

What is a Pastor?

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[0 : 0 0] 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.

Today is a momentous day in life of our church, not just because Taylor and I are wearing suits, which admittedly is a concerning thing, but because we have the privilege of installing an elder to Trinity Grace Church, Buddy Luster.

Yeah. And so we're pausing Ecclesiastes, though I was dying to get into that next text, for at least this week. So if you look with me, Acts 20, I'm going to begin reading in verse 17. Acts chapter 20, verse 17.

Now from Miletus, he, that is 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 I set foot in Asia, 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, testifying both to Jesus and to Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. 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 account 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 of you among whom I've 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 all. For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. 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. I know that after my departure, fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. And from among your own cells will arise men speaking twisted things to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore, be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night and day to admonish everyone with tears.

[3 : 3 0] 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 how these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who are with me. In all things I've shown you that by working hard in this way, we may help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said is more blessed to give than to receive. And when he'd said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them. There was much weeping on the part of all.

They embraced Paul and kissed him, 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.

God bless preaching, hearing of his word. Like every Sunday morning, he stood up to pray. It was 1120 a.m. in London on June 18, 1944.

It was in the midst of World War II. The British Empire that had controlled nearly a quarter of the world's land was essentially over. And the capital of the British Empire, London, was under attack.

[5 : 03] Sirens blared. Chaos reigned in the streets. People ran about in terror because of the routine air assaults each evening by Nazi planes. But also because of the remote controlled bombs that they had begun using only days before. Nevertheless, it was Sunday morning and Martin Lloyd-Jones stood up before his people. Even though at this point in the service, everyone in the church began to hear a bomber plane closing in overhead. Lloyd-Jones began his long prayer, his pastoral prayer, and did not stop. He continued to pray until the noise overhead was so loud he couldn't even hear himself talk. The congregation waited for the explosion. The bomb fell. The chapel structure cracked.

Bits of sealing and dust fell from the roof down on the congregants. After the explosion, the congregation rose to their feet, assuming the service was over. But Lloyd-Jones, after a brief pause, bowed his head again and continued his prayer as though nothing had happened. And the congregation sat down again.

After completing his prayer, Miss Lloyd-Jones advised anyone who was nervous to move underneath, to move into the seats underneath one of the balconies. Then he climbed the steps after a deacon swept it out to the sacred desk, as he called it, the pulpit, and began to preach from the book of Job.

Though the world was at war, though the war was literally at the door, Martin Lloyd-Jones knew it was no time to abandon the office and calling as a pastor to build up the people of God for the glory of God.

This morning, we come to a momentous day in life of our church, installing our second local elder in James H. Luster Jr., affectionately known to us as Buddy. I want to seize this opportunity to talk about the office of pastor or elder. It's kind of like the rebar of a church. You don't exactly show people the rebar when they come by or the basement when they come by, but it's a vital thing.

[7 : 38] So we're going to study it biblically from Acts 20. Among every man who will serve in the office of pastor or elder in the days ahead of Trinity Grace Church, including Buddy, my prayer is that there will be a similar resolve and devotion to the office and calling of a pastor. That no world events would deter, no cultural movements would distract, no personal ambitions would divert the present pastors, all future pastors, from devoting themselves to the office and calling of pastoral ministry to build up the people of God with the word of God for the glory of God. May God help us. I want to, essentially this is kind of two charges.

The first is a word to pastors, a word to pastors, a charge to pastors. I think it's vital, not just for them to hear it, but for you, not just for me to hear it, but for you to hear it, overhear it, know what a pastor should look like, think like, act like.

Acts 20 is the only speech addressed only to Christians in the book of Acts. It's not a mixed audience. It's an audience of just Christians, and it's not just addressed to Christians. It's addressed to Christian pastors or elders. Paul had left Ephesus after spending three years there. He gathered them in Miletus before he set sail. If you know the rest of the Acts, he's mostly in a boat until the last two chapters, and so before he set sail, he gathered the elders. He said, bring the elders that I might address them one more time. He's not talking about the old people, so to speak. He's talking about those who serve and govern the church of Jesus Christ, and it's a very personal and a very emotional speech, and you probably captured that just by hearing it, and it's seen by the tearful goodbye and the weeping afterwards, but it's not good friends and good times that is moving Paul's heart in these moments. Paul is leaving Ephesus after three years of devoting himself to preaching the gospel, and he gathers the elders one last time and charges them to continue to care for the church God has building. Regardless of what happens to him, and we know what happened to him. He was executed.

Regardless of what would happen to any other minister, Paul says he wants them to devote themselves to carrying up. So we see, first of all, this is a speech to pastors. I'm going to break this out in four commands for pastors. First is serve the Lord. Serve the Lord. The very first thing Paul underlines for the Ephesian church is his example of serving the Lord. Look down there in verse 18 where he begins, and then 19, you yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time. From the first day, I set foot in Asia serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials. I was serving the Lord. That's what I was doing the whole time. I might have been serving you, but I was serving the Lord. Later, he says his life boils down to the ministry he's received. Look in verse 24, one of my favorite verses in the old Bible.

He said, I don't account my life of any value, nor is precious to myself. If only I may finish the course and the ministry that is the service. Same word that he uses in 19, just in a different form.

[11 : 02] If only I may finish my course in the ministry I've received in the Lord Jesus to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. Now that's a staggering statement.

That's an otherworldly statement. I don't count my life of any value, but only that might fulfill and finish my ministry. He's saying my life boils down to my assignment from the Lord. If Paul had Twitter, his Twitter handle, his Twitter bio would be his assignment from the Lord. He is there to serve. You know, we often don't think like this. We often think about serving in such a way where the emphasis is on how we're serving. We're using this gift or that gift or even this passion, that passion.

We're taking care of this responsibility or that responsibility. But the emphasis for Paul is not how, but who? And what we know from his life, he doesn't really care about how. He cares about who he's serving the Lord. That is the Lord Jesus Christ. That's not a word for God generally. That's a word for his, his Lord, our Lord, Jesus Christ throughout the, uh, uh, uh, the, the epistles.

Paul often said, do lost Christu. I am a do lost Christu. I'm a slave of Christ. This is wonderfully true of every Christian. Sometimes I think we, we read these incredible statements by Paul. We think, man, that's in like the super Christian category. That's bogus.

There's no such distinction. When God calls us to salvation in Christ, he doesn't call us to give him an hour a week and a few moments before meals. He calls us to view our everyday duties and earthly occupations as a calling to serve him. So your Twitter bio should be servant of Christ.

[13 : 07] By on in a business, by teaching, by singing, dancing, whatever you're doing. So whether your daily work is filled with spreadsheets or assembly lines, building projects or lesson plans, child rearing or waiting tables, you are called to serve the Lord right there. That's true for everyone.

It's also true for pastors, knowing pastors are called to serve the Lord. Jesus Christ should produce in pastors and all consuming willingness to do wherever, go wherever and do whatever he commands. He's the Lord. He calls the shots. He defines our life and our ministry. No wonder Paul said, I serve the Lord with all humility and with tears. Notice Paul wasn't looking for personal gain or position or influence or a platform to use his gifts. I don't know how, I mean, I don't know how many emails or advertisements I get weekly, monthly, talk about using pastoral ministry as a platform for you.

That's insane. That's not the way it's done. Churches don't exist to serve pastors, give them a place to use their gifts. Pastors exist to serve churches and to give away everything to serve the Lord.

That's why Paul reminds us of Jesus' words at the end, talks about how he served his own needs. He said, it's more blessed to give than to receive. So buddy, serve the Lord.

Pour out your life for him as I know you strive to do. Second command, do not shrink from suffering. Do not shrink from suffering. In reminding them of his sacrifice, Paul reminds them of how he did not shrink. Look in verse 19. Again, serve the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews. Yet I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable. Now we studied the book of Acts a couple of years ago. It's an amazing book.

[15 : 15] But rarely did Paul finish a book in the book of Acts. He was also stopped mid-sentence, arrested, beaten, ran out of town, stoned, left for dead. And now as he begins to make his way to Jerusalem, he says more sufferings awaiting. Troubles ahead. Look at verse 22. He said, I know I'm going to Jerusalem constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonments and afflictions await me. You know, sometimes we think the Holy Spirit's only for blessing and prosperity. Well, the constraining, the filling, the empowering working of the Spirit here is driving him right into the hornet's nest. So be careful what you conclude when life is hard. You know, pastoral ministry is not the hardest job.

I'm kind of a one-trick pony, so I don't know what the hardest job is. Kind of been in it for so long. But it does bring with it a degree of suffering that pastors must not shrink from. Is it persecution?

Imprisonment? For Paul, yes. In some countries right now in the world, yes. In this country, could be one day. Pastors are called to rightly handle the Word of God, regardless of whether the culture accepts and applauds or rejects and condemns its truth. Pastors must not shrink from declaring anything that is profitable, whether it's culturally acceptable or not. But most often, the suffering pastors must not shrink from. Pastors must not shrink from is the daily anxiety of watching while everyone else is sleeping. John Flavel says, pastors are fittingly compared to the toil of men in harvest, to the labors of a woman and travail, and to the agonies of soldiers in the dangers of battle.

We must watch when others sleep. I remember years ago, began pastoral ministry, super giddy, excited, ready to rush into the purposes of God. I think I'm still there, but naive. And I remember being, talking to my friend, Bill Kittrell, and we were on a panel somewhere, and somebody asked, kind of, why do you read in the morning? Why do you get up? Why do you pray? And I said some naive, young, 20-something answer, and I love the Lord. Bill said, I'm terrified. I'm terrified.

I'm terrified. 15 years later, I know what he means. After years of trying to watch and continually entrust to people to God, it's terror that wakes me up more often than anything else. Not because you guys are bad people or anything like that, but because of the anxiety. Paul talked about it in 2 Corinthians 11, the daily anxiety for the churches. So don't shrink from suffering. Amen. May God help us.

[18 : 54] Three, proclaim the gospel. Proclaim the gospel. Paul, after reminding them of how he served the Lord and did not shrink from suffering, Paul reminds them again and again and again, and I could do it seven times again, of how he proclaimed the gospel and the word of God to them. Seven times he reminds them how they proclaimed the gospel to them, declaring, verse 20. Teaching, verse 20. Testifying, both to Jews and Greeks, verse 21. Testify, verse 24. Proclaiming, verse 25. Testifying, verse 26. Declaring, verse 26.

The point is clear. Pastors are not called to be creative or innovative. Pastors are not called to be hip or original. Pastors are called to proclaim what they have heard. Proclaim what they have seen.

Behind this word proclaim is the word, is herald. Before radio waves, newspapers, or social media, news was shared by a herald. A herald came into town. Someone was sent to tell everybody what happened in the Roman Empire. If there was a new emperor was born or a change in rule, they would send it out by horseback all throughout the empire. And so too, pastors are called to stand up and to herald and proclaim the good news, the news about Jesus Christ. And so a herald isn't anxious about his hair or his image, but about the message that must get out. They're called to herald. They're also called to testify. You saw that test or to witness. You saw that word testify, testify, testify.

You're called to witness to what they've seen. Behind this word is the idea of the courtroom. Everyone who get, you know, we think about it in this world that Jesus is on trial, but actually everyone who hears the gospel of Jesus Christ is on trial.

How we respond to the gospel is a matter of life or death, heaven or hell, mercy or judgment. So pastors are called to witness and testify to what they have seen and heard about Jesus before it's too late. Pastors are called to defend Christ, commend Christ, lay out evidence about Christ, and urge all who hear to turn in repentance to Christ. So it's not nice hand patters that couldn't find another occupation. Pastors must proclaim in the power of the spirit. I love this picture of Martin Luther painted from the reformation. He's got one hand in the text and the other hand at Jesus Christ.

[21 : 47] That's what pastors are called to do. We got, we got news. We have a bloody cross. We have an empty tomb. What are you going to do about it? I would say that to you this morning. What are you going to do about it? This is an undeniable, irrefutable, unsuppressable fact that Jesus Christ was a person who lived, died, and rose again from the dead. And if you, either you respond to him and embrace him and gain eternal life, or you remain outside of him and gain eternal judgment and damnation and wrath that you deserve.

You can only come through the word. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ. There's salvation nowhere else and under no other name under heaven by which you can be saved. So what are you going to do with the bloody cross? I know everybody likes to think for themselves and try to figure this. What are you going to do with the empty tomb?

Pastors proclaim and persuade others to believe because news demands a response. Look in verse 26, Paul says, as he said in Romans 15 and other places, it demands a response so much so that he says, I'm innocent of your blood now. Remember Ezekiel? The prophet says, the blood's on your own head.

That's what Paul's saying. You can't blame me. I preach the gospel. We preach the gospel every week here, and we preach it in the power of the Spirit as best we can, and such that if you hear this word, if you do not turn, if you should die tonight, the blood is on your head.

Because news demands a response. If the house is burning, you run out of the house. You don't think about it. Judgment's coming. That's what Paul's saying.

[23 : 47] Try to not shrink, verse 27, from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. The emphasis upon proclaiming and testifying underlines another point that Paul is making. He references his commitment to the good news, to the whole counsel of God. What's that mean? To the word of his grace.

The idea is a pastor is not called to be a social worker, an entrepreneur, a life hacker, or a business executive. The pastor is called to a book. Pastor is called to spend his life getting to know and unpack a book. Now since we saw a picture of Martin Luther, I'm going to quote John Calvin too, in a way that only he can say it. In his institutes he says, here then is the sovereign power with which the pastors of the church, by whatever name they be called, ought to be endowed. That it is they may declare, dare boldly to do all things by God's word.

May compel all worldly power, glory, wisdom, and exaltation to yield to and obey his majesty. That's God's. Supported by his power. May command all from the highest, even to the last. May build up Christ's household and cast down Satan's. May feed the sheep and drive away the wolves. May instruct and exhort the teachable. May accuse, rebuke, and subdue the rebellious and stubborn. May bind and loose.

Finally, if need be, may launch thunderbolts and lightning, but do all things with the word of God. Pastors are not peddlers. They're not charlatans. They're not gamesmen. They're not showmen.

They're called to be bound to a book, to only go as far as it goes, and to stop there. Pastors are called to proclaim the word of God and the power of the Spirit, whether it's in the pulpit, but the youth meeting, the small group of the counseling office to proclaim the gospel.

[25 : 46] Proclaim the gospel. I remember when I came here four years ago, someone said, you're either a pastor or a preacher. I said, oh really? What do you mean by that?

That sounded snarkier then. I wasn't as snarky. I said, what do you mean by that? That's my non-snarky voice, I guess. Wise guy. No, he said, well, the pastor spends 90% of his time with the people, 10% of his time preparing for the sermon. The preacher spends 90% of his time preparing the sermon, 10% of the time with his people. I said, man, I don't want to be either of those.

That's what we must not be. That's why the fourth command is care for the church. Care for the church. Paul commands the Ephesian elders in verse 28 to care for the church.

Look in verse 28 again. Pay careful attention to yourselves, 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 need to see in this verse. I preach a whole sermon on it. The main thing is the metaphor of shepherd. You see it in the word flock.

[27 : 12] You see it in the word care. The word is often translated shepherd. The shepherd is a vital metaphor in the Bible.

It brings together the whole Bible. When the Bible uses this metaphor, it emphasizes the Lord is our shepherd. He leads us just like he led Jacob. He guides us. He feeds us. He protects us. We are his sheep, Psalm 95, and the sheep of his pasture.

And it's no difference in this verse. Notice all three persons of the Trinity are mentioned here. It is the church of God. All three are referenced, I guess. It is the church of God. The church is not my church, your church, your mama's church. It's God's church.

It's the church Jesus obtained with his own blood. It belongs to God, doubly so. All things belong to him. Psalm 24, the earth and the fullness thereof is the Lord.

But it belongs to him doubly so because he bought it with his blood. Over whom, third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.

- [28 : 35] Now, this verse strongly affirms God's role in purchasing and gathering his people. But it also strongly affirms the privilege and responsibility of men to stand underneath God, to shepherd and care for specific people in specific local churches.
- The command is clear. Pay careful attention. In which the Holy Spirit has made you an overseer to care for the church of God.
- Amen. Be a shepherd. Now, sheep don't roam the hills of Tennessee as they did or do in Ephesus and so much around.
- And so much of that metaphor is lost. You know, we think of sheep as cute, cuddly things. John Stott clarifies it for us. He says, sheep are not at all the clean and cuddly creatures they may appear.
- In fact, they're dirty, subject to unpleasant pests, regularly need to be dipped into strong chemicals to rid them of lice, ticks, and worms.
- [29 : 47] They're also unintelligent, wayward, and obstinate. Yet shepherds do the dirty work. They lead, they guide, they feed, they protect, they rescue.
- They must not be soft. They're not gentle-hearted animal lovers. They're rough and tough and hard and weary for many a sleepless night. This is the work of pastoral ministry.
- Still time, buddy, you know, to walk out. Called to watch while others sleep. Timothy Laniak, a professor, tried to revive our understanding of shepherding biblically.
- He's a seminary prof that went, wanted to understand more about what it looks like to be a shepherd, moved to the Middle East for a year. Spent his time up close with Bedouin shepherds. He tells the story of interviewing one shepherd at the end of his time there.
- The shepherd says, you know, you don't 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 this family flock, even though it was quite a substantial business.
- [31 : 10] Several thousand sheep. My sons, he continued, don't deserve the flock. They don't have a heart for it. I spend my days out here and I don't have to.
- But I do it because I care. My sons still, and I can tell, they are preoccupied. They want to do other things. Pastoral ministry is no place for a man who wants to do other things.
- No place for a man who's easily distracted or easily discontented is for men who will stand immovably underneath the great shepherd for all their days to care for specific people in specific local churches.
- It's for this reason. I read a quote recently that said, every pastor dies with a smile on his face and a broken heart. That's right.
- That's where this is headed. A smile. So much goodness. A broken heart, though.
- [32 : 24] So much suffering. So many losses. So many who make shipwreck of their faith. Nobody care for the church.
- The second charge, though, is for all of us. This text is not just a word for pastors.
- Because of all the implications, it's for us as well. So I want to say, four commands. Maintain high expectations.
- I'm no fool. Well, we're a forming fool. I don't want to misspeak.
- I'm no fool in this area. So many people have been hurt by pastors. By their unfaithfulness. Their harshness. Financial misconduct.
- [33 : 38] Their distance. It's tempting to lower the expectations. You know what they say? No expectations. No disappointment. Just live the good life.
- Just don't do that. But there's another way I think we lower our expectations. I remember sitting with one of my seminary professors. I don't know.

Six years ago. And he said it. Two sentences that just totally rocked me. He said, The pastor as a spiritual guide has been lost.

People need guidance. And are going looking for it elsewhere. The pastor as a spiritual guide has been lost. People need guidance. And are looking for it elsewhere.

I think what he's getting at is our culture bristles against leadership and authority. Our culture celebrates individualism and independence. And so we lower our expectations of pastors.

[34 : 48] By driving them out of our lives. By discarding them. By not looking for them to do what God commands.

Now that's not meant to be a word of correction to anybody in this church. I don't feel that. But don't do it. Establish biblically high expectation of what a pastor is called to do.

And hold him to it. Don't do me a favor. Because you'll be doing the service.

I mean you'll be doing the church a disservice to do any pastor a favor. Second, listen. If pastors are called to preach.

Then we should be eager to hear. Listen. You know we should be like the Bereans. Those Jews that Paul said were more noble.

[35 : 51] They should receive the word with all eagerness. Examining the scripture. We should be eager to hear. Ready to receive the word of God. Hungering and thirsting for righteousness. Such that we relish any moment to hear more.

We should be eager. Not naive. Don't take your pastor. My word. Any other pastor's word. As law. Test it.

Lay it beside the word of God. Let your conscience be bound by the word of God. In scripture. Or. What did Luther say? My conscience bound by. My gosh.

Somebody knows it. But I don't know. My conscience. Let it be bound by the word of God. Holy Spirit. Go no further. Be eager to hear. You know one thing.

And this is old school. One thing I want to commend to you. Since I have a message. Where I can throw this in. Is I want to urge you. That's a carefully chosen word.

[36 : 50] To bring a physical Bible. I point your head in this all the time. And I want to urge you to do it.

I. I'll buy you one. If you need one. But I just think. I want you to know. Part of what I'm doing.

Is so that you would know your way around this thing. And you'd find life in it. Let's be eager to hear. Three.

Command or charge three. Be honest. Be honest. 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.

[37 : 47] All manner of avoidable difficulties. Between the life of a pastor. And the life of the church. What can cause such huge problems. Problems. A lack of openness.

And honesty. With our pastor. If we're going to have fellowship. If we're going to have a healthy relationship. If we're going to be able to care for you.

We all must be honest. And open. Now listen. This does not mean. That you guys tell us. Every little uncomfortable detail. In your life. Please don't. Keep it to yourself. I don't want to know.

But it does mean. That you tell. You're honest. How hard the marriage is. Before you file papers. You're open.

About how dire things are. Financially. Before. You move in desperation. You're vulnerable. About fears. Doubts. Worries.

[38 : 49] Questions. If we're open and honest. Or if we're not open and honest. None of this will work. We won't bear fruit together.

Paul's relationship. And. To the church in Corinthians. Or Corinth. Was one of the most difficult. Pastor. Parishioner.

Relationship. I guess. The most difficult. In scripture. Look at what he says. Second Corinthians six.

We've spoken freely to you. Corinthians. Our heart is wide open. In return. I speak as to children.

Widen your hearts. Also. My heart. Is wide open.

[39 : 51] Widen. Your heart. As well. Point four. Command four. Under. Main point two. Sub point.

No. Just kidding. Pray. Pray. You know. The story goes. When Charles Spurgeon. You know. Was preaching 10,000 people. By the time he was 21. They came.

A group came. To the Metropolitan Tabernacle. In London. And said. Tell us your secret sauce. You know. Like everybody wants. Colonel Sanders recipe. You know. They wanted. His secret sauce too.

He took them down. Underneath the sanctuary. Before the meeting. There was a group of. People. Pray. So pray.

That's your secret. One of the greatest gifts. I receive. As pastor. Trinity Grace Church. Is Ron Clayton's prayers. And yours too.

[40 : 51] So please pray. In conclusion. When Martin. Lloyd Jones. Stood up to pray. And preach. In the midst of Nazi Germany's. Bombing of London. He gave a powerful testimony.

To everyone else. Who would climb. Into that sacred desk. The church. Labor's on. And must. Labor on.

You know. What they call this age. They call this the age. The church militant. The age to come. Is the church triumphant. It will be reigning. In glory. With Jesus Christ. Well right now.

In case you needed a news flash. We're at war. Church must labor on. In the midst of its own war. Against sin and death. Suffering and disease.

Pride. A fallen world. And may she labor on. May the noise. Of what this culture says. Of what it says we should play to.

[41 : 47] Not distract us. From devoting ourselves. To what we're called to do. And let her pastors. Let the pastors of this church. Be resolved. And devoted to the office. And calling.

Of a pastor. With all their heart. Father in heaven. We thank you. We humble ourselves before you.

Father I thank you. With all my heart. For the remarkable miracle. You've done. And bringing. This church together.

It's been one of the most. Amazing things. I've ever. Been a part of. And yet God.

I am aware that. The devil would love. To destroy. What you have built. And so. I call on you. That you would keep us.

[42 : 46] In the love of God. Keep us. In the steadfastness. Of Christ. That you'd keep us. In healthy relationships. We pray against.

Division. Gossip. Slander. Speculation. Sinful judgment. Self-righteousness. We pray. For the fruits of love. Joy.

Peace. Patience. Kindness. Goodness. Faithfulness. Gentleness. Self-control. Lord. We pray. That we would. Abide in the vine. And bear much fruit. As a church. Not for ourselves. But for the glory.

Of Jesus Christ. The one who called us. Out of darkness. The one who purchased us. With his own. Blood. Protect us God.

We thank you. In advance God. In Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. You've been listening to a message given by Walt Alexander.

[43 : 44] Lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.