin or Pontius Pilate but before a world that opposes God.

[19 : 21] Pastors are called to testify to what they've seen and know about him, to defend him, commend him, to lay out the evidence before it's too late. The idea behind these words, and I don't want to prolong this, but the pastor is not meant to educate or not merely meant to educate or inspire, comfort or console.

The pastor is meant to proclaim news and persuade us to respond now. If you came to my house and my house was on fire, you wouldn't knock on the door.

You'd kick the door in. You'd throw rock through a window so you could climb in and say, get out of that house. Well, that's what's going on with the gospel and what the pastor is called to do. It's an urgent message for us to receive that we must respond and our response matters for eternity.

The judgment of God will either fall for our sin on Jesus Christ or it will fall on us. Jesus said, the wrath of God remains on them.

That's why Paul says, he has that curious phrase at the end of the sermon where he says, I'm innocent of all the blood. Your blood's on your own head. Peter said something similar to that earlier in Acts and a lot of that just comes from Ezekiel 33 where there's this idea that I proclaim to you this message and if you hear this message, well, then your response is no longer on my shoulders but on your own and that's what I would commend to you in response to proclaiming the gospel to you this morning.

[20 : 53] The good news of the gospel is that God has done everything that is necessary to reconcile you to God. The offended party has hunted down the offender and is trying to appeal to you, to persuade you, to lead you, to be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ and he did this by laying all of your sins upon him so that his wrath might be poured out in full on Jesus Christ in three hours so that you might not experience eternity without God experiencing the wrath of God forever.

So come to Jesus Christ. and find rest. Pull off the mask and find rest.

And Jesus Christ, I meant mask metaphorically. I love to yank that thing off too. If it weren't already clear that the pastor's work is to proclaim and preach from this sermon, Paul underlines it with his example.

He says, I preach repentance and faith. I preach the good news. Verse 24, I preach the whole counsel of God. I preach the word of his grace.

The pastor's not called to be a social worker, entrepreneur, life hacker, or business executive. The pastor is called to a book and to spend his life unpacking it. I got to read this quote.

[22 : 17] I've read it to you before, but I just love it. It captures it so well. The word of God that saves and sanctifies from generation to generation is preserved in a book. And therefore, at the heart of every pastor's work is book work.

Call it reading, meditation, reflection, cogitation, study, exegesis, whatever you will. A large and central part of our work is to wrestle God's meaning from a book and to proclaim it in the power of the Spirit.

The pastor is not called to hunt down a burden or to say what he feels or to say what he wants. The pastor is called to wrestle meaning from a book and proclaim it in the power of the Spirit.

You know, for us, this conviction has meant, it has shaped the way we organize Sunday meetings and the way we approach the preaching moment.

We go through books of the Bible verse by verse, sometimes in larger chunks, which you're going to see that as we conclude Acts, sometimes in smaller chunks, but we do it one book at a time.

[23 : 22] One of my favorite stories about this, this is not new to me or even to people in this generation. It's been an established practice in the Reformed tradition. John Calvin was pastor in Geneva, Switzerland, from France.

He left, he tried to get out of Switzerland. That's a long story I'll tell you about that. Some pastors don't like their calling too much and probably for good reason. And eventually he was basically drugged back to Geneva.

When he gets back in the pulpit, he starts at the next verse after the verse he was on three years prior. No introduction sermon, you know.

But that shows you the conviction. The idea is we preach the whole counsel of God not by us setting the agenda but allowing God to do so. not preaching what we like to hear but what the word organizes for us to hear.

You know, I wouldn't preach a sermon like this. This is one of those uncomfortable sermons. I'm telling you about my job description. You know, I'd like to keep that a little bit more private. But it encourages us to address things.

[24 : 36] I'd much rather preach evangelistic sermons. You know what I mean. Preaching year in, year out. You know, you might hear this and you think this is kind of archaic to spend all this time, all this hours and hours of study.

I spend 20 to 25 on a really rough week, hours prepping, not to mention other reading every week.

Seems a little archaic sometimes to me. But, you know, I think the point is God doesn't change us in a moment and many testify to that so well. He could.

He's going to change us in the twinkling of an eye. But he doesn't do that. We grow slowly, don't we? And God's chosen to change us slowly too in a congregation with the week in, week out wrestling of God's word and the ordinary preaching of the gospel.

Fourthly, he says care for the church. Care for the church. Paul commands the Ephesian elders in verse 28.

[25 : 48] Look down there with me. This is a verse you should know. Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to care for the church of God which he obtained with his own blood.

There's so many things we could see behind this verse and tend to preach another sermon but I can't do that. The main thing I do want us to see is the metaphor that's behind it. So Paul, just like us, he speaks with metaphor and the metaphor behind this verse is the metaphor of a shepherd.

The shepherd is this vital biblical metaphor. If you go into your Bible looking for it, you'll see it everywhere. Again and again, when the Bible uses this metaphor, it emphasizes that the Lord is our shepherd.

He leads us. He guides us. He feeds us. He protects us. We are his sheep, Psalm 95, and the sheep of his pasture. He owns us and the world.

That's what he's trying to say and it's no different in this verse. Look in verse 28 there. He says, pay careful attention to yourselves and all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to care for the church of God.

[26 : 55] The church is not my church. It's not your church. It's not your family's church. It's not my family's church. It's the church or if it's a church of any salt, a biblical church, it's the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's God's church. He obtained it with his own blood. So there we have God the Father. It's God the Father's church. He obtained it, Jesus Christ, with his own blood, second person of the Trinity.

It belongs to God and it was bought by Christ. It's doubly his. Do you see what's going on there? Over whom the Holy Spirit has made you pastors' overseers.

So there you have all three persons of the Trinity playing their part and declaring their ownership of the church. No pastor even calls himself.

No pastor positions himself. It's the Holy Spirit who positions them to care. So this verse, this one little verse strongly affirms God's role in purchasing and gathering his people.

[28 : 05] But it nevertheless gives certain men the privilege to stand underneath the great shepherd to shepherd and care for certain people in local churches.

Let me say that again. This verse nevertheless gives certain men the privilege to stand underneath the great shepherd to shepherd and care for certain people in local churches.

The command is clear. It's God's church. He's the great shepherd and yet the command rests on human ears.

Pay careful attention to all the flock which the Holy Spirit has given you to care for the church of God. More than any other image in Scripture the pastor is called to be a shepherd.

They're called to care for sheep like a shepherd. Now this is not a relationship we're familiar with or not one that I am naturally familiar with but sheep aren't the cuddly creatures we often think about.

[29 : 15] John Stott says it like this, sheep are not at all the clean and cuddly creatures they may appear. In fact they're dirty subject to unpleasant pests and regularly need to be dipped in strong chemicals to rid them of lice ticks and worms.

They're also unintelligent wayward and obstinate and yet shepherds do the dirty work. They lead they guide they feed they protect they rescue.

Shepherds in the Bible are not soft. They're not gentle hearted animal lovers. They're rough and hard. When the angels appeared to the shepherds we kind of think man these guys these are rough neck red neck type of people you know they fit in around here you know that's what the shepherds were in Luke 2 when the angels appeared to them.

That's what was shocking. How did the shepherds get in? That's the point. This is the word pastors are called to do. They are to lead feed guide study know protect and sacrifice for the sheep.

They're to watch while others sleep. They're to shepherd and care for certain people. I mean I have been called by God not to everyone in Athens Tennessee but to the people the Lord has entrusted very soberly to my charge.

[30 : 42] which is a terrifying thing. But like especially with some of you in here and I'm just kidding like the the lives of shepherds in the old world in the example of the apostle Paul their attention is to be riveted by this one thing caring for the church.

Timothy Laniak an author that I enjoy has written several different books on pastoral ministry. He's a professor at a seminary and as he's writing these books on shepherding and trying to reassert this metaphor for pastors he moved to the Middle East for a year to spend up close time with Bedouin shepherds.

He tells this story in one of his books of interviewing one shepherd and the shepherd said you know you don't really have a right to be in this business unless you have a heart for it.

And I'm not going to let my sons inherit the family flock even though in those days a flock of several thousand sheep is quite a business. He said my sons don't deserve the flock they don't have a heart for it.

It's funny actually I don't have it here but he says well your son kind of does to Mr. Laniac he's like nah my son's coming back with me to the states but he continues I spend my days every day out here and I don't have to but I do it because I care about them.

[32 : 23] He continues my sons don't I can tell. They're preoccupied. They want to do other things. Pastoral ministry is not a place for a man who just likes to read.

It's not a place for a man who wants to do other things. It's not a place for a man who's easily distracted or easily discontented. It's for men who will stand immovably underneath the great shepherd for all their days to care for certain people in local churches.

That's what pastoral ministry is about. When I moved here several years ago to Athens one local pastor told me that the church leaders in Athens are either preachers or pastors.

Now that word pastor that just comes from the word shepherd in the Greek and so they're either preachers or pastors. They either spend 90% of their time in the study and 10% with the people or they spend 90% of their time with the people and throw something together in 30 minutes to preach.

I hope Trinity Grace is somewhere in between. I feel the struggle between these two commands every week. Trust me. Pastors are called to preach and to care.

[33 : 38] Secondly, a word to the congregation. A word to the congregation. This text is preaching not just to me but to you and I need to overhear it.

Actually, I'm a member of the congregation too. That's the weird part of all this. But it's a word for you. I think there's a word in here for you and I want to say a couple points. First is maintain high expectations.

So many people are hurt by pastors. I'm a pastor. I know that. They're hurt by their unfaithfulness, by their harshness, by their financial misconduct, by their distance, by their failure to remember.

I remember John Piper saying, you know, it's not that he made any mistake in one of those ways or any great way, financial impropriety or immorality or any of these things but he failed to be there every time at the hospital or he failed to be there every time at this or that and so that might be all the failure is and it's tempting to lower our expectations of pastors.

If we don't expect much, that's what we can think, we won't be disappointed. You know, that's what makes life hard because our expectations are so high and you do have to be careful with expectations because they can quickly become demands but don't lower them.

[35 : 07] Don't lower them. Don't lower them on me or any other man. not because pastors are perfect people but because of what the Bible says about pastors and their roles in our life.

They're to shepherd and care in a world that bristles against leadership and authority. They're to guide and direct us. We need them. I need them. Where would I be without pastors? Talked to my buddy Bill this week and said, man, I'd be laying in a ditch somewhere in East Knoxville had you not been brought into my life.

So establish biblically high expectations and hold your pastor to it. Second, listen. Listen, if pastors are called to preach then we ought to be eager to hear.

We want to be like the Bereans. One of the texts we didn't get a chance to look at much is Acts 17 when he talks about taking the gospel. Paul preaches in Berea and they receive the word with all eagerness.

I just love that. They're examining the scriptures daily to see if what Paul is saying measures up with what God has said in his word and we want to be eager to hear. We're not naive. We're not just taking anything that comes.

[36 : 18] We're measuring it. We're testing everything as we should, weighing how it accords with all of scripture but nevertheless we're eager to hear. We're eager to learn. We're eager to grow.

I want to be a learner until the day I die. But if we're not careful, this season of live streaming and half opening as a church could seriously erode our eagerness to hear.

Now y'all know how it was. And March 22nd we were all fired up by this live stream thing eagerly watching every week. But I wonder if we're still eager. The Barna Group released a survey just this week.

Over the past four weeks they said 40% of Christians have streamed their regular church online. 23% have streamed a different church online.

Most sobering 48% streamed neither. We were all about it. Week 10 we've distanced ourselves.

[37 : 24] Are we still eager? Are we still streaming? You know maybe we're here which is great but are we still streaming? Are we still organizing our day around gathering?

Do we still need to hear? Thirdly be honest. High expectations. Listen be honest.

Ray Ortlund has said in the church you can either be impressive or known. You can't be both. And unless you're an idiot you'll choose to be known. And that's his quote not mine but I stand by it.

Christopher Ash says I want to speak now about perhaps one of the most common diseases to infect a church. It is a malady that causes exacerbates and brings to a crisis all manner of avoidable difficulties between the life of a pastor and the life of a church.

What can cause such huge problems? A lack of openness and honesty with our pastor. If we're going to have fellowship with one another if pastors are going to be able to care for us we must be open and honest.

[38 : 37] I love the way Paul puts this in 2 Corinthians. The Corinthians were the most dysfunctional church in the New Testament. It's the most difficult relationship Paul had with a church was this church in 2 Corinthians 6 11 which we have for you he says we have spoken freely to you Corinthians our heart is wide open in return I speak as to children as a father to children widen your hearts also my heart is laid bare is what he's saying now open yours up too that's what goes on in this pastor congregation relationship if we're not open and honest none of this will work or bear fruit sadly we're wearing masks now but the church is a famous place for wearing masks because people aren't honest who cares who cares about looking impressive we have to be honest and open in order to bear fruit fourthly pray

Paul concludes this sermon praying with them weeping with them I don't think that's accidental I think when you get this relationship between a pastor and his congregation and the sober calling that comes with it you're just aware none of it will happen without prayer and so he just cries down the story goes that Charles Spurgeon when somebody came and visited him you know he was 21 years old preaching 10,000 people open air preaching I guess it was inside a building but no mic no amplification and somebody came to visit Metropolitan Tabernacle in London said how did this all happen how did it happen the story goes that he led him down underneath the sanctuary where there was a prayer meeting that happened each week that's how it happens spiritual fruit is not built on human will it's built on the power of God thirdly a word to all of us a word to all of us this text preaches to all of us the whole sermon has a simple structure you know you know you know you know you know how I was with you you know how I taught you remember my example pay careful attention to the flock as we just talked about then he concludes verse 32 he gives them a benediction basically he says literally look in verse 32 he says

I commend you to God and to the word of his grace which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified he's saying I have labored and now I leave you in the hands of God to do what only he can do and then Paul's explaining what that is I commend you to God the word of his grace which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance with all those who are sanctified only God can build you up Paul plants Apollo's water but God gives the growth he calls on God to cause growth he calls on you to strengthen you the word is a word from construction it literally has house in the word house building it's a to build up to strengthen to construct to establish that's what happens and that's what goes on when we hear a testimony like that we're built up we're strengthened it's one of Paul's favorite words all throughout 1st Timothy so I leave you to God alone who can build you up and give you an inheritance what's this inheritance it's life eternal it's all we're laboring for it's endless joy it is

God who calls you to faith and though you're temporarily entrusted to weak failing men it is God who will carry you over the last hump now I'm not all about basketball but I've been getting into it just because of the last dance and I was reading one story that claimed!

Trash Talk in basketball NBA history was between Scottie Pippen and Carl Malone if you know anything about Carl Malone and Scottie Pippen Malone was with the Jazz he refused to be interviewed for the last dance he was with the Jazz they lost two years to the Bulls back to back in 97 and 98 and forget which game Malone was at the foul line Malone was nicknamed John Stockton was great at assists and so he just passed the mail to Carl Malone and Carl Malone took it to the house that was the way their relationship worked so Carl Malone had two free throws to seal the game against the Bulls he is standing at the line it is Sunday afternoon game five or six he is standing at the line the mailman Carl Malone the hall of famer ready to sink these shots and as he is getting the ball and doing his little rhythm

[43 : 58] Pippen said the mailman doesn't deliver on Sundays the mailman doesn't deliver and Carl Malone didn't deliver well Paul's telling us God always delivers we grow slowly but the Lord's taken us all the way these words are Paul's farewell he doesn't leave them with one last word from him not one last I love you not I hope to see you soon those words are wonderful but those words are not enough he is not trying to build them into him he leaves them with one last reminder of God and the word of his grace it is as if Paul is saying I will soon be gone but the Lord will never leave I will likely never see you again but the Lord will see you all the way through I have given you everything I have from the first day but he will give you everything you need until the last remember what he said it's more blessed to receive all you give to him all you give up for him all you sacrifice for him all you leave behind for him all you throw away for him all of it and more will come back he is not weak he is not failing he's not running out of strength

God is not dead he's not even failing in strength at all he's not failing in power or wisdom or grace he will not be outdone outmashed or overtaken and so I commend you away from me to this man to the man Jesus Christ who is able to strengthen you and give you an inheritance with all those who are sanctified so give your life to him holy and completely give everything to him you know Michael Jordan's example is compelling but the apostles example gets us closer to Jesus Christ it shows us the key of life life is not about gain it's about giving it away for Jesus Christ we're always giving our lives away for something either in an act or in the normal flow give your life away for Jesus Christ he will never fail let us be a church that's living full tilt you know

I was walking on the beach this week it was one of my favorite places to walk and pray you can't have high thoughts of yourself when you're walking on the beach with this massive ocean and I was just doing what I've done a ton of times I said Lord my life is yours you bought it with a price Lord I don't want to play games Lord I feel like I just say that prayer so many times Lord I don't want to play games I don't want to fall for the charade I don't want to get fat and calloused as I get older I want to fight I want to be full tilt for saying to us he's probably 58 years old at this point maybe early 60s about the time we retired of Florida and he's saying give it away to Jesus Christ let's follow it father in heaven we thank you for these few minutes to sit under your word we thank you for this word

God I pray that anything that was unhelpful would be forgotten! anything that was helpful be remembered I pray God this would be a church where pastors don't play the game and don't charade around it would be a church where pastors lay down their lives be a church that loves to gather loves to sit under your word loves one another a church I pray God just as you pray!

that would be one you know in the midst of this season where everybody's got opinions about everything and the opening and all that type stuff that we would be one one faith one Lord one baptism even as we've been united in salvation that we would be united in heart we be eager to maintain the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace and Lord that you would mature us we're aware God that we are your church and we long to be so Lord come and work we cast ourselves onto you pray that you would strengthen us in Jesus name amen you've been listening to a message given by Walt Alexander lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens Tennessee for more information about Trinity Grace please visit us at Trinity Grace Athens dot com